

The Georgian Times

NO 1 NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA THE GEORGIAN TIMES MEDIA HOLDING

No 5 (1496) Monday, March 18, 2013 Weekly Newspaper, International Edition - Published by "The Georgian TIMES" Media Holding Since 1993 www.geotimes.ge



Agricultural University: Failed Dialogue and a Bit of Untold History



Confrontation between the government and President Saakashvili's team is on the rise. Tbilisi's Agricultural University has become another bone of contention between the opposing camps and this may be a sign of what is to follow in a larger standoff. The cancellation of the Agricultural University's accreditation by the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science has brought students out onto the street in protest. Nonetheless, the government stands firm on its decision, now offering the university a chance to solve its problems and to then reapply for accreditation.

On p. 2

An Uncertain Future for Georgia's Gambling Industry

A new legislative initiative to ban advertising of gambling businesses in Georgia has recently been presented in parliament. A second hearing will be held in this week's session. In addition to banning gambling advertisements, a new petition launched by members of civil society to ban gambling all together is being discussed in the Committee of the Sector Economy and Economic Policy.



On p. 7

Plight of Foreign Investors in Georgia: Top-down Racketeering

On p. 4

Georgia's Foreign Policy Orientation in Line with its Geopolitical Code

On p. 6

Destroyed Children's Town in Tbilisi's Vake Park

On p. 7

Venice Commission's Suggestions to Georgia

On p. 6

Gudauri and Bakuriani - Beloved Ski Resorts for Foreign Tourists in Georgia

There are fewer people and prices are cheaper in Bakuriani and Gudauri, in March compared with previous months. Although spring is in the air in Tbilisi and other low land areas, Georgia's ski slopes are snowy and in good condition. Skiers and boarders can still experience the pleasures of the 2012 snow season and speed down the mountains of both of Georgia's popular ski resorts.



On p. 14

Agricultural University: Failed Dialogue and a Bit of Untold History

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Confrontation between the government and President Saakashvili's team is on the rise. Tbilisi's Agricultural University has become another bone of contention between the opposing camps and this may be a sign of what is to follow in a larger standoff. The cancellation of the Agricultural University's accreditation by the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science has brought students out onto the street in protest. Nonetheless, the government stands firm on its decision, now offering the university a chance to solve its problems and to then reapply for accreditation.



actor are currently being constructed with the help of the Russians.

Those in the Georgian and Russian media with institutional knowledge can see a maze of dots to connect. In short, the track record of Bendukidze should make any reasonable person quiver in their boots – and a bit of history is appropriate. Firstly, one must keep in mind who was leading up the sale of the Georgian energy sector to the Russians back in 2003-2005, and how he declared at the time how he did not understand why anyone should be threatened with the sale of various pipelines – the same ones that Georgia received gas from Russia.

After a series of high profile arrests of former officials, it appears that the Georgian authorities have suddenly turned their attention to a private educational institution as a follow up volley. The Agriculture University is owned by its founder Kakha Bendukidze, Georgia's first post Rose Revolution Economy Minister and self made tycoon who made his fortune in Russia. However, there are questions as to how he made his money and why he was able to obtain this property for next to nothing. Few in Georgia may be fully aware, and there are many layers involved, especially in light of the allegations of his role in Iran's nuclear development activities over the years.

According to confidential sources, much of Bendukidze's fortune was a result of close connections with Minatom, Russia's Ministry for Atomic Energy. A product of the Stalinist era and an embodiment of Cold War-style secrecy, Minatom is a complex of laboratories and secret "closed cities" where nuclear weapons are designed, built and mass-produced and much of the materials for Iran's Bushehr re-

Perhaps the most interesting side plot to Bendukidze's history is how the supply of materials to Iran for its nuclear program is closely linked to Moscow. He even at one time held a controlling share in Atomstroieksport and when he first started working in the Saakashvili government, he came highly recommended to make deals with the Russians and their strategic partners.

In October of 2004, just after Saakashvili took power in Tbilisi, Bendukidze sold his majority stake (53 percent) in Atomstroieksport to Gazprombank for 731 million rubles, (about 25 million USD) – not much for a company that experts predicted could have been received up to

20 billion USD in orders from Iran and other customers in the next few years. If Bendukidze had refused to sell his stock at the time, it is highly likely that he would have lost it anyway, just as Mikhail Khodorkovsky was stripped of Yuganskneftegaz.

It is well understood by many in the intelligence community who were involved in setting up the deal in the first place and sending Bendukidze back to Georgia to act as an economic development pundit. Just how cozy Bendukidze's relations were with the Kremlin remains debatable; however, one thing is certain: the relationship between Gazprom, Atomstroieksport and Bendukidze is something that was never reported in free and independent Georgian media.

Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili stated at a recent meeting with regional media representatives on March 14 that he initially also didn't understand the reason behind the Ministry of Education's decision to start inspecting the Agricultural University. There may be much more involved here, in rooting out those with close ties with the Russian Federal and the smell of their money, or in this case, how it would register on a gagger counter.

"However, the minister explained to GT that the cause for the inspection was a letter from employees of the university, in which they told that the level of

education there doesn't meet standards as envisioned and set out by Georgian legislation. The ministry could not simply ignore it; Giorgi Margvelashvili's (Minister of Education and Science) office had questions that needed answers," Ivanishvili said, adding that students' activity is a ruled process. He called on them to think and analyze what is in their best interests, and think about what they – not anyone else – want. "I can promise that the process will not harm a single student," he emphasized.

Ivanishvili also explained that Bendukidze's initiatives brought Georgian villages to total decay. "For whom does he train personnel? Society should question it; all must be equal before law. It is true that the former government took credit for having eradicated corruption at the low and medium levels of society but a privileged clan remained of which Bendukidze belonged. He exceeded the limits of the law when he was handed property worth a total of 200 million GEL for only 1 GEL," Ivanishvili said, stressing the process is not politically motivated and there is no need to exaggerate the issue.

During a meeting held in the Agricultural University on March 14 with representatives of international missions to Georgia, Bendukidze responded that the decision likely has nothing to do with his personality but the facts point only to political revenge. "The head of the Cabinet didn't forget to mention all my "wrongdoings".

According to him, I am bad as I moved our country from agricultural economics to consumer economy though I am very proud of this. He also says I purchased this building for 1 GEL, which is wrong. We paid three million for it and we took a formal obligation to invest 12 million USD in the development of the university. Since 2011 more than 10 million was spent on renovating and improving infrastructure and buying lab

equipment, approximately one million – for research" said Bendukidze, who is also the Chair of the Agricultural University's supervisory board.

He outlined the reasons for terminating the authorization of the university, saying that the Monitoring Commission didn't find 10 books in a library stocked with 1.7 million books. "Another reason the monitors named was the recruitment procedures for bringing Georgian lecturers from Western universities to ours. They stressed having no evacuation plan or phone number of a doctor on every storey and some other minor glitches. But it's ok – if they want it this way, we'll play along. We've got no problems," Bendukidze told journalists after the meeting with diplomats.

A member of Saakashvili's National Movement Akaki Minashvili assured that there are no defects in the Agricultural University, claiming that it is a modern school with up-to-date laboratories and equipment. As he told the Georgian Times, the new government is taking revenge on former officials. "This is typical Soviet method of struggle against innovations, progress free and critical thinking. The authorization should be resumed right away," Minashvili stated.

The Minister of Education in his turn promised to restore the authorization as soon as the existing problems are solved. Moreover, he offered students to continue their studies at the Technical University free of charge. "I am preparing facilities and equipment for students in the event that Bendukidze continues playing the role of a victim. This is a dirty game and students should remove themselves from it. However, I am ready to take care of even those students who keep participating in Bendukidze's political ventures," Giorgi Margvelashvili said.

Students thanked the Margvelashvili for his concern but not surprisingly they refused to

move to another university. They believe the negotiations with the minister will lead nowhere, citing how he didn't even care to read the report provided by the Monitoring Commission. "He told us it was too long, though it's only 85 pages. I think the minister has realized his decision was a grave mistake that will have negative consequences. But if he is not too much partial then he will revise his wrongdoing as terminating authorization means that 2000 students will not finish their education as no other university offers specialties that the Agricultural University has," Irakli Kiknavelidze, a student of the Free University, told the GT.

Iliia Bidzinashvili, a student of Agricultural University told GT that Monitoring Commission's accusation concerning illegal expulsion of 600 students is false – they were not expelled for nonpayment of study fees but for failing 6 out of 7 of their exams. "This is one of the best universities in Georgia. In just two years it moved from the 37th place to the 6th, based on student entrance exam grades. Cancellation of the authorization is the first step towards closing it entirely. So we will keep on fighting for our university and our right to study where we have chosen. The demonstrations will not stop until we reach our goal," Bidzinashvili stated.

The power-sharing struggle in Georgia began in early October, 2012 when the ruling party of United National Movement recognized its defeat to Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition in parliamentary elections. Since then, President Saakashvili twice met Prime Minister Ivanishvili and expressed readiness to cooperate with the new government. However, it seems the declared cohabitation is not working, and the dialog between the parties failed from the start.

Historical background on Bendukidze included in this article was provided by Ian F. Carver, Editor of the Georgian Times

An Uncertain Future for Georgia's Gambling Industry

By UTA BITSADZE

A new legislative initiative to ban advertising of gambling businesses in Georgia has recently been presented in parliament. A second hearing will be held in this week's session. In addition to banning gambling advertisements, a new petition launched by members of civil society to ban gambling all together is being discussed in the Committee of the Sector Economy and Economic Policy.

Current Georgian legislation bans the participation of those less than 18 years of age in gambling. However, this does not prevent many young people from engaging in the practice. Gambling has become an unsolved problem in Georgia. The thrill of the games and the thirst for a quick dollar frequently becomes addictive but most end up losing everything. The practice can even result in people committing suicide, while families are left to sort out unpaid debts, among other problems to contend with. According to the draft's author, Deputy MP

Koba Davitashvili of the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, the petition was presented to parliament precisely due to this reason.

Upon taking office, Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili told the Turkish newspaper "Sabah" that it is not worth degrading the image of the country by banning such businesses, and on March 13, 2013, he responded to the growing public concern about the industry by announcing that the government will not ban gambling, but revise licensing regulations for casinos.

The National-Religious Institute conducted quantitative research in August 2012, in which 1000 respondents were asked if they gamble and if yes how much. The study found that 36% of respondents gamble every day, 41% once a week, 7% gave up gambling and 16% do not gamble.

In November 2012, just after Georgia's Parliamentary elections, the institute sent a petition signed by 1500 citizens to the Prime Minister. After receiving no answer, they applied to Georgia's Parliamentary Speaker Davit Usupash-

vili in December 2012.

After Parliamentarian Koba Davitashvili familiarized himself with the petition, the draft law was prepared, which had passed with its first hearing after being confirmed by 77 parliament member, with only 14 against.

The new initiative restricts all public advertising and encouragement of gambling (except the lottery). Banning of public advertising refers to television, banner advertising, as well as internet space, which will be strictly controlled.

Discussions on whether to

ban, regulate or let gambling exist in its current form are actively being held throughout society. According to Zviad Tomaradze, head of the National-Religious Institute, citizens of all ages are involved in gambling and the practice especially harms young people, who are more susceptible to becoming addicted. He is a strong supporter of the ban on advertising gambling businesses, including the so-called poker apparatus and online games.

Continued on p. 9

The Georgian TIMES

1 English-Language Newspaper in Georgia

First published in 1993.

The Founder and the President Malkhaz Gulashvili. Tel: (+995) 577 461 046

The Georgian Times Media Holding.

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

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

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

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

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

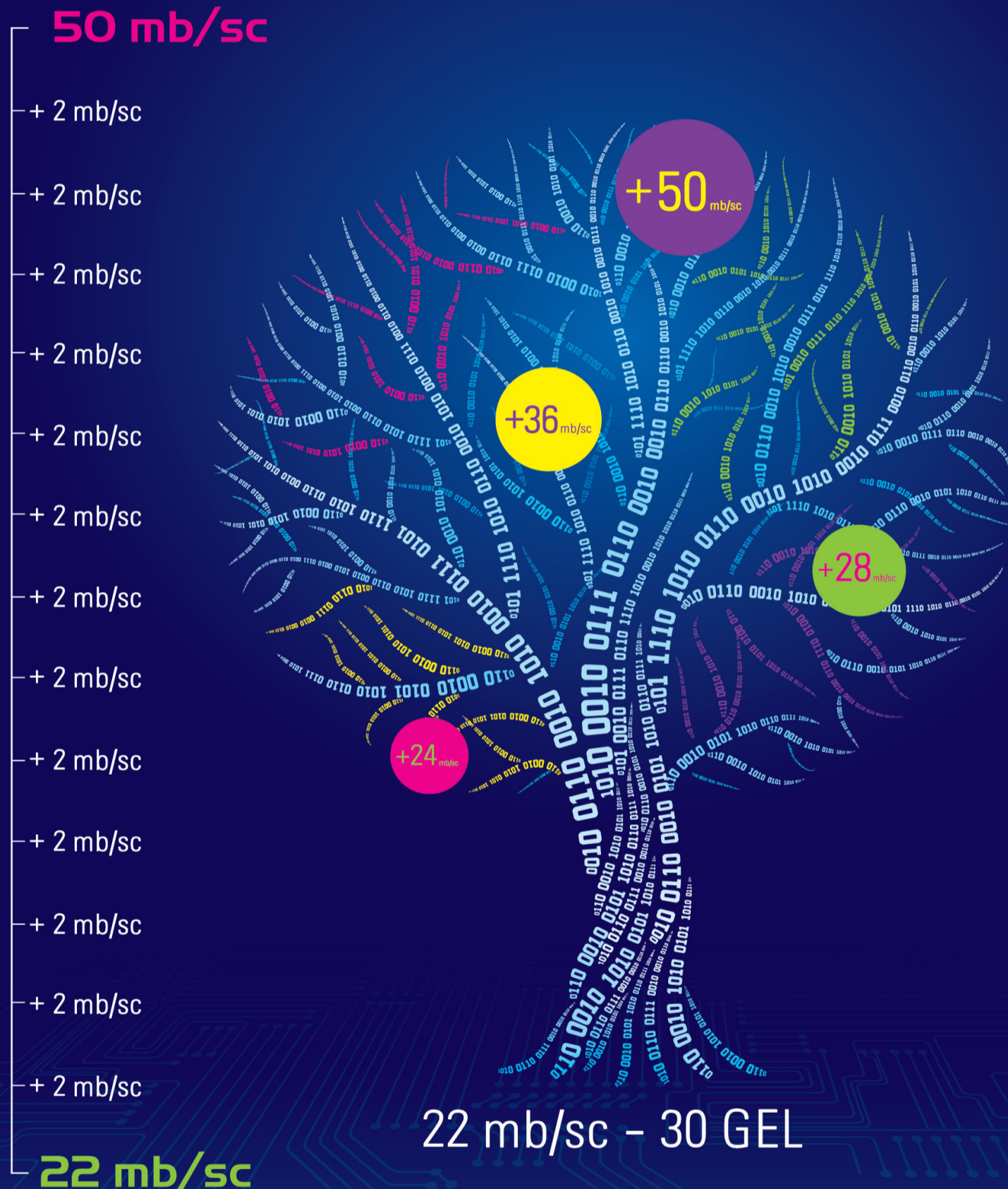
Director:
Kakha Maskharashvili
Tel: (+995) 551 501 133
E-mail:
director@geotimes.ge

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



DREAM PACKAGE

Best Internet Offer



22 mb/sc – 30 GEL

+ Extra 2 mb/sc for Free Every Month

Till 31st of December



2 100 100

www.silknet.com

Fiber Optic Technologies

Plight of Foreign Investors in Georgia: Top-down Racketeering

By EMMA BAIRMOVA

In 2004 President Mikhail Saakashvili, inspired by his victorious Rose Revolution and still full of euphoria, demonstrated what can best be described as an irrepressible enthusiasm for economic development and supporting the business environment of the country. His PR kicked into gear with the motto "Destination Georgia" and the reading audience treated to many articles about how it was the best place to invest. The country undertook ambitious tourism development projects, often donor funded. The President and his team urged investors the world over to invest in Georgia by trying to persuade them, via CNN and various other 4-hire media outlets, that corruption no longer existed in this small country and the much-touted reforms would provide investors with complete safety.

ENTHUSIASM SOON DWINDLED

All appeared to be going well for a few years, at least if you read the newspapers and the flowery mission reports, but the investors' enthusiasm soon dwindled and their luck ran out. The ones who took the initiative to work and invest in Georgia realized that they had been hoodwinked. The proverbial river of foreign direct investment (FDI) began to run dry. The Georgian government attributed this to the world economic crisis and the so-called credit crunch, notwithstanding the fact that many local banks were overextended and had too many bad debts – especially in the construction and real estate sectors. However the investors, had they been asked by the world's media, would have given a completely different explanation.

In 2004 Transparency International (TI) accused the Georgian government of tax terrorism, and by 2010 TI was openly stating that the local authorities were extorting money from foreign businesspersons by threatening them with inspections by the financial police and punitive fines. The American magazine "Businessweek Bloomberg" made the same allegations in an article called "Trapped in Tbilisi". Later a group of human rights activists called "Business for Free Business in Georgia" published a list of 147 imprisoned businessmen who they claimed had not committed any wrongdoing.

EUROPEAN STANDARDS

The Georgian authorities constantly expressed the need to introduce European standards of democracy but at the same time



said that their objective was to mimic the economic miracle of Singapore, which is not exactly a Western democracy. This double-headed approach resulted in actions which appeared to push away and intimidate foreign investors being taken. Apparently the government did not know the foreign investment would dry up, even when it had associated the country with armed conflict with Russia. It most likely did know, ahead of time, the potential consequences of the war, but failed to take steps to prevent it, regardless of the consequences.

In January 2013 the Coordinating Centre for International Investment in Georgia (CCII) openly accused President Saakashvili of lying when he stated that Georgia's new government, led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, had stopped the construction of a five-star hotel in the center of Tbilisi, in which the Abu Dhabi Group, a UAE investment company, had intended to invest 40 million USD. According to CCII's Director George Seturidze, the financing and implementation of this project had been terminated back in the summer of 2010 due to corrupt dealings between one of the Abu Dhabi Group managers, Sami Edwards, and senior officials of the former government. "In particular, this group of shady individuals misrepresented the truth to investors and did their very best to personally benefit from the project; they were working only for their own short-term interests," said Seturidze.

These Arab investors were also the owners of Poti port. Along with a number of Kazakhs, who had apparently also lost interest in Georgian property, they suddenly disappeared from the public scene. In July 2011 Saakashvili announced publicly that the Kazakh investors could no longer continue with the development of the Likani seaside

resort in the west of the country. However, according to Amanzhol Kusainov, General Director of the Kazakh Company Kazmunay Service Georgia, the Kazakh side was not planning to abandon the project, notwithstanding Georgian government interference and alleged links to the Kremlin.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WITH ISRAEL

Georgia also lost the possibility of economic partnership with Israel in the wake of several scandals, including land deals in Tbilisi, Lisi Lake, which was purchased for many times over the normal going price. Moreover, the arrest of two Israeli businessmen, who had arrived in Georgia on the personal invitation of the former Prime Minister, on bogus charges created a serious deterioration in bilateral relations. Georgia ended up having to pay 98 million USD in arbitration to the Israelis over this, by decision of a court in London.

Instead of following up by paying their legal debts the Georgian government gave the Israelis considerable prison sentences. They were set up as alleged bribe givers in a scheme to make them appear as criminals and not honest businessmen. Regardless, the authorities' decision to ignore an appeal on their behalf by the Israeli President and Minister of Foreign Affairs just added fuel to the fire. In response, the visits of the Georgian Parliamentary Speaker and Minister of Economy to Israel were cancelled. At the same time it was revealed that Georgia owed 100 million USD to another Israeli company for a deal to supply Georgia with military drones and how the codes to those drones had been sold or bartered to the Russians for inside knowledge of air defense systems purchased by the Iranians.

EXTORTING FOR PERSONAL PROFIT

It was now clear that the scandalous case of the Israeli businessmen was not an isolated one. For example, in November 14,



2006 the financial police closed Italian company Badagoni's stores and announced that its Italian wine was falsified. The Italian President and diplomatic corps and PR spin doctors soon intervened and the quality of the company's wine was reconfirmed when it won top ratings at an international festival.

The President of Georgia and the former Georgian Prime Minister were forced to apologize. In another case, Austrian company Shirmhoffer's products were held up in customs for months on the orders of David Kezerashvili, the former Minister of Defense, and other high ranking officials who sought to extort the company for personal profit. The scandal ended when Shirmhoffer, which had planned to invest 50 million GEL, gave up on Georgia completely; it decided to invest in Kazakhstan instead.

A few years ago a Belgian of Latvian origin, Tomas Sakalauskas, accused Bank of Georgia and

the Prosecutor's Office of forcing him into bankruptcy and demanded a thorough investigation of the case by the new prosecutor. Tomas Sakalauskas arrived in Georgia in 2006 and founded the construction company Eurobuilding. In early 2008 he took out a loan worth 2 million USD from the Bank of Georgia to purchase commercial property on Rustaveli Avenue. The economic crisis after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 seriously impacted his business plans and he was forced to ask the bank for an installment plan. When he did so, he was immediately arrested on trumped up charges. Sakalauskas stated at the time, "I wanted to contact the Ambassador of Belgium, but they turned this request down. The foreign office said that it would be better to settle the issue quietly and without any fanfare. They reminded me of the Israeli businessmen and demanded that I cover all the debt and pay an additional one million GEL to the Prosecutor's Office."

Turkey is a major economic partner of Georgia, but Turkish businessmen were not immune to

charge of offering bribes to Justice officials and sentenced to 12 years. He shared a prison cell intended for six people with 40 other inmates. Aksu is now requesting political prisoner status from the new government. According to his wife, he also never received any payment for the construction of the prisons, and is owed 4.75 million GEL. Instead of paying this debt, in 2010 the financial police fined his company one million GEL.

"The ruling elite of Georgia have paraded across Europe and Asia to promote Georgia as an ideal investment environment. Many businessmen are not aware that they could expect the same fate as me," Aksu wrote in a letter addressed to the new government of Georgia. In response, PM Bidzina Ivanishvili said that the new government will consider his case.

Yaman Chagatai, Director of the Doruk Nut and Food Company, is another Turkish businessman who fell into disfavor with the former Georgian government. The Anti-crisis Department of the Prosecutor General's Office arrested him on charges of money laundering, inappropriate use of credit and forging customs documents. He also was sentenced to 12 years in prison. Adnan Akyar, who was involved in the transportation business, recently sued former Defence Minister David Kezerashvili, accusing him of state racketeering. Kezerashvili forced him to buy 10 Jeeps in order to retain control of his business. According to his lawyer, Akyar has documents confirming the legal transfer of these vehicles, which cost 299,000 GEL. And yet he too was ultimately arrested on a charge of registering false invoices, and only released, a year later, after paying 200,000 GEL to Justice Ministry representatives.

During the visit of PM Ivanishvili to Turkey in February 2013 one of the main issues of his discussions with the Turkish government was the cases of these Turkish businessmen. Ivanishvili promised to create the "best conditions" in Georgia for Turkish businessmen. "Officials will no longer intervene in private property, and we will do everything possible to make Turkish businessmen feel at home in Georgia," he told Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a joint press conference during his one-day visit to Turkey. On March 13 2013 the Georgian-Israeli business forum was held at the Holiday Inn hotel. Ivanishvili promised to assist Israeli businessmen who wanted to invest in Georgia. It is clear that the new government and PM of Georgia are trying to correct the mistakes of the previous one, and once again things have started nicely, but it remains to be seen just how things will develop and whether the same mistakes will be repeated.



“Aversi” Dove Card Lottery has begun!

The cumulative “Aversi” Dove card is 5 years already. Besides the fact that with the accumulated amount on the card a customer is able to choose a particular prize from a catalogue, he/she is given the opportunity to take part in the lottery.

This time, “Aversi” offers you the forth grand lottery.

- 🏆 Every owner of the “Dove Card” will receive 1 lottery ticket by paying 20 GEL for the product at any “Aversi” drug store and 10% of the amount paid will be returned on the card.
- 🏆 For every 50 “Doves” 3 lottery tickets will be given as a present.
- 🏆 For 10 “Doves” you will receive 1 lottery ticket.

The prizes are:

5000 GEL to 5 winners

10 000 GEL to 5 winners

The main prize

20 000 GEL



“Aversi” - Health and Peace of Mind

WWW.AVERSI.GE

☎ 2-967 227

Georgia's Foreign Policy Orientation in Line with its Geopolitical Code

By VAKHTANG MAISAIA

On March 7, 2013 the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution that prohibits altering the country's foreign policy. The resolution, which outlines Georgia's nation interests and foreign policy direction, was supported by at least 96 members of Georgia's 150-member Parliament after both the majority and minority political fractions reached consensus on the issue. What is notable about the resolution is that it closely corresponds to criteria of the geopolitical code, the manner in which a country orients itself on the international political stage.

A country defines its geopolitical code based on the five main calculations: 1) a country's current and potential allies; 2) a country's current and potential enemies; 3) ability of a country to maintain its current allies and nurture potential allies; 4) how a country counters its existing enemies and responds to emerging threats, and 5) how country justifies these four calculations to the national public and to the



global community.

Based on these calculations and in full consideration of the above-mentioned resolution, it is possible to discern the foreign policy orientation opted by the Georgian Parliament and further interpret the manner in which such a strategic document was adopted. It is clear that the resolution adequately takes into account the above-listed points as outlined in Georgia's current geopolitical code. Consequently the following concrete responses can be made to these questions:

The resolution lists Georgia's current allies as the United States and the Baltic countries Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and therefore the organizations which they are members – NATO and the European Union. As potential allies are indicated countries of central

and south-eastern European and Scandinavian regions. However, the resolution underpins the importance of promoting political dialogue and economic cooperation among countries of the Caucasus region where Georgia continues playing a pivotal role in trade relations. Thus, the resolution implies fostering relations with regional states – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Moreover, paragraph 12 of the resolution stipulates that Georgia will continue to promote closer relations with the United States, the EU within the framework of the national interests and Helsinki principles. Notably, the Russian Federation is also included as potential allies, and this reflects the new Georgian government's efforts to normalize trade relations and diplomatic with it.

Regarding Georgia's current enemies, the resolution describes names those countries which infringe on Tbilisi's so-called "non-recognition policy" toward South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia's two breakaway regions, which have been recognized as full-fledged independent states by the Russia and a short list of other nations since 2008. As stipulated in the 18th paragraph, Georgia cannot maintain diplomatic relations or seek to join any trade or military-political alliance whose existing members recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; such alliances include the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), (a grouping of former Soviet states from which Georgia withdrew after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war), the Collective Security

Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Customs Union, all of which are led by Moscow.

This paragraph was included at the request of the minority National Movement opposition political fraction, which maintains a strong anti-Russian sentiment. Not surprisingly, due to extensive lobbying from the this fraction, 23 members of the European Parliament recently submitted a scathing anti-National Movement letter backed on rigged information provided by the ex-ruling party members of the Georgia government. Consequently it is curious to note how the National Movement cooperates with ruling majority Georgian Dream fraction in terms of foreign policy issues while concurrently impedes and undermines the Georgian national geopolitical image on the global level.

The Georgian government's participation in and support of international peace-making, police and civil operations mostly under NATO mandate in Kosovo and in Afghanistan are cited as ways in which Georgia should go about maintaining its allies and nurturing new ones;

As for the how Georgia justifies its foreign policy calculations to the national public, the

resolution makes clear to the Georgian public that their country will continue to promote Euro-Atlantic and European integration.

The resolution indicates those geopolitical areas where Georgia foresees implementation of its national foreign policy calculations: Caspian and Black Sea basins and Middle East and South-East Asia regions. For the first time, Georgia has named the Middle East as its key geopolitical area for pursuing its national interests.

By Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia – *ex-political prisoner, USIA 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".*

Venice Commission's Suggestions to Georgia

By SABA GVETADZE

The Venice Commission's Opinion on the Draft Amendments to the Organic Law on Courts of General Jurisdiction of Georgia has been the most important political/judicial issue of discussion for Georgia over the past week. The Venice Commission was approached by the Georgia's Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe in the beginning of December to issue its expertise and opinion on the amendments to the Organic Law (CDL-REF (2012) 045).

The Venice Commission, officially known as the European Commission for Democracy through Law, was created in 1990 to serve as an advisory body of the Council of Europe. Consisting of independent experts in the sphere of constitutional law, the Commission's mission was to respond to the urgent needs of Central and Eastern European countries following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and reunification of Germany at the end of the last century. The Commission is led by the President and the former Secretary General Gianni Buquicchio and is represented in the headquarters of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) by current Secretary General Thomas Markert.

The main function of the Commission is to issue advisory

opinions to the individual member states of the Council in response to requests from participating states, the Council of Europe and other international organizations or bodies participating in the work of the Venice Commission. The opinions are not binding for the countries but they represent the guidelines and expertise that aim at bringing a nation's constitutional law into compliance with European law.

The Commission invited the following experts to comment on the initiated constitutional change: Nicolae Esanu (Member, Moldova), James Hamilton (Substitute Member, Ireland) and Jorgen Steen Sorensen (Member, Denmark). The Venice Commission adopted the official document on March 9, 2013 after careful consideration of the initiated amendments and meetings with representatives of Georgia's Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice, Association of Judges, Parliament and NGOs from February, 6-7, 2013. The official Opinion was made public on February 11, 2013.

The need to address the Venice Commission arose after Georgia failed to reach a consensus on reforms concerning the country's High Council of Justice (HCoJ), the main function of which is to oversee the judicial system. The 15-member High Council of Justice has the power to appoint and dismiss judges as well as to initiate disciplinary hearings against judges. Two members, according to current legislation, are appointed by the



Georgian president while four members of the HCoJ should be Georgian Parliament members.

The amendments were initiated by the Ministry of Justice and aim to carry out the following main changes: the president will no longer have the power to appoint two members of the HCoJ, and the Parliament members will no longer be able to be HCoJ members. The HCoJ will remain a 15-member body as called for in the current legislation; however, six members should be respected members of academic circles nominated by law faculties of different universities, the Georgian Bar Association (GBA), NGOs and then be approved by the Parliament (as stipulated in the new Article 47.5). These measures would remove the president's influence over the HCoJ while at the same

time weakening the influence of the Parliament.

In the third section (Article 52.) of the Venice Commission's Opinion, the experts state that the elections (of the six members of the High Council of Justice) "from the parliamentary component should be by a two-thirds qualified majority". However, to ensure that the opposition in the Parliament retains influence on the composition of the HCoJ, "a mechanism against possible deadlocks or by some proportional method" is recommended to be included in the new legislation.

According to the amendments (new Article 50.3 and 50.4), the High Council is still able to appoint or make decisions on holding disciplinary issues of judges but only by securing two-thirds of the total number of its mem-

bers' votes. This means that such decisions should be supported by at least one non-judge members of the council. The Venice Commission considers this measure as positive but remains concerned about the difficulty of actually achieving such a majority. The Commission therefore recommends "to analyze once again if this will not lead to deadlocks and to introduce an anti-deadlock mechanism" (Articles 55-56 of the Opinion).

The Commission also does not support the measures introduced in the Opinion's new amendments in Paragraph 2, Article 3 which imply that the "authority of the members of the HCoJ, except the chairman of the Supreme Court, is terminated". The Commission's concern is that the measures might "jeopardize the continuity in membership of the HCoJ" (Article 71 of the Opinion) and that the actions "would set a precedent whereby any incoming government or any new Parliament, which did not approve of either the composition or the membership of the Council could terminate its existence early and replace it with a new Council" (Article 72). These concerns were shared by the Supreme Court of Georgia, as well as the opposition in Parliament.

The Opinion concludes with the experts' suggestion that "It might be wise to revisit the list of people authorised to record or take pictures in the courtroom" (Article 76). This advice seeks to grant wider powers to

the judges so that citizens' right of privacy is respected.

The Supreme Court of Georgia expressed its hope that the Parliament will not interfere in the affairs of the HCoJ. Moreover, it shares the number of changes initiated by the Ministry of Justice and is ready to cooperate in creating a more democratic and balanced power-sharing system of governance.

Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches of Georgian Government seem to be satisfied with the Commission's Opinion. The Minister of Justice, Tea Tsulukiani announced that the Parliament will no longer postpone the discussion of the amendments and the suggestions expressed in the document will be taken into account. Controversy still surrounds the issue of terminating the authority of the current HCoJ members and the current amendments will have to be modified if they are to comply fully with the suggestions of the Opinion.

The reform proved to be a crucial turning point in the history of power-sharing and a checks and balances system for Georgian democracy. The Opinion clearly states those measures that are supported and opposed by the Venice Commission but the question remains: is Georgia ready to comply with the European Legal system fully or is it only partially appropriate for Georgia? Just how the Commission's suggestions will be followed ultimately lies with Georgian civil society.

Destroyed Children's Town in Tbilisi's Vake Park

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI

Vake Park's Children's Town located in Tbilisi's most prestigious district has been abandoned for several years. Broken glasses and used syringes can be found littered all over the ground. Although the entertaining attractions do not function anymore, parents still bring their children to the park and roll the carousels themselves. According to *Tbilisi City Hall*, several years ago the *Children's Town* was leased to *Georgia Plus*, a local company that failed to fulfill its obligations to modernize the area. "The contract was suspended and a large-scale project is planned to be implemented in *Vake Park* in the near future."



The *Children's Town* located in the center of Tbilisi within *Vake Park* has been deserted for several years. The area, where just a few years ago one could see only happy children, is now a trashed and dilapidated wreck. Locals say that the impressive fountain located in the heart of the park operates only on May 9 when veterans

and government officials commemorate Victory Day.

"The attractions no longer function and the area is unsanitary; new buildings and restaurants have been encroaching onto the territory of *Vake Park*; dead trees, no flowers – everything is ruined and destroyed here," described Tamar Qacardashvili, a regular part visitor.

"People are very upset, as there are no other parks to take children in the center of Tbilisi," she added.

According to Giorgi Korkashvili, head of the *Ecology and Greenery Planting Department* at *Tbilisi City Hall*, in 2007 the territory of the former *Children's Town* was leased to *Georgia Plus*, to a local company, with the aim of restoring and modernizing the attractions.

"The company has not been able to arrange the proper functioning of *Vake Park* since 2010, so in 2012 we suspended the contract. *Georgia Plus* should leave the territory and remove the park from its list of property/current projects," stated Korkashvili.

As locals explain, the situation in the park has not changed over the past several years.

"In my childhood the park had a completely different at-



mosphere. Everything was working properly and the park was full of cheerful children. It was the most popular park among my generation," said Marina Tciklauri. "But now it's even dangerous to bring children here. I had to promise my granddaughter to take her to the zoo next time," she continued.

"I would recommend parents not to take their children to the *Children's Town*; there are other places where they can rest and walk around," Korkashvili told *The Georgian Times*. "We plan to begin rehabilitating *Vake Park* this year and hope that *Georgia Plus* will clean up the area in the near future; otherwise we will have to take legal actions."

Just how this will happen remains unclear. The *Georgian Times* tried to contact *Georgia Plus* and found out that this company has ceased to exist. It remains unknown just how long the hazardous situation will last and how much longer parents will be risking their children's safety in one of Tbilisi's most popular parks.

"We hope government representatives will look after the park because it's a unique place with its large territory and beautiful nature," stated Tciklauri.

According to Korkashvili, the *Tbilisi City Hall* has not yet decided what, if anything will be done to the now dilapidated *Children's Town* but a large scale effort to revive the park can be expected in the near future.

Will Georgians Disappear?!

Georgia's Population Declines Day-by-day

By ANASTASIA DGEBUADZE

A recent study by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has shown that Georgia does not have a favorable demographic outlook. It has been calculated, based on birthrate, mortality and emigration coefficients, that by 2050 Georgia's population will have fallen by a million from its estimated 4.5 million. The projected loss of nearly a quarter of the country's population, at a time when the populations of some neighboring regional states such as Turkey and Iran are rising, should be considered a national catastrophe.

It remains unclear exactly how many people currently live in Georgia, as there is conflicting evidence. According to the Office of National Statistics, which uses outdated indices, Georgia's population is 4.5 million, but according to Avtandil Sulaberidze, Director of the Institute of Demography and Sociology at Ilia Chabchavadze State University, Georgia's population dropped below 4 million for the first time in 2003 and currently stands at 3.77 million. Sulaberidze maintains that by 2050 the population will have



fallen by a smaller amount, 700,000, and this figure may be held to be more reliable. In proportional terms however, this is broadly the same decline as the UN suggests.

What does population decline actually mean? All emotions aside, there are serious social consequences involved. Around 16 percent of the Georgian population is made up of elderly people (65 years old or older) who largely depend on social assistance from the state, such as pensions, for their survival. However Georgia needs to generate tax income from employees and businesses in order to pay these pensions. If the birthrate continues to fall, Georgia will have more elderly

people receiving state funds than working age people contributing to the state funds through taxation. Even if the birthrate starts to increase a few years from now this will not solve this problem, as those not old enough to work are also supported by the state in various ways but also provoke the need for more disposable household income, and thus less taxation. Action is needed now, before Georgia inevitably bankrupts itself through not having enough people to meet its obligations.

Why has the Georgian population fallen? Abortions can't be discounted as a reason, because according to the Office of National Statistics between 2007 and now the number of

registered abortions has increased by 60% to a current 30,600 annually. But whatever the cause, in almost every region of Georgia (the exceptions being Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Adjara) mortality now exceeds birthrate.

Georgia is not the only country with this problem. Post-Soviet countries in general display approximately the same trends. For example, all three Baltic States have also witnessed population decline since 1990, as have Belarus and Moldova, and Russia and Ukraine have seen particularly sharp decreases. Since 1995 Russia's population has fallen by 7 million, i.e. 5%. But the situation is quite different in

nearby Turkey and Azerbaijan. Turkey's population has doubled since 1970, and had reached 73 million in 2011.

Emigration is also driving Georgia's population decline. Most Georgian emigrants head for Russia, as they have done for centuries, since they can speak the language. Despite the break of diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia after the 2008 war, and the consequent difficulty in getting Russian visas, almost 70% of new Georgian emigrants still go to Russia. Turkey, Greece and Western Europe are the next most popular destinations. According to Sulaberidze, in 2005 alone there were about 30,000 more emigrants from Georgia than those immigrating to the country.

Rural-urban migration is technically a separate issue, but is important because it has the same social consequences for the areas affected. According to the UN study in a few years some of Georgia's highland villages will no longer exist, and they are already being deserted. In the village of Grdzelitchala in Kakheti it has been 13 years since the last baby was born. In Maqarta in Dusheti there are only 13 families, and the local school has only one pupil, as opposed to two teachers. After four years this pupil will have to move to another village to continue studying and the teachers will be unem-

ployed because there are no other children to teach.

The only solution to the problem of rural-urban inward migration is to develop the villages. If enterprises are built and more livestock are husbanded there most people would not leave their residences. Poor infrastructure and lack of educational institutions are other severe problems. It is no coincidence that there has been no depopulation experienced in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Adjara regions, which have seen extensive tourism development. When tourism is developed in a region each family is challenged to create something the tourists will want. If they meet that challenge they can earn a living and thus be more willing to have babies. Shida Kartli, the other region which still has a growing population, is the nearest district to the capital.

The Patriarch of Georgia has promoted child bearing by stating that he will be the godfather of each third child of a family, and any subsequent children. Since he made this offer the birthrate has increased almost 20%, and the patriarch now has around 15,000 godchildren. We can therefore conclude that incentives to increase the birthrate actually work, so there is no reason why others cannot be tried. If they are, maybe this will change the UN's projections, before it is too late.

Armenia, Russia To Set Up Disaster Management Center

By Sargis Harutyunyan, RFE/RL's Armenian Service

The Armenian and Russian national rescue services will set up soon a joint center that will respond to possible natural disasters in Armenia and nearby countries, a government official in Yerevan said on Friday.



Armenia - Rescue workers hold exercises, 30Nov 2012

Nikolay Grigorian, a senior official at Armenia's Emergency Situations Ministry, told RFE/RL's Armenian service (Azatutyun.am) that the Humanitarian Center will use a small airport in the northern town of Stepanavan and a warehouse in Balahovit, a village just north of Yerevan.

He said the warehouse belonging to the ministry will be stocked with food, drinking water, tents, medication and other relief goods that would be shipped to regional countries struck by serious accidents, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Grigorian revealed that the Russian and Armenian governments signed an agreement on the center in December. Joint working groups have since been preparing for its launch, he said. "Right now representatives of Russia are in Armenia [for that purpose,]" added the official.

Grigorian also said that the Russian-Armenian disaster management center will be part of "rapid-reaction rescue forces" of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led defense pact of six ex-Soviet states. But he stressed that the new structure will not have any military mission. Nor will the Stepanavan and Balahovit facilities be used for military purposes, he said.

Only 12 percent of cultural workers have higher education in Azerbaijani regions

By Trend

Only 12 percent of 33,143 workers of culture in towns and regions of Azerbaijan have higher education, Azerbaijani First Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism Vagif Aliyev said at the meeting of culture and tourism departments in regions on the results of 2012.

According to him, 39 percent of cultural workers in regions have secondary special education. The lowest number of cultural workers with higher education among the regions of the country is in Dashkasan (3 percent).

This figure is in Aghsu, Astara, Barda, Lerik and Tovuz regions constitutes about six percent, Aliyev said.

According to him, the highest figure is observed in Absheron region: 24 percent of cultural workers here have higher education.

The Deputy Minister also noted that among cultural workers in regions there are not so many young professionals. Only 24 percent of cultural workers are under the age of 30 years.

According to him, sometimes level of education is not considered while recruiting candidates in regions. But it is also undeniable that young people with higher education are often not interested in work in the regions, especially in rural areas.

European Leader Rejects Armenian Opposition Criticism

By Rikard Jozwiak & Heghine Buniatian, RFE/RL's Armenian Service

The head of an umbrella structure uniting Europe's leading center-right parties has brushed aside Armenian opposition criticism of his unequivocal endorsement of the official results of Armenia's disputed presidential election.

Wilfried Martens of the European People's Party (EPP) insisted late on Thursday that the February 18 election was not rigged and that President Serzh Sarkisian won it legitimately. He pointed to the largely positive initial assessment of the ballot made by European election observers.

"There was real progress," Martens told RFE/RL in Brussels. "Not all reforms were realized but there is enormous progress. So I think that it is not correct to say that these elections were falsified. I think that the president was really, correctly elected."

Martens was one of the first Western leaders to "warmly" congratulate Sarkisian on winning a second term. "I am confident that the country's democratization process will be further enhanced under the leadership of President Sarkisian," he wrote in a February 19 letter.

Raffi Hovannisian, Sarkisian's main election challenger who considers himself the rightful election winner, strongly condemned the EPP leader's



Belgium - European People's Party President Wilfried Martens (L) meets with Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian in Brussels, 14Mar2013

"hasty congratulation" on Wednesday, saying that it ran counter to European values. In an ensuing letter to the EPP, Hovannisian's Zharangutyun (Heritage) party threatened to pull out of the pan-European grouping if the latter does not disavow Martens's stance.

Martens scoffed at the criticism. "Perhaps the challenger of the president had not 20 percent [of the vote] he hoped [to get] but much more: 37 percent," he said. "Perhaps he now has the illusion that he could have [won] a majority. But it was not the real fact. The real fact is that there was a majority in the first round for the president [Sarkisian.]"

Hovannisian hit back at the former Belgian prime minister

during a fresh rally held in Yerevan's Liberty Square on Friday. "How does he know that I expected 20 percent and must be happy with 37 percent? Whose script is he reading? You can guess," he told thousands of supporters. "Serzh's," shouted some in the crowd.

Hovannisian also charged that Martens "rigged Europe's grand values." "If this is Europe, then we don't need it," he said.

Martens spoke to RFE/RL shortly after meeting Sarkisian on the sidelines of an EPP summit in Brussels. Sarkisian, whose Republican Party is also affiliated with the EPP, was reported by his press office to have thanked Martens for supporting him during the presi-

dential race.

The Armenian leader also delivered a speech at the EPP gathering earlier on Thursday. He pledged to carry on with "comprehensive reforms" and European integration during his second five-year term.

Martens already raised eyebrows in Armenian opposition circles with strong support for Sarkisian and the ruling HHK voiced during last year's parliamentary elections. The HHK won the May 2012 polls amid similar opposition allegations of vote rigging.

Martens predicted that victory in a video address to an HHK congress held in March 2012. "Long live the Republican Party," he declared at the time.

BP: Shah Deniz field has great potential

By E.Ismayilov, Trend

Azerbaijani offshore gas condensate field Shah Deniz has the potential for the third stage of development, BP regional president on Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey Gordon Birrell said.

This was stated by Birrell in an interview with the magazine "The Business Year: Azerbaijan 2013".

According to Birrell, the company's goal now is to implement the second stage of field development, investment decision on which is to be adopted in late 2013. According to plans, the first gas within Shah Deniz-2 is expected to be produced in 2018.

It is planned to produce 16



billion cubic meters of additional gas within the second stage of field development that will be delivered to both regional and European markets.

According to Birrell, the second stage of development of Shah Deniz field with total

planned investment capital of about \$ 40 billion is currently one of the largest projects in the world, and the largest of BP's projects.

Currently, the Shah Deniz consortium is considering two options for its gas transporta-

tion to Europe - TAP and Nabucco West (through the territory of Greece). Azerbaijan plans to export 10 billion cubic meters of gas a year to Europe within the second stage of development of Shah Deniz field.

First gas production within Shah Deniz-2 project is expected for 2018.

Two offshore platforms will be installed and more than 20 subsea wells will be drilled for the production of an additional 16 billion cubic meters of gas a year under the Shah Deniz-2. It is predicted that gas production can be brought up to 24 billion cubic meters a year in the second stage of field development.

Gas reserves of Shah Deniz field are estimated at 1.2 trillion cubic meters.

The contract to develop the offshore Shah Deniz field was signed on June 4, 1996. Participants to the agreement are: BP (operator) - 25.5 per cent, Statoil - 25.5 per cent, NICO - 10 per cent, Total - 10 per cent, LukAgip - 10 per cent, TPAO - nine per cent and SOCAR-10 per cent.

Obama in Israel's New World

By DIANA PINTO

PARIS – Now that Bin-yamin Netanyahu has formed a new Israeli government out of a dizzying kaleidoscope of possible post-election permutations, has the country's politics moved to the center? US President Barack Obama would be wrong to think so as he prepares for his first official visit.



The unexpected second-place finish of Yair Lapid's new Yesh Atid ("There is a Future") party in the recent election has certainly changed the complexion of the government: the two leading Orthodox parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism, are out, while two smaller centrist parties, Kadima and Hatnua, are in. But those who breathed a sigh of relief at the weakening of Netanyahu's Likud and the country's extreme right-wing parties should be as anxious as ever.

The political horse-trading is over for the time being, and the outcome seems assured. Netanyahu will return as Prime Minister, and every party – in power or not – is ready to block, dilute, or paper over

whatever policies the new government manages to adopt. In Israel, the question nowadays is not whether the center will hold, but whether it matters.

In both domestic and in international terms, Israel has not so much moved to the center as it has embraced a new type of national consensus that began to emerge in 2011. In May-June of that year, while the international community was still mooting potential land swaps for an increasingly distant peace settlement with the Palestinians, Israelis were focusing on a domestic battle over the regulation of cottage cheese.

The new consensus was best symbolized by the massive popular protests that erupted two months later, bringing together young, economically frustrated, mainly middle-class Israelis who might once have been politi-

cally divided by their allegiance to either the center-left Labor party or Netanyahu's Likud. No mention was made, then or now, of the need for peace initiatives; of the state of mind of the now-invisible (to Israeli eyes) Palestinians, now relegated to their side of the security wall; or of the growing inequalities that separate Israel's Arab citizens from their Jewish counterparts.

By representing the aspirations of middle class Israelis seeking a better economic deal, Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett of the nationalist Jewish Home party became the two sides of a newly minted political coin, one backed by an inward-looking ethnic and national identity in a country that sees itself as alone in the world. This identity may be secular or religious; it may seek middle-class normality or proclaim an Israeli

version of manifest destiny – the two are not incompatible. Either way, the country no longer resonates with the expectations, hopes, and fears of a world still focused (ever more dimly) on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nor does Israel listen to the anguish of its own Ciceronian Zionists, perhaps best represented by the novelist Amos Oz. Israel has simply stopped seeking to reconcile its Jewish identity with its commitment to democracy, for it has stopped addressing the contradiction that the Israeli-Palestinian question represents.

Simply put, that contradiction is no longer relevant to the new Israel. Despite the deep economic frustrations of many of its middle-class citizens (the truly indigent did not protest), Israel has become a global economic and military powerhouse. The country increasingly lives in its own virtual reality, simultaneously proximate to and far removed from the revolutionary pre-modernity of most of its neighbors.

Indeed, Israel is now on an equal footing with all of the rising new powers of an increasingly globalized world. Few of them are democracies, and not one of them holds Israel to task

for its settlement policies in the West Bank or cares, like the United States, about Middle East peace. Why should Israel continue to focus on a weakened West that is constantly reprimanding it when the rest of the world beckons?

Nor does the old secular/religious divide have much salience anymore. Israel has become post-modern, producing new – and sometimes startling – synergies among its avant-garde high-tech sensibility, its secular and ever more orthodox religious identities, and its overall ethno-nationalist outlook. Its ancient biblical past can now coexist seamlessly with its ultra-modern present. Israel's new millionaires can easily live in far-flung settlements in "Judea and Samaria" and commute daily to their coastal startups.

And the army has already become the purview of nationalistic and religious cadres, even without conscription of the ultra-orthodox – one of the centrist camp's demands in pressing for fairer national burden-sharing. As a result, the Israeli state seems to be moving closer to its Asian counterparts, with their emphasis on economic innovation and their indifference to universal values or, for

that matter, peace.

Israel is now proud to be in a world of its own, in which it feels free to act unilaterally and scoff at toothless criticism from Europe (and now partly from the US). There is no reason to believe that Netanyahu's new government will seek to revive the increasingly feeble and moribund peace process, beyond offering verbal promises and inconsequential half-measures.

Nor should anyone expect a moratorium on settlement expansion. On the contrary, the settlements offer cheaper housing than is available in Israel, and thus resolve one of the main economic problems of the country's middle class.

"Red lines" in Israel have a way of mutating into lines drawn in the sand, which are then rendered invisible at the slightest wind. The new government's fragile equilibrium only reinforces this sober interpretation.

In Israel, Obama will encounter a country that has indeed moved, but not toward a missing center. It has moved into its own orbit.

Diana Pinto is a historian and the author of [Israel Has Moved](#).

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

An Uncertain Future for Georgia's Gambling Industry

Continued from p. 2

He pointed out in the interview with the Georgian Times that gambling is forbidden in neighboring countries, and "gambling tourism" is becoming more popular in Georgia. For this reason, Tomaradze disagrees with the call to ban of all types of gambling businesses.

Gambling businesses are financially sustainable and are huge tax contributors to the state budget. However, many are asking themselves if banning the industry would be more in the state's interest considering how gambling leads to so many social problems in the country. According to Davitashvili, a decrease taxes to the state budget that would result from banning the business is less important compared to those consequences the businesses bring to Georgian citizens.

"This is not an ordinary business; this is a sickness for the nation. A part of the population has fallen ill, while others not. The same applies to drug users. Why don't we legalize drugs or prostitution?

Both can attract tourists, but both are illegal. The same is true regarding gambling and this created a situation where many people have gotten involved. Many people got addicted, and most of them are unable to give it up. Generally, generating a profit through crime and illness should not be permitted," Davitashvili told The Georgian Times.

Banning gambling has its supports as well as its opponents. The Gambling Business Association of Georgia is opposed to the ban, but its members are partly supportive of the ban on advertising.

Those who oppose the ban focus on the importance of money generated from the industry. As Paata Sheshelidze pointed out in the interview with GT, the gambling industry is one of the most important contributors for the state budget. As he said, it is impossible to realistically control internet space and people involved in gambling will definitely play while abroad. In addition, he warns that the industry will be pushed underground. "The state budget receives a serious amount of

money from this business. I do not understand the reason for banning such a business that is legal in developed countries. Those who want to gamble will definitely play. If advertising will be completely banned, it will damage broadcasters, especially those broadcasting



sports show," told Paata Sheshelidze.

The author of the draft doesn't exclude the emergence of underground gambling groups, but he thinks that it is possible to neutralize such groups through financial sanctions. He also disagrees with those experts who think that controlling the internet is impossible. As Davitashvili says, the United States has set a ma-

major precedent when it comes to cracking down on internet freedom.

"I support a full ban of this business. We are already working on this issue. Fears of secretive gambling groups are exaggerated. This might happen but we should not let this pos-

sibility frighten us. As for internet control, is possible considering how online poker is forbidden in the US," Davitashvili explained, adding that those who will violate the law will be fined.

Part of society seeks stricter regulation of gambling businesses and wants to see changes in licensing regulations, as announced by the PM, claiming that it is important in pre-

venting people from getting addicted to the practice. They think that casinos should be concentrated in only several cities so as to reduce society's involvement.

According to statistician Soso Archvadze, the money that is generated from this business is very important for the budget, but the industry in its current form is unacceptable. "Gambling businesses need to be regulated, not banned. The state budget receives around 140 million GEL per year. When you declare a sphere illegal, you must find alternative sources to generate the income that will be lost."

Experts also discussed the option of restricting access to gambling halls for those from the vulnerable segment of society, who experts claim are often play these games. The industry was strictly regulated prior to 2005 but since 2008, this industry was placed under the control of the Ministry of Finance, which issued 5 year licenses for gambling operations.

The above-mentioned changes increased the flow of money for the state budget as

well as the number of gamblers. In 2008, 163 licenses were issued, resulting in 11,596,000 GEL for the budget. As the Gambling Business Association of Georgia explains, now 140,000,000 GEL is transferred to the state budget from this business every year. Davitashvili does not confirm these statistics, as he thinks the amount is no more than 50 million GEL.

The amount of money transferred from a gambling business depends on the type of games. Casinos generate an average of 15,000 – 30,000 GEL per quarter, while online games produce 30,000 – 60,000 GEL per quarter.

It is apparent that the gambling business is creating social problems in Georgia. The type and games are increasing, and the number of casinos is on the rise. The willingness of the government to intervene is needed in order to curtail this growth. Discussions are continuing as society and government weighs the benefits and consequences of the industry. One thing is certain: the many feel that the industry needs serious changes.

Food Safety in Georgia – Simple, Appalling and Horrifying!

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

An explosion erupted today between a customer, who wishes to remain anonymous, and the manager of the Vejini supermarket in one region of Tbilisi. The customer was complaining about the unhygienic storage of food. She referred to the frozen food as “looking horrifying” and “unfit for humans to eat”. She even went so far as to say that she would only feed such food to pigs, and yet it was there on display for customers who knew no better, and even the pigs might get sick.

The raw meat in the freezer was mixed with variety of different processed meat, milk and vegetarian products, few of which were in the packaging required in order to adhere to the basic hygiene rules which ensure food is safe for human consumption. The freezer was also open to the air, making it very easy for saliva, dust or any foreign object to fall onto what would rapidly become ‘germ infested’ food, which is then sold to the public. According to the rules designed to stop cross contamination; food should be stored “where it is not exposed to ash, dust or other contaminants” – and at proper temperatures, and that goes for eggs too!

There was also a strong foul smell in the shop, which other customers complained about loudly. There were also many other health code violations, but the staff looked on indifferent-

ly, doing nothing to resolve the problem. All this directly contradicts the food hygiene regulations. These do not only apply to every place which handles food, but every person who does so too. It was a shock to find that the blushing manager was ignorant of Annex 7 of the food code 2005, although it is management’s job to both know about and prevent food borne illnesses and inform other employees about these issues. It leads us to wonder: if the manager is so uneducated, what can the other staff be expected to know?

As we all know, freezing food only slows down bacterial growth; it does not kill or remove deadly germs. Food stored in the freezer has a longer life than food left in a fridge, but all food loses quality and flavor if it is stored for too long. The common term for this phenomenon is freezer-burn, and it happens much more quickly when there is no wrapping to protect the food, as in the case of this supermarket and its chicken legs with broken bones. Such products in the West can only be sold for cat and dog food due to safety considerations, not to humans. Don’t believe those chicken parts come from Brazil either! Another reason the rules are in place is that the ‘big five’ food sickness bugs (Norovirus, Salmonella, E.coli, Shigellosis and the Hepatitis A virus) can be transmitted through touch, even if good hand washing practices are in place, and these bugs can have very severe effects, and even kill you!

As there is no packaging on many products, there is almost



no way of knowing how old they are after they are mixed with new stock or how many times they have been thawed and refrozen; therefore, it would be hard for the supermarket to ensure that all its products have not yet passed their sell by date. It is therefore no wonder that there are an estimated 1,311,528 cases of food poisoning in Georgia every year. It has also been claimed that Georgia has the highest nationally reported rate of food borne botulism in the world. Botulism is a very severe paralytic illness which causes cranial nerve dysfunction and symmetrically descending paretic paralysis, and in some cases can even result in respiratory failure (death). One contaminated food source can rapidly make a large number of people dangerously ill, so even a single case of botulism can trigger a public health emergency and an unnecessary drain on public funds.

We also need to keep in mind that food safety is key to developing the tourism industry, in addition to Kosher food; people don’t want to get sick on their hard earned vacation. What this comes down to is; can we afford to expose our children and families to the dangers of unhygienically kept food when even the less dangerous forms of food poisoning can be detrimental to their health and cause a range of other complications, especially for the young and old?

Certain categories of people, such as the elderly, can be more severely affected by food borne illnesses than others. They may lead to complications such as dehydration, which results in a drop of blood pressure and disrupts the blood supply to the kidneys - in other words, sufferers are at risk of developing renal failure, which can be fatal. Another particularly vulnerable group is pregnant women, who

can undergo miscarriages and stillbirths. It is no wonder why the number of dialysis patients in Tbilisi is at a record high.

Even if we are lucky enough to dodge the horrible effects of this needless illness ourselves we are still left out of pocket, due to our inability to work when caring for a loved one, while the food providers carry on making money and making others sick because they do not follow simple rules which would keep our food safe. We shouldn’t be letting our food handlers get away with playing Russian roulette with our families’ health, or worse, their lives, especially when the solution is something as simple as proper food storage and labeling. This is without even getting into the touchy subject of GMO, the so-called ‘Frankenstein food’ that is being dumped into Georgia and the region in large volumes, including the feed that is provided to so called domestic poultry producers.

When the shamefaced manager of Vejini was asked if he would eat such food as first described in this article, he did not answer. Let’s hope the call for change in the way that things are done does not receive the same response. The simple answer would be to educate the public, so people begin to notice low standards and report violations to the Georgian Department of Public Health, if such a thing really exist which can conduct an investigation and impose fines or revoke licenses where necessary. However, this might be wishful thinking, but consumers should still have a more proac-

tive approach to dealing with this problem, making it impossible for vendors to sell things which are not fit to sell by refusing to buy them. One day it would be nice to see more unannounced inspections at wholesale and retail outlets alike. A better solution would be produce at home, sell at home and eat at home. Beware of the processed meats too, as that is another can of worms to open, as to the source and health status of the poor animals that went into them – whatever their species, fish, fowl or horsemeat.

Information about food safety regulations is easy to find on the public health website in the developed world, but it is in English or another foreign language. The authorities should think of using the country’s native tongue to reach more people. Health code enforcers must be trained in this field, HACCP, as the law requires, but food safety information hasn’t filtered through to the food handlers. It starts at the farm gate, processors and ends with the consumer and how they prepare the meal. Perhaps if the government made it mandatory for food handlers to take courses in food safety, this problem would be a thing of the past. At least for now for those handling the money not to handle raw meat and poultry products; things are not much better in restaurants.

There seems to be a great need for the government and for there to be a Department of Public Health to look into this, and reconsider how they approach this problem, and from a cultural perspective as well. Making simple changes can decrease the chances of this dangerous illness occurring. The public is owed a promise that their food is safe, and if education decreases the risk of disease outbreak it is money well spent. After all, who can put a price on public safety and health – especially in a place like Georgia, where human life and public health have not been seen as applying to everyone!

Will we Forget Reading?

By MEDEYA CHITANAVA

We progress as the world around us does. Technology has given us everything we need and has taken the place of most manual methods, but nothing can replace the knowledge found in books. Since before the invention of printing books have taught and improved us, and all these treasures are kept in a library, an institution with its own history.

So we at Tbilisi State University have decided to open up the warehouse of knowledge which is our great library. The greatness of our library lies in the fact that it holds more than 4 million books. This is a vast number, isn’t it?

The feelings which enveloped me when I first entered the library were so intense that I feel compelled to share them with you. It is a place where three epochs interlace - it seemed to me that I was travelling through time and finding myself in a great treasure house where history is real, science and art are generated and the greatest of all human knowledge is concentrated. The whole history of Georgia was before me – only a concrete wall



separated me from everything which has ever happened in the country. This would make anyone nervous.

It is not generally known that the TSU library was established when Kitta (Ivan) Abashidze bequeathed his entire book collection to the university in his will. This became the basis of the current library in 1918. From its very first day our library has been open for all students, school-leavers, undergraduates and lecturers.

I asked Tamara Giorgadze, Deputy Director of the TSU library, to tell me about its history. **Who was the first sponsor of the library? Kitta Abashidze established it in his will, but who took the idea forward from there?**

There was no actual sponsor.

In 1918 scholars such as Cagareli, Petriashvili, the Cwimon brothers, Kldiashvili and Gudishvili donated their book collections to add to Abashidze’s. Our young academics and students and the first director of our library also travelled around the provinces looking for interesting books, and we obtained some from the Saradjishvili collection from the Borjomi Mtavari library, books dating back to the time of Tsar Nicholas II. Nowadays we do not receive such large donations but the public still bring us books. The library staff also makes lists of the books the students need for their studies and the university buys them.

Does the library house any major collections at present?

Of course nobody brings us

historically important collections, but historian Maria Lordkipanidze has donated valuable books from her private collection. These are being conserved now and after will be presented in our main building on the Maria Lordkipanidze jubilee. Everyone also remembers the Georgian archaeologist Apakidze - his granddaughter has donated a collection of his books.

Does the TSU library collection have a significant financial value?

The importance of these books lies not only in their history but in the fact that the people who gave them to us played a part in creating not only the university but the library. The oldest book we have here was published in 1464. We have

books written by King Vakhtang (1709-1722) and the first printed edition of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” (1712). You can therefore draw your own conclusions about how important our library is and whether it has any financial significance.

Does the library use advanced technology? In the US, they have virtual libraries, in which facsimiles of all the books are stored on a computer database, which helps students find what they need easily. Do you have something like this?

This system is being developed. Books which we do not issue because of their age or rarity are being scanned so that we can make them available electronically. The works of our academics are also available in electronic form on our website. Every student can learn from these works. Unfortunately we have a full electronic catalogue only of the books we acquired in 2011.

Are fewer people using the library now that they can obtain information electronically?

This is unfortunate. I cannot tell you that we have many users, but this is because our library is far from the main university buildings. Students prefer to visit the library in the main building, which has been refurbished with computers and internet access.

Tamara Giorgadze has reason to feel sad. For all its members, a library is a second home and every book one of their children, in need of attention, care and special treatment.

Another sadness became ap-

parent during our visit. The library’s priceless historic books are kept in a special depository, which covers seven floors and preserves them within strict and unalterable temperature and humidity parameters. But now it protected by security alarms – only library staff can enter it. These alarms were installed after N.P.Kondakov’s “The History of Byzantine Enamel” (1863) was stolen, a book which has not only historical importance but bibliographical value, as only 600 copies were published: 200 in the German language, 200 in French and 200 in Russian. It was a special edition presented by the Tsar to various servants, and only 2 copies existed in Georgia, the one in the TSU library and another in the national library. Even Interpol was involved in the search for this book, but to no avail, as yet.

But when I left the library I couldn’t stop thinking about how things used to be. Everything people have been interested in, at any period of history, they have learned about with the help of books. Now we have forgotten the knowledge our predecessors wanted to give us, the things they learned from books. One day it will be very difficult to imagine people sitting in a comfortable chair reading their favorite book, trembling at its contents and gaining a piece of themselves from every book they read. This is why a library is a place everyone should visit. A library helps us love reading. The culture of reading, so to say, is learned in the library.

The Georgian Times

N1 NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA

Professionalism Experience Quality

We Do What We Know!



- | | | | | |
|-----------|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| GT | Newspaper
Magazine
Production | Marketing
PR Services
Advertising | Media planning
Journalistic Investigations
Image-making services | News
Design
Web Design |
|-----------|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|

WHERE GEORGIAN TIMES IS DISTRIBUTED

HOTELS

- MARRIOTT TBILISI
- MARRIOTT
- SHERATON METECHI PALACE
- TAVID
- VERE PALACE
- HOTEL VARAZI
- RIVER SIDE
- HOLIDAY INN
- AMBASADOR
- RADISSON BLU
- OLD METEKHI
- OLD TBILISI
- KOPALA
- HOTEL KMM
- GTM
- PENTHAUSE
- HOTEL PONTO

CAFE-BARS & RESTAURANTS

- KASABLANKA
- MARAKESH EXPRES
- CAFE LEFE
- MACHAXELA
- GLAZGO
- KANAPE
- SAKE
- SAMURAI
- PIANO
- CAFE DE FRANCE
- ENGLISH TEA HOUSE
- DISCOVERY
- AL MAGHREB
- GUFALO
- TENERIFE
- CORNER BAR
- JAZZVE
- CAFE LEFFE
- JAZZ CAFE

CHINA TOWN

- 11./11
- PROSPEROS
- LIT CAFE
- LITTLE HOUSE
- JAZZ EVENT
- IN HOUSE

BANKS & BUSINESSES

- CARTU BANK
- BANK RESPUBLIKA
- LIBERTY BANK
- RICO
- BANK OF WORLD
- GEORGIAN BANK
- NATIONAL BANK
- TAO BANK
- BASIS BANK
- VTB BANK
- RICO CREDIT

PROCREDIT BANK

- ZIRAAT BANK
- KOR-STANDARD BANK
- TBC BANK
- BTA BANK
- CREDO
- KHALIK BANK

EMBASSIES, COUNSULATES & DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIONS

- FRANCH EMBASSY
- CHINA EMBASSY
- KAZAKHSTAN EMBASSY
- NORWAY EMBASSY
- SWEDEN EMBASSY
- GREECE EMBASSY
- BELGIUM EMBASSY
- TURKEY EMBASSY
- CZECH EMBASSY
- LATVIA EMBASSY

AZERBAIJAN EMBASSY

- HUNGARY EMBASSY
- ESTONIA EMBASSY
- UKRAINE EMBASSY
- AMERICA EMBASSY
- U.K EMBASSY
- GERMANY EMBASSY
- BULGARIA EMBASSY
- ISRAEL EMBASSY
- NETHERLANDS EMBASSY
- LITHUANIA EMBASSY
- SWITZERLAND EMBASSY
- ITALY EMBASSY
- POLAND EMBASSY
- JAPAN EMBASSY
- IRAN EMBASSY
- ROMANIA EMBASSY
- ARMENIA EMBASSY
- IRAQ EMBASSY

BUSINESSES

- GEOCELL
- P.S.P
- AVERSI
- BORJOMI
- CLINIC OF GVARAMIA
- NESTLE
- CLINIC OF CUZANOV
- BRITISH-PETROLIUM
- EXPOGEORGIA
- MAGTI
- GORBI
- CAREFOUR
- TBILISI MOLLY
- GPC
- GOODWILL
- WISSOL
- GULF
- SOCAR

www.times.ge



ON-LINE NEWSPAPER
Georgian * English * Russian
www.geotimes.ge

The Georgian Times trilingual online portal offers the latest Georgian news and analysis in English, Georgian and Russian languages.

www.geotimes.ge

Be one of our 35,000 plus daily readers and visit Geotimes.ge today.



Tbilisi Eats Delhi on the Mtkvari

By KOBASAMSONIDZE

The best ethnic restaurant in Tbilisi is not Ukrainian, Chinese, French or Italian. Not Japanese, American, Turkish or Uzbek... it is Indian. If you are a lover of food, spice and all things exotic, A Taste of India on Kandalaki Street in Saburtelo is the best of the best in terms of non-Georgian food in Georgia, and here's why.

A Taste of India is located in a part of Tbilisi that is ground zero for people hailing from the Indian sub-continent. Hundreds of Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Nepalese come

to Tbilisi every year to study in the medical schools instructed in English located in and around the Medical Institute in Saburtelo. As with many émigrés, they tend to live in close proximity to one another in order to maintain a semblance of the lifestyle they are familiar with. Because of the density of residents from the Indian sub-continent in and around the Medical Institute metro stop on Vazha Pshavela avenue, the whole area has become a 'Little Delhi', where you are just as likely to overhear Hindi or Telugu as you are Georgian or English. Along with the émigrés and the languages they bring, you of course have an importation of food, and a variety of

Indian dining options ranging from fast food for students, to more luxurious full service dining options like *A Taste of India* located in the area.

The first thing you will notice at ATOI is the wonderfully decorated interior. All tables are curtained off from the rest of the dining room offering a nice degree of privacy when dining. The tables are low and the seats and comfortably adorned with pillows.

The service is impressive by any standard, but for Georgia it is a revelation. The extremely friendly English speaking staff can answer questions about unfamiliar dishes, and food is delivered promptly. The most notable feature of the ser-

vice at ATOI is the inclusion of a small remote control button at each table that is used to signal to the staff when service is needed.

A wide gamut of Indian cuisine is available, but to those who have been to India will notice a clear preference towards Northern Indian dishes. Staple dishes at ATOI are *Dahl*, split lentils; *Naan*, Indian flat bread similar to Pita; *Paneer* a traditional South-Asian cheese; as well as Indian dishes that have gone international such as *Tandoori Chicken* and *Chicken Tikka Masala*.

One of the wonderful things about ATOI is its vegetarian friendly menu options. Because of the vegetarian tradi-

tion in Indian culture, there is no limit to the number of options a non-meat eater has. Dishes like *Vegetable Pakora*, bite sized pieces of vegetables dipped in batter and deep-fried, the fragrantly spiced *Vegetable Biryani*, a rice dish cooked with seasonal vegetables, and garlic *naan* make a wonderfully tasty and filling meal. Washing down anything you choose to eat at ATOI with a *Mango lassi*, a smoothie blended with yogurt, is an excellent idea as well.

While ATOI caters splendidly to the vegetarian, it does not shy away from meat dishes, and carnivores can enjoy a variety of options such as *Chicken Tikka Masala* or *Lamb Curry*. It should be noted that ATOI does

not serve any beef as is the culture in predominately Hindu India to revere the cow and not butcher it, and the protein at ATOI is almost exclusively from chicken and lamb.

Regardless of whether you are vegetarian or not, A Taste of India provides what might be the most flavorful, diverse and well-rounded menu in Tbilisi. They pride themselves in using the freshest seasonal produce and can prepare dishes to the particular spice tolerance of their diners. Any diner, whether familiar with Indian cuisine or not, will be delighted at the service and food they are offered here.

A Taste of India is located at 23 Kandalaki

Death is Jazzy in the US, Stinky in Israel and Bizarre in Georgia

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

"France, the Army, Head of the Army, Josephine." – were the last words of Napoleon Bonaparte. People become famous for their last words. People get famous by death itself. An American citizen Debby Mills-Newbroughton, 99 years old, was killed as she crossed the road. She was to turn 100 the next day but, crossing the road with her daughter to go to her own birthday party, her wheelchair was hit by a truck that happened to be delivering her birthday cake. The woman deserves to be famous for a death like this. I would say what are the odds, but going to your 100th birthday party... I mean... Come on ...

Regardless of how one dies, it's still sad. Maybe not for those who read about a death like Debby's, but for those who loved the deceased person. It still is inevitable. I don't think there can ever be a right time to die. It's mostly unexpected. It might be quick, but also long and painful. They say when you know you're dying you start thinking and feeling differently. You may drown in regret. As death comes your whole life runs in front of your eyes, in a blink you think of a million things – what you did, or you wanted to do. I'm guessing it depends on a person and his/her priorities.

American Beauty is movie that shook me to my core back in the day. It gave me the most peaceful and positive and beautiful pre-death and afterlife monologue of all times: "I had always heard your entire life flashes in front of your eyes the second before you die. First of all, that one second isn't a second at all, it stretches on forever, like an ocean of time... For



me, it was lying on my back at Boy Scout camp, watching falling stars... And yellow leaves, from the maple trees, which lined my street... Or my grandmother's hands, and the way her skin seemed like paper... And the first time I saw my cousin Tony's brand new Firebird... And Janie... And Janie... And... Carolyn. I guess I could be pretty pissed off about what happened to me... but it's hard to stay mad, when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much, my heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst... and then I remember to relax, and stop trying to hold on to it, and then it flows through me like rain and I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life... You have no idea what I'm talking about, I'm sure. But don't worry... You will someday."

We shall all know some day, but for now, what do we know about death to begin with? We don't know what happens to a person, we only know what happens/what we do to a body. There are many types of funeral traditions in the world. I remember

watching my dead neighbor being carried out of the apartment wrapped in the sheet. Who knows where they took him afterwards? I may be wrong, but as I remember they were from somewhere in or around Chechnya.

People get cremated. Some are wrapped in a sheet, hung some heavy stuff and drown in the water. Those with concerns about the effects on the environment can simply be buried the way that suits their environmental beliefs. They may choose to be buried in an all-natural biodegradable green burial shroud, sometimes a simple coffin made of cardboard or other easily biodegradable material. Further, they may choose their final resting place to be in a park or woodland, known as an eco-cemetery. That's called a green funeral. People nowadays even organize to broadcast the funeral online, so the family who can't attend can watch the ceremony. Yes, people actually do that.

Of course my favorite land of all times – United States of America – offers somewhat fun, but most importantly jazzy funeral. The Jazz funeral tradition in New Orleans, Louisiana arose

from a combination of African spiritual practices, French musical traditions, and African-American cultural influences. A typical jazz funeral begins with a march by the family, friends, and a jazz band, starting from the home, funeral home, or church, and proceeding to the cemetery. Throughout the march, the band plays very somber dirges. Once the final ceremony has taken place, the march proceeds from the cemetery to a gathering place, and the solemn music is replaced by loud, upbeat, raucous music and dancing where onlookers join in to celebrate the life of the deceased. This is the origin of the New Orleans dance known as the "second line" where celebrants perform a dance-march, frequently while raising the hats and umbrellas brought along as protection from intense New Orleans weather and waving handkerchiefs above the head that are no longer being used to wipe away tears.

Turns out Jews have a few step plan regarding funerals. Burial is a must. Burial is intended to take place in as short an interval of time after death as

possible. Displaying of the body prior to burial is not allowed. No flowers. When they get home, the mourners refrain for a week from showering or bathing, wearing leather shoes or jewelry, or shaving. In many communities, mirrors in the mourners' home are covered since they should not be concerned about their personal appearance. It is customary for the mourners to sit on low stools or even the floor, symbolic of the emotional reality of being "brought low" by the grief. The meal of consolation, the first meal eaten upon returning from the funeral, traditionally consists of hard-boiled eggs and other round or oblong foods. During this seven-day period, family and friends come to visit or call on the mourners to comfort them – "Shiva calls". To be honest, I expected more from Jews. This is the nation I love and admire the most. But stink for a week is not gonna bring back the beloved dead and might "kill" some who are still alive.

When someone dies in Georgia everyone living or passing close by finds out. Georgians mourn just as loud as they can. They mostly blame it on the pain of the loss that they forget they are not in the desert. Once the corpse is in the mourner's house people start arriving. Some of them to comfort the mourners, some of them to check in as they must and some come along. Often times the casket is open, so everyone can see the dead person. It gets better in the western regions of Georgia when they place the dead on the couch as if watching a TV, or reading a book. Depends on what he/she loved doing while living. Western regions are famous for mourning the dead. They actually scratch their faces with fingernails to show how much they are hurting over a loss; and not the closest family members, but regular relatives. It's like showing the respect to a family. The harder you scream and scratch your face the

more the mourners owe you after. They turned it into a business too. You can actually hire a crying or scratching person to cry for your dead. Oh, you should see the writings on the memorial stones on the graves in the eastern regions: dead by the hammer, killed by the husband, etc. My own grandmother pulled the funniest thing after my uncle died. She didn't like the painting on the stone. Of course she had no patience to wait for a new stone, so she had the painter paint the new picture on the other side of the stone. She simply turned it around. And now there is my uncle in the ground, in the front of the stone, and in the back of the stone. As devastated (and she really was) as she was, she knew every single relative who came and didn't come. She wasn't lazy to call those who didn't make it after the funeral and let them have it.

After the funeral we have the biggest "supras" ever. It's like a wedding, but people wear black. They pay for a funeral dinner that could serve 2-3-4 hundred people, enough to feed the entire city. People borrow money to look rich when their loved one dies. The casket must be fancy, and the "supra" must be as fancy as no one ever had. They strongly believe that people eating and drinking, let me correct it, getting wasted drunk, somehow go for the dead person's good in the other world. They are willing to scratch the face, to cry just as loud as they can, and be in debts to impress others. Death is not about the dead person in Georgia, it's about those who are still alive and their entourage.

"All that live must die, passing through nature to eternity".
- William Shakespeare.

Tako Agarashvili

The views and opinions expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of the Georgian Times



SUNDAY BRUNCH

Gather around with your friends and family on Sundays for brunch at Tbilisi Marriott where we will cater to every family member! Sunday Brunch at Parnas captures the essence of Marriott's glamorous culinary tradition where Chef Pedro Gonzalez offers a variety of delights on the buffet with comfort cuisine combined with modern flavor. Everyone will find Sunday Brunch exciting with unlimited complimentary wines from Telavi Wine Cellar, mimosas for the ladies and kids' game room equipped with Xbox KINECT for your little one to enjoy!

Every Sunday, 12-3 PM
 Buffet - 47 GEL+VAT
 Buffet, unlimited white and red wine - 59 GEL+ VAT
 Children under 9 free of charge. Ages 9 to 13 - 25 Gel +VAT
 Special discounts for the parties 10 and more
 10% discount for our returning guests

Tbilisi Marriott Hotel
 13, Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi 8,
 0108 Georgia (Caucasus Region)
 Telephone: +995 32 277 92 00
 Fax: +995 32 277 92 10
 tbilisi.marriott@marriott.com
 TbilisiMarriott.com



TOURISM

Gudauri and Bakuriani – Beloved Ski Resorts for Foreign Tourists in Georgia

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI

There are fewer people and prices are cheaper in Bakuriani and Gudauri, in March compared with previous months. Although spring is in the air in Tbilisi and other low land areas, Georgia's ski slopes are snowy and in good condition. Skiers and boarders can still experience the pleasures of the 2012 snow season and speed down the mountains of both of Georgia's popular ski resorts. According to travel agency Concord Travel Georgia, Gudauri, with its professional ski slopes always attracts young people; while young families usually prefer Bakuriani. Either way, visitors can enjoy a pleasant environment in both winter resorts.

"I always prefer Gudauri because it is closer to Tbilisi than Bakuriani. I love skiing very much and when I want to escape the city noise for a weekend and enjoy the snowy slopes that lie outside the city I always go there," said Nika Gogolashvili, a



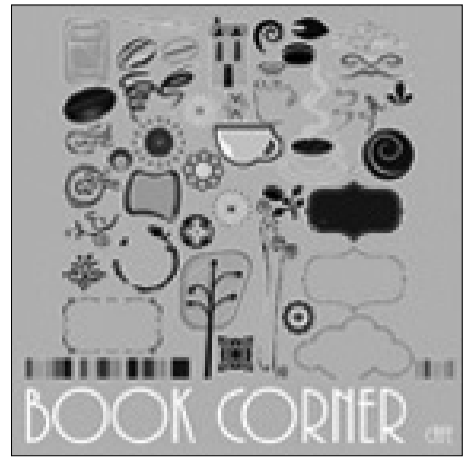
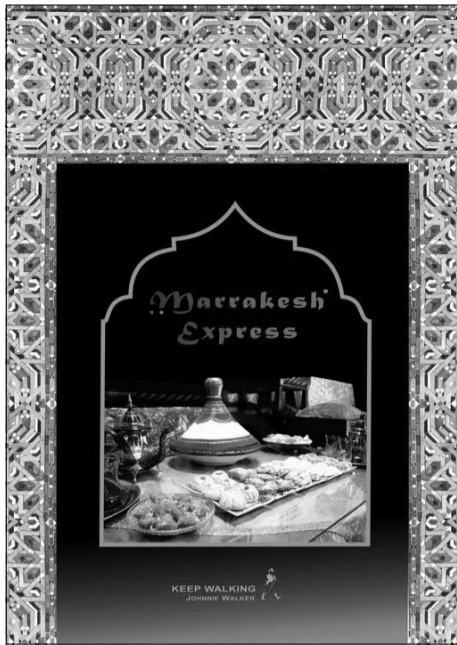
27-year old skier. The Gudauri ski resort is situated 120 kilometers north of Tbilisi on the southern slopes of the Great Caucasus Mountain Range. Not far from the now open Russian border crossing, the resort is Georgia's highest (2,379 meters above sea level) with average winter snow cover reaching 1.5 meters. Since May 2011, about two years after the Tbilisi City Hall took over management of Gudauri, several development projects have been completed, including a 2,450 meter lift with 72 gondolas. "The weather is very good and we hope that this season will last until the mid-April," said Irakli Mamforia, sales manager

of Marco Polo, one of the most popular hotels in Gudauri. "Compared with the last year prices are higher; to rent a room in our hotel costs 350 GEL at the moment," he added. In Bakuriani, skiers and snow boarders can enjoy a big choice of routes, such as Kokhtagora (Mount Kokhta), Tatra, Didveli and Ocdakhtianebe (25 meter rope-ways). "I like hotels but the service is in a very low level. Also, the ski slopes are damaged a lot in Bakuriani and nobody seems to care. This is why many people prefer going to Gudauri," Ana Daushvili, a 21-year old tourist told The Georgian Times. "With the exception of opening of few café-bars, nothing has changed

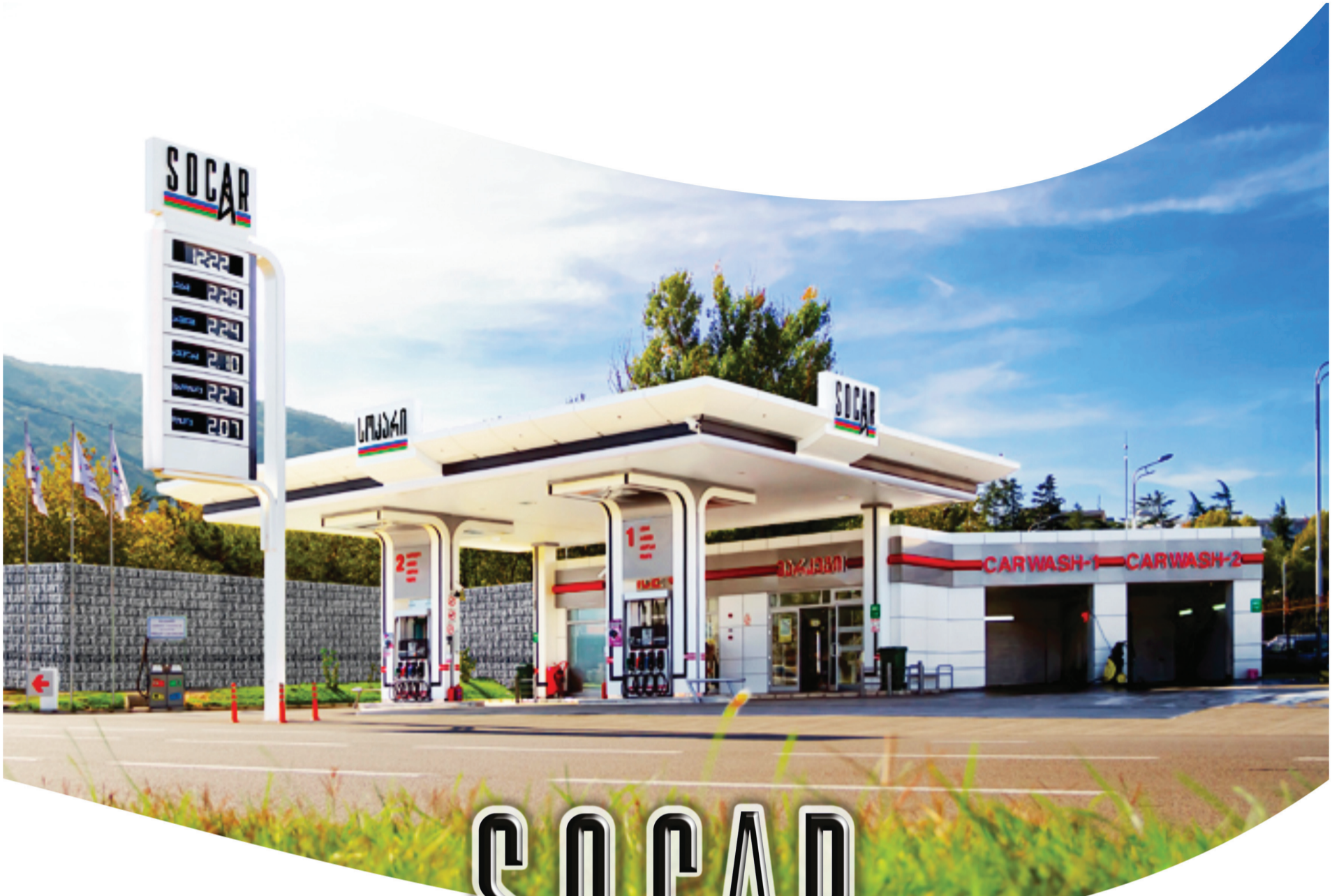
here compared with the previous year. The number of entertainment facilities also has not increase." Bakuriani, surrounded by coniferous forests, lies 30 km from Borjomi, in southwestern Georgia, (about 180 km from Tbilisi). The resort is connected with Borjomi by an electrified narrow-gauge railway. The highest mountain of the resort Kokhtagora is situated at around 2,200 meters above sea level. Both Bakuriani and Gudauri have a wide range of accommodation. Owners of the guesthouses and hotels are welcoming and they offer visitors packages that include the option of having meals. In March, prices per night range from 40 GEL to 350

GEL, depending on the type of accommodation, with Gudauri tending to be on the pricier side. "We have sent approximately 500 visitors to both resorts this year. However, 2013 was not so good compared with last year," commented Nino Tskhondia, tour operator at Concord Travel Georgia. But as Mamforia told the Georgian Times, the number of tourists at Gudauri's Marco Polo Hotel increased by 15-20% this year. "Our Hotel hosted 12,000 guests this winter, adding "we are going to make a new entertainment center, bowling hall and a play area for our guests next year." Madlena Manusachiani, sales manager of Mgzavrebi, which is one of the biggest hotels in Bakuriani, says that the hotel operates all year around, but guests come only in the winter and summer months. "This year we had many foreign tourists, mainly from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Ukraine. This winter we offered our guests very good rates... we also opened a new supermarket and pizzeria," Manusachiani said in an interview with GT. As she commented "there are no night club-style venues in Bakuriani, even though there is a demand."

"Unlike Gudauri and Svanteti (another mountain holiday destination), the government doesn't care and spend any money on the development of Bakuriani. Everything depends on businessmen. More attention is needed from the state to develop this winter resort," noted Zurab Kurtanidze, an upset owner of one of the ski lifts and a cafe in Bakuriani. Despite these shortcomings, Georgian winter resorts are still very attractive for foreign tourists, especially from former Soviet republics. "After the winter season foreign tourists continue to arrive, especially from Israel, to rest here and see the beauty of these high mountains," said Eka Kharitonashvili, Manager of Villa Palace Hotel in Bakuriani. "Extensive sunshine, alpine climate, average snowfall, beautiful ski slopes of varied difficulty, spectacular views, the renowned Georgian cuisine, and pleasant atmosphere - this is what we offer our clients every year in Bakuriani and Gudauri," stated the manager of Concord Travel Georgia. "Bakuriani and Gudauri have a great potential and I think that they need more attention and promotion to become world-class resorts."



Contact us and Become our Partner
12, Kikodze str, Tbilisi, Georgia.
Tel: (+995 32) 2934405,
E-mail: marketing@geotimes.ge;
http://www.geotimes.ge



SOCAR



WWW.SOCAR.GE

სოკარ გეზი