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Expert Council to Solve Georgia's Tourism Problems

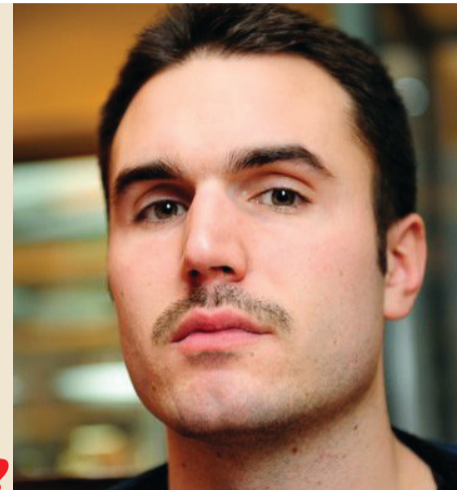


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Indian Farmers Struggle to Develop Georgia's Agricultural Sector

Fertile soil, cheap land and labor – these are the main attractions for foreign farmers in Georgia. Hundreds of enterprising Punjabi tillers have been moving to the country one after the other since the former Georgian government started widely advertising the ex-Soviet state's progress. However, local authorities were not the only to promote Georgia's abundant availability of land to potential Indian investors.

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ers. Based in Jalandhar, India, Crown drew Georgian media's attention a few days ago, when a video of its executive director Dharmjit Saini appeared on YouTube. Saini is seen showing his

compatriots land in Georgia's eastern Kakheti region and talking about the advantages of buying lands in Georgia.

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Expert Council to Solve Georgia's Tourism Problems

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Georgian tour operators officially started working with government in order to solve problems in the tourism industry. From now on all the troubles they face can be brought up at the state level – and government promises to listen to their needs and concerns.

First Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia Dimitri Kumsishvili and representatives of the private sector signed a Memorandum of Understanding on February 20, 2013 at the Tbilisi Marriott Hotel. On the basis of the document, a Council of Tourism Advisors was founded.

At the moment the council unites nine organizations – Georgian Tourism Association, the Association of Inbound Tour Operators, the Guides Association, the Private Employment Agencies' Association, the Georgian National Tourism Administration and the

"All seasons can be profitable if management and organizational issues are sound. The government will support busi-

ness – this is the Council of Tourism Advisors' primary goal," - Georgian National Tourism Administration Nata Kvachantiradze

Country	2012 January	2013 January	Change	Change %
EUROPE	219 672	268 303	48 631	22%
AMERICAS	2172	1757	-415	-19%
EAST ASIA/PACIFIC	4010	4935	925	23%
MIDDLE EAST	389	1529	1140	293%
AFRICA	582	440	-142	-24%
Total	227 006	277 045	50 039	22%

Local and foreign experts will assist the Georgian tourism industry in choosing the right path towards development, head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration Nata Kvachantiradze told the Georgian Times. She emphasized the importance of cooperation between private travel agencies and the government, especially at a time when the sector is preparing for the

expect more travelers from Russia. We used to work only as outbound tour operators but now we are planning to bring tourists to Georgia as well. This direction is rapidly gaining popularity," head of GeoTravel Nino Chumburidze said.

"We used to work only as outbound tour operators but now we are planning to bring tourists to Georgia as well. This direction is rapidly gaining popularity," - head of GeoTravel Nino Chumburidze. Another representative of the tourism industry, director

sorts and over 150 museums make Georgia one of the most popular destinations for neighboring countries.

"Tourists come to Georgia for its ancient history and culture; they are often attracted to the mountainous regions such as Kakheti, but we can't boast about having a high-level of service either in the capital or in the countryside." - Shoren Niniashvili, head of Promethea Voyages

But despite this rapid growth, Georgian tourism industry faces serious obstacles. As Shoren Niniashvili, head of Promethea Voyages, mentioned, the biggest problems are poor infrastructure and low quality service. "Tourists come to Georgia for its ancient history and culture; they are often attracted to the mountainous regions such as Kakheti, but we can't boast about having a high-level of service either in the capital or in the countryside. For instance, the thing that complicates exploring Tbilisi on your own is the absence of street signs in English. Meanwhile, in the regions we hardly have any quality hostels or reasonably priced hotels," Niniashvili said.

Bad marketing and lack of qualified guides are other problems, head of GeoTravel Nino Chumburidze added. "We need to improve these points in order to attract more foreign visitors while raising the number of domestic tourists. Hopefully, this can be done through the Council of Tourism Advisors", she stated.

However, according to Kumsishvili, the council will revise major issues and problems in the sector but not take decisions on every particular case. "Of course we will pay attention to developing tourism infrastructure, increasing service quality, entering new markets, promoting Georgia on international markets and recruiting qualified staff in this business. But we will bring up only the most important issues at the state level. The problems with lack of quality guides, for example, can be solved with the Georgian Guide Association, infrastructural problems – at the Ministry of Economy. It all depends on the importance of the problem," he told the Georgian Times.

Prison Notebooks for Georgia's Newest Crop of Alleged "Political Prisoners"

By IAN F. CARVER, Editor-in-Chief



After a spate of arrests immediately after Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition came to power, it appears the new government is finally going after the "big fish." As I write this, Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugalava is being indicted for legalization of illegal income, money laundering and for allegedly handing over the telecommunications rights of Imedia TV to those who were not the rightful owners. That is but the tip of the iceberg as to the multitude of sins committed by these young "pro-Western" reformers – products of the Soviet system.

Facts are sketchy as this issue goes to print but it appears his questioning and pending arrest has something to do with possible money laundering and "elite" top level corruption. Regardless of the recriminations, one thing is certainly clear: the majority of such elites never thought anyone would get in their way; they had a sense of impunity bestowed to them by the forces of democracy that only they were responsible for in post Rose Revolution Georgia.

But cracks began surfacing in what was considered a "beacon of democracy" when protesters amassing on Rustaveli Ave were violently dispersed on November 7, 2007. It was the first indication that something was wrong with the trajectory of the US-sponsored colored revolutions in Georgia and elsewhere. Georgia's opposition station Imedia TV was raided and its equipment destroyed that night, signaling a crackdown on freedom of speech in Georgia. I remember that night vividly from inside the Imedia TV compound while it was surrounded by heavily armed Georgian Special Forces and police units - who were kind enough escort me home.

Only a year ago it was largely thought that Ugalava was being groomed by President Mikheil Saakashvili to be his handpicked successor, heir to the throne, as the best assurance to continue Georgia's neo liberal economic policies and democratic "miracle." Such dreams came to an abrupt halt when Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili entered politics in late 2011, aiming to "right the wrongs" of the Georgian government.

Just after Ivanishvili's arrival on the political scene, I remember bumping into Ugalava and his entourage one night at Gallery Café, one of Tbilisi's latest and most popular clubs at the time. His appearance at such a venue seemed to reflect an effort to present himself as more "down to earth" and "one with the people." Sensing a tough crowd, they soon departed but not before I asked him directly in passing what he thought of Ivanishvili. His answer: a candor "nothing special".

I wonder what he and others are now thinking of Ivanishvili when his coalition honestly won Parliamentary Elections in spite of so much mudslinging and vote rigging. I also wonder if any of his minions can follow in the tracks of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) from their prison cells.

A bit of a history lesson for comparative purposes, Gramsci was arrested and imprisoned by the Italian Fascist regime in 1926. He recorded thousands of brilliant reflections on hegemony, civil society, and passive revolution. I doubt, however, if this newest crop of so-called "political prisoners" have the aptitude to put to paper something that could set the history right as to all that has transpired since the so-called Rose Revolution. But perhaps they will have time to reflect now that the shoe is on the other foot. Hopefully they will now have time to improve their intellectual skills and catch up on their reading. "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", by Edward Gibbon, should perhaps be top of their reading list.



Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development are among them.

As Kumsishvili stated at the press conference, the objective of the newly established council is to design a long-term strategy for tourism development while also harmonizing the positions of the industry and the government. "International Financial Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, assured us that they will help with identifying experts to fully elaborate this strategy. At the same time, I think that the involvement of the private sector in this process is essential," the deputy minister said.

As he explained, tourism development should be well-planned, results-oriented and clear for everyone. "We need to know where we are heading in order to cope with existing obstacles. The council will work recommendations and monitor their implementation so that progress in made in the right direction," he added.

upcoming summer season. "However, it doesn't mean we are keen on developing only summer resorts – all seasons can be profitable if management and organizational issues are sound. The government will support business – this is the Council of Tourism Advisors' primary goal," Kvachantiradze explained.

The Council held a few informal meetings, which resulted in a decision to participate in a tourism exhibition in Zagreb, Croatia which is a popular tourist destination for Central Europeans. This became possible after cutting down on some expenses. "We participated in three international exhibitions and saved 100,000 GEL, thereby fulfilling our promise to reduce expenditures. I am sure the council will do continue to work efficiently and do its best work," Kumsishvili said.

In turn, tour operators expressed optimism towards the council. They believe it will help to improve conditions needed for tourism develop-

of travel agency Promethea Voyages Shoren Niniashvili, informed that the number of tourists traveling with her company has been growing between 20 to 30 percent annually.

Recently-updated information proves that the number of visitors has significantly increased. According to the Georgian National Administration of Tourism, the most popular reason to visit Georgia is holiday, leisure or recreation (40 percent). Only nine percent travel transit through, eight percent – for business or professional and seven percent – for shopping purposes. Each tourist spends an average of 1500 USD during their stay in Georgia. In January 2013, the number of arrivals of non-resident visitors increased by 22 percent compared to the same period the year before. In total the number of international travelers amounted to 4,389,256 in 2012, demonstrating a 56 percent growth over the previous year. More than 12,000 historical monuments, 103 re-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

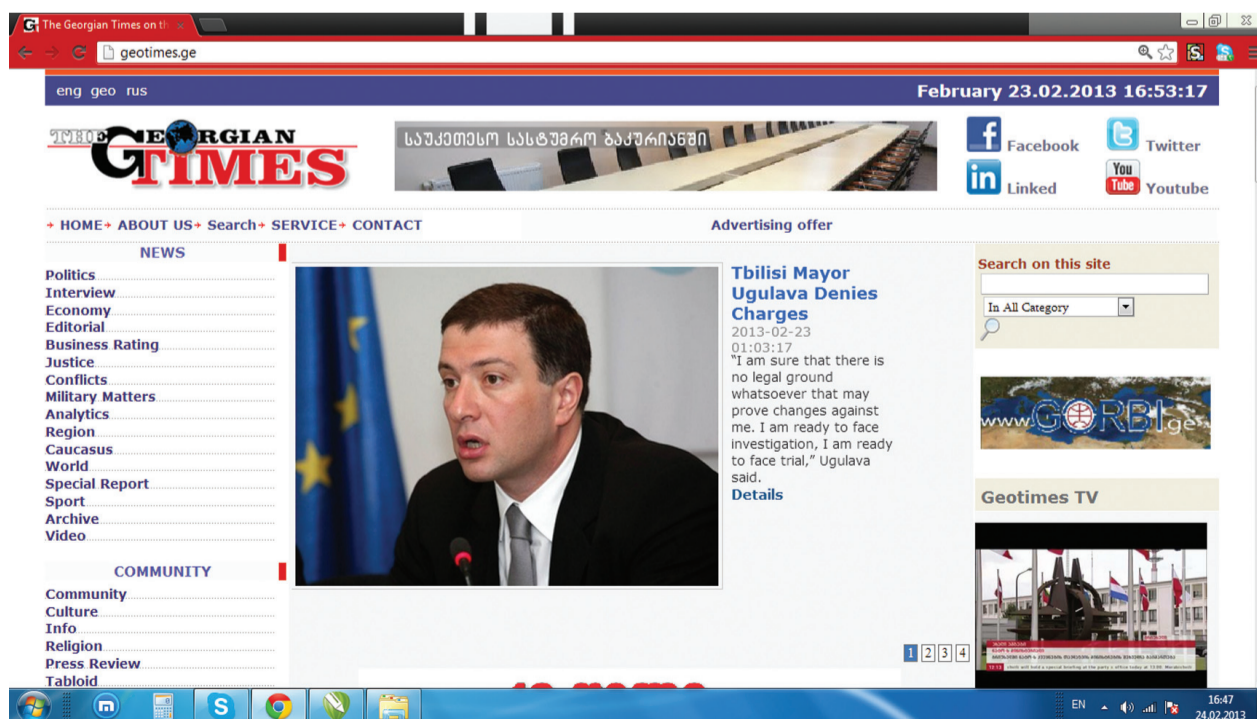
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Indian Farmers Struggle to Develop Georgia's Agricultural Sector

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Fertile soil, cheap land and labor – these are the main attractions for foreign farmers in Georgia. Hundreds of enterprising Punjabi tillers have been moving to the country one after the other since the former Georgian government started widely advertising the ex-Soviet state's progress. However, local authorities were not the only to promote Georgia's abundant availability of land to potential Indian investors.

Rumors about rich soil in the small Caucasian republic spread throughout Indian Punjab two years ago and in 2010 Punjabi-based consulting company Crown Immigration Consultancy Services started up operations in Tbilisi. During the last two years the firm brought to Georgia about 100 farmers. Based in Jalandhar, India, Crown drew Georgian media's attention a few days ago, when a video of its executive director Dharmjit Saini appeared on YouTube. Saini is seen showing his compatriots land in Georgia's eastern Kakheti region and talking about the advantages of buying lands in Georgia.

As Saini told the Georgian Times, his firm brought 100 farmers to the country, with the others coming on their own. "They are mainly interested in land in Georgia's Marneuli, Lagodekhi, Tsnori and Gori areas. We do not have too many clients, sometimes they number only 2-3 a month, sometimes none," he declared, adding that his efforts to explain the situation to YouTube users were in vain. The video provoked un-

people oppose foreigners coming to Georgia for agricultural reasons. There have even been threats and insults towards Indians but we are doing nothing illegal; we are only attracting investments to the country. Citizens of India have already invested millions into the Georgian economy and they are willing to do invest more if locals give them such an opportunity. In the United States, there are many people of Indian origin. They buy land, run their business and do not face any problems. Even the Indian government sells our land to foreigners and locals understand that foreign investments improve the economy and create more jobs. Every country should welcome [foreign] investors," Saini stated.

Nevertheless, Georgian economic analyst Giorgi Khukhashvili said he doesn't support the process of "total sale" of Georgian land. According to Khukhashvili, the state must have a well-developed security plan in order to avoid facing even more serious problems in the long run. "Investments themselves are good of course but we need to have some strategy when the conversation turns to selling agricultural lands. I have information from reliable sources that some lands were sold to foreigners for a symbolic price. I do not want to dramatize the situation but we should stop this process now, as tomorrow it could already be too late. Georgians in Georgia will have no land, they will be sort of guests in their country," the analyst told the Georgian Times.

Saini alleges that Indian farmers do not have such aims, and that they only want to make money and allow Georgia to

farmers; but as we discovered, 90 percent of the land stands idle. I can't even explain why this is – either Georgian people are lazy or they do not have the money to work the land. Our clients come here, invest and employ local villagers. What's wrong with that?!" Saini said.

David Zodelava, an owner of land in Kakheti, does not really mind foreigners purchasing lands, but on one condition – they need to bring something new to Georgian agriculture. "Approximately two years ago some Indians came to Kakheti in order to buy land. Initially I was planning on cooperating with them, as they had some innovative ideas and offers. I was delighted with their proposal but it turned out later that they had nothing new to offer; they are farming exactly like us. Of course they can come and buy land but it is pointless if there is no progress," he told the Georgian Times.

However, not all farmers are so favorably disposed to the influx of Indians. Levani Giorgadze, a farmer from Tsnori in eastern Georgia, declared that locals will keep on protesting against their land being put under foreign tillers. "Country folk prefer their land standing idle rather than allowing non-residents to become landowners in Georgia," he added.

According to Khukhashvili, the fact that today farmers are unable to work their land does not necessarily mean that in five years from now the situation will remain the same. "Even from a commercial point of view, selling our land at such low prices is not reasonable because in a few years the same land can be sold to locals at double the price," Khukhashvili explained.

Nevertheless, Zodelava be-



A few days ago Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili informed that authorities will assist land-poor farmers with their spring planting. The new government has also increased funding for agriculture by more than 60 percent from the previous budget and in January 2013 a fund worth approximately 600 million USD was created to provide credit to small farmers.

According to the Georgian National Investments Agency, there are approximately three million hectares of agriculture land, of which 27 percent is arable land, nine percent perennial plantations, and 65 percent – meadows and pastures. Seventy-five percent of this total is still publicly owned. The share



of Georgians engaged in the agriculture sector in 2010 averaged 50 percent of the total number of employed citizens.

"Many people oppose foreigners coming to Georgia for agricultural purposes. There have even been threats and insults towards Indians but we're doing nothing illegal; we are only at-

tracting investments to the country." - Dharmjit Saini

"Investments themselves are good of course but we need to have some strategy when the conversation turns to selling agricultural lands." - Giorgi Khukhashvili

"Country folk prefer their land standing idle rather than allowing non-residents to become landowners in Georgia." - Levani Giorgadze

"Selling our land at such low prices is not reasonable because in a few years the same land can be sold to locals at double the price." - Khukhashvili

"Georgia's excellent soil and resources is a godsend for farmers; but as we discovered 90 percent of the land stands idle." - Dharmjit Saini

NEWS

Moscow Court Sanctions Arrest of Georgian MP

By CIVIL GEORGIA

Moscow's Basmanny district court sanctioned arrest of Georgian MP from UNM party Givi Targamadze, charged by Russia with plotting mass disorders, in absentia on February 21, the Russian news agencies reported.

Russia's Investigative Committee filed criminal charges against MP Targamadze last week, accusing him of conspiring with Russian opposition figures for the purpose of organizing mass riots. He was charged with "crime preparation" and "organizing mass riots, accompanied by violence", which carries a prison term from four to ten years.

As a parliamentarian, Targamadze enjoys with legislative immunity. Georgian law bans detention of a lawmaker without Parliament's approval and the Georgian constitution bans extradition of Georgian citizen to other states.

"Targamadze is a Georgian citizen, member of the Parliament and the Georgian state will protect him," said lawmaker from Georgian Dream, Irakli



Sesiashvili, who chairs the parliamentary committee for defense and security.

In October, 2012 Russia's Investigative Committee launched criminal proceedings against Sergei Udaltsov, a leader of protests against President Putin, and several other opposition activists.

Udaltsov was accused of plotting to organize mass riots with the help of "foreign citizens" – allegations stemming from a television documentary, which was aired by NTV, the TV channel owned by the Russian state-controlled monopoly Gazprom.

The documentary, Anatomy of a Protest – 2, includes what seems to be a secretly re-

corded video footage apparently showing Georgian MP Givi Targamadze meeting with some of the Russian protest leaders, allegedly also including Udaltsov; the documentary claimed that participants of the meeting were plotting large-scale disturbances in Russia with the goal to topple President Putin.

According to the Russian Investigative Committee that meeting took place in the Belarusian capital of Minsk in June, 2012. At the time Targamadze chaired the parliamentary committee for defense and security.

Targamadze has denied any involvement calling it "Putin's fabricated propaganda". Udaltsov has also denied having links with MP Targamadze.

Meguardian
PUNJABI FARMERS FIND PASTURES NEW (AND CHEAP) IN GEORGIA
 village 30 miles from India's western border. The conversation – about crops, prices, weather and mendacious middlemen – is like a million or so similar early-evening calls placed by farmers across south Asia. Except that the land that Singh is now tilling is in Georgia, the small mountain nation in the Caucasus.
 ნოდოლი ფარმერები, 38, is one of a new wave of farmers pioneering one of the wo

ambiguous public backlash; many fear their ancient homeland is being sold off to foreigners.

"The day my video was uploaded, it was inundated with negative comments. Many

profit from their hard work while breathing new life into the local agriculture sector. "Of course the main reason Indians choose Georgia is the country's good land and low price. Georgia's excellent soil and resources is a godsend for

believes the problem was created by the government. The reason behind selling land at a very low price is the high property taxes. Farmers are unable to pay taxes, so they have to sell their land to whoever is interested

Are Georgians still Playing Catch-up?

By KENDRA PARADIS

After the reportedly high pedagogical success of programs like Teach and Learn with Georgia and the accompanying increase in teacher training and assessment, the national standards of education have been raised at least to stage 2 goals of modern pedagogical approach and with the induction of so much fresh (national) blood to the field, stage 3 teachers are on the rise. It is, however, the very nature of these foreign focused programs and ready-made training camps, seminars, and photocopy-able techniques which endanger their own goals.



The Georgian education system has applaudably come a long way since the dark old days of the Soviet factories, which once produced students in the same way they produced toasters: identical and of poor quality. Education has indeed become more than the simple dissemination of facts to be memorized, rote, and regurgitated as stage 1 pedagogy demanded. The profession of teaching is demanding more and more in the classroom concern-

ing the techniques used to “disseminate” information and schools are looking more at the responsibility and accountability of teachers in the successful acquisition of that knowledge. Many schools however, are still a far cry from the intentions of Tbilisi who, even after rapid modernization, are still chasing at the heels of modern education as an ever evolving field.

Much of the teaching profession has tried to move away from coverage objectives; as we

can all recognize there is more to learning than simple facts and figures. This commenced the progression to stage 2 in the evolution of teaching. The standardization and well meaning assessment of education systems however, put a significant wrench in the emergent theory and practice of good methods in the last few decades worldwide. Standardized testing created a double burden for teachers who understand the importance of teaching more than knowledge. Recently, the feel-

ing was compounded by the development of stage 3 methodology: teachers who understand that education encompasses even more than the addition of skills. Stage 3 methodology was the first to start considering the students’ individual needs in the context of classroom learning. Teachers are asked not only to take students’ emotional factors into consideration in their ability to learn, but even in which way they are able to learn best.

The “shock-and-awe” tac-

tics of a government which itself admitted to the face of modern pedagogical facilitators that policies will be carried out in a “we need it done yesterday” atmosphere were on the right track, but cannot hope for more than a superficial improvement of educational standards. The Georgian education system, if it manages to achieve its current goals, needs to be worried about the potential for misuse and stagnation of its well intentioned initiatives and in fact, they’re not alone. Much of the pedagogical world is facing a shift from Generation 3 to Generation 4 teachers and school communities. There has been an alarming lack of training for teachers in subjects other than English language and even within ESL teaching, there is much more to literacy than the ability to read and write. Communicative styles to teaching and learning are great, but they serve only as a heightened allegory for the complexities of learning overall: learning whether knowledge, skills, or attitudes is all contextual.

The shift to stage 4 teaching embraces that leaning is learnable and strives to include students in the process rather than simply expecting them to receive a prefabricated model that can easily be used as a supple-

ment to what teachers are already doing. Teachers must move from technical aspects of teaching to the cultural realms of the classroom encouraging students not only to get the right answers but to take risks in their efforts to gain knowledge. This reciprocally requires that teachers take the risk to allow students to work through things for themselves. Working with strategies like the multiple intelligence theory only gets us part of the way because it only addresses part of the equation: changing teaching techniques. Stage 4 aims at the other part of the equation: finding way to help students help themselves.

In this day and age students face a completely different world from those who attempt to show them how to be successful within it. The internet gives us access to a constant barrage of continually developing information. The problem now, is not how to find the information, but how to select and evaluate what you need and how to defend yourself from the rest. Resilience, resourcefulness, reflection, and reciprocity are the key to learning not just how to learn but how to be successful in a future of change and uncertainty. Isn’t that the future we’re trying to give to our students?

SOCIAL RESEARCH

Defining Georgianness

By FRANK KLOBUCAR

There are many things that come to mind when asked to describe Georgian culture. Hospitality, food, wine, song and dance are usually cited; people reference the church, supras, patriotism, heavy drinking, a vehement spirit, and more. When asked to identify what makes an individual a Georgian, though, there seem to be a few very strict criteria.

In this recent poll conducted by Georgian Opinion Research Business International, we asked 1500 Georgians a variety of questions as part of the decennial European Values Survey. The questions covered issues of immigration, politics, religion, and a wide spread of other social concepts. From the resulting data we discovered that while 99.7% of respondents had Georgian citizenship,

this isn’t sufficient to be considered Georgian in the eyes of most.

There are many people of non-Georgian ethnicity living in Georgia these days; Russians, Armenians, Azeris, and more. Many of these earned their citizenship by residency, and some by special consideration. But can they be considered truly Georgian? If you were to receive Georgian citizenship, would anyone actually call you Georgian?



It seems your chances are slim, as two of the most important standards are beyond your control: having been born in Georgia and having Georgian ancestry. For the sake of discussion, though, let’s see what you could do to win them over.

It’s of course important to be respectful of the laws and institutions of the country, said 86% of our respondents. Half of these said it was very important, while the rest said it was quite important. Residence in



Georgia also plays a large part: most respondents said being born here was either very (60%) or quite (26%) important, as was having lived in Georgia for an extended period (92% total).

I was surprised by the second most import requirement for being a true Georgian, in that I expected it to be the most important by far: 93% felt that Georgian ancestry is necessary to be a true Georgian. However, the most important defining characteristic of a person’s “Georgianness” is the language he or she speaks.

If you know your modern Georgian history, you know that the prospect of losing Georgian as the official language of the Georgian SSR brought tens of thousands of protestors onto the streets in 1978, one of the largest protests in Georgia’s Soviet-era history. It seems fitting then that language is the most important aspect of personal culture in the minds of Georgians. Not only did virtually all respondents feel that speaking Georgian is important (97%), a larger majority said it was “very important (71%)”

than for any other quality. Don’t get too excited about your Georgian language lessons, though. Based on the rest of these requirements, unless you’re ethnically Georgian you probably won’t be able to convince your neighbors to call you “Qartvelo.”

Data in this article have a margin of error of 2.5% at 95% confidence. Visit our webpage at gorbi.com for more articles.

Frank Klobucar is an analyst at GORBI, Georgia’s first social and market opinion research firm.

To be truly Georgian, how important is it to...	Very	Quite	Total
be respectful of Georgia’s institutions and laws?	43%	43%	86%
be born in Georgia?	60%	26%	86%
have lived in Georgia for a long time	58%	35%	92%
have Georgian ancestry?	59%	35%	93%
be able to speak Georgian?	71%	26%	97%

Russia's New Geopolitical Realities in the 21st Century

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Kremlin policy makers have recently adopted a new foreign policy strategy entitled *The Russian Federation Foreign Policy Conception*. The new concept outlines Russia's foreign policy priorities in promoting Russia's national interests and achieving its strategic objectives in the international arena. It is clear that the strategy sharply differs from that of the United States. Whereas the current U.S. foreign policy strategy is still based on Zbigniew Brzezinski's four concrete geopolitical principles: unification, enlargement, engagement and pacification, Russia's strategy follows a new course of multipolarity, enlargement, coercion, devolution and diversification.

Seemingly these geopolitical features closely correspond to the content of earlier adopted policy paper that outlines how to promote national security interests on the geopolitical levels, e.g., *"The National Security Strategy till 2020"* and *"Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation in 2020"*. Collectively, these three main documents delineate the concrete aspirations and visions for incumbent Kremlin authorities and lay out the strategic development oath for the country in a period when President Vladimir Putin's final presidency term is to end. It is contingent on the new leadership to continue the country's development direction and it does appear that the foreign policy strategy closely corresponds to timeline restraints, which have been fixed in the first two documents.

However, the latest policy document envisages a new approach and fresher attitudes that take Russia's contemporary geopolitics into account. Most noteworthy is how the collective "West" i.e., the US, EU and NATO are considered as equal challengers and erstwhile competitors of Russia at the international level. In particular, Russia negatively views any further NATO enlargement and deployment of NATO military capabilities closer to its borders.

Moreover, the policy sees the Russian Federation distancing itself further from geopolitical cooperation with the West and in tandem fostering closer relations with the oriental



"East", namely through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a tri-polar group comprising Russia, China and India. The same is true regarding Russia's positioning with the "BRIC" countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as well as the "Group of 20". The new strategy envisages greater cooperation and engagement among countries of the "South".

Russia's current authorities perceive the geopolitical triangle of Russia-India-China as being the most important in terms of geo-economic-political cooperation. This is an area of mutual interests that needs to be prioritized in conjunction with promoting strategic ties with Japan, North Korea and the People's Democratic Republic and Mongolia. It is noteworthy that Mongolia is mentioned as being one of Russia's strategic partners for the first time since Boris Yeltsin's tenure.

In tandem with the "North Asian" identity, Kremlin policy-makers are also seeking to

accelerate Russian engagement with counties of the Asia-Pacific region by being more involved in their regional affairs. This process seeks to bring about a "dynamically developing geopolitical area" as the document states. Consequently Russia considers this strategic region as being the most influential "power centre" – a fulcrum, where it is possible to foster the economic rise of Russia's "oriental" regions such as Siberia and other parts of the Russian Far East.

It is interesting to note that within the scope of this geopolitical area, the Kremlin leadership perceives the creation of a transparent and equal architecture of collective security and cooperation. This is a process that is put into play in order to counter-balance the similar architecture that has been adopted and expanded in the Euro-Atlantic area since 1949-1975, and especially in recent years with NATO expansion in its various forms and stages.

In addition, Russia will work to foster its ties with Australia,

Vietnam and New Zealand and with each member-states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In terms of its Asian-Pacific foreign policy, Russia forecasts the development of a peaceful diplomatic mission in the Middle East and North Africa. It also sees benefits from a more proactive role in Afghanistan's peacemaking processes. (The concrete passages of this area of policy-making are found in paragraphs 75-91 of the document).

new policy paper, Russia will begin implementing concrete measures in order to hinder and prevent this "soft power" as part of larger strategy of rolling back Western influence in its near abroad. A first step in this direction could be seen in the decision of the Russian Federation Investigation Committee of the Prosecutor Office's to issue an arrest warrant for Givi Targamadze, a member of the Georgian Parliament for allegedly attempting to destabilize

national politics, as predominantly determined by reinforcing intra-political configuration with so-called "political vertical" endorsement inside of the Kremlin itself. (*"Political vertical"* is a special jargon used to describe the Russian political system - distribution of the political power inside the Kremlin's authority which is aimed at diminishing the role of the various political groups or coalitions and power to be shifted into the hands of a few – like domination in the Russian politics of the so-called "Siloviki" political lobbyist group – Nikolai Patrushev, Igor Sechin, Victor Ivanov, Sergey Shoigu). The influence of the current dominant group of Kremlin lobbyists, who sit at the summit of the vertical, has seen the "Eastern" orientation become critical.

In consideration of these realities, it is interesting to underscore how the Kremlin has identified three main geostrategic areas (*geostrategic area – or the geographic spaces/ regions which have importance in the pursuit of the national interests, especially military-political consideration – see the eighth paragraph of the paper*), these are: the Euro-Atlantic space, the Eurasian space and the Asia-Pacific space.

But from a Georgian perspective, the five key principles which lie behind these policies, fine though they are on the surface, are potentially threatening. For example, one of them is devolution – giving minority groups greater right to run their own affairs. This is presented as a means of moderating separatist aspirations within the RF by granting limited self-government to such groups. However paragraph 51 of the document reads: "In line with Russia's priorities we will continue to promote the development of the Republic of Abkhazia and Republic of South Ossetia as modern democratic states, reinforce their international positions and thus provide them with credible security and social-economic restoration". Writing such a sentence about territories which are internationally recognised as part of Georgia clearly indicates that Moscow is content with maintaining difficult relations with Georgia for the foreseeable future.

Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia, Ph.D in politics and military science, USIA Alumni, Director of the "Georgian Times" Strategic Studies Centre "Azri"

However, as Russia works to benefit from resetting relations with the West, it will concurrently continue with mild criticism of the "Western" geopolitics by highlighting its so-called "soft power" strategy (*see paragraph 20*). From the Kremlin's perspectives, this "soft power" is viewed as a complex of concrete decisions in pursuit of Western foreign policy goals.

These are masked within the framework of human rights conceptions and the use of information-communication and humanitarian technologies so as to interfere in the internal affairs of other states and infringe upon their sovereignty. The "soft power" strategy aims to influence civil society consciousness and manipulate public opinion. Such a strategy is realized through the financing of various humanitarian and development interventions with the ultimate goal of bringing about various degrees of destabilization in a targeted state.

As outlined in the Kremlin's

the situation in Russia under the auspices of various NGO mechanisms that have been used by allies of Georgia.

The Kremlin has simply opted to address the issue by making an example of Targamadze, demonstrating that he is a primitive criminal, representing a low level of mental aptitude – a simple foot soldier of Georgian origin. It is clear that the Kremlin understands that Targamadze has committed many bloody and criminal acts as ordered by those who understand that he would be the fall guy. For example, based on various sources, he was personally involved in the execution of Brigade-General Gia Krialashvili and Colonel Koba Otanadze, and a third attempt on the life of an officer of the Georgian armed forces (Colonel Otanadze) in May, 2009.

Russia's drastic shift from the "West" to the "East" (the agenda used to be popular in previous foreign policy conceptions drafted in Yeltsin's period and partially during Putin's first presidency) stems from internal

Tbilisi Mayor Charged Without Being Arrested

By CIVIL.GE

Tbilisi mayor, Gigi Ugulava, has been formally charged with two counts of mispending and embezzlement of large amount of public funds and one count of money laundering into two separate cases.

Ugulava, who appeared before investigators at the Finance Ministry's Investigations Service on Saturday, was not arrested. Chief Prosecutor Archil Kbilashvili said on February 22 that Ugulava would be charged without arresting him.

Ugulava's lawyer said that his client was not questioned by investigators as he exercised his right to silence.

The Investigations Service says charges involve two separate cases – one related to “a criminal scheme of seizure of Imedi TV” in 2008, which is also related to the case of Tbilisi municipality's Rike deal and another one related to mispending of GEL 4.1 million of public funds by creating hundreds of fictitious job positions in a municipal service through which funds were channeled to pay salaries of UNM party activists.

In connection to the case of alleged fictitious jobs, Ugulava has been charged with second and third parts of article 182 of the criminal code, involving “mispending or embezzlement” of large amount of state funds by an official, carrying prison term for seven to eleven years.

In connection to “Imedi TV/Rike deal” case, Ugulava has been charged with the same parts of the article 182 of the criminal code, plus third part of article 194 of the same code, involving legalization of especially large amount of illicit income, carrying prison term from nine to twelve years.

Ugulava denies charges as “absurd” and claims that criminal proceedings against him aim at forcing him out of office, which, he says, is part of Georgian Dream coalition's efforts to take over Tbilisi municipality, now controlled by the UNM party.

Supporters of Ugulava, among them UNM parliamentarians, as well as UNM's secretary general Vano Merabishvili, were gathered outside the Investigations Service on Saturday protesting against filing of criminal charges against the Tbilisi mayor.

“I am happy today as never before, because I see you are in good spirits and I see hope in your eyes,” Ugulava told supporters before entering into the Investigations Service. Ugulava said criminal proceedings against him were “the least of our problems”. He said “the country is in a trouble” because



the right to express a dissent opinion was in danger.

Supporters greeted Ugulava with applause after he left the building of Investigations Service with some chanting “Gigi, Gigi”.

Secretary of National Security Council Giga Bokeria, who was among those gathered outside Finance Ministry's Investigations Service, said that PM Bidzina Ivanishvili's declared goal “is to destroy political opposition.”

“This case [against Ugulava] is about an attempt to seize Tbilisi municipality without elections, which is a very dangerous choice for our country's democracy. But I am sure that this goal to [silence] real political opponents will never be materialized,” Bokeria said.

Commenting on criminal charges against Ugulava, President Saakashvili said in an interview with public broadcaster's program, Accents, on February 22 that “Ugulava will of course defend himself” and expressed hope that “independent judiciary still exists in Georgia”; he said what “matters most of all is to maintain free local-self governance, Tbilisi self-governance.”

“That's more important than the issue of whether he [Ugulava] will be arrested or not,” Saakashvili said.

In respect of Imedi TV/Rike deal case, investigators claim that in 2008, when Imedi TV's controlling shares were owned by Joseph Kay, a distant relative of late tycoon Badri Patakatsishvili, founder of this TV station, “then defense minister Davit Kezerashvili met Kay and through direct threats convinced him to relinquish [his ownership] of the Imedi TV on the condition that Gigi Ugulava would have reimbursed USD 10 million”, which Kay had spent on TV channel's operations.

The Investigations Service claims that Ugulava schemed Rike deal for the purpose of obtaining USD 10 million state funds and covertly transferring it to Joseph Kay.

The Investigations Service

launched probe into sale and then buying back of over four hectare plot of land, known as Rike, in downtown Tbilisi by the capital city's municipality in December 2012.

Tbilisi city municipality sold 43,350 square meters plot of land on Rike for USD 7 million to a private company New Rike in 2006; in late 2008 the Tbilisi municipality bought back from the same company the same plot of land for USD 17 million.

The Investigations Service said on February 22, that in late

2008 Tbilisi mayor Gigi Ugulava made a deal with owners of New Rike company on buying back plot of land on Rike for USD 17 million, but New Rike should have transferred funds to an offshore company controlled by Joseph Kay. After selling plot of land on Rike to the municipality, New Rike transferred USD 8.81 million to Kay's offshore-registered entity, the Investigations Service said, adding that the deal represented seizure of Imedi TV through “misappropriation of state funds and money launder-

ing” scheme.

About two weeks after the October 1, 2012 parliamentary elections Imedi TV, which was run by President Saakashvili's long-time ally and former government member Giorgi Arveladze, was transferred in ownership to late tycoon Badri Patakatsishvili's family. The television station is now wholly owned by widow of Patakatsishvili, Ina Gudavadze.

Speaking with Imedi TV's political talk show on February 22, Chief Prosecutor Archil Kbilashvili said that according to a testimony of Joseph Kay, President Saakashvili was aware of deals surrounding Imedi TV back in 2008. Kbilashvili said that Kay had indicated in his testimony that while meeting with Kezerashvili, he also spoke via phone with President Saakashvili in December, 2008; citing Kay's testimony Kbilashvili also said that Kay was told by Saakashvili to do what Kezerashvili was asking him. Also citing Kay's testimony before investigators, Kbilashvili said that in early 2008, before Kay took control over Imedi in controversial circumstances, Kay met President Saakashvili over the Imedi TV issue and its future operations. Asked if prosecutors would “question the President” over Imedi TV issue, Kbilashvili responded:

“In the course of investigation, it is possible to invite the Georgian President as a witness for the purpose of clarifying this issue.”

President's spokesperson Manana Manjgaladze dismissed Chief Prosecutor's remarks as “dirty lie.”

“It is difficult to talk about cohabitation when another party resorts to such methods. It is impossible to speak about cohabitation on the one hand and on the other hand to resort to such dirty fabrication,” Manjgaladze said.

Another case over which Ugulava has been charged is related to allegations by the Investigations Service that total of 764 people were fictitiously employed in Tbilisi municipality's waste management service, receiving salaries, total of GEL 4.13 million, from capital city's budget, but in fact performing various activists for UNM party.

“Investigators accuse us of employing people. Yes, we have employed them and I think there is no crime in it,” Ugulava said late on February 22, adding that the truth would be revealed during court proceedings where hundreds of witnesses, who have testified before investigators into this case, will have the opportunity to testify “freely” before the court.

WORLD

Dramatic Rescue from Flooded Athens

By DAILYMAIL

A terrified motorist was left clinging onto her car as it was swept away by flood waters surging through the streets of Athens today.

The dramatic scenes unfolded as torrential rain led to flash flooding in the Greek capital, where one woman has died and thousands more people left stranded.

Two men climbed onto the roof of the silver 4x4 and pulled the driver to safety in northern suburb of Chalandri.

The woman had been clinging onto the side of the vehicle as it was carried away by flood muddy flood water more than a metre high.

At least five other cars in the same block were overturned and three were piled on top of each other.

Police said a 27-year-old woman died of a probable heart

attack after being trapped in her car in Halandri, another suburb north of the capital.

The heavy rain is the worst seen in the recession-hit country for 50 years. It caused a river to burst its banks, bringing chaos to much of Athens during the morning rush hour.

There have also been power cuts across the city and public transport has been severely disrupted, with at least two subway stops being closed.

Meteorologist Yannis Kal-

lianos told state television: “This is the worst storm since 1961. We're talking about 52 years without ever having seen such a heavy downpour in this area.”

Officials said Pappou was among the worst affected areas, having been swamped by more than 130 litres of rainfall per square metre in just under three hours.

By mid-morning, rescue teams received at least 900 calls from residents whose houses were flooded and more than 90 calls from commuters marooned in their cars.

In parliament, a worker was left dangling through the glass ceiling over the assembly as she tried to contain water dripping into the room below where lawmakers were about to start debate.



Are Stock Markets Really Becoming More Short Term?

By MARK J. ROE

CAMBRIDGE – In a recent commentary, I examined whether increasing pressure from more rapid stock trading is inducing corporate managers to obsess more over quarterly results, impairing their capacity to run their firms for the long term. But I noted how pressures from governments and rapid technological change are potentially just as powerful as those from stock-market trading. How carefully can one plan for the long term in, say, the eurozone, if the currency itself is at risk? And how long should brick-and-mortar retailers' time horizons be if distribution is moving online?

It is regularly argued (to the point of having become conventional wisdom) that cheap and easy portfolio reconfiguration, technical trading strategies, and investors' moves from one sector to another force managers to pay too much attention to immediate financial results. And, as trading accelerates, the pressures increase.

But, even if managers and boards at publicly traded firms focus excessively on their quarterly results, and even if median stock-holding periods have shortened greatly in recent decades, it is difficult to know whether stock-market trading has become more rapid in ways that would make managers pay even more attention to quarterly results.

We must draw some very basic – but insufficiently recognized – distinctions about averages. One way to measure the average stock-holding period and its change over the past quarter-century is to add up all holding periods of all investors at the end of the year and divide the total by a weighted average of the stockholders. The result – the mean – is the average holding period.

Alternatively, we might line up all of the holders from shortest to longest and check how the holding period for the one in the middle has changed – the median. Often, these two ways to measure an average will have the same result and show the same rate of change. But when they differ, the difference should affect our thinking about the phenomenon. For stock markets, the difference may be

important.

Consider something not involving stock trading. Imagine a suburb of Seattle with a population of 10,000 and an average annual *per capita* income of \$50,000 in 1970. By 1980, the average soars to \$100,000. What was the source of this spectacular increase? Was it superior education, good policing, infrastructure development, or something else? Can policymakers elsewhere study what the suburb was doing right and imitate it?

Now consider that mean wealth doubled in Redmond, Washington, as a result of Bill Gates' success. By 1980, his meager 1970 income of \$50,000 had increased to, say, \$50 million. Is it meaningful to say that average income in Redmond had doubled in the decade, when income was unchanged for everyone else? The median, unchanged over the decade, would better describe the suburb's average income. Whether Redmond's average wealth increased depends on how you look at it.

For stock markets, consider this possibility: 100 shareholders each hold 100 shares of the XYZ Corporation for three years. They sell their shares

after holding them for three years to other investors, who in turn hold their shares for three years and then re-sell them. The average holding duration for each shareholder is three years.

Thereafter, 90 do what they have always done – hold for three years. But the other 10 sell their shares every four months to a new set of shareholders. One might be tempted to say that the average duration for holding stock in the XYZ Corporation was only 20 months, while in the good old days it was 36 months. In other words, holding duration was nearly halved. And, if we think managers are paying more attention than ever to quarterly results, we might think we have found the culprit.

But what is the best way to interpret the change in the holding duration for policymaking purposes? For 90% of the shareholders, nothing has changed and their holding period has not shortened.

This analytic problem is hardly unique to short-termism. When a distribution is skewed and not symmetrical around a middle value, the mean can fail to describe properly the population and its change over



time. Emerging evidence suggests that this may well be the case in the stock market.

A team of finance economists – Martijn Cremers, Ankur Pareek, and Zacharias Sautner – [recently assembled data](#) examining a related issue. They find that holding durations for two of America's primary shareholders, Fidelity and Vanguard, have not budged since 1985. More broadly, the duration of holdings by mutual funds and pension funds – America's core stockholder class – *increased* during the quarter-century from 1985 to 2010. In 1985, the duration for stock holding in the United States was 1.2 years; by 2010, it had increased to 1.5 years. A fringe of rapid traders may well have greatly reduced the mean duration of stock holding, but, for the bulk of traditional Amer-

ican shareholders, the duration did not change.

These results fit badly with the typical argument that short-termism has increased in recent decades. Maybe the stockholder base was too short-term-oriented a quarter-century ago – maybe the original 1.2 year (mean) average holding period was too short. But, if American management has become more short-termist in the ensuing quarter-century and even more attentive to quarterly financial results, the reason does not seem to be a shortening of core shareholders' holding period. The media, corporate players, and lawmakers seem not to be thinking about the problem – and how to measure it – properly.

Mark Roe is a professor at Harvard Law School.

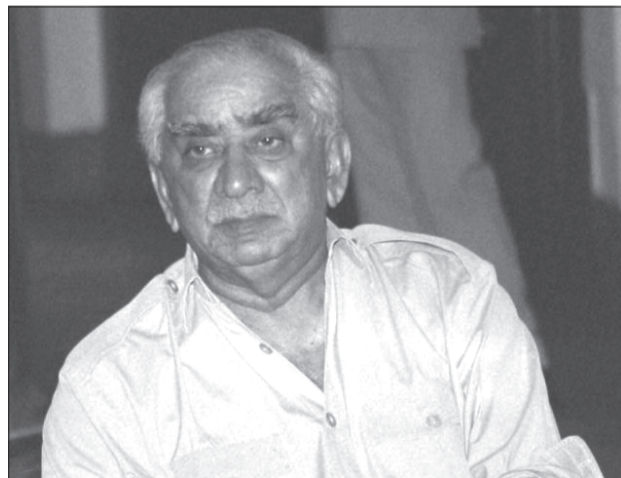
The Road to Asian Unity

By JASWANT SINGH

NEW DELHI – Asia's lack of institutions to ameliorate regional tensions is often lamented. But greater Asian unity may be arising by the backdoor, in the form of new and impressive infrastructure links.

Today's efforts to expand regional infrastructure projects are all the more remarkable for linking even countries locked in diplomatic, and sometimes open, conflict. New bus routes between India and Pakistan may not make headlines, but they deliver a degree of normalcy to relations riddled with mistrust. Elsewhere, rail links between China and Vietnam, road developments connecting India and Bangladesh, and new ports, harbors, and pipelines in Myanmar and Pakistan are forging a new form of economic unity alongside the region's manufacturing supply chains.

Such ventures now dot Asia's geography, even as tensions over unsettled boundaries and sovereignty claims are fueling turbulence. Consider Afghanistan, which faces yet another phase of internal dislocation. There, India nonetheless



continues to build a strategic road around the country, as well as a vitally important dam at Salma. And a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan, which would traverse the country, is coming closer to reality.

Then there is the Bay of Bengal, where Chinese infrastructure investment is set to transform the backward Myanmar seaside town of Kyaukpyu and the surrounding region by tapping offshore gas fields and constructing a pipeline to Yunnan Province in southern China. These initiatives reflect not only China's voracious drive for natural resources and new trade routes, but also

Myanmar's own plans to create a "mini-Singapore" within its borders.

Of course, China is not investing in such infrastructure out of altruism. Almost a decade ago, outgoing Chinese President Hu Jintao identified the country's "Malacca Dilemma," referring to the channel between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra that connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as a grave strategic threat. Roughly 80% of China's energy imports pass through that potential chokepoint, which is mostly policed by the US Navy. The links now being developed in Myanmar will reduce China's

dependence on the Strait of Malacca by more than one-third.

The plans are illustrative of Myanmar's pragmatic new outlook. Sandwiched between China and India, Myanmar, which had earlier suspended construction of the Chinese-backed Myitsone Dam, may one day be the link that facilitates closer economic ties between the two giants. Japan, not wishing to be left out of the great infrastructure game in Myanmar, is investing billions in port reconstruction.

To the west, in Pakistan, one can travel on the Makran coast along a road built with Chinese assistance, eventually coming to the ancient fishing port of Gwadar, with its natural deep-water harbor. With a development plan by the Port of Singapore Authority having fallen through, the China Overseas Ports Holding Company has taken over, raising strategic concerns in India, Japan, and the US. Indeed, despite intense opposition from the US, China's project in Gwadar may soon be followed by a joint project with Iran to lay a pipeline carrying 750 million cubic feet of natural gas per day.

China is also actively pursu-

ing the construction of a Pan-Asia Railroad, which, when complete, will form an enormous circular route. Starting in Kunming in Yunnan Province, it will extend through Myanmar and south to Bangkok, where a spur will traverse Malaysia to Singapore. From Bangkok, the line will run east through Cambodia and north through Vietnam to Hanoi, then through Laos and back to Kunming.

This sounds like an enormous undertaking, and it is; but, with some rail lines already existing (some for many decades), the project could be completed by the 2015 target date. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations' long-held dream of unity might first arrive by rail.

Meanwhile, India has already opened up road communications linking the East Indian state of Manipur to North Myanmar, with India's Border Roads Organization completing the first all-weather road connecting the two countries. And, in Central Asia, India has projects at Ayni Air Base near Dushanbe in Tajikistan, including a functioning field hospital (where the late Ahmed Shah Massoud, the leader of Afghanistan's anti-Soviet war, died following an assassination attempt on September 9, 2001).

These infrastructure investments clearly hold the potential to bind Asia closer together than ever before. But there are geopolitical risks in this scram-

ble for development. Predictably, the West is ramping up its aid, particularly in Myanmar, where the streets of Yangon are now choked with traffic created by aid and government development agencies (and investors).

Of course, tension is probably unavoidable as these links develop. Tellingly, Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has spoken of her country in terms of the "vicinity of China, the geographical distance of the US, and the cultural linkages with India." The question is whether Asia's infrastructure investments, particularly those by China, will be used to create Asian satellites of the Middle Kingdom, or become tools to be used among equals.

Asia can use its geography either to keep its states isolated, or to trade with one another and develop to the benefit of all. After centuries of isolation and colonial slumber, the region is now awake to the potential benefits of greater unity. It will not matter that the infrastructure may not have been built solely for that purpose if Asia's leaders keep their eyes on prosperity, rather than only on power.

Jaswant Singh, a former Indian finance minister, foreign minister, and defense minister, is the author of Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence.

Silk Road Dining in Georgia - Gruzбек Style

By KOBA SAMSONIDZE

Tbilisi has faced a serious historical deficiency. Despite being the capital of a gastronomically based culture, the diversity of dining options in Tbilisi has been severely limited. You had your neighborhood dukani, the khatchapuri stand down the street, and your favorite all night khinkali spots, but that was about it...until recently.



Yes, there have been a few Chinese restaurants, a couple of 'sushi' joints, various American fast food chains, and some pizzerias, but real culinary diversity in the Tbilisi has been few and far between, and not at all helped by the tendency of Georgians to value their cuisine as higher on the food chain than others, and therefore avoid foreign culinary influence entirely.

During Soviet times, restaurants were an unheard of bourgeoisie luxury, out of place within a workers society. There were *sasadilos*, small standing room only affairs with cheap and quick foods for workers on the go, but that was

about it. After the fall of the Soviet Union, when restaurants were free to operate, the dire economic situation, coupled with the basic danger inherent with being out late on the streets in pre-rose revolution Tbilisi made the prospects of dining out unattractive for many.

This culinary isolation lasted close to twenty years, and in that time Georgians retreated back into their traditional comfort foods. Recently however, more exotic (read: not Georgian) options have started to return as nationals seek out less traditional fare, and become more open to food outside the bread, meat and cheese trinity. Meanwhile expats' search for a bit of diversity in their restaurant ro-

tation or desire for a taste of their own culinary tradition.

One of these more exotic options is Gruzбек, located on the west bank of the Mtkvari next to the office of the Georgian Patriarch, it is the undisputed king of Uzbek cuisine in Tbilisi.

For the uninitiated, Uzbek food is a true East meets West affair. Involving huge platters of roasted meat reminiscent of any back yard BBQ, but also, incorporating many influences from farther east, notably China, in its generous use of noodles, as well as its geographical home, the steppe of Central Asia with prominent use of lamb and bread.

The restaurant itself is

styled like a sultan's palace. Plush embroidered pillows cover practically everything. Low tables next to couches rest under tall mosaic adorned domed ceilings. The luxurious harem like atmosphere is the perfect environment to drink, eat and drink some more.

All meals at Gruzбек must begin with large, family sized cuts of lamb as well as sheaping plates of sweet rice mixed with fruit, vegetables or meat called plov. This, along with the tasty *shakrap* salad made of thinly sliced tomato and onions sprinkled with salt and pepper should be the basis for all meals at Gruzбек.

Additionally the Uzbek equivalent of khinkali, steamed dumplings called *manti*, or the smaller *samsa* are wonderful appetizers, and are available in vegetarian varieties. If you are in the mood for soup, *lagman* is a hearty Asian inspired soup with noodles made of dough that has been repeatedly stretched and folded over on itself which fans of East Asian cuisine will be familiar with.

Finally, as anyone who has spent any amount of time in Georgia knows, no meal is complete without bread, and at

Gruzбек this is no exception. The traditional Uzbek *obi non*, are round flat loafs with a depression in the middle, and are baked in an oven similar to that used for Georgian tonisपुरi, but are denser and much more filling.

Gruzбек is a true dining ex-

perience, and not a place for a quick snack. Don't be surprised if the sights and sounds of frequent, and impressive belly dancing performances interrupt your dinner conversation, or if a neighboring table of diners invites you to join in a toast. To that end, you would be a mistake when dining at Gruzбек to not order a bottle of vodka and some mineral waters. Not only so you can



return the toast, but because you are likely to spend at least a couple of hours on the comfortable couches eating, talking and toasting with co-workers, friends and family while watching as your table piles up with plates of colorful, and delicious food.

If you are in the mood for a taste of Asian cuisine, or want to convince a Georgian who is wary of food outside of Georgian staples Gruzбек is a great choice. It offers enough familiar looking foods for the most culinary unadventurous, while managing to include a wealth of exotic and diverse flavors that will please the most well traveled foodie. Gruzбек is located at 3 Erekle II Square.

In Their Shoes

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

I went to this photo exhibition "In My Shoes". There were personal items, amateurish taken photos, essays and little writings by four former female addicts. When it comes to addicts or former addicts it doesn't move me much personally but it does take me right to the memory of those who are no longer around because of drug abuse. I know I know, the entire humanity worldwide has been going over and over this very global issue. Books, movies, plays, demonstrations nothing is preventing drug abuse. You might think I'm not going to write anything new, yet I encourage you to keep reading because I may not be able to find a new answer, ask a new question, yet I'm going to be using some really interesting quotes by interesting people.

"I was more addicted to self-destruction than to the drugs themselves..." - Gerard Way. As bad as they are they surround us. The longer the distance, the better the safer it is, yet we are not the ones who choose it. It doesn't matter how far we are from them, they still take lives from us. Lives of people we know, because an addict may still be alive but it's just

the shape of the person, it's not the essence. "The edge... there is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is the ones who have gone over." - Hunter S. Thompson.

"Drugs are a waste of time. They destroy your memory and your self-respect and everything that goes along with your self-esteem." - Kurt Cobain. We all know - drugs are bad. There is a certain age though when they are in the spotlight to us. And I mean everyone. Alluring for some, cool for others, scary for the rest, but to all of us they are always forbidden. That's probably the first reason human kind finds out they even exist. Then we get more and quite vivid information, then some of us give in and there is no vivid ending to that - you actually are strong enough to quit or the death comes. "Selling my soul would be a lot easier if I could just find it" claimed 80s heavy metal rocker Nikki Sixx.

"When you smoke the herb, it reveals you to yourself" told Bob Marley. There are always different opinions why people do drugs. Some do it cos they are sad and are looking for peace and happiness, some cos they are tired and need to relax, some want to rest the brain from everyday busy thoughts about a job, some cos they are happy so why not spoil themselves with a little celebration, some cos they simply can, some cos

they are curious, some cos they need more energy, some to loosen up, some cos they think now it's too late not to. But all these have one thing in common - "A drug is a chemical compound.



The problem comes when people who take drugs treat them like a license to behave like an asshole" - Frank Zappa.

Yes, drugs steal our personality, kindness, habits, yet we are so eager and happy to any extent. "Drugs are a bet with your mind" - Jim Morrison. I couldn't agree more. It is a bet, but not by the people, but by the drugs. The worst thing about it is that we think we are in charge, when it's the other way around. Once we are hooked it owns us. Knowing

the side effects we still can't resist. We promise it's the last time, but it's never so. It consumes a human being and it appears like there is no other way of living other than with drugs. People are willing to sell whatever, to betray whoever, to cheat on whatever, to lie to whoever only to get their next fix. "It's only in drugs or death that we'll see anything new, and death is just too controlling" -

in this world. It is a choice for everyone to do that first shot of heroin or any other drug, it's the choice to help others or to ruin their happiness, it's the choice to have an affair with married people, it's the choices we make that lead us to actions, with all the resulting dreaded side effects and of course their results too. "But I didn't understand then that I could hurt somebody so badly; she would never recover. That a person can, just by living, damage another human being beyond repair" - Haruki Murakami

Chuck Palahniuk.

"I'm the one that has to die when it's time for me to die, so let me live my life, the way I want to" - Jimi Hendrix. I agree with him on that matter. We all choose our way to live, and I am against good or bad, right or wrong, Jew or Christian, Afro-American or Caucasian, to me it all comes down to one simple principle - make any choice, and hopefully it is not to harm others. It's the choices we make, the priorities we set that lead us to bringing good or harm

are they become dead hostages, so let's not give up on them. Let us show the strong will by not leaving and even if they don't ask for help, that's the whole concept of kindness. Let's not do drugs, let's become drugs for them. Let's hook them on kindness and hope, and then the hard work comes in the picture. But most importantly our loved ones shall remain the picture right next to us.

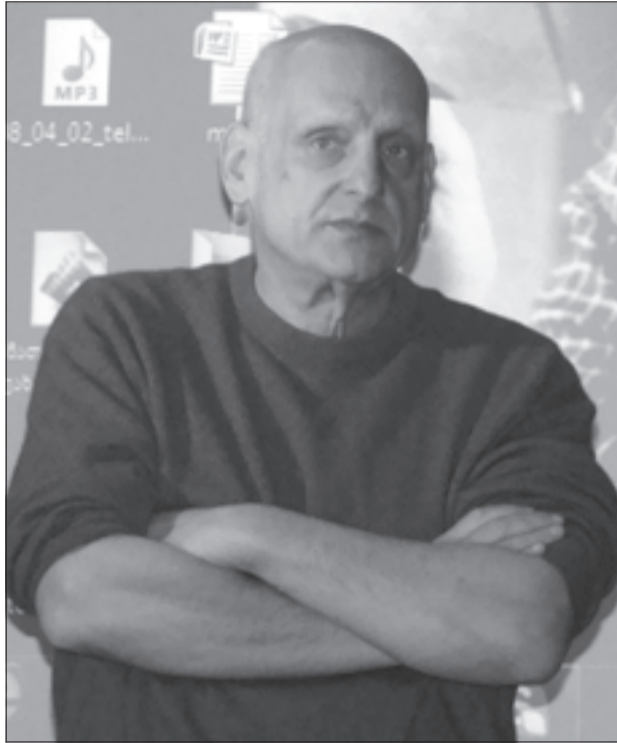
I may be daydreaming, but this is what I believe in. I believe in making more effort towards people who are lost to addiction in order not to see my close friends crying over their dead siblings, or children. Throw a word, a line, a play, a movie, a novel someone out there may get a hang of it and at least think about quitting. One word can save a life, let's not be stingy when it comes our time or effort. Throw it out in the space; it may land on someone's mind.

"Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something inside of you... There's no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time... And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive... But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm; you won't be the same..." (Haruki Murakami) you will be "Biutiful".

Jim Stark: 30 years in the Film Industry

By TINA GOGOLADZE

Meeting an attractive young girl at a party is a common experience in a young boy's life, but for Jim Stark a well-known American producer and script writer, this experience was a first step in a successful career. The girl was a student of film school so in order to impress her Jim introduced himself as a film lawyer. Weeks later the girl from the party, Sarah Driver, called him and said that she produced a short movie for his boyfriend and needed a lawyer to make a feature film with him. His boyfriend was Jim Jamousch.



After 30 years working in the movie industry and producing films like "Down By Law", "Night On Earth" "Mystery Train" and others, short movies was the theme of the master class, which Jim Stark conducted for Tbilisi's "Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film University" students this week. It is the second visit of the famous producer in Georgia and as he says not the last.

The first film he worked on as a lawyer was Jim Jamousch's "Stretching Paradise". After completing his first project he received a letter from Gregoraki, young director who wanted to work with him. In collaboration they made and produced "The Living End" and "Doom Generation".

Jim, how did you first get interested in making films?

When I was young, I took a class in filming. Now those kinds of classes are very common, but in the 1960s it was quite unusual. The class was about European art movies. I never saw films like

that and I fell in love with them. I still like them more than Hollywood films. I had this interest from my teenage years and I wrote film reviews for newspapers during high school, university and even when I was in law school.

Then I met one independent director John Jost he was a very famous director of experimental movies and the fact that he could make movies by himself so cheaply impressed me a lot. However, my first real involvement was when I worked with Jarmusch on "Stretching Paradise". I had a serious interest in films and the real question was what career I could really have. I tried to produce films, but I never made a real commitment to it. I said I'll try for a while and see how it goes. "A while" turned out to be a long

while and here I am. I'm still not sure about my commitment, but if there are new projects that I'm interested in, I just work on them.

Which are the most important or interesting projects in your career?

Two films: "Cold Fever" and a movie based on Charles Bukowski's novel "Sactorum". Those are two projects, which I was mostly creatively involved, so they are my favorite ones. Besides Jim Jarmusch and Gregoraki and I had a chance to work with very interesting film directors and created movies which have their own audience. I think I'm quite lucky.

Nowadays art and individual films have to compete with commercial projects with bigger finances. Where is the outlet for American independent films?

The business has changed a lot. When I started working on films, our movies was playing in theatres in thirty countries and it was like that till the late 90s. Since then it got harder and harder to get cinema relieves or even to make sales through television. So the outlets now for most American independent films are film festivals. We also do small self releases in small cinemas in 10-15 cities. Every year at the Sundance Film Festival there are 3-4 films that are picked up and distributed by studios.

What was the biggest change in film industry which influenced

of money to promote and advertise which we didn't do with artistic films. Money is not still available for artistic movies and because you don't have time to build an audience by word of mouth, the possibility for cinema distribution is basically destroyed. That has been a big change.

On the Hollywood side they are spending bigger and bigger amounts of money on films; they want bigger and bigger stars in movies, special effects and lots of action so they can drive more people in on the first weekend and by the third weekend the film is over but it has made a hundred

With the advent of new technology now anybody with a still camera or even an I-phone with HD video recording can make a movie. The editing part went from huge studios to laptop computers. So everybody can make a movie, that's good news. The bad news is on distribution side, especially with the change in Europe from cultural television to commercial TV. They used to run art films during prime time on German television but now you can't even sell films to German or British stations. That's a change.

This is your second visit to



the distribution of art movies?

When we started with Stretching Paradise it stayed in movie theatres for a year and a half. Those days the cinemas would keep the film for a long time and let the audience spread the word. That system doesn't exist anymore. Now even for small films there is a Hollywood system of being focused on first weekend, and the main question is how many people will come on the opening night.

When lots of people come on the first weekend you spent lots

million dollars. That's the model used today and with such a model, it is too hard to make small artistic movies.

The independent movies in the US started when there was a cheaper alternative to shoot movies, which at that time done with 60 mm cameras, small lighting packages, portable microphones and tape recorders. So they would go without the studio onto location and make low budget independent films.

During my involvement in film industry, this changed again.

Georgia. Are you planning to work with Georgian filmmakers in the future?

If some interesting projects will catch my eye I will be happy to work on Georgian films. As truism is now developing in Georgia and more people from abroad visit this country I think that interest will grow in filmmaking as well. This county has very beautiful landscapes and shooting movies is much cheaper here. I keep telling my colleagues how perfect Georgia is to shoot a movie.

Georgian National Museum Presents 150 Years of Pirosmanni

By KENDRA PARADIS

As Tbilisi and the rest of eastern Georgia waits for winter' dreary cold grey skies to finally settle upon us, it can be hard to find things to do in the city. This winter season has been full of interesting museum exhibits displaying everything from art and literature to historical and contemporary political themes. If you're interested in art of even just a view of Georgian life in a simpler time the Pirosmanni exhibit is an exciting collection of the world renowned painter's life work.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of Niko Pirosmannashvili (1862-1918), in association with



UNESCO, the exhibit "Pirosmanni 150" is displayed at the Georgian National Museum-Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery. A wide range of Pirosmanni's works from Shalva Amira-

nashvili Museum of Fine Arts will be displayed at the exhibition, including Pirosmanni's 108 paintings and unique photo collections from the archives.

The exhibition of the self-

taught painter will present rare photo materials depicting the city of Tbilisi in 1860s-1910s and various scenes from Pirosmanni's life. A native of Kakheti, his earlier works represent the region, known for its winemaking and natural landscapes. Pirosmanni's primitivist works were inspired by the social conditions of his time and ordinary Georgian people and their everyday lives. He rarely depicted urban settings and was the only Georgian animalist. His fondness for nature however, is demonstrated through his attention to composition as his style did not focus on pure imitation or attention to detail. Growing interest internationally of Pirosmanni show nevertheless, that works by self-taught artists have never lost interest in contemporary society.

The exhibition is accompa-

nied by an exhibition catalogue, as well as special educational programs. Art historian Gogi Khoshartaria and other Georgian scientists will hold talks about Pirosmanni's art and life, as well as famous Georgian film director Giorgi Shengelaia who will also lead discussions; all open to the public.

If that doesn't strike your fancy, a new exhibit has just opened in the Literature Museum that displays original photographs from the 1800s during Georgia's last attempt to avoid

domination from the Russian Empire. The exhibit displays the conspiracy against the death of Nicholas I in addition to Ilia Chvchavadze's indirect response to the appointment of Russia's general-governor of Georgia, Mikhail Vorontsov.

With the exhibitions open until March 30, don't miss the chance to visit some of Tbilisi's museums this winter and be enchanted by Georgia's past. With so much to see, defending yourself from the winter blues just got a little easier.



U.S. Hopes For Post-Election Calm In Armenia

By RFE/RL's Armenian Service

The United States urged Armenia's leading political forces to show "restraint" in the wake of a disputed presidential election and again endorsed the findings of the main international vote-monitoring mission late on Wednesday.

"The United States congratulates the people of Armenia on their February 18 presidential elections, which were judged by international observers to be generally well-administered and characterized by a respect for fundamental freedoms, including those of assembly and expression," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a written statement.



Nuland said Washington is at the same time concerned over violations reported by the Western observers mostly representing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "We agree with the findings that while Election Day was calm and orderly, it was marked by undue interference in the process, mainly by proxies representing the incumbent, and some serious violations, including cases of pressure on voters," she said.

"We urge law enforcement officials to investigate and to take appropriate action in response to credible reporting of election violations, and we call on all parties to remain calm in this post-election period and to exercise restraint in their actions," added Nuland.

Despite the guarded praise, it remains to be seen whether U.S. President Barack Obama will congratulate President Serzh Sarkisian on his controversial reelection. Sarkisian received no congratulatory message from Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, when he became president in an even more disputed ballot held five years ago.

Sarkisian has so far been congratulated by only one major Western leader, French President Francois Hollande. Sarkisian's office said on Thursday that he has also received similar letters from the heads of two other European Union member states, Lithuania and Slovakia.

Earlier on Wednesday, EU's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, and enlargement commissioner, Stefan Fuele, welcomed "further progress" in the Armenian authorities' handling of elections. In a joint statement, they too endorsed the findings of the OSCE-led mission.

Citing that statement, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt gave a more negative assessment of the Armenian election. "I think it's fair to say that the quality of the presidential elections in Armenia was well below expectations," Bildt wrote on Twitter.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry was quick to dismiss this criticism, insisting that international monitors "welcomed the progress achieved during the presidential elections." "Carl Bildt seems to be lacking good advisors on Armenia, and therefore the quality of information he possesses is disappointing," read a ministry comment posted on Facebook.

Armenian Opposition Supporters Resume Protests In Yerevan



By RFE/RL's Armenian Service

Several thousand opposition supporters are rallying again in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, to protest the official results of the February 18 election that returned incumbent President Serzh Sarkisian to office.

About 8,000 supporters of former Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisian, Sarkisian's main challenger, gathered in central Yerevan on February 22.

Hovannisian was expected to tell his supporters about discussions he had with Sarkisian at a meeting at the president's office on February 21.

Sarkisian was declared the winner of the presidential election with 58.64 percent of the vote, Hovannisian finished in second place with 36.75 percent.

After the results were announced, Hovannisian said the vote was rigged.

Activists of the nationalist Dashnaksutyun party and former presidential candidate Andrias Ghukasian joined the demonstrators on February 22.

Sarkisian, Hovannisian Meet On Post-Election Tensions

By Karlen Aslanian, RFE/RL's Armenian Service

President Serzh Sarkisian and his main election challenger, Raffi Hovannisian, met behind the closed doors on Thursday to discuss opposition demands for the annulment of the official vote results that gave victory to the incumbent.

Short video of the unexpected encounter released by the presidential press office showed the two main election contenders smiling and greeting each other. "You look kind of sad," Sarkisian said, shaking Hovannisian's hand. "No, [I am] righteous," countered the latter.

"It's nice to see you, Mr.



President Serzh Sarkisian (L) meets with opposition leader Raffi Hovannisian at the presidential palace in Yerevan

The meeting requested by Hovannisian lasted for one and a half hours. Few of its details were immediately made public by either man.

Sarkisian agreed to receive Hovannisian after the opposition leader accompanied by hundreds of supporters marched from Liberty Square, the scene of his post-election rallies, to the presidential palace in Yerevan.

Sarkisian," added the U.S.-born oppositionist clad in blue jeans and a black pullover.

The meeting proceeded behind the closed doors. A statement by Sarkisian's office said it focused on "a broad range of issues relating to the presidential elections and the post-election period." "Serzh Sarkisian and Raffi Hovannisian emphasized the priority of carrying out all processes within the



Supporters of Raffi Hovannisian rallied in front of the RA Presidential Residence while Raffi Hovannisian was having a meeting with Serzh Sargsyan

framework of Armenia's constitution and laws," the statement added without elaborating.

Hovannisian, for his part, refused to divulge any details of the talks when he addressed the crowd standing outside the presidential compound 90 minutes later. He said he will publicize them at his next rally scheduled for Friday evening.

"The Armenian people will celebrate our victory in Liberty Square tomorrow at 5 pm," Hovannisian declared. He urged the supporters to disperse, saying that he will be busy for the rest of the day holding "diplomatic meetings" with unspecified individuals.

Some in the crowd disagreed with his decision to interrupt the post-election protests,

chanting "Now! Now!"

Hovannisian again declined to elaborate on the meeting when he made a brief appearance at the square later in the day. Addressing several hundred people standing there, he denounced instead a segment of the official footage which left the impression that he was against the presence of journalists or cameramen at the meeting. He said it was Sarkisian who insisted on holding it behind the closed doors.

The unexpected talks came after Sarkisian and his campaign team rejected Hovannisian's demands to have the official results annulled and recognize him as the rightful winner of Monday's presidential ballot.

Azerbaijani Parliament Limits Sales Of Religious Materials

By RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service

Azerbaijan's parliament has approved an amendment to the law on religions limiting sales of religious materials.

According to the amendment approved on February 22, all religious materials, such as books, video and audiotapes, and discs can be sold only if they are specially marked to show they are allowed for sale in the country.

The new regulation also says that all religious materials should be sold only in specially designated stores.

The parliament speaker, Oqtay Asadov, said the measure's goal was to prevent the illegal import of material propagating religious extremism.

Azerbaijan is a secular country with a mostly Shi'ite Muslim population of more than 9 million.



Azerbaijani Politician Arrested On Corruption Charge

By RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service

An Azerbaijani politician expelled from the ruling party after being implicated in a corruption scandal has been arrested.

The Sabail District Court in Baku ordered Gular Ahmadova to be held in pretrial detention for up to two months.

The Prosecutor-General's Office announced late on February 13 that Ahmadova will be charged with abuse of public office in order to commit embezzlement.

In September, a video appeared online showing Ahmadova, a parliamentary deputy with the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, discussing the size of a bribe required to secure a seat in parliament.

The incident allegedly took place in 2005.

Although corruption is said to be rampant in Azerbaijan, the high-profile exposure of public figures is rare.

Ahadova faces up to 12 years in prison if found guilty.

In Azerbaijan, Anger At An Author, But Not Necessarily At His Argument

By DAISY SINDELAR

lifetime of achievements came tumbling down this week for Azerbaijani author Akram Aylisli, who was stripped of his honorary titles and pension after writing a novel, "Stone Dreams," casting regional rival Armenia in a sympathetic light.

But amid the furor over Aylisli's work, a quieter conversation has also emerged, with many Azerbaijanis calling for steps toward peace with Armenia.

The relationship between Baku and Yerevan is a deeply antagonistic one, plagued by festering anger over the six-year war over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority separatist region located within Azerbaijani territory.

"Stone Dreams," published recently in the Russian literary journal "Druzhba narodov" — which, ironically, translates as "Friendship of the Peoples" — stirred resentment by depicting only the conflict's Azerbaijani attacks against Armenians, notably pogroms in Baku and Sumgait. Incidents of Armenian aggression against Azerbaijanis, such as the February 1992 Khojaly massacre, are conspicuously absent.

But even some Azerbaijanis who suffered during the war have come forward to praise Aylisli's book — including Gunel Movlud, a 31-year-old Azerbaijani

poet and Karabakh refugee.

"This novel can work in Azerbaijan's favor. Of course, it's his own opinion. Maybe what he says isn't the truth, maybe it is. But this novel reflects something. It shows that we're a civilized nation that can accept responsibility for our part in things," Movlud said.

BOOK BURNINGS

Many of Aylisli's defenders appear to be motivated, in part, by the depths of the animosity now directed at one of the country's most respected writers.

After a week of protests, book burnings, and calls for Aylisli to give up his citizenship, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev upped the ante, issuing a formal decree stripping the 75-year-old writer of his honorary title as "People's Writer" and dropping a monthly \$1,250 presidential pension he had received since 2002.

Aliyev argued the measures were a just punishment "for distorting facts in Azerbaijani history and insulting the feelings of the Azerbaijani people." But Aylisli — whose dozens of novels and plays before "Stone Dreams" never touched on the Armenia issue — accused the government of crossing a line in attacking his entire body of work.

"I didn't ask them to give me that title. And they didn't give it to me for this novel. They gave it to me for my other works. So what does it mean? They're canceling out my other books? I really didn't expect anything like

this decree," Aylisli said.

†The crackdown has extended further, with Aylisli's son, a powerful customs official, being asked to resign from his post and Baku's National Drama Theater canceling an anticipated production of Aylisli's play "Don't Love Me."

The severity of the censure may be tied to Aylisli's open criticism of Baku's ruling elite. In addition to its depictions of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, "Stone Dreams" paints a thinly veiled portrait of Aliyev's father and predecessor as president, Heydar, as a corrupt official who buys the loyalty of Baku's intelligentsia with free apartments. And a more recent manuscript, "Big Traffic Jam," which has only appeared in samizdat form, is rumored to subject both Aliyevs to a scathing satirical critique.

But the groundswell of support for Aylisli has forced even the government to edge away from its normally pugilistic stance on Yerevan.

Many Azerbaijanis were astonished February 7 when the country's public television station broadcast a live debate on the Armenia question. The debate featured many contentious exchanges, like this one between Aylisli and ruling-party lawmaker Musa Guliyev:

Guliyev: You wrote something that can be used as Armenian propaganda. They're saying, "Look, Azeris are barbarians. We can't live with them."

Aylisli: You do that! Every single day you curse Armenians,

but then you turn around and tell them that we should live together.

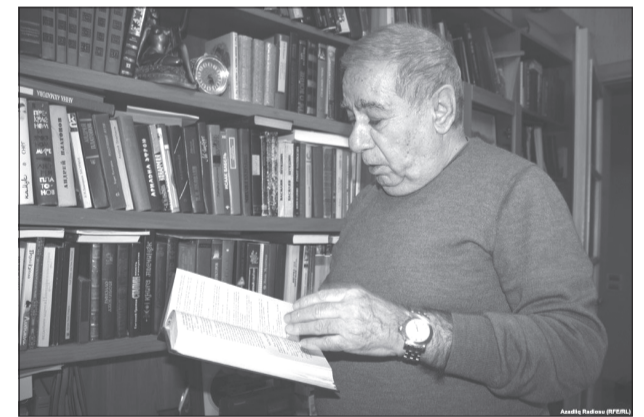
ARMENIAN REACTION

The issue has been closely watched in Armenia, where Aylisli's privations have provided local media with a fresh opportunity to criticize the Azerbaijani regime.

"Agos," the Turkish-based newspaper formerly run by the slain Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, wrote a scathing account of the affair, noting that Aylisli's plays had been a feature of Armenia's Soviet-era theater scene and quoting the writer's own assertion that "Stone Dreams" was a message to Armenians that "it's not the end" and "we can live together."

Levon Ananian, the chairman of Armenia's Union of Writers, on February 8 offered a formal response to the controversy, saying: "Kudos to our Azerbaijani colleague! He is that brave man who blazes the trail, the trail that leads to repentance through truth." Ananian added that "not only Armenians, but also Russians, all people that are concerned about the future of the country...should share this braveness."

It remains to be seen, however, whether any Armenian writer will rise to a challenge posed by Aylisli to his literary counterparts across the border. Speaking last week, Aylisli said he deliberately chose to focus on Azerbaijani violence and that it was the "job of Armenian writers"



Aylisli has been a staunch critic of the ruling regime

to follow suit.

"It's not possible for any people to commit such cruelties and not write about it," he added.

Related: Azeri Author Sends Unpopular Message To Armenians: 'We Can Live Together'

Back in Azerbaijan, there are those who wish Aylisli had chosen to portray both sides of the conflict. Rustam Behrudi, an Azerbaijani poet, says Baku has gone overboard in its attack on the novelist, particularly at a time when it is conducting a significant crackdown against anti-government protesters and political opponents.

At the same time, Behrudi says Aylisli erred in representing only one side of the story. Any story of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, he says, should portray the actions and sufferings of both.

"Azerbaijan has so many big problems. But instead of solving

those problems, they're attacking a writer for his novel. What is literature about? It's about freedom of expression, about liberty," Behrudi says.

"I don't think it's right to attack a writer like this. At the same time, I disagree with the author about some parts of the novel. If an Armenian was beaten and killed in Baku, and a writer writes about it, he should also talk about the events that caused the attack."

Written in Prague by Daisy Sindelar based on reporting in Prague and Baku by Azerbaijani Service correspondents Rovshan Gambirov, Shahnaz Beylergizi, Sevdal Ismayilli, Kebiran Dilaverli, and Turkhan Kerimovand. Gayane Danielyan of RFE/RL's Armenian Service also contributed to this report from Yerevan.

The Defense Dividend

By ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN

BRUSSELS – On a hillside overlooking the Turkish city of Gaziantep, Patriot missile launchers are keeping watch under NATO command and control. This is just one of six Patriot batteries from three Allied countries – Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – providing protection for millions of people along Turkey’s southeastern border with Syria. The deployment shows NATO’s enduring commitment to its core task: safeguarding its members’ security. It also shows that, when a crisis erupts, there is no substitute for effective deterrence and defense.

Virtually every day brings fresh evidence that an arc of crisis – from terrorism and weapons proliferation to cyber-attacks and piracy – is spreading from the Middle East and the Sahel to Central Asia. These risks will not disappear while NATO members focus on fixing their finances. The fact is that our way of life is predicat-



ed on security and stability, without which investment withers, employment collapses, and economies shrink.

In these tough economic times, we are all acutely aware that security comes at a price. But we must not forget that the cost of insecurity is unacceptable. Defense is our essential insurance policy in a complex and unpredictable world.

Conflicts take a terrible human toll, while restoring peace and supporting reconstruction

is extremely expensive. For example, the total cost of the Balkan wars of the 1990’s is estimated at \$150 billion. Today, NATO continues to maintain a safe and secure environment for all of Kosovo’s people, and is helping the entire region progress along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Another example is piracy, which can threaten vital trade and energy routes. The overall cost of piracy off the coast of Somalia in 2011 was estimated

at \$7 billion. But, with concerted international efforts, including by NATO ships, pirate attacks have dropped sharply. Although the situation remains precarious, for the last eight months pirates off the Horn of Africa have been unsuccessful in their attacks against merchant vessels.

Finally, we have seen cyber-attacks not just swamping Web sites, but targeting entire countries, such as NATO ally Estonia in 2007. The Estonian

presidency, parliament, government ministries, political parties, news organizations, banks, and communications companies were all hit. In fact, everything on which a modern democracy and knowledge-based economy relies was attacked. Today, as part of our continuing drive to improve the security of our members’ networks, Estonia’s capital, Tallinn, hosts a NATO cyber-defense center of excellence.

These examples show that hard power and soft power go together. To be effective, we need both. When dealing with international security challenges, diplomacy remains the primary tool; but, by investing in defense, we can back up our statements with military strength and improve our chances of addressing challenges successfully. It is also an investment in our most innovative and technologically advanced industries.

Indeed, research programs led by defense industries have already changed our lives, giving us the jet engine, the Internet, and satellite navigation. In the future, technology developed for military aerial surveillance could have major civilian benefits – for example, helping to control traffic and reduce road congestion, and assisting in the dispatch of rescue teams and humanitarian assistance.

Expertise in the defense sector has been built up over generations. Like any other high-

tech industry, it is constantly evolving. If we cut defense spending too much, for too long, we will sacrifice that hard-won expertise, which will be impossible to regenerate quickly when we need it most.

A strong defense also helps to ensure that the benefits of security are shared across countries. NATO itself embodies that goal. Our 28 allies have more security together than they could achieve on their own. While this helps them to defend their own interests more effectively, it also allows them to play a much more active role in international crisis management, such as the protection of civilians in Libya in 2011.

So defense investment is also investment in security and stability, in diplomacy and cooperation, and in technology and innovation. It is an investment in a safer and more prosperous future for our own countries and for the rest of the world.

Even though defense budgets are under pressure in this time of austerity, it is essential that NATO members hold the line on defense spending and are prepared to increase it when their economies recover. The decisions that we take on defense today will have a profound impact on our children’s security tomorrow.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen is Secretary General of NATO and a former prime minister of Denmark.

Reinvigorating the US-Japan Alliance

By JAMIE METZL

NEW YORK – Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s current visit to the United States provides an ideal opportunity to reinvigorate the long-standing US-Japan bilateral alliance in the face of an increasingly aggressive China and persistent tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

For a half-century, the US-Japan alliance has been a cornerstone of Asian and global peace, security, and stability – and Japan has been an outstanding global citizen. Japan developed the economic-growth model that other Asian countries later emulated so successfully; actively contributed to global economic development; participated in the United Nations and other multilateral institutions (including paying a disproportionately high percentage of UN costs); and has helped to set a global standard for environmental protection and sustainable development.

As Abe arrives in Washing-



ton, DC, Japan and the US are both facing significant internal and external challenges, including rising tensions in Asia. In recent months, Chinese aircraft have repeatedly violated Japanese airspace over the East China Sea, and a Chinese naval vessel locked its weapons-targeting radar on a Japanese destroyer and helicopter.

Likewise, a Chinese military intelligence unit in Shanghai has reportedly hacked – and stolen from – a multitude of US businesses. And North Korea conducted its third nuclear test earlier this month, sending shock

waves through the region.

Tackling these challenges will require strong US-Japanese cooperation. But, to enhance the alliance’s impact, both countries must first focus on reinvigorating their own societies and economies. For the US, that requires overcoming a political culture characterized by polarization and crisis in order to develop effective policies aimed at boosting economic competitiveness.

In some ways, Japan’s domestic challenges are even more daunting, given that its political system has produced six

prime ministers in as many years, none of whom managed to address effectively Japan’s stagnant economy, decade-long deflation, and shrinking workforce. Japan should move to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations – aimed at creating a free-trade zone in the Asia-Pacific region – which could help to open up Japan’s overprotected and under-competitive economy, just as accession to the World Trade Organization did for China.

To stem the contraction of its workforce, Japan should launch a major initiative to enhance female employment – and women’s role at all levels of the economy and society. By implementing measures to improve citizens’ proficiency in English and promoting study abroad, Japan’s leaders can tackle the rising insularity, cultural isolation, and inadequate foreign-language skills that are stifling its social and economic development.

Beyond strengthening the economy and bolstering its partnership with the US, Japan must address the enduring suspicions of countries that were brutalized by Japan’s occupation before and during

World War II. Although previous Japanese governments have issued apologies for the country’s past behavior, Japan, unlike Germany, has not fully faced its history.

During his election campaign, Abe, a self-declared nationalist, expressed a desire to revise Japan’s 1995 apology for its occupation and war record. But he did so while visiting – and voicing his wish to return to – Tokyo’s Yasukuni Shrine, a nationalist pilgrimage site that commemorates, among others, 14 Class A and more than 1,000 Class B and C war criminals.

With Japan’s security in jeopardy, its leaders can no longer afford to be vague about the country’s past. Rather, Abe should reaffirm the country’s 1995 statement; apologize again, even more firmly; and revise or close the Yūshūkan military and war museum at Yasukuni, which glorifies Japan’s militarist past while ignoring its concomitant atrocities. Japan should also reach out to South Korea, America’s other ally in the region, and demonstrate greater flexibility in an effort to resolve the two countries’ long-standing maritime border dispute.

The US and Japan must

make clear that China’s provocative behavior in the East China Sea over the last six months is unacceptable, while highlighting China’s obligation to help to rein in North Korea’s nuclear program. If this demonstration of shared values and resolve does not alter China’s behavior, a wider conversation would inevitably begin in Japan about the potential revision of Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution, which essentially denies Japan the ability to maintain armed forces like most other “normal” countries.

This week, US President Barack Obama and Abe should reinvigorate the bilateral alliance, reaffirming the principles on which it is based and committing to ever-closer military and strategic collaboration. If the two countries work to tackle problems in their own societies, and to strengthen the alliance that binds them, the partnership could be as significant in the future as it has ever been in the past.

Jamie Metzl, a member of President Bill Clinton’s National Security Council, is a Senior Fellow of the Asia Society.



რანეტო ავერსის მტრედი ბარათის გათამაშება

ავერსის სააფთიაქო ქსელის დაგროვებითი "მტრედი ბარათი" უკვე 5 წლის გახლავთ. გარდა იმისა, რომ ბარათზე დაგროვილი თანხით მომხმარებელს სასაჩუქრე კატალოგიდან სასურველი პრიზის არჩევა შეუძლია, მას საშუალება ეძლევა მონაწილეობა მიიღოს წამახალისებელ გათამაშებაშიც.

"ავერსი" მეოთხე გრანდიოზულ გათამაშებას გთავაზობთ:

- 💰 ავერსის აფთიაქებში ყოველ გარდასვლით 20 კოანობი წახსოვრება მიიღობთ გათამაშების 1 ბილოთს, ხოლო რასხრუყლოი თანხის 10% -მდე ყველა მტრედი ბარათზე რაგინბოუნრებათ.
- 💰 ბარათზე რაგინბოუნრებათ 50 მტრედი წახსოვრება მიიღობთ რამდენით გათამაშების 3 ბილოთს!
- 💰 10 მტრედი წახსოვლოთ მიიღობთ გათამაშების 1 ბილოთს.

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Laughter Shows a Good Game

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

Tbilisi can't offer much diversity of fun. Citizens often times nag, searching for some activities after their tiring work days. It's mostly super fancy restaurants or weekend clubbing. To my surprise I discovered people who engage in decent, fun, mind stimulating activity and that is playing the variety of board and party games.

kids does what he loves the most – creating games.

Mark is kind of famous in the gaming world. The world is full of passionate people willing to test his games. Having wanted to be a movie director and a writer, he tried his luck in Hollywood back in the day, writing scripts and making a lot of money. Mark never wanted to be that guy whose scripts were bought but never used in a movie. As Mark says, he had “crazy cool ideas, and wanted

We started a TV show called *Kindred: The Embraced*, based on my book. We cancelled the show after airing one season because, sadly, the leading actor Mark Frankel who died in the motorcycle accident. He was the heart and soul of the show.

An American being into vampires and wanting to dedicate his life to creating board games, what made you think Georgia was a smart move?

At the time I lived in NYC.

tion seeing my daughter when we walk down the street. People in the United States do not notice kids. Unlike here, everybody here loves kids. That says a lot about the country.

How did Georgia inspire you game wise?

Actually one of my latest big projects is inspired by the Georgian political situation. It's a new board game called *Democracy*. To be more precise, it was the battle for a democratic country between people who supported the president and ones that supported the opposition. The president's supporter would say that we are in charge, and then the opposition would say, when we get in charge we shall throw you all in jail. And neither side seemed to understand how the democracy really works. Democracy is about compromising. I wish for a balance among political parties. They should all respect each other and work together for a stronger Georgia. It will happen I'm sure!

And your answer was a board game?



the game produced without people testing it by actually playing it. That's what I see needs to be corrected or fixed. So you want a large group of

Next is one of my favorite tensions in life – frenemies. I have this other party card game *Succubus*. It's a costume party. Vampires are divided into



So I attended one. It was a party game *Succubus* testing night. Bunch of buzz, adventurous company dressed up in costumes gathered up and the night took a start. Teams of people walking around the living room, sipping, laughing, communicating, challenging each other, trading cards trying to get the best poker hand –

to fulfill them into board games.” Having known Mark for years, I had the chance to get a deeper understanding of him and his creativity over a morning Latte in a café near his apartment in Vake.

What was the first step for you?

I was always into vampires. Back when they were not cool,

It was the time of my life when I was selling my company. My partner and I had different plans for the future of our company *White Wolf Publishing*. He wanted to do novels and I wanted to do board games. It was the time to sell, start a new life and move on. That's when my wife and I met, it was 8 years ago. We moved to Georgia, be-



trying to win – turned out fun. What made the party even better, was the guy who creates those games in Tbilisi. Mark Rein-Hagen a US citizen who is happily married to a Georgian woman with two beautiful

I wrote a book titled *Vampire: the Masquerade*. It was a storytelling game. It was not about killing vampires, but how to become one. It was very successful. The agent found it in a game store and looked me up.

cause this a wonderful place to raise kids, to have a family. There are many wonderful things to be said about this country. The people are really warm. It amazes me to see teenage boys showing their admira-

Yes, that's why I did the game. Even Americans get confused nowadays, they think politics are all about uncompromising moves, when it should be the other way around. So the point of the game is showing the actual process of democracy.

So games are not only for fun?

I believe that the games should be fun and educational but not in a boring way. I love to use the word didactic. A game should both entertain and teach you something. The philosophy of my new company *Make Believe Games* is the didactic games, the games that teach. Yet, if you are not laughing you are probably not playing a good game.

Do you think that you can get politically tired Georgians into playing a political board game?

It's pretty hard to find people to play games in Georgia. I needed play testers. I can't have

victims who can help you to perfect the game.

How hard was that? Considering that Georgians are not used to playing such games?

It was hard to gather a few people to test the game. Yet, there is a group now, for Sunday afternoon. They meet up and play the board game. I also test it abroad. I sent out the PDFs around the world to 40 different groups and tested it. This game was successfully funded by *Kickstarter* in November 6, 2012. People from different countries have already ordered the game, even though the production in China takes forever. So I'm thinking by June it should be out and on sale around the world.

So it looks like the gaming culture is coming along here, no?

In Georgia people are adopting the culture of sitting around as a family or group of friends and play.

What's next?

groups and they are handed a special stack of cards. They trade the cards, or you challenge them, you have a little duel, anything you like, drinking, joke telling, jumping on one leg, etc... to the point of best poker hand. After the team is winning, then you need a winner individual. That's where frenemies come in. During the entire game you are working on winning as a team, yet as an individual. It is actually a very common thing in any aspect of life. We are going on *Kickstarter* in two weeks.

Besides that I am thinking about making a Georgian *Scrabble*. Language games are really important. It's the best way to learn and love the language. It won't have huge sales, but I hope some people will buy it, especially schools. I will also be creating applications for iPhones and Androids. It's my thing. I'll be doing this for the rest of my life.

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