

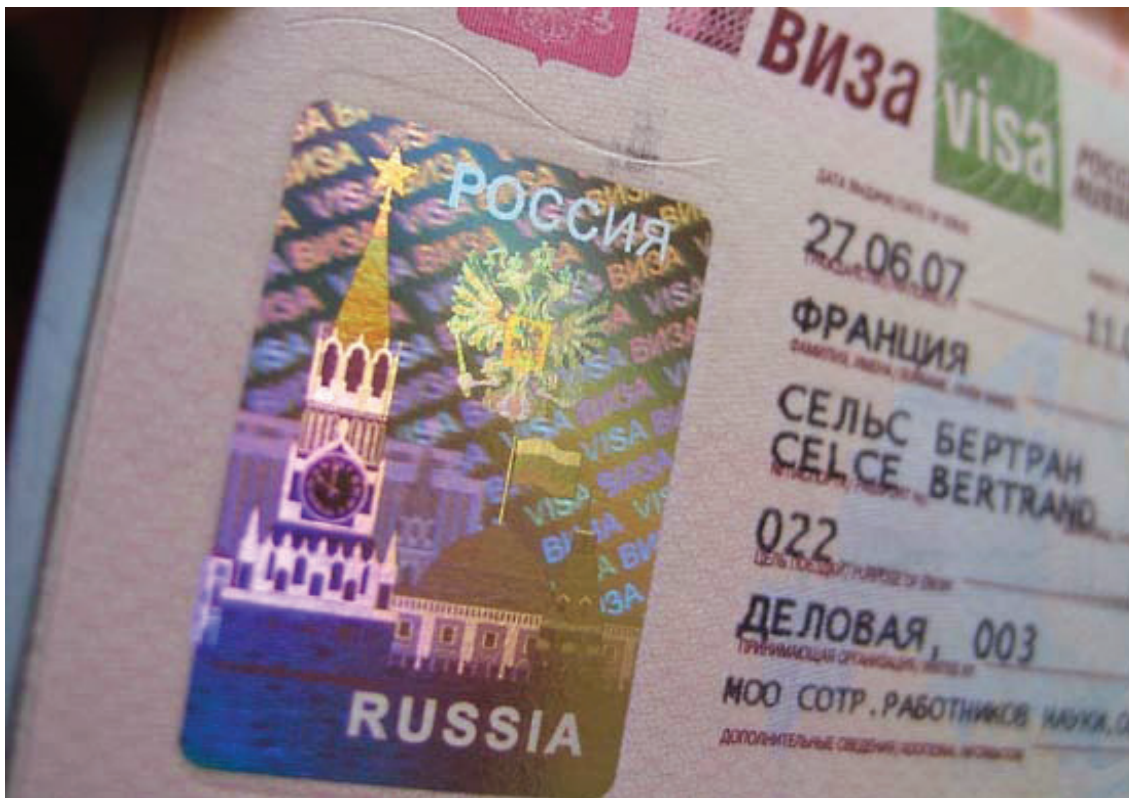
# The Georgian Times

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## Russian Visas for Softer Law on Occupation



Russia wants to simplify its visa regime with Georgia conditional on amendments to its Law on "Occupied Territories". Nonetheless the political spectrum of Georgia is reacting to the news in different ways – the majority government perceives this possibility as a positive sign in relations between the two former Soviet countries, while the opposition talks about the negative ramifications and risks of such amendments .

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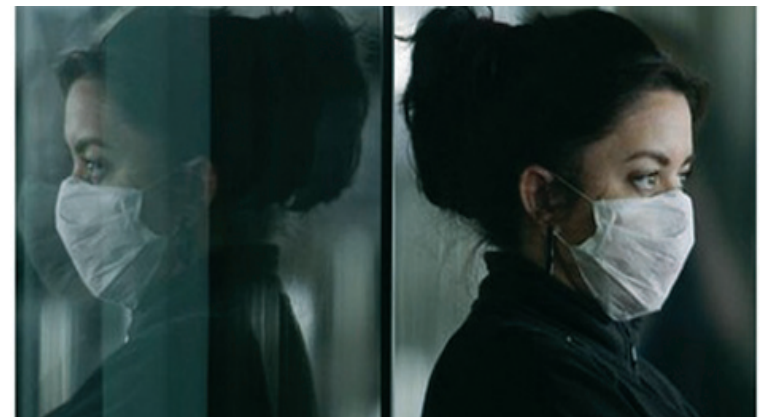


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## How to Protect yourself from H1N1 Flue



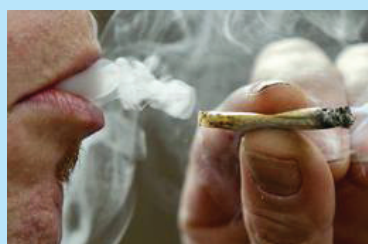
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**On p. 2**

## Getting High in Tbilisi

Changes in government have also brought changes in ways to get high



The five month tenure of current Georgian government has been enough to notice many political, economic, social and cultural changes, both large and small. I may not be qualified to speak about the political or the economic ramifications of

change in government, but I do feel confident enough to talk about the social and cultural changes, specifically changes in the prevalence of mind-altering substances.

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## Sustainable and Market-Driven Georgian Agriculture, "Not Grant Driven"

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# Russian Visas for Softer Law on Occupation

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Russia wants to simplify its visa regime with Georgia conditional on amendments to its Law on "Occupied Territories". Nonetheless the political spectrum of Georgia is reacting to the news in different ways – the majority government perceives this possibility as a positive sign in relations between the two former Soviet countries, while the opposition talks about the negative ramifications and risks of such amendments.

The visa regime between Georgia and Russia was established in 2000 as part of an attempt to curtail alleged terrorists who were based in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge of East Georgia from crossing into the Russian Federation's North Caucasus region, particularly the Republic of Chechnya. The Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and subsequent Russian recognition of independence of Georgia's two breakaway territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, led to a complete severing of diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, Georgia unilaterally abolished visas for Russian citizens in 2012 in what was largely seen as political move.

President Mikheil Saakashvili at the time said that Georgia welcomed businesspersons and tourists from Russia. Nevertheless, this seemingly goodwill gesture was not reciprocated by Moscow. Alexander Lukashovich, a spokesperson for Russia's Foreign Ministry de-



clared that Russia was ready to set a visa-free regime for Georgians; however, stipulating that Russian citizens who had visited Abkhazia and South Ossetia should not be arrested under the Georgian law. Georgia's Law on Occupied Territories makes it a crime for anyone to enter Georgia's breakaway regions at border crossings other than those controlled by the central and internationally recognized government in Tbilisi. Moscow strongly protested the law because many Russian citizens travel to Abkhazia for their holidays without first transiting through Georgia.

One of the first statements made by the new Georgian government that came to power after the country's 2012 parliamentary elections concerned

this law. A few days after defeating Saakashvili's National Movement Party, a representative of Georgian Dream coalition and present-day State Minister of Reintegration Pataa Zakareishvili declared that the law will not be annulled but some amendments facilitating access to the breakaway territories will be adopted. The subject has recently regained public attention after being raised in Parliament.

Opponents of the Georgian government claim that any softening of the law is tantamount to accepting Russian occupation of 20 percent of Georgia's territory. As Chiora Taktakishvili, member of the National Movement said, even one adjustment made to the law will completely devalue it. "Adop-

tion of such amendments means going against Georgia's national interests. Russia sees three different states on the territory of our country and this will never change. Annuling or changing the Law on Occupied Territories means recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," Taktakishvili stressed.

Zakareishvili sees no logic in such statements. "We don't intend to cancel the law, as no one denies the existence of the Russian occupation. New rules will impose a 400 GEL (approximately 250 USD) fine on those who have illegally crossed Georgia's borders and repeat offenders will be thrown into jail," he told the Georgian Times, adding that he had proposed such a provision to

Saakashvili's government but his proposal was rejected.

As the minister explains, foreigners visiting Georgia were unaware of the existence of the law and how it carries a 4-year prison sentence for illegal crossing of the state borders, including by entering the country through Abkhazia and South Ossetia. "They were sent to jail simply for lacking information. The package of changes to the law was initiated by me and hopefully it will be approved by the [parliamentary] majority," he said.

At the same time supporters of President Mikheil Saakashvili link accepting the law to the issue of visa simplification with Russia. According to Sergi Kapanadze, Georgia's former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the law must be modified only in case of fundamental changes in the current situation, "not based on someone's wish."

"I get the impression that we are ready to betray our values for the sake of improving relations with Russia," he said.

Zakareishvili, however, assured that the law on Occupied Territories has nothing in common with simplification of visa regime, as these issues were raised in totally different time frames. "Russia doesn't lay any claims to Georgia, even if it does we won't waive our interests in favor of Moscow or make concessions to Russia; if abolishment of the visa regime requires restoration of diplomatic relations, which can't happen as long as Russian tanks stand in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, (capitals of Abkhazia and

South Ossetia, respectively) then we will give up our attempts," he declared.

Complete revocation of visas with Georgia is not discussed in Russia's political circles – the main reason for this is the absence of diplomatic relations between the two former Soviet countries, Nikolay Silaev, senior fellow at the Center for Caucasian Studies of Moscow State University of International Relations told GT.

"Nevertheless, the visa regime for Georgian citizens will probably be softened in the foreseeable future. I would not consider Georgia's decision to revise certain provisions of the Law on Occupied Territories as a concession. It's rather a rational step, and it is not seen in Moscow as a condition for easing its visa regime. In my opinion, abolition of visas is in the interests of Russia as well," Silaev added.

The first official talks between Georgia and Russia were held in December, 2012 in Switzerland. The parties discussed only technical issues though analysts saw signs of a thaw in bilateral relations. The second meeting in the Czech Republic in March, 2013 brought more or less concrete results. In particular, Zurab Abashidze, the Georgian PM's special representative for relations with Russia and Grigory Karasin, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister reached an agreement on resuming trade relations, restoring flights and easing the current visa regime. These issues together with the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games will be the subject for further negotiations.

# How to Protect yourself from H1N1 Flue

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI

Four more people have died of the H1N1 virus this week in Georgia. According to the Public Health and Disease Control National Centre of Georgia there are 284 laboratory confirmed cases of both type A and B of the virus this winter that so far has claimed 22 lives this year. Although the peak of the virus's infection is over, new cases of the flu are expected until the end of March. The Georgian Times explains what the symptoms are and how people can understand if they are infected with H1N1 virus.

There are three types of influenza viruses: A, B and C. Human influenza A and B vi-

ruses cause seasonal epidemics almost every winter. Influenza type C infections cause a mild respiratory illness and are not thought to cause epidemics. As the Georgian Public Health and Disease Control National Center informs there are 262 cases of type A and 22 of type B viruses in Georgia this season.

"At the moment four children infected with these viruses are undergoing medical treatment at Tbilisi's Iashvili clinic. The number of cases has decreased over last few weeks," Ivane Chxaidze, Deputy Director of Iasvili clinic told The Georgian Times, adding that "patients with H1N1 are treated with Tami flu and there is enough of this medicine in reserve at the hospital."

H1N1 also known as swine flu is a new disease, which was first spread in 2009. It has the same symptoms as the average

flu and is spread through contact with an infected person. "A person with H1N1 has high fever, coughs very often and has cold-like symptoms. The problem is that he/she feels the same as if infected with the average flu," Imnadze told GT.

As Chxaidze further explains, it is very important to receive medical care in the early stages of the disease and follow the doctor's advice in order to avoid any complications. "If you have a high body temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher that lasts more than three days, you must go to a doctor," advises Chxaidze. "The virus is especially dangerous for children, elderly people and pregnant woman," he adds.

According to the Public Health and Disease Control National Centre most people who died this year were aged



30 to 64; four children were under 4 years old and one from 5 to 14 years; one death was recorded in the 15 to 29 age group.

"The number lethal cases of H1N1 is less this winter compared with last year," Imnadze explains.

Doctors hold that vaccination is the most effective way to be protected from the flu. It can be administered at any time but the most recommended period is at the beginning of the flu season. The vaccination costs approximately 30 GEL, depending on the clinic.

"It begins working after two weeks and remains effective for six months. However, being vaccinated does not mean that one is 100 percent protected from being infected with H1N1," Chxaidze explains. There are many strains of flu that are constantly mutating, making it difficult for those who develop vaccines to keep up with their evolution.

To prevent infection doctors advise people to wash their hands and clean flat surfaces very often; to avoid any kind of contact with an infected person even after recovering from the illness, at least for a few days. Such precautions will greatly minimize the chances of infection. It is also advisable to avoid public transport when possible, and to stay away from compacted large crowds of people, as the virus can be spread by breathing the air of others.

## The Georgian TIMES

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## SOCAR Continues to Develop a High-quality Network of CNG

On March 11, 2013 at 12:15 pm in Tbilisi SOCAR officially opened its fourth natural gas station in Georgia. The new station is located on the left bank of the Mtkvari River on Ksani Street near the Dighomi Bridge, and is now among 103 SOCAR fuel stations operating in the country.

The station is equipped by Argentinean company Galileo, which offers the latest generation of gas compressor equipment, which provides quick and safe gas compression.

Car owners are able to use special service blocks which can regulate tire pressure, salon cleaning, water filling and other services. All in all, 20 people are employed at the new station.

Inaugurating SOCAR's new station was President of Azerbaijan State Oil Company Mr. Rovgan Abdullayev along with other official guests.





# Favorable Business Climate or Something Fishy in FDI Figures?

By LISA TONAKANYAN

**In search for greater profits and a business-friendly environment, investors from various countries are flocking to Georgia. However, not all their well-laid plans and high expectations are living up to the billing. There are also questions about their motivations in the first place, and whether they are strategic or simply opportunistic investors.**

Liberal and free market oriented economic policy, reduced tax rates, simplified licensing and taxation procedures have made Georgia one of the most attractive countries among former Soviet Union states for investors, at least according to various governmental sponsored sites and PR provided by the Chamber of Commerce.

There have existed a number of impressive reforms all aimed, at least in theory, at opening up the economy and providing a level-playing field for locals and outside investors alike. Much has been written in the Georgian and international press about how the country was open for business and

come one come all. The much touted reforms brought in by the so-called Rose Revolutions reformers was considered as but tip of the spear in the fight against corruption. The government boasted that not only were they going to take on corruption by the horns but they would reduce opportunities for bribe takers; they did in fact reduce the number of taxes from 21 in 2004 to the six that currently exist.

Regardless of the motivations, all of this is claimed to have led to a growth in foreign direct investments, FDI, to Georgia. Depending if you want to take official numbers at face value or with a grain of salt, the Department of Statistics claims that during the first three quarters of 2011 the total amount of FDI reached 774.6 million USD while during the same period in 2012 it dropped to 684.2 million USD, a substantial reduction. Some attribute this drop to fears to the changing political landscape in Georgia or the overall worldwide economic situation. Others would say that such a drop is more line with the real figures.

The biggest contributor in 2012 was the Netherlands (25 percent). Turkish investments averaged 17 percent of total

FDI, British – 8 percent, Japanese – 7 percent, and the US and Russian – 6 percent each. The largest share of FDI was made in the financial and energy sectors (24 and 21 percent, respectively). The British Virgin Islands has come out of nowhere to be the third highest investor in Georgia. This sounds a bit strange – it could be legit, but it could be money laundering as well.

It is interesting to note that the inflow of funds from Asian and African countries has started increasing as well, though entrepreneurs from these parts of the world do not rush to throw wads of money to implement grand projects. Rather, they usually take an incremental approach, and at least at the initial stage, they prefer leading small businesses.

For instance, Gabriel Tiya miyu from Nigeria moved to Georgia with his wife in November, 2012 with the aim of opening a small lounge bar of mixed Georgian-African cuisine. Tiya miyu explains that the idea belonged to his father, who visited Tbilisi in April, 2012 as a tourist. “He liked the country and stayed here to learn the business environment. Soon he and his Georgian friend opened a shop. The business was run-

ning well, so he bought the share from his friend and continued the enterprise alone. In June he rented this place in Isani district to set up an African restaurant, and now my wife and I as well as some of our friends are doing our utmost to open as early as this week. We are aiming to attract students as customers – both Nigerian and Georgian. We want locals to try our dishes as well, and hopefully they will like it,” Tiya miyu told the Georgian Times.

The Nigerian entrepreneur plans to invest more money in different sectors in Tbilisi along with the western city of Batumi. “I don’t have a concrete plan yet, but the business climate here favors investments, and I think doing business here will become more and more profitable,” Tiya miyu said, adding that in spite of the rapid economic growth he doesn’t intend to migrate to Georgia. As long as he owns a hotel in his homeland and some other enterprises in London he plans to turn over his duties in Georgian-African Restaurant to the manager to be able to travel between Georgia, Nigeria and UK anytime he wants.

In contrast to Tiya miyu Indian businessman Bhajan Syan,

who owns a petrol pump in Punjab, wants to stay in Tbilisi with his two sons and bring the rest of his family to the country once he starts making a decent livelihood. He came to Tbilisi with a firm intention of getting involved in agriculture but decided to first get a feel of whether the venture was worth the risk.

“I learned about Georgia from newspapers, advertisements and the website [www.investinggeorgia.ge](http://www.investinggeorgia.ge). In August, 2012 I and my sons moved to Tbilisi and opened a small Internet café. I thought it would generate a good profit especially since it’s close to a metro station. I invested 10,000 USD in this business but at this stage I have started to incur losses – my net income is around 1,200 USD per month and taxes are very high. However, I don’t complain, as this is a new business; I do not want to draw any hasty conclusions. After one year we’ll sit calculate our profit or loss and decide whether we should continue this business or find something else. If everything goes well I plan to invest in real estate or land,” Syan told the GT.

Bhajan Syan considers the registration procedure in Georgia easy enough and he thinks it’s possible to earn a relatively good income with a small investment. However, the taxation system of the country needs improvements – it is neither loyal nor encouraging to investors. There are no advantages for foreigners, no benefits or discounts, Syan claims.

Nevertheless, the number of foreign companies registered in Georgia has increased. According to National Agency of Public Registry, in 2011 there were about 110 foreign companies registered in Georgia. “We don’t have final data for 2012 yet but according to the information based on three quarters of the year the number of foreigners registering their business in Georgia has doubled,” a representative of the Public Registry told GT.

The new government under Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, a multi millionaire who made his fortune in the Russian Federation, stated it will pursue the same open door economic policy as President Saakashvili’s team. The tycoon has promised to eliminate all the problems foreign investors face by giving business a freer hand and putting an end to monopolization of certain fields and top down corruption.

However, it remains to be seen whether or not he will make good on such promises and assure that there will be real investors or simply continue the policy and attract many of the kind that simply look good on paper and backed with official statistics. All things considered, the question remains at the end of the day why Georgia is such a preferred designation for new investors in these difficult and ever-changing times – or is something more involved here – something that must be better understood, not only by potential investors but by banking regulators as well.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

# To all companies and bureaus

## Sub announcement tender 3 / FAR / 2013

Al Faris state company, an affiliate of the Ministry of Industry and Minerals announces tender number 3/ FAR / 2013 for supplying (ELECTRICAL GENERATOR 1000 KVA) within the investment budget for the year 2013 to complete the rehabilitation of Al Faris. Those interested in participating in the above-mentioned tender should refer to the commercial department in our company located in Khan – Dhari near the petrol station to receive a copy of the general conditions and specifications against an amount of (50000) dinar non refundable and whoever awards the tender will undertake the last announcement fees. Any offer submitted after the tender closing date will not be considered.

Conditions:

1- Submissions should be enclosed in three envelopes: (technical, commercial and documents). These envelopes should be closed, sealed and the name and number of the tender should be written on each one.

2- The envelopes should contain the following documents:

- The company or bureau registry certificate issued and renewed from the Ministry of Trade.

- The contractor’s classification card issued and renewed from the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation.

- Quittance of tax from one of the branches of income tax directorate for the current year for the participated Iraqi company or bureau and Arabian or Foreign company, which has an officially registered branch in Iraq.

3 - A participating company or bureau should submit primary insurance of (1%) from the offer value in form of certified check or guarantee letter valid for three months and issued from an Iraqi authorized bank, any offer that does not include it will be considered.

4 - Commercial envelope should include the final price of the offer reaching the stores of the company in Khan-Dhari (CIP); this price is nonnegotiable and valid for three months.

5 - Foreign and Arabian companies which have no branch or representative in Iraq can send their offers by DHL. Any offer sent by E-mail will be not be considered.

6 - If the participating company is a secondary contractor or a manufacturing company, the agent should submit confirmation and authorization from the original foreign or Arabian company by e-mail with introducing commercial lists and origin certificate confirmed from the Iraq Embassy or commercial attaché in the origin country.

7 - The company is not committed to accept the lowest bid.

8 - A conference will be held on Tuesday (06.03.2013) in the head office of the company to answer any questions about the tender.

9 - You can contact us on our company e-mail for clarification [AL\\_Faris2004@yahoo.com](mailto:AL_Faris2004@yahoo.com) You can find the general conditions and specifications of the tender on the website of the Ministry of Industry and Minerals: [www.industry.gov.iq](http://www.industry.gov.iq) or our company site [www.fariseng.com](http://www.fariseng.com)

10 - The last date of accepting offers is Tuesday (13.03.2013) at 12:00 PM (noon) and any offer submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

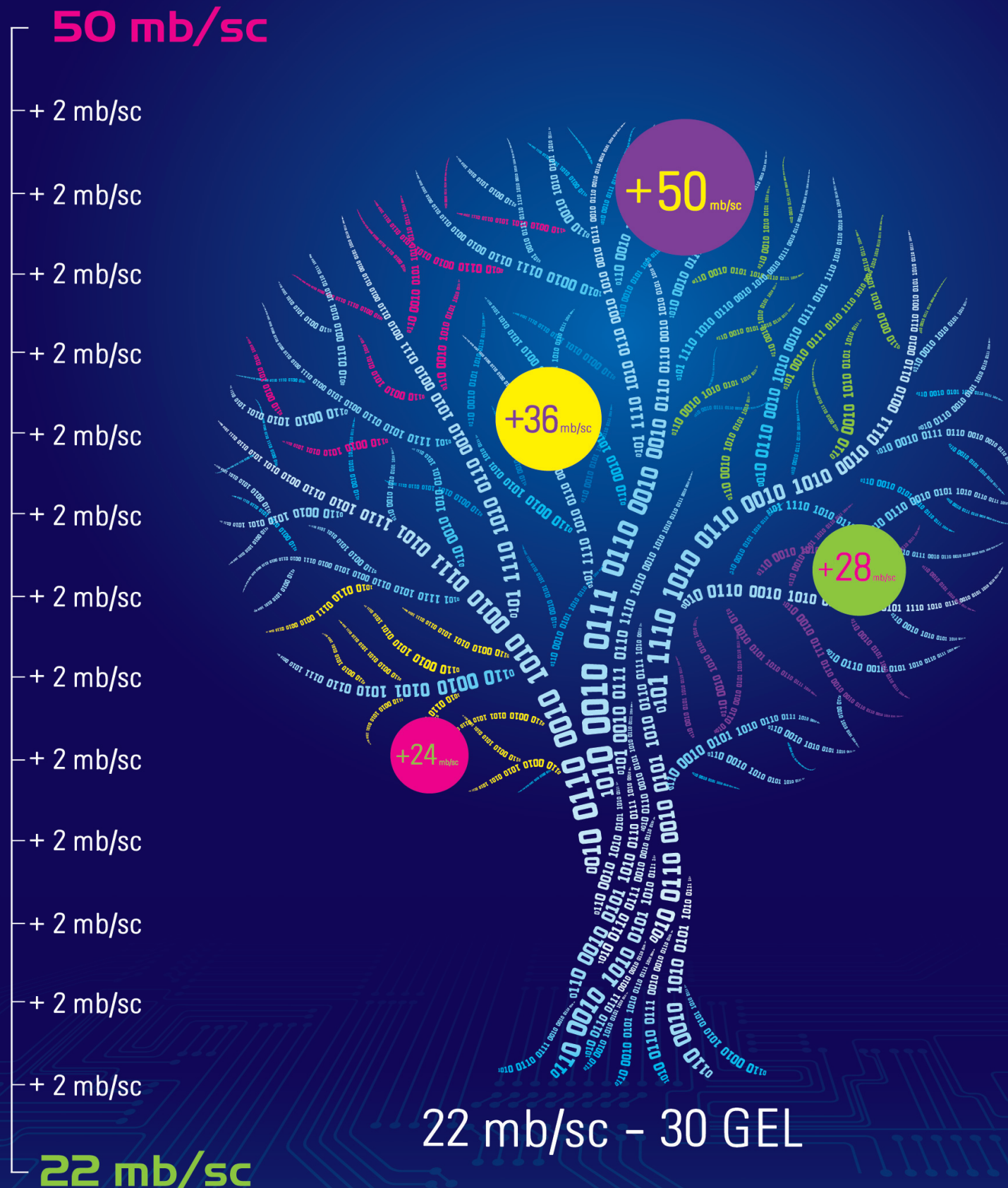
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# Georgia Defense Budget – Priorities, Risks and Tin Horn Dictators

By SABA GVETADZE

Georgia's current defense management policy is insufficiently developed and still in a state of flux, which was exacerbated by last years' Parliamentary elections. The last few months have been a transitional period for the new government it is clear that much money has been wasted, especially in the spheres of national security and the overall defense budget.

Even before the new government came to power layers of competing and vested interests, with short term political agendas, were shaping this policy; national security was not its guiding principle. It is now clear that many of the purchasing decisions of the Ministry of Defense were economically and politically driven, especially in the run-up to the 2008 Georgia-Russia war. Georgian and international media outlets have documented cases of corruption in arms and food procurement, such as the case of Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), and the scandal back in 2008 of standard weapons and ammunition being supplied to the Georgian Army.

It is clear that many of the instances of corruption in the Georgian MoD were discussed when Robert Muller, the former FBI Director, visited Georgia in early May 2010 and held closed door meetings with Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili and Minister of Justice Zurab Adeishvili. Such violations as corrupt procurements, arms trading and the other alleged "side deals" reported are breaches of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act when US citizens are involved in paying kickbacks to members of the Georgian government.

Muller's visit lasted several hours but still, to this day, the

full details of how widespread the corruption was have not been revealed. But the Georgian media has since published the names of specific individuals involved in it and there is clearly a connection between them, especially people such as David Kezerashvili, the former Minister of Defense and Temur Alasania, the uncle of the Georgian President. Such individuals are vying for first place in what appears to be a real power struggle, deriving from their respective positions in government, past and present, and their continuing spheres of influence and networks of patronage. American sources suggest that the main suspect in the weapons smuggling known to have taken place through Georgia, Daniel Alvares, has also been charged with corruption related to weapons sales made in association with members of the Georgian government.

On a micro level, a recent audit of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) revealed many instances of corruption, notably the purchase of 3,000 bullet-proof vests costing a total of 2,800,000 USD from Ukraine. It was determined that these were of low quality and totally unsuitable for military purposes. Another such case was that of the multi-launch systems which rained down tube launched cluster bombs short of their targets, on Georgian villages and troops near the front, in 2008.

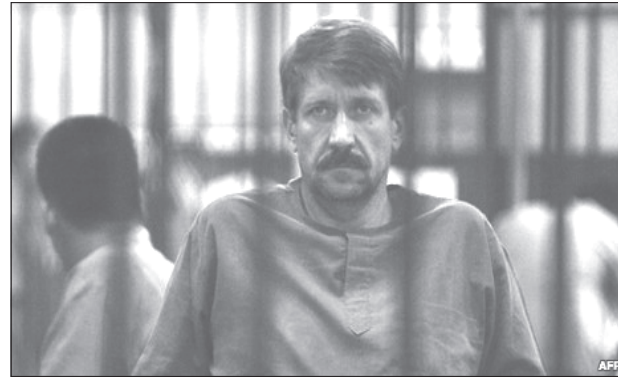
Furthermore, the purchase of ten luxury cars, costing the state 1,537, 313 GEL, was not justified. Often it is difficult to even understand what items were purchased by the MoD, or whether it was even for military purposes, as much of what is bought is listed as Top Secret as it is for the use of high-level MoD officials.

President Mikheil Saakashvili's government and the MOD

apparently spent more than 8-9% of Georgia's GDP on defense, especially in the period 2008-2009, one of the highest proportions in the world. However, it is becoming ever more apparent that much of this amount was not even spent on useful items but either embezzled or squandered. Even Transparency International, (TI), the international anti-corruption agency, confirmed in a May 2012 report entitled "Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index" that Georgia remains vulnerable to real challenges which can readily put its national security goals and missions at risk. This report also confirmed that a high level of elite corruption has long pervaded defense spending. An atmosphere of secrecy still dominates the military sector but it is debatable if this was imposed for security reasons or is driven more by the need to conceal misappropriations and incompetence.

The formal oversight powers of the legislature have not been applied to the defense sector to any substantial degree, and this may have contributed to a breakdown of checks and balances in defense budgeting. It also highly debatable whether the legislature could ever properly monitor some apparently off-the-books sources of government income, mostly in the real estate sector, which apparently provide funds earmarked for defense procurement. Even the internal audits which are undertaken are never published, and nobody is ever held accountable.

Given Georgia's record in military procurement it is clear to see why there are no clear public figures, in actual percentages, of how much of the national budget is being secretly spent, or records of where this money comes from, and it now evident that the legislation for



making sure Georgia gets the most bang for its buck never envisioned many of the side deals concluded by the former government. Research has shown that procurement is largely opportunistic in nature, rent seeking, and there is no formal acquisition strategy or transparency. According to the TI report 42% of all government procurement is single-sourced, and this figure may be even higher when the MoD is involved.

This all demonstrates that current national defense policy planning is far from efficient; it should be concluded that it is very similar to those of former banana republics with their tin horn dictators. The previous government troika of Vano Merabishvili, PM and former Minister of Internal Affairs, David Kezerashvili, former Minister of Defense with close connections with the Israeli Defense Industry (Mosad), and Bacho Akhalaia, also a former Minister of Defense and of prisons who is currently jailed for various alleged crimes, was aided by Zurab Adeishvili, the former State Prosecutor alleged to be one of the main players in the illegal arms trade, as confirmed by Georgian and other media sources.

On the same level as the notorious Russian-KGB/FSB arms

dealers (generally labeled as the "Siloviki" grouping, with direct links to the Kremlin), these above-named individuals are alleged to have been closely involved in illegal arms dealing and trading, believed, based on some sources, to be worth up to \$2-3 billion annually. It is now clear that the business activities of this troika not only involved "black deals" of illegal arms but also forging links between the "big transit" corridor routes of the illegal arms trafficking trade cartels, such as that of former high stakes arms dealer Viktor Bout, AKA the Merchant of Death, which many suspect continues to operate in Georgia to this day.

It is very much conceivable that Mikhail Saakashvili's personal network, run largely by his uncle, the former senior KGB officer Temur Alasania, has provided him through these deals with the political resolve, resilience and audacity in the face of all odds which kept his authoritarian regime in power for so long. Georgia has signed the United Nations Convention against Corruption and other international anti-corruption and arms trafficking conventions, but these have not prevented the illegal deals of the past eight years.

There is still clear evidence that the illegal arms trade flourishes in Georgia, despite some joint anti-proliferation initiatives, including a restriction on conventional weapons systems proliferation, undertaken with the USA's Defense Department. Certainly is quite true story that in a country with a "failed state" image is often engaged in international relations precisely because it can thus play a role in illegal arms trafficking and weapons for drugs swaps, as only then does it become an attractive partner for successful states. Moreover, it is also clear that a lucrative "hook" was provided for senior members of the previous government through these off-the-books cash flows and sweet deals.

In conclusion, Georgia's defense policy needs a radical overhaul or it will continue to be on the verge of collapse; many international NGOs and civil society representatives have stated clearly that the new government must distance itself from business as usual and stop turning a blind eye to the many instances of arms trafficking and other illegal financial operations which put national security at risk and drain the national budget, particularly when Georgia has so many pressing social issues.

GT will continue to publish investigative reports on this issue, providing a clear view of what is going on in this sector.

By Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia – *ex-political prisoner, USA Alumni, an international defense fellow and doctorate student at the U.S. Air Force Academy (1998), graduate from GIPA and George C. Marshall College of International and Security Studies, a Counselor at Georgian Mission at NATO HQ and a rapporteur to the NATO IS PASP Security and Defense Economics Directorate (2004-2008), visiting Professor at Bratislava State University and "Caucasus International University", director of the "Georgian Times" Strategic Studies Center "Azri".*

## Thomas Hammarberg's Important Mission to Georgia

By SABA GVETADZE

**Thomas Hammarberg, a leading human rights defender in Europe and Former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights will take up the post of special adviser of the European Union on legal issues concerning the development of relations with Georgia. This announcement was made by the press service of the Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili following a meeting he held with Hammarberg on March 5, 2013.**

A Swedish diplomat, Hammarberg served as the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner from April 1, 2006 till March 31, 2012. His publications during this time on children's rights, Islamophobia in Europe, Roma and LGBT rights are some of the most well-known works in the field.

Hammarberg's appointment is yet another sign of the European Union's willingness to pursue further steps towards cooperation with Georgia. By sending the special advisor to Georgia, EU Vice President Catherine



Ashton and current European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle have once again demonstrated Europe's support for the democratic development and improvement of human right protection in Georgia. The appointment, which will last for four months, at least initially, can only be greeted with enthusiasm from those who have supported enhanced and special relations between Georgia and the EU.

Hammarberg will be tasked with observing further reforms made to Georgia's legal system and providing recommendations to the Georgian government. The overall mission of the former Commissioner is to lead Georgia down the path towards expedited integration into the European community. It is evident that much work still needs to be done in terms of constitutional reforms, not least those concerning the rule of law, human rights and bringing the national law in compliance with the Common Law.

As a special adviser, Hammarberg will hold regular consultations with Georgian ministers, members of parliament, opposition leaders and civil society representatives. He has already met

with Maia Panjikidze, Minister of Foreign Affairs and David Usushphashvili, Parliamentary Chairman. The success of these consultations will largely depend on the readiness and willingness of the above-mentioned actors to work together and find common ground on the issues that determine successful EU integration.

Georgia should be prepared for Hammarberg's constructive criticism. At the same time, it will be crucial that Georgian society be encouraged to actively engage in discussions so that the recommendations Hammarberg sets forth can be effectively realized. European integration does not only imply a legal framework whereby national laws are better organized in accordance with Common Law. Integration represents an ambitious undertaking that comes with a huge responsibility on the part of its citizens. The process is very demanding and the active involvement of every citizen to develop civil society is required in this process.

Hammarberg is not new to Georgia. In 2011 he visited the country to analyze the legal system, specifically the country's criminal justice policy and the independence of the judiciary branch, the basic human right

which entitles every citizen to have an equal access to justice and the right to a free and fair trial.

In his report, the Commissioner described the Georgian reforms aimed at developing and modernizing criminal justice policy as a "serious effort" and an "ambitious" process (Strasbourg, 30 June 2011, CommDH (2011) 22). Moreover, the report positively evaluated the willingness of the government to fight against corruption, calling organizational changes in the judicial system "significant". However, the author pointed out the need to pursue further measures "in order to guarantee effective prosecutorial supervision of police investigations".

The report demonstrated the dedication and passion of the expert towards his work in Georgia. He is familiar with Georgia's achievements as well as the current challenges facing the country. Hammarberg's experience will greatly assist in guiding Georgia as it develops a more effective, modern and just legal system. As he stated after meeting the Prime Minister, there are appropriate conditions needed for building democratic state and that he only agreed to his new special advisory position because of his deep love for the country.



# Getting High in Tbilisi

Changes in government have also brought changes in ways to get high

By GIORGI GIZHIASHVILI, in an altered state!

**The five month tenure of current Georgian government has been enough to notice many political, economic, social and cultural changes, both large and small. I may not be qualified to speak about the political or the economic ramifications of change in government, but I do feel confident enough to talk about the social and cultural changes, specifically changes in the prevalence of mind-altering substances.**

I was often surprised at the great variance in opinions Georgians had toward drugs while in Georgia for a few years and experiencing life in remote regional villages, small towns and the capital Tbilisi. On one end

of the spectrum was the opinion that all drugs are bad, i.e. heroin and marijuana are equally destructive, to the individual and society; and on the other side, the opinion that, when regulated properly, some currently outlawed substances have a place in our society on equal footing with such substances as alcohol and tobacco.

Many Georgians remember the Shevernadze era as a time when acquiring marijuana was as simple as walking into a field and harvesting it, whereas the most marijuana a person might happen to come across these days is a matchbox half full and already mixed with some errant tobacco from a cigarette.

There has been, however, in the past couple of months a new entrant into the realm of intoxication in Tbilisi. Com-

monly referred to in Tbilisi as *bio* or *chemia*, and known abroad as *Spice* or *K2*, these substances are synthetic analogs of marijuana. Legal in most countries until the end of the past decade, they remain legal in many still it is debatable whether or not this is legal in Georgia, in fact or by the letter of the law. Most of these synthetic cannabis alternatives consist of inert herbal plant dry matter that has been sprayed with a chemical compound, which attempts to mimic the effect of THC, the primary consciousness-enhancing compound in marijuana.

The material is then packaged and marketed as herbal smoking material or incense that can be inhaled in various ways. While the actual effect varies based on dosage, purity

and user tolerance, it can range from almost an unperceivable high to something more akin to consuming psychedelic mushrooms and going berserk.

Due to its international quasi-legal status, these drugs can be purchased legally in many countries as well as over the Internet; they have become a common alternative to smoking marijuana in countries with harsh drug laws. Further, because of the chemistry involved, it is very easy for the producers to adapt to new drug laws. When one compound is identified and made illegal, the producers simply alter the chemistry slightly, creating a new substance, which must now undergo the same illegalization process which effectively keeps the producers one step ahead of the authorities.



In short, this means that in Georgia, and Tbilisi in particular, more and more young people are being introduced to these substances and enjoying them. All the while many still do not have access to a regular supply of marijuana, likely due to the fact that marijuana harvest season usually takes place in August or September, and the previous administration was still in power and was responsible for administering harsh penalties for any perceived drug use or attempt at cultivation.

But with the new government, and the associated am-

nesty for prison inmates, acts that would have been unheard of just six months ago during the previous government have now become a common component of a Saturday night out. The fear of openly offering a friend or acquaintance a hit of some synthetic weed has largely dissipated. Whether this is a result of mid-winter boredom, or a measurable increase in use and availability of such substances remains to be seen. But one thing is for sure, people are getting high in Tbilisi, and it can be a lot of fun, at least until the party is over with the new government.

# Rabati Castle Reconstruction tainted by shady Auctions and Side Deals

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE

**As part of an on-going investigation, the Georgian Prosecutor's Office held a press conference on February 28 to discuss massive misappropriation of state funds during government-led reconstruction works of the extensive 13<sup>th</sup> century Rabati Castle in the Akhaltsikhe region of southern Georgia, not far from the Turkish border. Much more is involved here than just the humdrum corruption that still plagues Georgian institutions and society as a whole.**



state-sponsored arm twisting against private businesses.

Consequently, late last year, the Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation in Samtskhe-Javakheti region into the alleged misappropriation of funds from the state budget by officials of the Akhaltsikhe municipality and instances of blackmail, etc. Such cases fall under crimes detailed in Article 182 in the Georgian criminal code. Official documents dealing with the privatization of real estate in Akhaltsikhe region from the municipality board was obtained by investigators during the process. Although facts are still sketchy, and being it an on-going investigation, there appears to be significant evidence to raise serious questions about the legalization of the real estate in this Georgian region and the role of the former ruling government and its supporters, including members of

the National Party, in the process.

It is interesting to note, based on information obtained from the Prosecutor's Office how the buyers were under arrest or serving prison sentences at the time of the auctions in some cases. For instance one audit determined that a 20,000 square-meter former cattle farm in the village of Atskuri with an original going price tag of 14,400 GEL was increased by the municipality to a starting price of 63,000 GEL and sold off. Georgian Invest participated in the auction, which was represented by Mirdat Kamadadze, and all the while the company's CEO, Juansher Mashia, was serving a prison sentence in the 8<sup>th</sup> Penitentiary Colony. Georgian Invest ultimately purchased that plot for 4,949,500 GEL as the sole bidder.

In these two cases of alleged corruption, the sold property was returned to the state. A library-club in the village of Tskhaltbila was assessed at 13,000 GEL during an inventory. Here only one buyer, Jemal Gvarliani, participated in the auction, buying the club for 100,000 GEL and then relinquished rights to it for the benefit of the government. In the village of Kheoti, another club building, this one worth a mere 5,000 GEL was purchased for 500,000 GEL by Ltd. Insta Georgia, the representative of which, Giorgi Mepharishvili, again the sole individual show-



ing up for the auction. Such a tendency sets a pattern in line with other cases. Again, Insta Georgia's director, Levan Simonishvili was sitting in prison at that time and the state regained ownership of the property based on his generosity, soon after the auction.

The on-going investigation has also revealed that some purchasers did not even register their new ownership rights at the Civil Registry Agency. Ltd. Kotsitsashvili and Company bought a library-club in the village of Julgha for 200,000 GEL which had a mar-

ket value of only 13,000 GEL. Vakhtang Kotsitsashvili, a representative of the company, failed to apply for an ownership certificate. Meanwhile, the library and medical institution in the village of Kheoti was appraised for 4,000 GEL and was sold off at the auction for 200,000 GEL. Similarly, the buyer, Davit Andronikashvili, neither applied for a certificate nor register the property at the Civil Registry.

On February 22, 2013 the Prosecutor's Office called purchasers Davit Andronikashvili, Mirdat Kamadadze and Giorgi

Mepharishvili as witnesses. The Prosecutor's Office declared that the investigation is on-going and appropriate legal measures will be taken in the nearest future.

The pattern does not come as a big surprise to many, especially those who understand that such deals have been endemic in recent years. With over 26 million GEL spent on the Rabati Castle reconstruction works at the time, the motivations are clear and are part of a larger policy that appears to have been directed from the top levels of government.



# Azerbaijani Opposition Blogger Says ‘Democratic Revolution’ Is Approaching

By RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service

**Azerbaijani blogger Emin Milli is a rising star in his country's rapidly growing opposition movement. He is widely known as the “donkey blogger” for his role in a now-famous video lampooning President Ilham Aliyev's government — a video many believe was the real reason he was recently jailed for 16 months.**

Milli is currently in Prague as a jury member for the One World human rights film festival. He told RFE/RL correspondent Claire Bigg about his hopes for democratic change in Azerbaijan, the lessons he learned in prison, and how the international community could be undermining efforts to unseat Aliyev.

RFE/RL: Azerbaijan has seen a series of protests since the beginning of the year denouncing government corruption and abuse of power. Such accusations are not new. In your opinion, what is driving people to take to the street so actively this year?

**Emin Milli:** Aliyev has always presented himself as a guarantor of stability in Azerbaijan. Now, he is becoming a guarantor of increasing instability. His father kept some space open for the opposition — there were always five or six

members of the opposition in parliament and he would meet opposition newspaper editors. He pretended there was a dialogue. Things are very different now. There has not been a single opposition member in parliament since 2010, new laws have been adopted to fine people for participating in peaceful but unsanctioned rallies, the financing of nongovernmental organizations has been made almost impossible.

People became so tired and so frustrated. You cannot trust courts, you cannot trust the law, and everything has become more expensive. You know that people in government are stealing hundreds of billions of dollars. Another now the issue is the situation in the army. Every year, about 100 soldiers die in the Azerbaijani Army, but only about 15 of those die on the conflict line with Armenian armed forces. The others die because of corruption and mismanagement in the army. People don't have jobs in the regions. That's why people started taking to the streets.

RFE/RL: How big a role have social-networking sites like Facebook played in drumming up support for the protests?

**Milli:** A new-media revolution is taking place in Azerbaijan. Out of 9 million people in Azerbaijan, more than 1 million are now on Facebook. Re-

search showed that 7 percent had daily access to the Internet two years ago. This year, the same research — done by U.S. professor Katy Pearce — shows this figure has gone up to 11 percent.

A university rector in Azerbaijan [Elshad Abdullayev] has been taping his conversations with different people in government for years. His brother worked for the National Security Ministry before going missing. So he started bribing government officials so they would give him his brother back. He failed. Now he lives in France and is posting all these secret conversations on YouTube. The biggest scandal he put online was the fact that he gave \$1 million to the head of the presidential administration, Aliyev's right-hand man, in return for a parliamentary seat. Things that would never have been public before are now read and shared by hundreds of thousands of people.

RFE/RL: You served 16 months in prison on charges of hooliganism that were widely believed to be politically motivated. This time in prison has obviously not crushed your resolve in campaigning for democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan. But has it changed the way in which you campaign?

**Milli:** Many things are changing in Azerbaijan, and the pace of change is so fast that I cannot even keep track. What



changed in Azerbaijan is that the old and the new oppositions are uniting with a single candidate. Even more importantly, they will sign a document outlining their whole strategy, how they share their resources, what their common goals are, who will assume which responsibility in bringing a democratic revolution to Azerbaijan, and how the country will be run once the single candidate comes to power. This has never happened in Azerbaijan. It's a change in narrative.

Spending 16 months in jail has, of course, made me stronger. It made me believe that the ideals I fight for are very powerful, because otherwise I would not have been put in jail. What has changed since I was released is that I have seen the opposition uniting. That's what makes me believe that this new chang-

ing narrative can bring democratic change to Azerbaijan.

RFE/RL: You have accused the international community on a number of occasions for not doing enough to combat abuse and corruption in Azerbaijan. What concrete steps can foreign governments take to help improve the country's rights record?

**Milli:** “International community” is too broad a term. I'm talking about the U.S. and British governments. So far, these governments have supported the Aliyev regime because Aliyev provided oil and gas and invested a lot in these countries. The international community's civil-society institutions have not only underfunded democratic civil society in Azerbaijan, they have also funded so-called “gongos,” pro-

Aliyev nongovernmental organizations. USAID, for instance, recently gave \$1.5 million to an NGO whose head also chairs the Azerbaijani parliament's legal committee, which initiated the law to fine people participating in peaceful protests.

Everything Azerbaijan's democratic movement is doing now and all the changes that will happen this year will take place not thanks to Western support, but despite Western support to Aliyev's regime. All we want from the international community at this stage is for the international media to pay more attention to what is happening in Azerbaijan and for the U.S. and British governments to realize that they are threatening their own military and economic interests in Azerbaijan by supporting Aliyev.

# Black Sabbath Guitarist Writes Music For Armenia's Eurovision Entry

By RFE/RL's Armenian Service

**Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi has written the music for Armenia's entry in the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest.**

Iommi said his ballad “Lonely Planet” is due to be performed by the Dorians in the Eurovision semifinals on May 16 in Malmo, Sweden.

The Dorians have written the lyrics in English.

Iommi, a founding member of the legendary heavy metal group Black Sabbath, said the music came from a “demo idea” he was working on.

The song was voted by Armenians to be the country's Eurovision contender.

Iommi is known in Armenia for his work raising funds after the 1988 Spitak earthquake killed tens of thousands of people.

Last year's Eurovision contest, held in Azerbaijan, was won by Swedish act Loreen, giving Sweden the right to host this year's edition.





# Transatlantic Trade's Transformative Potential

By MOHAMED A. EL-ERIAN

**NEWPORT BEACH**—After instant and seemingly coordinated fanfare in Europe and the United States, the proposal for a European Union-US free-trade area has been generating little media attention. There are three reasons for this, and all three highlight broader constraints on good national economic policymaking and productive cross-border coordination.

In his "State of the Union" address in January, US President Barack Obama proposed a "comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership" with Europe based on trade that is "fair and free." His administration regards this as part of a comprehensive approach to generating "good-paying American jobs."

Obama's bold proposal received an immediate and enthusiastic reception in Europe. Taking to the airwaves within hours, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy called the proposal "ground-breaking."

Arguing that it could increase Europe's annual economic growth rate by half a percentage point, they declared that formal negotiations would start quickly.

At first, there was quite a bit of general interest, and understandably so. The proposal involves the world's two largest economic areas, with national, regional, and global implications. Yet, despite the realization that an agreement could fundamentally alter the nature of global trade and production networks, it only took a few weeks for interest to drop off.

One reason is rooted in initial conditions that limit direct gains from increased trade while widening the scope for tension and conflict. Free-trade agreements that promise the greatest benefits are those that link economies characterized by high tariffs, low levels of trade, and little overlap in consumption and production patterns. This is not the case for the EU and the US. Average tariff levels are only 3%. The EU already accounts for almost 20% of US imports, and the US for 11% of EU imports. And, given similar *per capita* income levels and cultural ori-

entations, overlaps in production and consumption are considerable.

Having said this, there would be immediate upside potential, owing to better resource allocation, more harmonized investment regimes, stronger standards, and the elimination of outdated non-tariff and regulatory barriers. Aerospace, auto manufacturing, biotechnology, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals are among the sectors that stand to gain. There is also the potential for reforming inefficient approaches to food and agriculture, particularly in Europe.

The second reason for wanting attention to the proposed partnership speaks to a broader issue: A seemingly endless stream of short-term political dramas has made it extremely difficult for both Europe and the US to focus for long on any secular and structural initiative.

In Europe, broad-based discussion was undermined by the outcome of the Italian election—just the latest sign of how frustrated citizens in a growing number of countries are rejecting conventional political parties and the political *status quo*. With that, it becomes more difficult to pursue longer-term policy objectives, which merely adds

further uncertainty about the precise path of European economic and financial integration.

In the US, the disruption took the form of yet another fiscal mini-drama. With a dysfunctional Congress again letting down the American people, the country is now on the receiving end of a budgetary sequester—another self-manufactured headwind to economic growth, job creation, and progress on reducing income and wealth inequalities.

Put the two together and you get a barrier to EU-US trade negotiations—one that renders ambitious (though not entirely unrealistic) the two-year timeline that has been set for completing the deal.

The third reason concerns the poor state of global policy dialogue, notwithstanding all the happy talk about global challenges and shared responsibilities. Last month's G-20 meeting ended up as yet another expensive summit lacking sufficient content and follow through. Rather than catalyzing constructive policy coordination, it has inadvertently encouraged complacency.

All three reasons are highly regrettable. They underscore the West's seeming inability to break



out of a short-term mindset in order to respond to the risks and opportunities related to historic national and global re-alignments.

The real promise of freer transatlantic trade consists in its potential to transform global trade, production networks, and multilateral organizations to the benefit of all. At the most general level, it would act to rationalize the current system of four poorly functioning blocs—centered on China, Europe, the US, and the rest—to three, and eventually (and perhaps quite quickly) to two better-functioning blocs that would have little choice but to work well together: one dominated by China, and the other by the EU/US.

Such a global structure has the potential to encourage better medium-term alignments to reduce trade barriers, set proper standards, and enhance mutually beneficial cooperation. It would facilitate coordination on stronger global rules and princi-

ples, including those pertaining to intellectual-property rights and trade in services. And it would force multilateral organizations to reform if they wish to retain even the limited relevance that they have now.

The proposal for freer transatlantic trade is potentially transformational. It comes at a time when the West is increasingly being dragged down by short-term disruptions and continued policy inertia. Yet the implementation prospects are far from promising. The proposal has the capacity to act as a catalyst for adapting policy approaches to current realities; but it is subject to the dulling forces of twentieth-century mindsets and institutions that are too slow to adapt to twenty-first-century challenges and opportunities.

*Mohamed A. El-Erian is CEO and co-CIO of PIMCO, and the author of When Markets Collide.*

## Winning the Transatlantic Trade Challenge

By ANA PALACIO

**MADRID**—US President Barack Obama's announcement that negotiations will begin on a comprehensive "Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership" has generated excitement on both sides of the Atlantic. After a restless month in which it appeared that momentum for talks had dissipated, the announcement has renewed hope that a transformative agreement between the United States and the European Union can be reached.

Though commentators and policymakers have noted the numerous challenges inherent in such a pact, the general mood is one of optimism, reflected in US Secretary of State John Kerry's comments in Berlin during his first overseas trip since taking office. But, in order to prevent negotiations from stalling over sensitive topics, such as subsidies and food safety, key political actors should first convene to resolve core differences. If combined with continued senior-level engagement, such an approach could make or break the deal.

The economic benefits of a trade agreement between economies that, together, account for more than 50% of global output and maintain nearly \$4 trillion in cross-border investment are



evident. Such an agreement could also transform transatlantic ties more broadly.

An ambitious transatlantic trade pact that is fully compatible with World Trade Organization standards and accepting of third parties should aspire to more than laying the groundwork for an "economic NATO." Indeed, it should seek to create the foundation for a free-trade area of the entire Atlantic basin, with membership extending to Africa and Latin America.

The completion of a US-EU trade agreement would reenergize a transatlantic relationship that has been weighed down by the eurozone crisis and is at risk of becoming strategically irrelevant. Yet, sadly, we have been down this road before, only to run out of pavement.

In the mid-1990's, as policymakers sought to reframe

post-Cold War US-European relations, there was movement toward the establishment of a transatlantic free-trade area (TAFTA). But US fatigue following the conclusion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico, together with rising domestic protectionism, helped to keep TAFTA on the ground. The most recent push, in 2007, was derailed by policy disagreements, particularly over health and safety standards.

The current environment appears to be more favorable. The economic boost provided from such a partnership is badly needed on both sides of the Atlantic. In the US, free trade provides Obama with a potential major policy victory on an issue that should garner bipartisan support. Meanwhile, nego-

tiations offer Europe the opportunity to shift its narrative from the monotonous drone of crisis management to a genuine recipe for growth.

And, of course, there is now the impetus posed by the world's rising economic powers, which are challenging the ability of the US and Europe to dictate the standards of international trade.

It has been suggested that a good way to start the talks would be to consider the free-trade and free-trade-related agreements that the US and EU already have in place. But the success of the upcoming talks will need more than positive atmospherics and a starting line for technical negotiations. Achieving an agreement also requires political will at the highest levels.

In the US, the president and Congress must both be engaged to ensure that entrenched domestic interests, such as agriculture and civil aviation, do not impede a potential agreement. The truly contentious issues—genetically modified (GM) food, subsidies, and intellectual-property rights—should be raised with the key political actors now, not later. And, including US congressional leaders—particularly House and Senate Republicans who support such a deal—in the talks from the beginning would increase the chances of success, because an agreement would not be seen solely as a victory for the Obama administration.

Moreover, a bipartisan approach might ease authorization for so-called Trade Promotion Authority, allowing the president to present an agreement for an up-or-down vote without possibility of amendment—which will be essential for the completion of negotiations. We have already seen qualified US congressional support from Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus and ranking Republican Orrin Hatch who, while calling the potential agreement "an enticing opportunity," specifically noted the need to address "unwarranted agricultural barriers" in the EU, including policies on GM organisms and hormones.

The EU, for its part, must go beyond the European Commission and directly involve the European Council and heads of member states. Though negotiation of an agreement is within the Commission's competence, movement on the key issues requires the clear support of member states. Compromise on agricultural issues or geographical indications, for example, will not occur without French and Italian support. Indeed, there have already been grumblings from France about agricultural reform and cultural subsidies.

The final report of the High Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth, released ahead of Obama's announcement, recommended that the "EU and the United States meet periodically

at senior levels after negotiations have started" to review the progress of the talks. This is an excellent suggestion, but such senior-level engagement should also occur at the outset, before the start of formal trade negotiations, which are expected to begin this summer.

What is needed is a focused high-level meeting that brings together a small number of essential political leaders. Besides the obvious negotiators—EU trade commissioner Karel de Gucht, Commission President José Manuel Barroso, and the new US Trade Representative—this group should include European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, key European heads of state, and senior Obama administration officials. Key US congressional leaders should also be involved.

A working summit would demonstrate a willingness at the highest echelons to resolve in principle the major obstacles standing in the way of an agreement. If successful, such a meeting would lay a foundation of genuine political support for efficient and effective technical negotiations. An agreement that rejuvenates the transatlantic relationship will require nothing less.

*Ana Palacio, a former Spanish foreign minister and former Senior Vice President of the World Bank, is a member of the Spanish Council of State.*



# Sustainable and Market-Driven Georgian Agriculture, “Not Grant Driven”

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

**Much political focus and money is now being directed to developing the agricultural sector as the new Georgian government realizes that too much of what has transpired in this sector in recent years under the former administration was political rhetoric and unsustainable. The results speak for themselves in the fledgling agricultural sector, reduced production, selling off of agricultural land to foreigners, and greater exodus of the rural population to larger towns and cities. In spite of the fact that agriculture remains the predominant source of employment in Georgia, its share of the real GDP has diminished steadily from over 20% in 2000 to less than 15% today.**

In 2006 the real change in agricultural output was negative (minus 12%), but the sector recovered in 2007 and 2008 (annual growth of 9% in both years) as a result of improved access to inputs and equipment. Agriculture is still characterized by low efficiency, while those sectors with higher productivity sectors are not labor intensive, as in the poultry sector. The challenge is how to translate this into a reallocation

of labor from low productive agriculture to more productive activities and to realize economies of scales by consolidation of small plots into spreads that will support a family farm and produce enough of a harvest to market in volumes that can fetch competitive prices, and sold in bulk to value added processors and even exporters.

USAID, the World Bank and other internationals aid and development agencies and financial institutions have poured millions upon millions of dollars into Georgia, especially after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. But despite all the good intentions and visiting experts, Georgia still is not even food independent and is having to import to feed itself. Many of the problems have not been addressed as the structure of Georgian agriculture and the need for greater efficiencies and sustainable policies.

For example, the Agricultural Development Activity of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, initially a \$15 million US government funded program which was designed to stimulate economic growth and raise the domestic competitiveness of Georgian farmers and agribusiness through the use of competitively awarded matching enterprise grants. However, the MCC pact could be best described as having done no harm at best because of the political nature of its implementation.

It was supposed to support

the value chain processing and enterprise development aspect of the project but instead it exposed many of the structural flaws in the nature of Georgian agriculture. One thing is certain that MCC exposed the need for projects to be designed which are based on local realities and in a participatory fashion – involving local stakeholder, and not just on paper. However, in the case of the ADA, what Georgia got was a model just copied on a project that was used in Moldova by the same implementing partner – with either close to the same or even less success.

Much of the problem is that such programs are donor-driven instead of being market-driven. An integral component of such programs overall intention was purposively to improve production by providing matching grants to farmers for accessing innovative agriculture production technology and practices along with development of business linkages between farmers and value-added processors or directly with cash markets; expansion of private supply/service enterprises engaged in introduction or expansion of input provision of seed, feed, fertilizer, new varieties, equipment leasing and better farm management practices; and supporting value adding enterprises (helping with new processing technologies and practices to add value to raw product through small scale process-

ing equipment, quality assurance system, processing, packaging, and competitive domestic marketing).

However, this was not the reality at the end of the day, and the Agricultural Development Activity was limited and soon high jacked by political forces, and even those that participated in the project, applying, were often not those actually engaged in agriculture but those more beholden to political process and the desire to eat the grants.

Moreover, it is now clear that when such claimed agricultural development programs neither addressed issues of trade from a market-driven perspective nor discuss what was the best mechanisms to bring about intermediate to long-term sustainable growth within an uncertain macro-economic environment. The expected results turned out to be marginal at best. The trick is getting farmers raised on communism to produce or to be motivated enough to produce in volumes enough of a high standard to compete with imports, especially from nearby countries such as Turkey and Iran.

Markets drive agricultural and rural development and not grants. It is not the type or quality of land or equipment used by farmer that is the main issue at but the level of basic knowledge of farming practices they have in order to produce quality products. Assistance is needed in the form of timely techni-

cal, financial, and marketing support to farmers, grower groups, agribusinesses, as well as continued education, extension services/rural advisory services and applied research throughout the country is needed. Additional research, extension education and vocational agriculture are necessary to give producers the necessary skills and competitive edge, especially the younger generation.

More is needed in form of critical training programs in international marketing and credit must be implemented to develop new lines with the establishment of extension services/rural advisory support and look to needed educational and training programs connected with farmer groups and processing plants. Farmers often cannot see the immediate benefit to accept new practices based on market conditions, and would rather produce and sell by run of the crop method, as there is no real incentive to produce quality products. Quality is not very important in local markets and there is no premium for delivering higher quality products to middlemen.

In addition, terms of trade must be adjusted to fall not only within the terms of WTO regulations, but also be developed in line with the export base of recipient countries so that they can seek the most appropriate market niche where Georgian can develop its own competitive advantage. This is not an

easy task. It requires making the economic and political system work in tandem, and not only close to elections. Free trade reduces the capacity for some regions and countries to produce and export, especially in light of policy and procedures left over from planned economic systems that currently inhibit free trade. WTO and various development projects have not been of much benefit for Georgian agriculture because of not being able to see for the forest for the trees.

In short, free trade, in the absence of a level-playing field in business and legislative environments, sets the conditions to where a country or commodity group is no longer able to effectively compete in terms of production costs and meeting international quality and food safety benchmarks. Such barriers to trade can also impact domestic market share as well when similar products can be imported at lower prices. It is marketing and consistent high quality that contributes the most to country's economic growth and export trade potential.

The only way this can realistically be accomplished is by abolishing top down policies and procedures that restrict the agricultural sector ability to find niche markets, and by adopting rigorous marketing and quality campaigns to stay competitive within those niches – starting first with the domestic market and then looking to exports.

## EDUCATION

# Conflict as a Conduit

By KENDRA PARADIS

**Group dynamics are crucial to successful work in a team whether considering interaction between colleagues, supervisors, or classmates. This may seem like an obvious statement but it's something which is often overlooked in professional settings or even when paring students for group projects and classroom assignments. Often we don't have a choice concerning with whom we work and an understanding of the way that groups of people function together can go a long way to performing well in a difficult group. Each group of people, no matter the task, how long or short they are on a task together, or from what culture, need to pass through certain stages of development, which will ultimately determine the quality of their output and the well being of the collective and individuals within.**

This process is known as “storming and norming”, the middle two stages of group development, within the four stage process. First, naturally, a group must form or be formed. During this stage, all the members get to know each other and look for potential allies or problems; meaning how each member deals with stress, what we have in common, etc. Each member is looking for acceptance and the main task is to decide how the team will function; what is the team, who will lead it, when does it meet, etc. The leader of the group is usually quite directive in this stage as the members have not yet assumed clear roles.

Next, the members storm. Each competes to have his/her ideas considered while the team explores the task and the best ways to complete it. This is a dangerous point of development, sometimes questions and problems are solved quickly, but it is possible the group will never leave this stage. The leader is often accessible but needs to remain directive to solve the problems and lead the group out of the tension and conflict which is likely to occur. It is crucial that members feel a non-judgmental atmosphere to avoid

the discouraging potential of working through the storming phase.

The danger in team building would appear to be potentially fatal storming in that members may not find an effective way to deal with conflict. Although members naturally avoid these types of uncomfortable interactions in the forming stage, everyone is searching for inclusion and the storming stage can lead to destructive group dynamics; it is vital to the future development of a team that issues actually surface and are dealt with or else they will inevitably lead the team back to storming again and again until resolved. While the leader remains directive, it's important to note that too much control will leave the team terminally dependent on its leadership if that leader acts as more than a facilitator for compromise within group decision making.

If the group is able to move forward they will stabilize in the norming stage. The team has reached a mutual agreement and each individual feels a collective sense of responsibility in reaching the common goal. Team members are able to assume the proper roles and operate on team needs instead of

individual preference. At this stage it is possible, and important, for the leader to continue to supervise but take an increasingly less directive role.

Lastly, some high performing groups will achieve the elusive performing stage. Leaders take on a more participative role as the members are able to make decisions and solve conflicts without outside supervision. Each member is able to work independently while completing the group's collective function. Everyone understands the implicit strengths each member has to offer and they seamlessly work to compliment counterparts' weaknesses.

These stages may be, and are often, revisited and teams may find their progress can lead to regression as they revisit different stages of their development. Even groups that have reached the performing stage sometimes refer back to an older phase if the situation demands it. This restorming and renorming is most common when the contents of the group or the structure of the task are changed. For teams which were successful in navigating through their development, dissolving the group may be very painful and some members may try transforming to



preserve the original team for another function, even if purely social in nature.

Some theorists have suggested a fifth stage, adjourning, in which the task is completed and the group dissolves itself. This is an important stage in education. Group dynamics are an important part of learning and a lot can be gained from reflecting on the working process. Awareness of these processes can lead to smoother transitions through team development and overall effectiveness when working in a group. As a teacher, knowl-

edge of these stages can be invaluable in dealing with classroom management (as well as the habitual pain of adjourning at the end of ever session.) Students who could be labeled as trouble makers in the classroom could alternatively be viewed as storming which would create a higher likelihood of norming instead of remaining in a cycle of conflict. Conflict is indeed a natural part of functioning with others and understanding the stages of group development can help us not to fear it but use it as a tool for better performance.



# Tbilisi Eats Lebanon

By KOBASAMSONIDZE

Two exciting new options for ethnic food in Tbilisi have recently opened, and both specialize in Lebanese cuisine. While the dishes they offer are relatively similar, they are distinct when it comes to presentation and price.

The first and more high-end option is Crispy Lebanese. Located prominently in a newly renovated building on the corner of Aghmashenebeli Ave and Tamar Mepe, Crispy is situated across two floors with the bottom one acting as a shawarma operation, and the second floor a more traditional dining room. At first sight you might think you are in the wrong place if you were planning on a nice sit down meal, as the ground floor is not very impressive and seemingly thrown together at a moment's notice; however, the



upstairs portion exudes the opposite vibe.

Crispy is aiming to occupy a specific market niche for dining in Tbilisi: a heaven for expatriates from the Levant and Middle East who want a taste of home, and the familiar dishes from Lebanese cuisine that accompany it, while giving Westerners who want to add another mid-to-high-end dining option to their rotation. Portion sizes are good and the service is friendly and attentive, and all of the familiar options like hum-

mus, baba ghanoush, falafel and pitas are available. The falafel is slightly firmer and darker around the outside than I prefer but still quite good, and the hummus is deliciously smooth and creamy. They also offer a wide selection of continental food for the less adventurous eaters.

The main criticism that diners at Crispy Lebanese might have after eating there would be the price. The food is not cheap, especially when compared to the other Lebanese option in Tbilisi.

Lunch for two could easily run upwards of 20 GEL a head, and while the food is fresh and filling, the price could be a deal breaker for many outside the expatriate community.

Cedar of Lebanon on the other hand is a completely different establishment. Situated on a tiny side street off Rustaveli, it is so small that you could easily walk past it without even noticing, and it is doubtful if the tiny café could fit more than 10 people at once. The interior is sparse with a few unique design elements including

an ornate cuckoo clock, as well as a clock with a polish flag and iconography of the pre-requisite symbol of all things Lebanese, the cedar tree.

If Crispy is expensive, Cedar is an out right steal. It is almost not even necessary to look at prices for individual dishes as most are between three and five lari. This is great because you can really explore the diversity of the cuisine by ordering a variety of different options. Excellent starters at Cedar include fattoush, a simple peasants' salad of diced tomatoes, cucumber and onions with some lemon and mint, which gains its uniqueness with the addition of flakes of traditional Lebanese pita for some added texture; and a salad of rucola bathed in lemon juice and mixed with onions and sumac.

The falafel, when compared to Crispy's version has a softer interior and flakier outer shell that I find more enjoyable to eat. While Cedar's hummus is a little grainier than Crispy's, the baba ghanoush is equally delicious at both restaurants, and the *labneh*, a strained yogurt like dip was far superior to Crispy's offering.

Again, the main difference when comparing these two restaurants is in the kind of place you want to eat. The menus contain almost identical options for Lebanese food, with Crispy offering a variety of continental options as well. While Cedar is little more than a one-man operation, offering a no frills eating experience complete with a refrigerator you can grab drinks from at your leisure, Crispy is full service restaurant. Where Cedar is mostly likely known about via word of mouth among the Lebanese and Middle Eastern community in Tbilisi, Cedar has marketing and expatriate connections. Both are delicious and equally authentic, and they don't seem likely to step on each other's demographic toes. The only choice between the two is what kind of surroundings and dining experience you are in the mood for. Myself, I frequent Cedar when I am craving Lebanese, but that is because I am a starving food critic.

Crispy Lebanese is located at 171 David Aghmashenebeli Ave

Cedar of Lebanon is located on Gribopedov str.

# The Flip Side to Georgia's Growing Fast-food Culture

By GIORGI KHUKHUNASHVILI

Tbilisi residents help to establish fast-food industry in unconventional ways – price and health put aside, trendiness is what really matters.

On February 14, 2013 the first Burger King restaurant opened in Georgia's Tbilisi Mall, causing quite a buzz, especially among teenagers. Fast-food restaurants are spreading rapidly in Georgia. The dynamic rhythm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century dictates us to move faster, think faster and, eventually, eat faster.

Around the world, the popularity of McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's and other fast-food chains is evident by their immense sales and in-your-face advertising. The most famous, McDonalds, has managed to open 32,000 restaurants in 100 countries since its founding in 1940 and even served as the sole food outlet at the London Olympics. Over 60 million people around the globe eat at McDonalds everyday proving just how dominant the fast-food industry is.

Unsurprisingly, McDonalds was the first fast-food franchise to enter the Georgian market. Opening on the capital's Rustaveli Avenue in 1999, the restaurant served upwards of 7,000 customers on its first day of business. Over the last 14 years, Tbilisi is now home to other franchises like Burger King and Texas Chicken.

Wendy's is soon to open in capital's former central post office building. The list is certain to expand in the coming years.

Fast-food is appealing to customers for two simple reasons: it is cheap and fast. The flip side is that fast-food menus are unhealthy. They contain excessive amounts of cholesterol, salt and trans-saturated fats – all of which contribute heavily to heart disease and an abnormal metabolism.

In a 2010 report by the United States Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), up to 36% of adults and 17% of children in the US are obese, with the rate for adults expected to reach 60% by 2030 in 13 US states. However, even more alarming is that childhood obesity has more than doubled over the past 20 years. According to the CDC, the percentage of obese children aged 6–19 years in the US increased from 6% in 1980 to nearly 18% in 2010. If the numbers continue to grow, more children and adolescents would be vulnerable to cardiovascular diseases, type II diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis.

In Georgia, obesity has not reached critical levels, at least yet. According to the survey conducted by Caucasus Research Resources Center in 2008, obesity was ranked around 1% in terms of most urgent health issues. However, this gives a false sense of com-

fort, as according to the same survey around 20% suffer from cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. These are health problems that are caused by appar-

much healthier than the fast-food alternatives, it is often the fast-food industry prices that appeal to Georgian customers. Nevertheless, a regular menu,



ent malnutrition, not eating balanced meals, and unhealthy lifestyles. Excessive amounts of cholesterol, salts and fats are the three main sources of heart disease and metabolism imbalance and the best way to prevent this is to raise public awareness and sell the idea of healthy lifestyles to adolescents and teenagers.

While the average Georgian restaurant sells food made from largely locally sourced ingredients that are fresh and far less fatty and salty and therefore –

which includes a burger, fries and a drink, costs 11 GEL (about 7 USD), while the same items in US cost about the same. However, the average wage of a US citizen is \$42,979, while a Georgian citizen earns only \$3,230 on average. The difference is shocking, yet many Tbilisi residents still find it worth paying for food that is overpriced for Georgian standards and offers little to no real nutrition.

Despite these disparities, the fast food industry is quite



arms, is no exception. But Georgians have managed to give the fast-food trend a strange twist. It is no secret that Georgians take their eating seriously, including overeating. There are now several local brands which serve a mix of traditional cuisine and conventional fast-food products. The most prolific among them is Ori Lula, which runs six branches throughout Tbilisi. Perhaps the most popular item is Ori Lula Menu which includes Kababi, fried potatoes, and a cold drink. Interestingly, these are the staples that every Georgian restaurant offers to its customers but at a lower price. But Ori Lula's kababi presented in its own Ori Lula wrapping sway consumers towards the more trendy food outlet.

Fast-food in Tbilisi is neither fast, nor cheap but apparently remains very popular for some unknown reason. The only explanation for Georgians' preference for fast-food is that it be trendy. It seems that walking around Tbilisi with the McDonalds-branded Coke paper cup is an instant stamp of approval. Fortunately, the US and Europe are slowly turning the corner with the growing popularity of organic food and going for healthy living. Hopefully Georgia will do the same before it also reaches the same levels of obesity as so often found in more developed countries.



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# Rocko's Thick, Deep, Emotional, Bright, True, Special Colors

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

There are lots of colors... Lots of colors on big canvases... Lots of colors with thick layers... Lots of colors to express a lot... Colors on faces, on bodies, on the backgrounds... It's a fact; this guy knows exactly what to do with colors. He knows what he wants to say with his painting and he says it massively, deeply, colorfully and yet at the same time delicately just right.

Gallery Vanda is hosting the exhibition "Parallel Mode" by Rocko Iremashvili. A young Georgian artist, whose work gets you to stand in front of each painting much longer than planned (at least in my case). His messages are not happy, his colors are. He has mastered enough to be able to show the sorrow, the protest, the pain with the happiest colors possible. Ever wonder how bright, rainbow colors can possibly express inner unhappiness and rebel? You can simply go visit the exhibition and see it. It's right there, at the gallery Vanda, on the canvases by Rocko.

Rocko was educated in Tbilisi. He went to Nickoladze Art School for two years, then entered M. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and majored in painting. He thinks he made a right choice school wise. It was back in the day when the State Academy of Arts was full of people trying to find themselves in alcohol and drugs rather than drawing. It gave him pretty intense and busy school years. After winning the German exchange contest DAAD, he left for the Stuttgart State Academy of Art – and mastered there. As is very common for Georgians, love of the mother-



land brought him back to Georgia. Rocko has had 14 exhibitions in total (both in Europe and Georgia). His works used to be sold out in a blink of an eye, until they weren't. One day sales just stopped. Motivation is feeding his inspiration at the moment, yet the best days are yet to come.

**Do you regret coming back home?**

Actually no. After coming here I had a chance working with different medias. Considering the expenses, I wouldn't get a chance to do all that in Germany. I don't think that an artist has to limit himself to one direction. One should try all different things and find himself not just in one, but mix it if he can. I draw, paint, sculpt and this all requires quite some spending. It would have been impossible for me to work on all that in Europe. So no, I don't



regret coming back here, yet I don't want to be here anymore.

**Different medias? Yet your baby is painting?**

This specific exhibition "Parallel Mode" was all painting; I do work and prefer to work with sculpture, video and other medias.

**How did coming back home show on your art?**

The social environment has the biggest impact on every kind of work. We can't possibly escape that influence, especially in art. It's the source for human emotions both rebellious and positive inspiration.

**Are all time odes about Georgia true? That this is the very heart of inspiration?**

The universe has a lot to offer. So I don't agree with the motto that "it's us Georgians that are the best". There is a lot of beautiful nature and beautiful characters out there. Different places inspire you differently. You just have to grab it and show it in any way you can possibly express.

**They say you can learn how to draw, but you have to be born as a painter to paint. Do you agree with this?**

I used to agree with that. But after seeing quite a few examples of people progressing with a lot of practice I think it's overrated. I have witnessed people becoming great painters, when I thought they were not so talented. But results were pretty astonishing. I think people can learn everything. I believe that despite age or lack of practice, if a human being has to and wants to express

something he shall find a way. There are many genius writers, and artists who found their talents in quite an age, yet became huge.

**What is it that you painted on those canvases for this exhibition?**

It's solely my attitude towards events happening at the moment they were painted. Those canvases were made at different times. That's why I called it "Parallel Mode". At the same time I was working on something else. While doing so, I just found messages to express from within and painted those canvases. Some show protest, some show sadness and fear towards how kids are growing up with wrong toys and in the wrong environment. Like I said, it's the impact of events surrounding me.

**Do painters have one favorite work?**

I have but different ones at different times; one or two works at a time. It changes with

what sells. It makes an artist extremely unhappy, but some choose to go that way, simply because they have families and they must be making money. It's extremely hard.

**So you vote for "art for art" VS "art for people"?**

Absolutely. I have a contract with the gallery in Germany they pay me despite my paintings being sold or not. It was my condition, if you like what I create then display me and I won't be working on demand.

**What does Georgian audience buy?**

Georgians are searching for art that makes them smile; it's more of a wall paper for them. They don't want to be looking all the time at the painting on the wall that is aggressive or sad. There are not too many mansions in this city to buy big canvases. Other than that, Georgians mostly purchase the brands. Name sells well. After coming from Germany my exhibition sold out immediately.



changing the state of mind, again, depending on the stage of life. I just try to create art that is very special to me and most likely remain special. Like Indians used to collect the smells of the important events, I'm trying to collect important moments of life with pieces of my work, regardless of size. I did a couple of works to fill the blanks. I needed it to complete the series for example. Actually it's very hard for an artist to create what he doesn't feel. There are people like that, and honestly I consider them heroes, knowing how hard it is. They have responsibilities, painting is only an income for them, and they paint

My name had just arrived from Europe and was hot then. It showed on the sales, big time. Now I don't sell at all.

**Why did your works stop selling?**

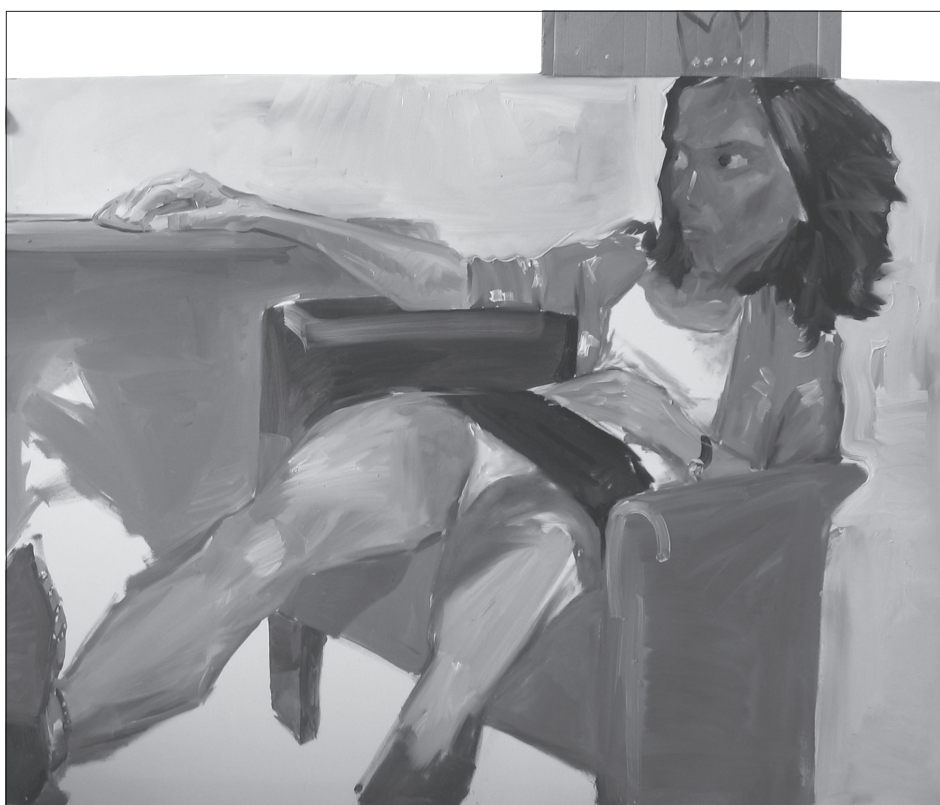
After the crisis sales just stopped.

**What are your current plans?**

I'm working on a big project "Duet" – a mix – sculpture, video, performance, etc. I'm aiming for May. Then I'll leave.

**What is your final destination?**

The United States of America. It certainly is the very center of the art world. That's where my art and I want to be.







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- 👉 For every 50 “Doves” 3 lottery tickets will be given as a present.
- 👉 For 10 “Doves” you will receive 1 lottery ticket.

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**The main prize 5000 GEL to 5 winners**

**20 000 GEL 10 000 GEL to 5 winners**

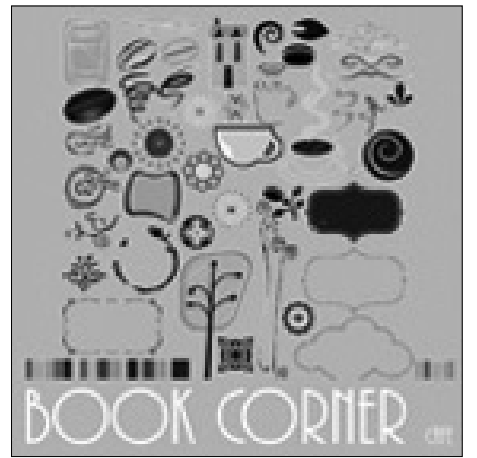
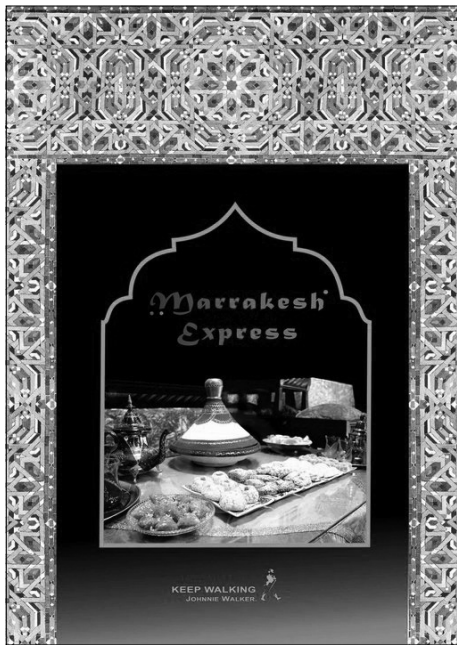


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- ჩვენ გთავაზობთ გაცვლით პროგრამებს ამერიკის შეერთებული შტატებისა და ევროპის უნივერსიტეტებში.
- სტუდენტებს შეუძლიათ გადაიხადონ სწავლის გადასახადი მ ნაწილად.
- შბსუ-ში ასწავლიან მსოფლიოს სხვადასხვა ქვეყნებიდან მოწვეული პროფესორები.
- სწავლა მიმდინარეობს ინგლისურ და ქართულ ენებზე.

შსსუ-ს ჰაიბრნიჩი უნივერსიტეტები

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- ვისტულას უნივერსიტეტი (Warsaw, Poland)
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