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## More Dangerous Dead than Alive: Boris Berezovsky Unexpectedly Dies in London



Russian intelligence services may have murdered the Russian business oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, who had been granted political asylum in the United Kingdom after the Russian government issued warrants for his arrest for corruption and tax evasion.

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## Alex Petriashvili: Georgia Pays a Very High Price for Joining NATO

Integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is seen in Georgia as the only way to ensure the country's security. In spite of the strong will of Georgians to join NATO and the EU, the new government is willing to restore relations with Russia, which considers the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the main threat to its own security.



On p. 4

# More Dangerous Dead than Alive: Boris Berezovsky Unexpectedly Dies in London

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY AND TIM BYRNES, GT

**Russian intelligence services may have murdered the Russian business oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, who had been granted political asylum in the United Kingdom after the Russian government issued warrants for his arrest for corruption and tax evasion.**

Nikolai Glushkov, one of Berezovsky's oldest friends, told the British newspaper, the Guardian, that a close friend of Berezovsky had emerged from his house believing he may have been murdered.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) had accused the billionaire of providing financial support to Chechen militants during their conflicts with the Russian government, to destabilize the leadership of Russian President, Vladimir Putin, who had ridden to power on a wave of a public approval for his hardline stance on the separatist region of Chechnya.

They also allege he provided support to the militants who carried out a wave of bloody and brutal terrorist attacks on Russian soil, including the Beslan massacre and the Moscow theatre siege, in revenge for the Russian Federal Government's military response in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.

According to various sources and eyewitness, Russia's southern neighbour Georgia had been used to launch these terrorist attacks.

These havens existed pre-

dominately in the Pankisi Gorge of Eastern Georgia, located close to border of the Russian Federation.

Berezovsky had also made no secret of his close 'association' with the former Russian FSB officer, Alexander Litvinenko, who British intelligence services claim was murdered by agents working for Russian intelligence.

Litvinenko, who was also granted asylum in the UK, caused problems for his former 'handlers' and became an outspoken critic of the Russian government's conduct of the Chechen wars.

Speaking in confidence to Tim Byrnes, an Australian journalist now in Georgia, back in 2008 a FSB colonel claimed that Berezovsky had provided financial backing to the Chechen militants in order to help them wage war against the Russian government.

"After the Beslan massacre, in North Ossetia, Berezovsky hoped to provoke the North Ossetians to attack the neighbouring Islamic separatist regions of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, to avenge the murder of more than 300 innocent civilians, mostly children, who were taken hostage by Chechen militants," the FSB colonel claimed.

According to the colonel, a bigger war in Russia would incite a larger military response by the Russian federal government.

It was thought that once the Russia's southern republics in the turbulent Northern Caucasus region would be set ablaze then



other Russian regions would follow and a larger and costlier conflict would erupt.

These and other serious allegations have also been made by other sources over the years, due to Berezovsky's close connections with the Georgian government and other networks of patronage, and his links to foreign intelligence services, including the CIA and MI6.

"He also wanted to draw the Russian government into another war in the hope that this would destroy the Russian government's credibility at home and abroad," the FSB colonel said.

The colonel also claimed that "Berezovsky was working with American and British Intelligence, who also wanted to destabilise a Russia that was rising economically and militarily" after years of mayhem and decline before the advent of Vladimir Putin.

## DEMISE OF BORIS BEREZOVSKY

Aside from these oft-repeated allegations, Berezovsky's

links with financial mechanisms and crime syndicates are most revealing. Here some actual materials contained in investigative dossiers as shared with the editor of the Georgian Times over the years. The British and international media is covering this story from many angles; there are various theories, and so not to repeat what is being written and conspiracy theories examined. We seek to provide the readers of GT with a better understanding of why Boris Berezovsky may be more dangerous dead than alive.

But first, let's play the devil's advocate and ask how can you hang yourself and be found on the bathroom floor and the police say that no-one else was involved? Maybe the rope conveniently snapped after he died? It could be hypothesized that he just jumped and broke his neck while breaking the rope. The British police would not leave such a gaping question without

having an answer for it. They will only release as much information as is necessary without hampering their investigation.

## NOTES CONTAINED IN INVESTIGATIVE DOSSIERS

Dating from 2005, we share information about Berezovsky, "I am looking forward to your feedback and how we may be able to compare notes. I am especially interested in the finer details of a story published back in 2003 "Times on Friday: BP's Georgian pipeline bother with botler," By Carl Mortished, International Business Editor, and the larger picture of what goes on within the money laundering networks and the connections with Gazprom and Kremlin structures, including those of Sheikh Sultan bin Khalifa al Nahyan, son of Abu Dhabi's crown prince, and his links to Berezovsky, the Borjomi Mineral water company, Georgian banks, and the Georgian government under Mikheil Saakashvili.

As Carl Mortished wrote in the article "BP was embroiled in a dispute with a former Soviet bottling company with links to Boris Berezovsky, the exiled Russian financier, and the rulers of Abu Dhabi. The Georgian Glass and Mineral Water Company (GGMW), whose Borjomi brand once graced the Russian tsar's table, is insisting that BP reroute an oil pipeline linking the Caspian to the Mediterranean in order to protect springs in the Caucasus mountains from possible pollution."

## SALFORD CAPITAL PARTNERS; APPARENT LINKS

There was a UK based team that later investigated such above-mentioned links. Quoting a representative, "we first met a man named Ruslan Fomichev in late 2001 and is described by Salford Capital Partners ('Salford') as a "former banker and advisor to Berezovsky". Mr. Fomichev is a former director of Russian TV station 'TV6' that was owned by Berezovsky. Badri Patarkatsishvili, a Georgian National, a partner of Boris, was also a director of 'TV6'. Mr. Fomichev is based in London. It was claimed that Fomichev was the former chairman of the Russian 'Obiedynenny Bank'.

This was a difficult period for bank regulators, and Swiss investigators, were trying to track down \$4.8 billion of missing IMF money allocated to Russia, and suspected that \$1.4 billion of this was credited to a correspondence account for Obiedynenny Bank at a bank in Geneva. The Swiss believe that a company called Runicom SA controlled this account. According to the press, the Swiss investigators described Roman Abramovich as the owner of Runicom SA and joint controller of Obiedynenny Bank. Abramovich was a former close associate of Boris Berezovsky. As the inside source in the banking community claimed, "In re-stating these press reports, I am not initially suggesting any wrongdoing by Fomichev or any other parties."

Continued on p. 11

# Constitutional Amendment Comes into Effect

By LIKA MOSHIAVILI, GT

**The Constitutional amendment stripping the President of his right to appoint a new government without Parliament's approval has entered into force after recently being signed into law by President Saakashvili. The Georgian Parliament ratified the amendment after its third and final reading by 114 votes on March 25. It is expected to put an end to the tense power struggle between Georgia's two main political forces, the Georgian Dream coalition and the United National Movement.**

The amendment stipulates that in the event of the cabinet resigning or being dismissed by the President the latter will have no right to appoint at his will a new government. Meanwhile the

sitting government will continue working until a new cabinet was confirmed by Parliament.

"I was never going to dismiss the government or the Parliament! But this vote was important for democratic dialogue in our country and to demonstrate that the *United National Movement* is still very strong," President Saakashvili stated after the vote.

The amendment also adds a clause of the Constitution which prohibits the President from dissolving Parliament within the six months prior to the presidential elections. Thus, the President will have no right to dissolve the Parliament from May 1 until the inauguration of the new President, as Georgia's next presidential election is set for October, 2013, with the exact date to be announced by Saakashvili.

"With this constitutional amendment, Parliament has restored its power," Parliamentary Chairman Davit Usupashvili commented after the vote. "I

want to congratulate the Georgian people and Parliament," he said.

Usupashvili noted that the approval of the amendment would allow Saakashvili to deliver his annual state of the nation address to Parliament. This was supposed to have taken place on February 8, but the *Georgian Dream*, which won an overwhelming majority in last October's highly contested parliamentary elections, postponed his speech, saying that it would be better if the President waited until after the constitutional amendments had been adopted.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, and Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, issued a joint statement on March 26 welcoming the amendment to Georgia's constitution.

"The cross-party consensus

that underpins this agreement demonstrates the commitment of all sides in Georgian politics to good governance in the national interest. The constitutional amendment, which confirms the role of the democratically-elected parliament in approving the appointment of a new government, consolidates Georgia's democracy and sets an important precedent for co-operation between all parties in Georgian politics," the statement reads.

The US State Department also congratulated the leadership of Georgia and the parliamentary majority and minority on passing the important landmark decision.

"It paves the way for the consolidation of Georgian democracy and renewed focus on the many issues facing the government today," the Department of State commented.

Co-rapporteurs from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

Michael Aastrup Jensen and Boriss Cilevijs also welcomed the adoption of the constitutional amendment in a statement released on March 26.

"This amendment removes an important source of misunderstanding and tension. We therefore welcome it, and especially the fact that it was adopted with broad bi-partisan support following an agreement between the ruling majority and opposition," the statement says.

"We expect that the same willingness to cooperate and compromise will also prevail in the deliberations over other important items on the agenda of the parliament, such as the reform of the High Council of Justice. Such willingness to compromise and co-operate can form a good basis for fruitful co-habitation."

The co-rapporteurs from PACE will visit Georgia on April 7-12 as a part of an ongoing monitoring mission to discuss the latest political developments

and continued reforms in the country.

The constitutional amendment was proposed by the *Georgian Dream* coalition in late December 2012. It was supported by 135 MPs at its first hearing, 123 MPs at its second and 114 votes after the third and final.

However the amendment was a major source of political wrangling between the Georgian Dream and United National Movement for several months. UNM lawmakers agreed to vote for the amendment only after the GD agreed to first hold a test vote, demanded by the parliamentary minority on March 21.

This constitutional amendment is expected to lower tension between President Mikheil Saakashvili and Prime Minister elect Bidzina Ivanishvili. In the final analysis, it may actually mark the smooth transition of power to the newly-elected government and bring Georgian political processes more in line with reform-minded Western democracies.

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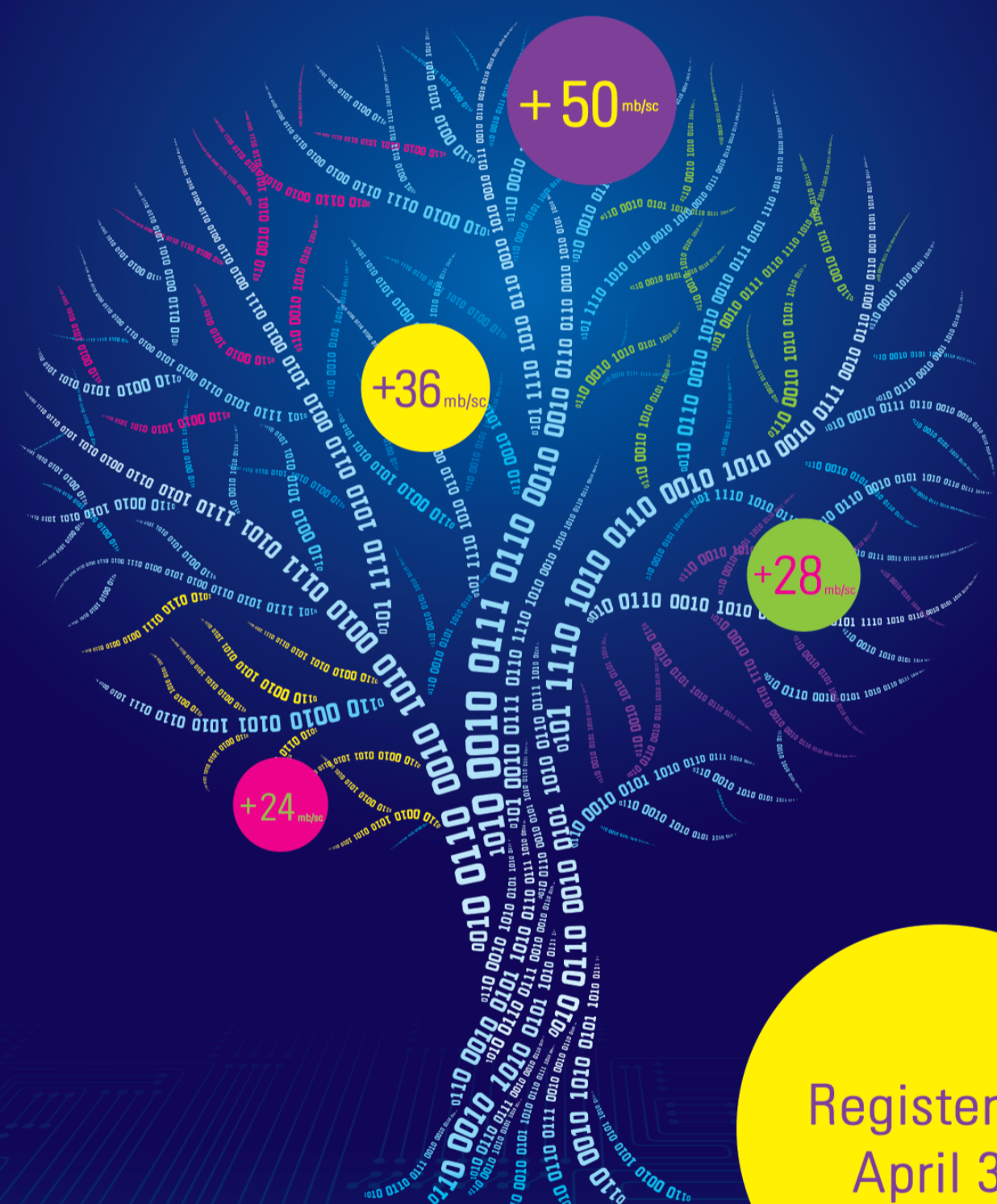




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# Alex Petriashvili: Georgia Pays a Very High Price for Joining NATO

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

Integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is seen in Georgia as the only way to ensure the country's security. In spite of the strong will of Georgians to join NATO and the EU, the new government is willing to restore relations with Russia, which considers the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the main threat to its own security. In an interview with The Georgian Times, the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Alex Petriashvili talked about the ways of cooperation with the West and Russia, as well as about the government's expectations regarding NATO and EU integration.



**What progress has Georgia made on its way to EU integration since the Parliamentary Elections in 2012?**

I can point out three major directions we succeeded in. First of all, it is the Association Agreement – we held a very successful round of negotiations on it; then it is the deep and comprehensive free trade agreement, and finally receiving the action plan on visa liberalization. Besides, we started working on food safety and energy issues; the Ministry of Justice has revised the Labor Code, making very serious changes in cooperation with experts from the International Labor Organization and European states. Very soon the government will establish an anti-monopoly body, which will eliminate all signs of elite corruption.

**You named the achievements of the new government. What are its failures?**

We still need dramatic reforms of the judiciary system – the courts and penitentiary sys-

tem. We are working on these issues very hard. We want to have a truly independent court, and penitentiary system in accordance with international standards.

**The old government of Georgia attached big hopes with the Vilnius Summit. What can we expect from this meeting?**

It's a very important event for us but our expectations are not exaggerated. We are very close to concluding talks on the Association Agreement. We hope it will be endorsed by the EU and Georgia at the summit. The free trade agreement is also almost finalized. Concerning visa liberalization, the Georgian side needs to work on the legislative aspects of the document and we hope that by the Vilnius Summit we'll be able to go through all these legislative procedures. These are the realistic expectations based on the current state of affairs.

**What are the differences in approach towards Euro-Atlantic integration between the current government and the previous one?**

The difference is in the way we illustrate the situation. We show society the real picture. What the previous government was saying is that in 2013 our citizens will be able to travel visa-free to the European Union or Georgia will be given member state candidacy. This is not true. So we have changed the rhetoric.

**Do you mean the main difference between your government and the previous one was only in the rhetoric and the results would be the same if the government had not changed?**

Well, I'd like to mention that the previous government did a lot of work but during these last four months the new team of negotiators has moved forward

very important issues which remained open – some of them because of the differences in the positions of the parties, others because of the political strategy and absence of political will of the previous government. It concerns, for instance, the Labor Code and food safety issues. In addition, the old authorities were confusing society – one day they wanted to follow the European model of development, the next day – Singaporean. I think they could make their mind up which direction to go – European or Asian. In reality they were closer to Singaporean model rather than European; however, the economy of Singapore flourishes and the rights for the private property are protected, which we didn't have here.

**One of the first statements the new government made concerned the restoration of the relations with Russia. How possible do you think the resumption of talks is while Georgia doesn't remain committed to its Euro-Atlantic path?**

We are doing what we declared. The appointment of the special envoy to Russia Zurab Abashidze was welcomed by the international community; it hailed the change of tone and messages between the parties. No one is turning a blind eye to the occupation of Georgian territory by Russia's military forces. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are integral parts of Georgia. Normalizing relations with Russia will be hard but not impossible. This is another difference between us and the previous government, which was trying to have the maximum temperature in talks with Russia in order to keep the international community alarmed, pointing out that we are very close to an escalation of the military conflict. This is not our strategy. We changed the rhetoric and we try to solve the issues that are solvable. How-

ever, there are red-line-issues in our relations that we do not touch.

**In conditions of deepening economic and political crisis in Europe how reasonable for both Georgian and the EU is conducting talks on EU-integration?**

Today the EU is skeptical about enlargement but I believe it will overcome the problems it faces by the time Georgia is ready for accession talks. Nobody has an illusion that the membership of the EU will happen overnight. Our way to EU-membership is going to be a long process. We must continue reforming, building democratic institutions and a truly free market economy in the country. We will continue moving in the European direction regardless of the economic situation in Europe.

**If the decision was made tomorrow that Georgia would be given NATO membership, what do you think the local reaction would be? Don't you think initial reaction might be positive, but then people might ask if that implies accepting the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia?**

Our goal is ensuring a long-term stability and security in the country. EU and NATO are the institutions that can give us such guarantees. I believe that nobody is planning to join EU or NATO at the expense of Georgian national interests. It's not correct to speculate on that. Georgia's number one priority is restoration of the country's territorial integrity. We don't want to bring our problems inside the EU. Our task is to negotiate with the Abkhazians and Ossetians, to make Georgia more attractive – economically and politically – in order to help them make a choice in favor of reintegration. Practical steps are needed for that, and this is exactly what we are doing.

**How will Georgia follow-up on its peacekeeping missions af-**

**ter its ISAF mission is accomplished and how will it affect prospects of integration with NATO?**

The political decision to continue participating in NATO-led international missions after 2014 has been made already, and now our Defense Ministry is discussing the nature of post-ISAF cooperation with NATO. I'm really proud to say without exaggeration that the Georgian military is one of the best in Afghanistan – this is the evaluation of our allies in NATO and the Afghan leadership. Georgians will most likely be training and consulting Afghan national forces as well as participating in particular combat operations. There are some negotiations regarding the Mali peacekeeping mission. For the first stage we might send a small group of liaison officers. Georgia's participation in NATO's missions is one of the most integral parts of our strategy of joining the bloc. NATO realizes that Georgia pays a very high price for its wish to become a member of the organization. I don't really like the word "price" in this case but we are indeed paying a very high price to achieve our final goal.

**How do you perceive Georgia's foreign policy goal of integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures from perspective of nine-year presidency of Mikhail Saakashvili?**

Eduard Shevardnadze was the first president who officially stated Georgia's aspiration to join NATO and EU in 2002. Saakashvili continued and developed this cooperation and today we have the Georgia-NATO commission, the Annual National Programme and we are expecting a visit by the North Atlantic Council to Georgia. Our allies are making very important declarations and decisions concerning Georgia's accession to NATO. We are moving forward.

## PUBLICITY

# To the Partners of "Rustavis Poladi" and Commercial Banks

Greetings,

It has only been for a few months that I got to address you as the director of JSC "Georgian Steel", and as a lawful representative of the JSC "Georgian Steel".

Since the July 6, 2011 a sequence of criminal and forceful actions were performed against JSC "Georgian Steel", by means of this and other unlawful actions, assets of two JSC "Georgian Steel", and "Tuji XXI" were given to Ltd. "Rustavis Poladi" (I.D. 404411908).

On the basis of our request, court has sequestered Ltd. "Rustavis Poladi" assets and "Tuji XXI" shares!

Law enforcing organiza-



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tions have started investigation of suspicious facts and circumstances!

But most importantly these people have destroyed Rustavi metallurgical factory as a brand name, because of their incompetent and unqualified management

The story is very complicated and hard to explain, so I will not bore you with it, this is the obligation of judicial and investigative bodies.

Based on what's men-

tioned above, I address you to stop any kind of relationship with Ltd. "Rustavis Poladi" and any legal or physical person/body associated with it.

I inform you, that if done otherwise, your actions will be considered as the acknowledged action of violation of the legal owner's rights and interests.

After the restoration of justice, JSC "Georgian Steel", and Ltd. "Tuji XXI" do not


intend to fulfill any fettering agreements.

We are open to meetings and joint discussions!

Sincerely,  
Director  
Natia Jakeli

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# Ramifications of Georgia's New Peacemaking Mission in Mali

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

The Georgian government is seeking an innovative way to integrate into EU structures by contributing to peacemaking, training and crisis management operations in the western African country of Mali. Officially Georgia is willing to join French and other governments in countering the country's separatist Tuareg ethnic group in the northern part of the country, as confirmed by Irakli Alasania, Georgian Minister of Defense in mid March. However, in spite of the nature of the conflict, Alasania claimed that Georgian troops will only act in a training capacity.

At least 200 trainers will be involved in assisting Mali forces deal with Islamist rebels and backstopping the local army in bringing about peace and stability.

The EU has found itself in what may prove a difficult struggle

purportedly under the banner of anti-terrorism, given the Islamic origin of the separatist movement in Mali (declaration of a separate country). It was feared that if the movement were to become successful there could be serious regional and international geopolitical implications. Mali is located in the Maghreb region and borders Algeria and Mauritania among other countries, and the consequences of NATO-backed regime change in Libya in 2011 are still being felt in the region.

However, others consider this to be a flimsy disguise for French energy security and neo colonialization. French has deep tracks in the region, and it is no surprise that the country spearheaded the mission. Georgians will also find themselves working alongside forces from Nigeria, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Togo and Senegal as part of their first-ever African mission.

The EU military mission envisages the provision of a train-and-equip program to buttress



the Malian military to successfully quell the Islamist insurgency. Sources claim that the duration of the training mission is to be 15 months with 250 military instructors and 200 soldiers to protect the trainers as they carry out the support role.

The Georgian side has agreed to such a mission out of political expediency. It is understandable that the Georgian government wants to be able to fast track the process of integration with the EU by contributing to the EU-led security and defense goals, as

earlier endorsed at the Helsinki summit decision in 1999. Consequently the EU set up its own European Rapid Reaction Forces with a command and control HQ in Strasbourg, France. It is already positioned for such foreign missions with the creation

of the EU-led peacekeeping force and the capacity to provide peacemaking monitoring. This is the kind of operational task involvement proposed by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the Georgian government and according to Alasania, Georgia has already provided its preliminary consent as feedback.

The Georgian government's foreign policy vision and goals are to reinforce not only its NATO orientation but also to speed up EU membership processes. It is not a coincidence that the NATO Information Center under the aegis of the Defense Ministry of Georgia was recently renamed as the NATO and EU Information Center. Such symbolic actions demonstrate how important it is for the Georgian government to speed up the process of membership into European structures. It is clear that Georgian soldiers and officers may soon be in harm's way, not for the sake of the mission but in order to bleed the country into NATO and the EU.

By taking part in the mission, Georgia is also reciprocating to the EU following the deployment of the EU monitoring mission in Georgia in the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Such a contribution to the EU is considered to have political pay-offs and will contribute to Georgia's political stability, and even territorial integrity in the longer term.

# Reforming Georgia's Armed Forces into a Lean and Mean Fighting Machine

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

Irakli Alasania, Georgia's Defense Minister announced on March 23, 2013 during a Parliamentary hearing of the Defense and Security Committee that Georgia will restructure its national defense capabilities as part of larger effort to drastically reform the national defense system.

Such changes envision a complete overhaul of the armed forces and the development of a professional army worth the name. There are many motivations for this long overdue reform, but ostensibly it is a response to two needs: 1) to prevent acts of terrorism ahead of Russia's Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 and 2) to reinforce Georgia's presence in the proximity of the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to deter possible Russian intrusion into Georgia proper.

Much has been written about how armed forces reform could be brought about, and the utility of reserve forces, which have not proven effective in Georgia. Georgia's reserve system is very similar to that of the former Yugoslavia, at least on paper. This worked successfully during the Cold War and the same system has been applied in South Ossetia.

However, such a system can only work when these reserves are a highly-qualified professional team of officer corps and soldiers which can be quickly mobilized. Developing such a combination remains a challenge for Georgia. It takes more than words



on paper to achieve reforms, and a radically different approach to preparing the National Military Strategy and Defense Strategy Review is now needed, even a paradigm shift.

Much of the present problem is that there has been little oversight of the operations of the Georgian armed forces, and any internal evaluation has been conducted with dubious motivations. An army cannot be effectively measured by its size, its number of men or weapons. It is clear that all Georgia's neighbors have larger and more experienced Armed Forces contingents but this in itself is meaningless, as it takes more than mere numbers to create an effective military. The mission and motivation of the Georgian Armed Forces are the key questions at this point.

In terms of a standing force, the Georgian Armed Forces are approximately 23-25,000 strong by the best guess. According to the law "On Defense" Georgia should have 28-32,000 military personnel, but this staffing level has not yet been achieved. Georgia is surrounded by quite a dangerous collection of military powers: despite this, the ratio of Georgia's Armed Forces personnel and those of its neighbors is 1:4.

Turkey has 400,000 servicemen, organized into five regional commands, Armenia has Armed Forces of about 60,000 and Azerbaijan has about 130-140,000 military personnel. The most important factor however is Russia, as Georgia and Russia are still technically at war and only a tiny armistice with six paragraphs keeps the fragile

peace between the parties. This peace deal might break down or be torn up by one side or the other at any time. The Russian side has two Army bases in the area on full operational readiness at any time – the 49<sup>th</sup> (which defends the Black Sea coast and Abkhazia) and the 58<sup>th</sup> (which defends South Ossetia). These ran the military operations against the Georgian Armed Forces in the August war of 2008. Russia also has bases in the occupied territories (the 4<sup>th</sup> Base in South Ossetia and 7<sup>th</sup> in Abkhazia).

These Russian forces are at full combat readiness and capable at any time of launching a strike against the Georgian capital Tbilisi and Kutaisi, home of the government buildings. The local Armed Forces of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia also

comprise 10-15,000 combat ready personnel controlled by the Russian military regional command. Furthermore, Georgia is faced by the "South Strategic Command" of the Russian Armed Forces, headquartered in Rostov, which coordinates the activities of all the regular and paramilitary forces stationed in the Northern Caucasus, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Russian Armed Forces deployed in Armenia (at the 102<sup>nd</sup> Military Base in Giumri and 882<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Force Squadron in Yerevan).

The Russian military has roughly 200,000 personnel in the Caucasus. The "South Strategic Command" units are 30-35% equipped, with relatively modest Russian weapons (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation combat air weaponry and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation combat tanks and artillery systems), but by 2015 this figure will be 60%. Islamic insurgent formations are also active in the Northern Caucasus, with roughly 6,000 guerrillas being led by well-known Islamic warlord Doka Ummarov (declared to be one of the world's most dangerous terrorists by Russia and the US). After the so-called "Lapankuri" incident on August 28, 2012, the Islamic insurgent leadership is keen to claim revenge and punish the Georgian government for this "bold deed".

The threat to Georgia identified by the Defense Minister has very little connection with the Sochi Olympics but is linked to the fear of reprisals for the "Lapankuri" operation. Indirect challenges for Georgia include organized crime networks and drug and illegal arms smuggling

cartels, with which the previous Georgian regime made "off-record" type bargains in exchange for huge amounts of "dirty cash" laundered through suspicious "investment projects". Now these arrangements have broken down but concrete transactions could still be conducted without government back-up, increasing the risk of instability within Georgia.

There is also a high probability of a renewal of military operations over Nagorno-Karabakh between the Armenian and Azerbaijani Armed Forces and any widening of the militant Islamic insurgency in the Northern Caucasus spilling over onto Georgian territory. If the crisis in Syria deepens and the US conducts aerial and rocket attacks on Iranian strategic installations, as is expected, the geostrategic situation in the Southern Caucasus could deteriorate further and Georgia could be converted into a transit "gateway" for delivering arms, mercenaries and for the movement of displaced people, causing it more security problems.

It is clear that the new Georgian government's assumptions on risk assessment and geopolitical analysis demonstrate a low level of expertise. A superficial approach has been taken to "cost and benefit" calculation. However reform of the Armed Forces in itself is long overdue.

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# Georgia Attracts Foreigners for Many Reasons

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

*Georgia's temperate climate, relative safety and friendly people attract many foreigners, mainly from Turkey and Arab countries. . . Some seek a stable and secure life, others a well-paid job or a profitable business. If the presence of Turks has never been surprising for Georgians, the influx of Arabs is a new phenomenon.*

The wave of demonstrations which began in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2010 brought total chaos to some Arab countries. The Arab Spring itself led to the resignations of the presidents of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Protests in Syria against President Bashar Al-Assad esca-

lated into a civil war in 2011 that continues to worsen. Many residents of the Middle East, and particularly those who had some savings, fled the volatile region as soon as possible to escape their countries' physical and economic destruction. More than a million Syrians have left their country since 2011 and hundreds of thousands of Coptic Christians from Egypt began searching for a new homeland after the largest Islamic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, took power in 2010 and the economy began teetering; Iraqis are also fleeing, in their case from the ongoing violence which has followed the American-led invasion. Iranians are escaping economic difficulties back home brought on by US-backed international sanctions and fear of another pend-

ing invasion.

Some left their homes at the first sign of trouble. Maher Younes, a hotel and tourism manager, moved to Georgia from Syria in 2010. Since then he has visited his home country only once in order to move his sister to a safer place – Dubai, UAE, where he himself had lived for two years.

"I didn't like it there. People in the United Arab Emirates think only about making money. You can't make friends there; you might live in the same block for years and never know who your neighbour is. When I came to Georgia I felt like I was at home – the same climate, and the same friendly, smiling people. I liked Georgians and I married a local girl. I'm thankful to my friend, who told me about

this country. But not many Syrians can come to Georgia due to a lack of money. They mainly migrate to neighbouring countries as refugees," Younes told the Georgian Times.

Younes initially started his own business in Georgia but today manages some Arab-owned night clubs and restaurants. He feels that running a business in Georgia is more difficult now than in previous years due to a drop in the number of tourists. However, the Georgian Ministry of Interior Affairs says that during the last two months the number of tourists increased 31 percent in comparison with the same period in 2012 and according to the National Agency of Public Registry and Revenue Service no changes in business registration or taxation procedures have taken place in 2013.

Iranian citizen Kiarash Afrasiabi came to Georgia in search of a better life a year ago and started an import-export business. "It was a choice between Georgia, Armenia and Turkey, and finally I decided to come to Tbilisi, as it's easier and less troublesome to start a business here. I am now exporting some medicines and metals from Georgia to Iran and importing some goods from Iran to Georgia. I also deal with Estonia and England," he told GT, confessing that he plans to stay in Tbilisi as his business is flourishing. Afrasiabi even

wants to eventually obtain Georgian citizenship, which is a relatively simple process.

"I want a secure life – that's all," Nooruldeen Hamid Shakhoo, a young Iraqi who moved to Georgia in May 2012 told GT. He came to Tbilisi in the hope of graduating from the State Medical University but soon left there to start a private business.

"My father visited Georgia last year and advised me to move here. Unlike other countries, Georgia gives us 1-year-visas readily – and at the airport. Many Iraqis come to Georgia with the intention of living here. Taking into consideration the increasing number of Arabs in Tbilisi, I decided to open an Arab restaurant. Let's see how things develop," he said.

A native of Cairo, Egypt, Maged Zarif Iskander learned about Georgia from priests in his home country's Coptic Orthodox Church. He was told that in a little Caucasian country situated between Russia and Turkey he could start his own business for as little as 10,000 USD.

"The economic downturn has forced many Egyptians to set their eyes on small developing countries. I came to Tbilisi in October, 2012 and opened a little coffee-shop where other Egyptians can gather, sit, talk, have a cup of tea or smoke shisha. But life in Georgia is not really that cheap. One needs at

least 50,000 USD to run a business. My wife and children are still in Egypt and I want to bring them here by June or July, 2013 but I won't be able to if the situation doesn't change," he told GT.

Iskander says that his expenses exceed his income. He pays 750 USD monthly for the tiny semi-basement room where his Hookah café is situated and spends another 1,000 USD on all other expenses. "I incurred losses during the first four months, and only then I started making some money but it's not yet enough to sustain a family. I will stay here until October and see how things work out. My Georgian friends have told me that the summer season brings a liveable profit. If it pays my costs I will settle here, if not I'll go back to Egypt," he said.

Turkish citizens in Georgia however have a different mentality. They do not intend to leave their country behind forever – Turks come here for work or business. Zeki Dohan, a cook from Samsun, is one of them. A Georgian-speaking Turk who arrived in Tbilisi in 2007, he plans to stay here for as long as he has a proper job.

"I like Georgia, so I am here. I work for Turkish restaurants, where I prepare our national cuisine, which is popular even among locals. I visit my home town not very often. But someday I will return to Samsun for sure," he told GT.

# European People's Party Criticizes Georgia Government

By UTA BITSADZE, GT

**On March 26 Georgia's Prime Minister made public a personal letter received from Swiss Ambassador Guenther Baechler in which he criticized members of European People's Party for their role in a concerted black PR campaign directed against the Georgian government.**

"It is interesting to see how much some members of the EPP adapted from ancient Soviet-style propagandistic methods – methods, they would publicly deny of course," the Swiss ambassador's open letter reads.

Guenther Baechler acknowledged that the United National Party (UNM) had achieved much after coming to power in 2003. However, he noted that the UNM government's successes in eradicating the country's old system of corruption had been overshadowed by the ever-increasing level of elite corruption which developed throughout the period. Baechler considers this to be a key challenge for Georgia's new government as it seeks to broaden and deepen democratization processes.

The Ambassador underlines a strong will of the current government to respect democratic values as has been demonstrated by the involvement of by many well-respected international professionals, including Thomas Hammarberg, Special Advisor of

the European Union on legal issues concerning relations with Georgia. The Ambassador mentioned his appointment to Georgia indicates that government is serious about the pledges it made prior to coming to power in October, 2012.

Baechler also apologized to Georgian citizens for sometimes interfering in the internal affairs of Georgia in the run up to the October parliamentary elections, noting that he has always biased towards democracy, human rights and peaceful relations.

Responding to the outcome of the Georgia's 2012 Parliamentary elections, 23 Euro parliamentarian deputies, including 19 from the EPP published a critical letter on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2013 in which they alleged that "Disrespect for the constitutional rights, lack of competitive level field of the opposition political forces, infringement of independence of media and Judiciary system, endanger further progress in Georgia's approximation with the European Union and implementation democratic values."

On March 13, the EPP presidency adopted a declaration, which was made public on March 14 during EPP's enlargement summit in Brussels which Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili attended.

The submitted declaration consists of five paragraphs and it is purported that the government disrespected the constitutional rights of Georgian President when he was not allowed to deliver an annual report to the

Parliament. It also calls on the government of Georgia not to interfere in the judiciary system and to ensure the full observance of the principle of independence and impartiality; and that media must be free and freedom of expression must be fully guaranteed.

EPP published a letter on its website after Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili had addressed to the authors of the declaration. The Georgian government called the declaration signed by EPP unreasonable and shortsighted. The officials of Georgian government claimed that the EPP declaration reflects the political position of the UNM.

The Georgian government dismissed the declaration, saying it "is not supported by examples and lacks any kind of substantiation. It only reflects the political position of Georgian opposition party – UNM instead of providing a proper analysis and balanced evaluation of the situation that now exists in Georgia."

Georgia's Parliamentary Chairman Davit Usupashvili underlined that Georgia's new government is ready to listen to criticism and recommendations from the West. "I have asked many of you more than once, and I repeat now: set European standards for us and judge us based on them. We are very much in need of such a mechanism to free ourselves from post-communism. However, please do not use President Saakashvili and his former regime as a standard, as it would be an insult to Europe."



Usupashvili wrote in his open letter to "European People's Party."

Usupashvili advises signers of the declaration to protect the values of Europe. He also notes that Georgia's European choice will not be strengthened by a groundless criticism towards the Prime Minister. "Your letter of March 6 to PM Ivanishvili, the leader of the Georgian Dream Coalition, in which you claim to be trying to save Georgia's European choice, actually distances you from Europe as we know it. From Europe, about which we dream and toward which we are making resolute steps in both words and deeds," Usupashvili added.

Parliamentarian Nugzar Tsiklauri of the UNM has criticized the Prime Minister for his respond to EPP, calling any criticism of famous European politicians as the vertex of inadequacy.

"Bidzina Ivanishvili tries to

connect such heightened criticisms coming from European society, authoritative European organizations, and not only the EPP. He seeks to reduce the substance of such criticism. We all know well that criticisms also come from the other fractions of European Parliament and the NATO General Assembly and when you don't consider their positions, it is the vertex of inadequacy," Tsiklauri told journalists.

Sandro Tvalchrelidze, the head of "International Foundation of Sustainable Development", thinks that the EPP declaration should be have been foreseen, but it was not alarming. He says the EPP is a union of many political parties and for this reason the Prime Minister should not involved himself in the dispute with them.

"European People's Party" is a coalition of political parties of which the UNM is an associated member. It is clear that their

statement will not change a lot, because only those 23 Euro parliamentarian deputies don't belong to this coalition. It was not the opinion of all EPP members, and mainly this criticism was groundless. That's why it would have been better if the political secretary of the Georgian Dream had answered it instead of the Prime Minister," Sandro Tvalchrelidze said in the interview with GT.

The political reality certainly has been changed in Georgia after the parliamentary elections in October 2012. Criticism from the West has become more active on issues frequently emphasized by the former ruling government. Regardless, Western support of UNM is still most apparent, as demonstrated during the March 13 Brussels summit. It does appear that the political divide will continue to last for a long time, and those issues which are most important for citizens will be concealed.



# Tragic Death of One-Year-Old Shocks Entire Nation

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

**Gogita Abashidze, a one year old infant starved to death in the village of Makho in a Georgia's western region of Khelvachauri. Although the five-member family lived in extreme poverty, they were unable to obtain social assistance. The weakness of the child was visible; Gogita Abashidze's body was so exhausted that the one-year old child was wrinkled like an old man. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 77,000 children are living in poverty and 300 children die each year during malnutrition and lack of food in Georgia.**

"The child was in a shock when it was brought here. The situation was difficult from the very beginning. He was put on artificial breathing machine. He had a low weight - he was born 4 kg but his weight was only 4.200 kg by this time," commented Tea Ivanadze, doctor at Batumi Healthcare Center for Mothers and Children.

Neighbors from the village say that it the village administration should be ashamed of themselves; this family lives in

the house with holes in the floor, broken windows, a damaged roof and dilapidated walls. They had been unable to obtain social assistance from the government.

The death of an innocent child leaves many questions unanswered. Why were the Abashidzes not included in the database of socially disabled families? Was the state's social agent, who visited the family indifferent to their plight?

Badri Mamuladze, head of Khelvachauri staff in Social Service Agency states that a social agent visited the Abashidze family on March 15, 2012 and that Gogita Abashidze was born four days later.

"The social welfare service asked me for the children's private numbers. My wife gave birth to the children at home and we had no personal numbers," explained Levan Abashidze, Gogita's father. "They told us to go to the Public Registry to receive them, but I couldn't go. A photo of the child was required and I had no money for it," he continued.

Besides Gogita, the family has two more minor children.

"I used to feed Gogita with the porridge of fried wheat flour because I had no other choice. As for the elders, they mostly eat potatoes or somebody as-

sists us with food," said Inga Abashidze, the mother of the deceased child.

People from the Social Agency are now claiming that Gogita Abashidze's parents might be deprived of the parental rights and the children might be appointed guardians as they were not fit to raise a child and are responsible for what happened.

According to research conducted by UNICEF, 77,000 children are living in the extreme poverty in Georgia, which means that 9.6% of children under the age of 16 live on just 2 GEL a day. Moreover, 25,000 children live in relative poverty with 3.6 GEL per day in Georgia.

"Three hundred children die in Georgia each year because of food shortages. The total mortality data is 800 children a year, which is also a quite disturbing data. Georgia comes in 42nd among 84 countries in terms of child mortality," stated Maia Kurtsikidze, head of UNICEF's Communication Program.

The tragic death of Gogita Abashidze sent shockwaves throughout Georgia. On March 23, youth held a protest rally outside the Parliament building in Kutaisi. They protested against the complicated procedure for receiving social assis-

tance and demanded that the procedure be simplified to avoid further such tragedies from ever happening again.

A demonstration was also organized in Tbilisi under the name 'All children are children of all', which was held in order to protest poverty, terrible living conditions and hunger in the country. People organized a march starting from in the center of Tbilisi to the office of the Public Broadcaster, in order to demand TV air time to discuss this problem.

Georgia's Public Defender Ucha Nanuashvili said this story will become a turning point for defending the rights of the child.

At the president's palace, the Georgian flag was lowered to half-mast on March 24. President Mikheil Saakashvili said no-one should die from hunger in the twenty-first century. He called on the government not to sit at its offices, but to go to families and study problems of the poor.

"This is a huge tragedy - the death of Gogita Abashidze. Today I gave the order to lower the flag as a sign of condolence, but it also should be a lesson for everyone, for each of us," Saakashvili stated.

He called poverty one of the biggest enemies of Georgia and



said the country should fight against it together.

The leaders of ruling Georgian Dream coalition, as well as the local government of Adjara region expressed their condolences for the death of the child.

"It is a complicated case and after investigation we will know which institution was responsible for Gogita's death," noted Davit Sergeenko, Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

Deputy Chairman of Health and Social Affairs Committee Guguli Magradze explained that the Committee will discuss the new initiative to eliminate child poverty and food shortages in the near future.

"I think we should provide them with essential products because when you give money to a family, they may choose not spend it on their children but rather for other purposes. So it's better to give them certain products, which are necessary for a child," explained Magradze. "This issue will be

initially discussed at the Health Committee and later recommendations will be submitted to the government cabinet for approval," she added.

As Magradze notes, an increase in social assistance for needy families is planned from July 1 and the families will receive 60 GEL instead of 30 GEL, while each subsequent member will receive 48 instead of 24 GEL.

"The state is responsible for protecting the child's rights in the country. We should urge them and work with them in order that they are able to fulfill this responsibility. Discussions should be held on these issues not only when a tragedy happens. These issues should be constantly discussed," noted Kurtsikidze.

Kurtsikidze pointed out that UNICEF cooperates with the current government and provides recommendations on how to improve the situation. "We are working with them in this continuous process and things are going in the right direction," she concluded.

# Strong Winds and Storm Sweep across Georgia

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

**Cost of losses caused by bad weather in Georgia reached 6 million GEL. Strong winds lasting for several days tore off tin roofs of some buildings, ripped down advertisement billboards and smashed windows. Georgia's western regions of Adjara and Guria were the most heavily hit by the storm. Electricity and water supply have already been restored throughout the country after wide-spread disruptions.**

According to the special HQ set up on the orders of Georgia's Prime Minister, the strong wind destroyed the roofs of 38 houses in Gori, 110 houses in nearby villages, 125 houses in Ozurgeti, 63 in Kobuleti, 102 in Khelvachauri, 30 houses in Batumi and several houses in Mtskheta and Tbilisi. The storm inflicted significant coastal damage in Kobuleti and



Batumi, where a 55-year old fisher died and several people were slightly injured.

Archil Khabadze, chairman of the Adjarian autonomous republic informed that the total damage in Adjara caused by the storm is estimated at 3 million GEL.

"The government of Georgia will pay [for the losses] of the disaster-affected people," the head of the HQ, Minister of Energy Kakhav Kaladze told journalists. As he explained, the



money will be allocated from the PM's reserve fund. "We must roof buildings as soon as possible, as it is spring and rainy weather is expected. This process is already underway and I think the rehabilitation work will be completed in about a week," he added.

"All the local municipalities are provided with wood and other necessary construction materials," stated Magda Popiashvili, PR manager of the Ministry of Regional Develop-

ment and Infrastructure of Georgia.

The Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili along with the Minister of Finance Nodar Khaduri arrived in the central Georgian town of Gori and visited those areas most affected by the strong wind.

The Prime Minister stated that the government is fully mobilized to deal with the consequences of the disaster and can respond in a short notice

and start recovery work fast and effectively. Ivanishvili noted that the wind was actually not very large strong, and that the damage was mainly contributed to the poor quality of roof repairs that were carried out in recent years.

"The buildings, especially in Gori area, were built very quick-

said.

Nodar Jishkariani, Director of one of Oda construction firm did not deny responsibility, but explained that his company carried out roofing works on three high stories building in Gori a year ago based on state instructions. Jishkariani comments that the timber he was told to use was of very poor quality and that the buildings' old, but rather high quality roofs were replaced with flimsy tin sheeting. According to the official information, the damage inflicted to Gori exceeds one million GEL.

The disaster that hit Georgia also damaged 20 public schools in Ozurgeti, Rustavi, Kaspi, Gori, Tbilisi, Kobuleti and Shuakhevi. The Ministry of Education and Science informs that most of the schools' roofs were blown off and windowsills were shattered.

"We will start recovery work immediately. At first we will re-roof schools to protect buildings from rain and reinstall broken windows," announced Giorgi Marhvelashvili, Minister of Education and Science of Georgia. As he stated, the learning process at the effected schools will not be interrupted.

According to The National Environmental Agency, unstable weather will continue throughout Georgia until the end of March.

# Lady Farmer's Courage Promises Better Future for Rural Georgian Region

By Nino Kalandarishvili, GT

The village of Shkmeri, located in the upper reaches of Georgia's northern Racha region, is difficult to reach even in spring, as it is still covered with the winter's deep snow. I went there to visit Makhvala Gagnidze, one of our project beneficiaries, a female farmer who serves as a role model for others in the village. Shkmeri is 22 km from the Oni municipality, and aside from the snow, the road itself is in really bad shape. While finding the way to her farm my driver and I got stuck in the snow, and found it difficult to even walk the rest of the way, let alone try and free up the car. The condition of the road makes not only travel but getting additional feed to Makhvala's farm difficult.

Like many villages in Georgia, Shkmeri has its share of social problems. There is no school because there are not enough students, most of the families have left and more are still moving to



Makhvala Gagnidze, far right, walks with local villagers in Racha

the city for employment opportunities. Previously there were 400 families in the village but only 100 now remain, and in winter time only 32 stay; the rest move to the city. Much of this exodus is related to the absence of school, but this pattern is found in many rural communities throughout Georgia.

Fourteen families have recently been forced to leave Shkmeri in order to provide their children with an education. Dali, one of Makhvala's neighbours, explains how hard it is for young people to stay in the village, as they can't find a job. They sit at home watching TV, and out of boredom turn to alcohol. "Ma-

khvala deserves many plaudits for her work in trying to bring a positive dimension to this dying village and improve local living conditions. She motivates us to find a better life. We are inspired to be active and believe in ourselves. It is unfortunate that most people in our village are dependent on government social assistance. Such people don't wish to be more active but Makhvala has destroyed such an illusion in the minds of many women. 'We are responsible for ourselves' - she reminds us these wise words all the time, she is a perfect example of a determined woman who passed through the hard time and in the end she

achieved her goals. Moreover, she created a chain of positive change in every woman's mind in our village," Dali says.

Makhvala tries to motivate people to remain in their homes and keep their families in the village. For this reason she has established a commercial farm and is raising cattle, which produce various dairy products. The village has huge cattle breeding potential but most residents can only see themselves seeking their fortunes in the cities and making their escape from such remote areas. Makhvala is seeking to revive the traditional activities that created the village and sustained it for centuries.

In 2008 Makhvala developed a business plan which was eventually funded. "I set up a small farm with 22 cows. It was difficult, and we had to seek cover when the Russians bombed our village, I was screaming out to the workers to take cover and stop working," she recalls.

Four years later Makhvala increased the number of her cattle by 90 head through lots of hard work. With huge unemployment in the region, she has begun to involve women in commercial agriculture by employing them on the farm, where their main duties

include milking cows and producing cheese and other dairy products. She plans to increase the number of workers in the summer. "Modern agriculture can't be developed without modern techniques and knowledge. The project "Rural Development in the Region of Racha-Lechkhumi" (RDRL) which is implemented by CARE International in the Caucasus and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has provided me with a tractor, a mowing machine and hay bailers. Now it's easier for me to process my 300 hectares of hay fields and improve my cattle feeding practice in all seasons" she says.

The farm produces 20 kg of cheese daily and sells it in Oni's bazaar market, which is only open on Thursdays. She complains that the market is too far from the village. For some farmers transportation costs more than they can make selling their products, and therefore Makhvala helps other women by taking their dairy products to the Oni market.

"In Racha people mostly make traditional cheeses such as "Imeruli" and "Sulguni". That's why I wanted to produce something new and exclusive. I was trained by the RDRL project to make artisan cheese. I experi-

mented with coriander and basil cheese, and with the help of the project, I introduced this new product at the Ambrolauri agricultural fair and Expo-Georgia in Tbilisi. There was huge interest in my cheese at both, and I completely sold out. Various customers asked me to work with them in future projects and I even received a call from someone wanting to export my cheese to Switzerland!" Makhvala says.

Makhvala hopes to open a milk collection and processing plant and employ additional people to improve the social conditions of people living in remote regions and prevent their depopulation. She is seeking to borrow money at reasonable rates to do this. "If I get a low interest loan I will be able to increase my cattle herd by 200. I will produce other dairy products besides cheese: cottage cheese, boiled butter and cream. My biggest dream is to see the Sachkhere road opened, as Imereti people will then be able to reach Racha through Shkmeri and my village will start functioning again. In the meantime, we just need to keep a strong faith and stay motivated, never give up and not run away in the hope of a better life somewhere far from home," she says.

## EDUCATION

# Georgian Public Education is Progressing but Private Counterpart seems to be far Ahead

By George Khukhunashvili, GT

Growing demand for foreign education makes pricey private K-12 schools more appealing, compared to the public sector. However, the recent reforms in educational system could raise the competition.

The educational system in Georgia is always a subject of intense scrutiny. Over the years, there have been numerous reforms and, arguably, the most prolific one was finalized in 2005 by the National Examinations Center. The center introduced national examinations, a SAT-like test, which became the only criterion for the admission to higher educational institutions. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) characterized the reform as "the new model that ensures selection of the best students for higher education and is based on the fair, transparent, standardized and meritocracy principles".

In 2005 the Georgian government decided to replace the old, Soviet-style system of entrance examinations with a new one and, naturally, public high schools had to make necessary adjustments in order to prepare students for these changes. During the last 8 years, the MoES has conducted numerous reforms in the system of K-12 education - experts distinguish two main areas: financial and academic.

In 2005 the Georgian Parliament passed legislation prohibiting the government from funding public high schools, instead, offering vouchers for every stu-



dent a voucher to enables them to study at their school of choice. Prior to the reform, the most popular and trendy schools were getting unfair financial advantage, but the *per capita* voucher system allows each institution to receive as much funding as necessary to sustain and provide quality education to its students. Simon Janashia, Director of the National Curriculum and Assessment Center at the MoES, argues that this approach helps to increase competition among public schools, since their financial welfare is directly proportional to the number of enrolled students.

The MoES's 2008 "Educational Reform in Georgia" document boasts the new academic curriculum. It outlines 5 new in-

stallments, which prioritize academic achievements, development of skills and attitude. Simply put - the reforms focus more on quality, rather than quantity. The most recent change in the national curriculum was an addition of the final examinations in every subject for the 12<sup>th</sup> graders and re-certification of teachers and directors of high schools. Naturally, these reforms cannot produce tangible results in the first couple of years. It will take several years to change the educational system and personnel, which were used to operating with obsolete methods left over from the Soviet times.

Consequently, the tendency is that more parents distrust public high schools and try to find the best fit for their children in the

private sector. According to the MoES, there are up to 200 registered private schools and 2,200 public schools. These numbers indicate that there is an intense competition among K-12 institutions and, unfortunately, public schools are the underdogs in the race against the diverse and well-funded private sector.

One of the finest representatives in Georgia's private education sector is GZAAT. The Guivy Zaldastanishvili American Academy was one of the first institutions to offer alternative ways of studying to Georgian students. Garry Crippin, the director of GZAAT, outlines that the biggest advantage of his school is the "curriculum and teaching methodology". The method of "Harkness Table" is famous for

discussion based classes around seminar table, which encourages students to think critically and be constantly involved in assigned tasks. According to Crippin, apart from the revolutionized methodology, GZAAT "offers students options in Advanced Placement courses and an outstanding record in university admissions for the US and Europe." Today, 130 GZAAT students are attending universities and colleges in the U.S. and many more in Europe and the UK.

One of the main reasons for the growing popularity of private schools is students' desires to continue an undergraduate education abroad and enroll in universities and colleges outside of Georgia. According to the "Facts about Georgia" published by the Center of International Education, in the past 6 years, the number of enrolled students in the U.S. has increased by 36% - in 2007 this number was 353, compared to 481 in 2012. The growing interest in obtaining a foreign education puts public schools in a tough spot, since most do not have enough resources to offer SAT preparation courses, AP courses, college counseling, interviews with university representatives and necessary facilities in order to attract these students. As a result, Georgian parents, who want to send their children abroad for higher education, do not tend to consider public schools as an option and, instead, concentrate on alternatives in the private sector.

However, the education market is constantly evolving and some think that an opportunity to continue studies

abroad is not the only determining factor in the race. With the numerous reforms in higher education, the quality is improving and Georgian universities become more appealing to students. Moreover, it is financially more acceptable for the vast majority of Georgians to study in local universities, rather than abroad. Crippin argues that private schools offer better and more versatile education and parents still find it worthy to pay high tuition fees, despite their children's preferences for the higher education. "GZAAT has a well established reputation in Georgia, and in 2010 it was rated by the MoES as the top school. Almost all of our teachers were trained in the US and have been with the school for many years. Our students, who have continued their education in Georgia, have been very successful at the university level."

Indeed, most of the GZAAT graduates have enrolled in schools like the Free University, Caucasus University, Georgian Institute for Public Affairs and Tbilisi State University, which are rated as the top 4 institutions in the country.

Some might think that it is a no-brainer to conclude that private education is more rewarding. Naturally, private high schools are more flexible and better-funded compared to their public school counterparts; however the crucial link is that the improvement process has started. The popularity of private sector is nothing but a great stimulus for public schools and one can hope that the underdogs can make a run for the title someday.

# Bombings: GRU Terrorist Plot or Sinister Ploy?

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY, GT

Over 8,000 prisoners, including hundreds of political prisoners, have been released under the amnesty granted by the Georgian government of PM Bidzina Ivanishvili since January 2013. But despite the large numbers of released, many whose cases need review remain behind bars. These include “conspirators” convicted for plotting acts of terrorism against national and foreign targets in Georgia during what appears to have been a black PR campaign against Abkhazia and its Russian backers conducted by the previous government in the post 2008 war period.

One such prisoner is Koba Matkava, a Georgian national arrested on April 3, 2011 for attempting to plant a bomb on a central boulevard in the western Georgian town of Zugdidi. Matkava confessed to police that he had been offered 3,000 USD to carry out this attack by Yevgeni Borisov, who the Georgian authorities of the time described as a Russian foreign military intelligence officer, a member of the Main Directorate, or GRU, based in Russian-occupied Abkhazia, one of Georgia’s two breakaway regions.

Between 2009 and 2011 Georgia experienced a spree of bombings and uncovered various bomb plots, including the attempted bombing of the Kho-bi-Ingiri Railway Bridge, the TV transmission tower and the US Embassy and even a foiled plot to bomb the NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi. The Georgian government was quick to lay the blame for each of these incidents on foreign intelligence services.

An American-based forum for intelligence news, Intel-News, had reported that a classified US intelligence report indicated that these bombings had been coordinated by the GRU and listed Borisov as the main culprit for the wave of bombings and terrorist acts. However those sitting in prison, and their families, have alternative stories to the official ones. Some parts of the previous government’s official story are not adding up, especially as they are reported in the West. It appears that in many instances the real story is that Georgian citizens have been killed and falsely imprisoned for the sake of political expediency and to continue portraying the Rus-



Koba Matkava, a resident of Gali region was charged with terrorism in 2011 and is currently serving a 10 year prison sentence in Tbilisi’s Gldani prison.

sian Federation as some evil empire for outside consumption.

## LARGER GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT PLOT

Matkava shared his cell with Giorgi Keburia, a businessman who was released on bail earlier this year after serving six months in pre-detention. In an interview with the Georgian Times following his release, Keburia claimed that Matkava was an innocent victim of a larger Georgian government plot, most likely intended for outside consumption.

According to Keburia Matkava was tricked into coming to Tbilisi from Georgia’s Gali region, which is within the

breakaway region of Abkhazia, and then detained and charged with terrorism. The so-called terrorist was then subjected to rushed and less than transparent court proceedings and sentenced to 30 years (later reduced to 10 under a plea bargain extracted under brutal torture and the threat of being raped or killed).

## MATKAVA’S ORDEAL

GT has been granted access to an interview Matkava gave to Keburia prior to his release. In this Matkava explains that his uncle, Eldar Kobalia, who also lived in the Gali district and had good contacts with the Russian joint staff representatives in Abkhazia, was detained

by the Georgian Special Forces after they had failed to arrest Matkava himself.

“I suspect that the Georgian side thought that after some time my uncle would appear and start negotiating with the investigation service representatives. But there was no sense in doing that; I even passed a message to my mother asking her not to let my uncle accept any offers for my release. I knew the Georgian side would trick him and both of us would certainly end up in Gldani prison”, said Matkava

As Matkava explained, Kobalia was just a poor village man who had not been outside Gali and Zugdidi in his life; he would only go to Zugdidi when he needed to buy something in the market. But as he knew Matkava well, “The Georgian Special Forces captured him in Zugdidi and made him contact me. His call was so strange that I thought at first he was drunk. Furthermore, he said the following: “Koba, take our package and cross the border, I’ll be waiting for you there.” I was shocked, and replied: “Which package?! And why do I have to cross the border?” After this Eldar called twice more, and I immediately guessed that he had been arrested,” Matkava explains.

Matkava was then taken to the Moduli Building of Ministry of Internal Affairs in Tbilisi and questioned by Data Akhalaia and Ioseb Topuridze. They advised him to confess to everything and to sign papers saying so, as there was no other way “that is your only salvation... otherwise, he would be found hanging in a cell, they told me,” says Matkava.

He added, “After being tor-

tured for two weeks I was given the opportunity to talk to Eldar Kobalia. He told me that he had been raped and tortured and that life was horrible. I was completely confused by Eldar’s story. In Gldani prison they forced me to confess because I had no other way to avoid being raped or killed; I agreed to sign, and confessed to everything.”

Matkava was taken to court and formally sentenced to 30 years. But after ending up in hospital due to severe beatings, his sentence was reduced to ten years, as part of a plea agreement brokered by visiting police.

“Later on, I received information that Eldar had died under torture inside the prison, and later I heard the same from my mother, who had heard about it in Gali. Kobalia’s lawyer, Lekso Arkania, met Koba’s family and told them the terrible story of how his client had died as a result of being tortured and raped with a police baton. His body was released to his relatives, Murtaz and Levan Kobalia, on condition that this story was never told; they were told they would be killed if they spoke about it.”

## ONGOING INVESTIGATION

These cases and others are now under investigation by GT, and contacts in the Zugdidi region are coming forward. Representatives of the EUMM have confirmed off the record that many of those convicted of terrorism may in fact be innocent, citing the case of Gogita Abuladze, which is now being reexamined by the Georgian Ministry of Justice.

Many so-called terrorist

cases in Zugdidi were never properly investigated, and torture was involved. GT is looking at several other dubious cases, which include but are not limited to those of terrorists sentenced to long terms: those of Mamuka (Nukri) Shonia; Mukhran Tskadaia, David Kekutia, Gocha Khurtsilava, etc.

As one source in the EUMM recently wrote to one of GT’s investigators, “most probably everything is faked and the Russian Borisov was mentioned just to blame Russia for these crimes”. The source noted that, “exactly one year ago a man, Gogita Abuladze, disappeared after meeting an agent of the Georgian Secret Police in Anaklia (a town on the coast near the Georgian-Abkhazian border). Several witnesses have confirmed this to me. I know this man’s parents, who live in Anaklia, very well. They are in a desperate state and believe that the Georgian secret services have probably killed him. He was also an alleged acquaintance of Borisov”.

The ongoing investigation by the Georgian Times is revealing that it is highly likely that the so-called acts of terrorism many men have been convicted for committing were actually plotted by the former Georgian government as part of a larger political game. It does appear that many of these acts were not the random actions of a few rogue and out of control elements in Georgian and foreign intelligence services, as suggested by the previous government, but part of a coordinated plot to undermine opposition of all kinds, including proactive efforts at conflict resolution.



# How to Reclaim your Curriculum

By KENDRA PARADIS, GT

Creating assessment for and as learning, as outlined last week, is about planning. Planning for classroom atmosphere as a place where students can be challenged, take risks, and learn the crucial steps to constructive criticism (feedback), self-evaluation, and modification based on those results to show improvement. The idea that assessment is a one shot deal is what discourages our students not only through the stress of such a situation but also by labeling them and not allowing them to ever move from that cast once it's been set. Assessment should never be solely a means of collecting statistical data on knowledge acquisition. The challenge for most teachers should not be how to get their students to prove a job-well-done in the testing milieu but how to use assessment effectively in spite of looming exams. So how does planning fit in?

Planning is less about coverage objectives and more about tactics, style, and atmosphere. Teachers are facilitators in the classroom- we don't "teach" we facilitate the discovery and mastery of information and skills into the brains and active lives of our students. Much like a hostess facilitates the discussion, eating and dancing of her guests at a party. You would



never tell your guests how to eat or who to talk to and about what, rather you provide the food, company, good atmosphere and encouragement for your friends to be able to have a good time successfully all by themselves. Who doesn't want that in their classroom?! However, in an ever more standardized and controlled educational atmosphere it is easier and easier to lose sight of that or to be unable to learn and achieve it in the first place. An excellent example of the plight of classroom teaching is Georgia's recent experience with foreign English teachers working alongside Georgians to improve teaching technique.

Barring cultural differences and the difficulties of the pro-

gram outside of the simple task of classroom teaching hours, TLG seemed to be making great strides in convincing local teachers of the importance of planning. Then, in an effort to improve the quality of ESL overall, they destroyed all the progress they had achieved. It's safe to say no one- as in not a living soul- would defend the quality of the variety of textbooks on the market prior to the Ministry's intervention. Furthermore it is- although not surprising- horrific to hear rumors of them being discarded after all the funding and man hours that went into making the program work. Never the less, the English World textbooks from MacMillan only exacerbated the problem regarding les-

son planning and use of new pedagogic techniques.

These books were made especially for the Ministry and were pedaled to teachers in that way, "everything we need is in the book; speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar. We just have to follow the book!" ...and learn it as fast as possible. Not only were students- and schools- unable to secure all the materials printed by MacMillan including flashcards and a number of small pamphlet-like books belonging to the student pack; teachers were not even using the teachers' manual on how to teach the lessons because first, they already know English and don't need to be told how to do it so they don't

need to be told how to teach it either and second, if they looked at the manual for the first lesson then all the following lessons followed the same structure so they could just repeat the same process with the new information.

So how do we turn the tables? How do we move from coverage of information in planning to planning for the learning, skills, and above all else the actions of our students? The answer is actually quite simple. Don't start your planning from your perspective. Start from the students' point of view. Not 'what do I need to teach' but 'what will they be able to learn and do?' To frame it another way, start with assessment. Now I know, "assessment is meant to prove the results of learning," how can it fit any place but the end?

In essence start from the end and work backwards through your plan. Backwards planning, as it's known, is a quick and simple way to plan entire learning units, a week of lessons, one lesson itself, or even just a small task within a lesson. By starting with a task that provides students an opportunity to demonstrate what they know and are able to do concerning a given concept we can ensure we give them everything they will need to achieve that particular task. The acronym GRASPS which stands for goal, role, audience, situation, product, and standards is an example of a tool which can help to move through the process of backwards planning.

First, provide a statement

of the task and establish the goal, problem, challenge, or obstacle in the task. Then, define the role of the students in the task. State the job of the students for the task. Also be sure to identify the target audience within the context of the scenario. Example audiences might include a client or committee. Next, set the context of the scenario. Explain the situation. Only after all that information is clear should you introduce the "assignment." Clarify what the students will create and why they will create it. Last, but most importantly, provide students with a clear picture of success. Identify specific standards for success. The easiest tool for this would be to issue rubrics to the students or develop them with the students.

With very minimal modifications the GRASPS model can be used for the planning of everyday learning and provide students and teachers with consistent and frequent assessment. As I discussed before- and this is paramount to the planning process- assessment is not merely the test at the end of a learning unit. Planning through the lens of your assessments nearly guarantees the higher success of your students. As educators we need to start matching our assessments with our expectations and start making them clear and attainable to students. That is how we can ensure that the pressures of standardization and the quest to quantify success will not inhibit our purpose in the classroom.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# More Dangerous Dead than Alive: Boris Berezovsky Unexpectedly Dies in London

Continued from p. 2

Mr. Fomichev works closely with Salford (indeed he works from the same London address) and put us in touch with Eugene Jaffe, Salford's CEO, who is also based in London. Mr. Jaffe has made certain representations to partners which formed part of a legal dispute. Salford, as many Georgian linked companies, was registered in the British Virgin Islands but was particularly active in Serbia. Salford has been involved in a scandal in Serbia concerning the Apatin Brewery, which is a matter of public record. Salford states that it manages a fund called the 'New World Value Fund'.

All this comes from open sources and is a matter of public record. Sheikh Sultan bin Khalifa al Nahyan was represented on the Advisory Board of the New World Value Fund. Salford had close business dealings with Berezovsky, who was the subject of an international arrest warrant in Russia; Berezovsky was reportedly under investigation by

the Swiss Attorney General for money laundering and being a member of a criminal organization.

The former attorney to Berezovsky is a man named Stephen Curtis, who owned the London-based legal firm Curtis & Co. This firm was employed by Salford to advice on various legal matters. Curtis was formerly a director of Salford. Following the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in Russia, Mr. Curtis was appointed the managing director of Yukos Oil Company. He had an office in Gibraltar. Mr. Curtis was subsequently killed in a helicopter crash in March 2004. It is reported in the press that, shortly before his death, Mr. Curtis was working with British intelligence, MI5 and MI6, in connection with illicit business dealings of Russian nationals in the UK.

Moreover, it is clear that there is much history between the late Georgian oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili and Berezovsky, their real and alleged links, and the coincidence of their deaths and MOs. The laundering of Rus-

sian money via Salford Investments is allegedly linked with Arabs, and even has a nexus with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project. The starting point of any investigation into all that has been claimed to be foul is Sheikh Sultan bin Khalifa al Nahyan, son of Abu Dhabi's crown prince.

The person who was alleged by closed sources to be the point man was Giorgi Bedineishvili, a Salford Director. He worked both in Georgia and the UK. These allegations, dating back to February 2004, have been discussed in detail with the Financial Monitoring Service of Georgia.

What is more revealing,

based on what is best described as 'local knowledge', is that the network of linkages clearly involved former Georgian PM Zurab Zhvania and his insight of what was going on both on the financial and political fronts. Moreover, there was a real link with Sistema, another financial operation which

wished to promote the concept of a free economic zone in Georgia and much networking went on with those who were in favor of such a project. The Prime Minister had his people posted to key positions in government, both in Tbilisi and in the regions. He was just one of a growing list of now deceased people who knew too much about what was actually transpiring in Georgia and the extent of foreign involvement, not only in financial but covert operations, especially during the two wars in neighboring Chechnya.

In short, many players were and continue to be, involved in such businesses; these involved a wide range of alleged mafia and criminal structures, as well as those serving the foreign policy aims of the Russian Federation and Western interests. It is necessary to collect more background in order to look into these issues in the proper light, and with the latest death in mind, and work out where to ask the right questions and really investigate.



# Carriage-Building Company aims to meet Growing Regional Demand

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

The new company is a successor to the JSC Railway Carriage-Building Factory, which had many years' experience of both passenger and freight carriage building. Few Georgians are aware that Georgia is home to one of the largest carriage building companies in the world, and the only one in the Caucasus. The Carriage-Building Company Ltd was established in 2005 and is located in Rustavi; it is located three km from the Georgian capital, Tbilisi.

The company is growing because of its innovation and technological sophistication, and has great potential for further development. Badri Tsilosani, the president of its successful parent company Georgian Carriage-Building Holding is a planning engineer, Doctor of Economic Science and a very interesting person. He gained his present position by his own hard labour and now manages a huge company together with his family. In this exclusive interview he tells us his story.

**Mr. Tsilosani, what can you tell us about your carriage building company?**

The company has been operating in one form or another for 130 years and is one of the oldest establishments located in the Caucasus. Our business is the repair and construction of new carriages - we manufacture electric carriages, passenger carriages, all types of freight wagons, wheels,



customers, but only 20-30% of our production goes to Georgia, most of it being for customers in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine and Russia. We have large orders from these countries and also have customers in Kazakhstan and Turk-

menistan and other post-Soviet countries. We repair old carriages and build new ones, produce mini-wagons, petroleum tanks, including wagons for grain transporta-

tion, containers and gas tanks. In the former Soviet Union, wagon building is found in only three countries: Russia, Ukraine and Georgia. We are licensed to build carriages and also have ISO certification. By the way, obtaining a carriage building license is a very complicated process in Georgia; such licenses are only

issued by the Centre of Railway Friendship, which supplies all post-Soviet countries as well as China, Bulgaria, Poland and the Baltic states. There are large countries which have the potential for wagon-building but are approximately 1,500 people. We have big orders from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, and I think if these go through, we will provide jobs for 1,000 more people. Our company contributes several million GEL to the state

budget each year. Next year, due to our increase in profits, we will double our budgetary contributions as well as create new jobs. I think that we can help improve the social situation of the country by creating additional workplaces for people.



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locomotive engines and repair locomotives, metro stations and metro engines. We also build new metro wagons. We once imported our materials from Russia, Ukraine and China, but now we have purchased a metallurgical plant where we will manufacture the casts for our wagons ourselves. Georgian Railways is one of our

still fighting to obtain a certificate. We also train staff in Russia and Europe, and try to recruit licensed employees, because to create a good product you need licensed people. Our company also has its own clinic and as part of our holding we have established a special school that trains future employees in metallurgy and wagon-building. This school has 300-400 students.

**How many wagons do you produce?**  
We can produce 2,000 new carriages per year. In addition, we repair 3,000 wagons a year which have been "written off" after 15 years of service. The demand for such wagons is great in Russia, Ukraine and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Two thousand new wagons generate an income of 180 million GEL, and our work brings in a total of 300 million GEL. Today we are working at 50-60% capacity, and this is a great indicator. The company employs

**What are your future plans?**  
We are planning to manufacture a new type of wagon. Technology has now evolved so much that we can produce 80-120 ton wagons. In the transportation of goods it is very important to place in a carriage as much cargo as possible, as this saves money. We do not want to lag behind, and by the end of this year we will be manufacturing such wagons. We are currently conducting market research to discover what the new production demands of customers are, where their damaged containers are going, etcetera. This requires a certain amount of money and investment.

**Do you have any competition in this region?**  
We have no competition in either Georgia or the Caucasus. Russia, Ukraine and other countries are very strong competitors, and there are also companies in other countries, such as Kazakhstan, which repair carriages, but in the production of new wagons we have almost no competition. The need for carriages is so great that 150,000 a year are not enough to satisfy the demand of CIS countries. There is a very large deficit, and the 10,000 wagons a year I will produce will not solve the deficit problem, but they will all be sold.

**Are you involved in charitable activities?**

Yes. We have renovated the Palace of Culture, which has existed since the 19th century and hosts cultural events, classes and clubs. 1,500 children study there. It has a big stage bigger than the one at the Marjanishvili Theatre, where famous Georgian ballerina Nino Ananiashvili danced when they closed the Opera Theatre. The famous Georgian ensemble Erisioni also rehearses here. My wife is engaged in charitable work and I help her. Recently, we and the Iavnana Foundation bought a house for a poor family. We also help other charity funds. We spent 2 million dollars on the repair of the Palace of Culture. We also help build churches. I believe that the formula for success for a good businessman is honesty and dignity. Business gained by fraud or wrongdoing will necessarily crack somewhere along the line. Personally, I always choose the path of honesty.

I want wagon building in Georgia to develop and grow, so

Ukraine have established huge enterprises, which produce 20,000 wagons a year, at a cost of 120-150 million dollars. We need a medium-sized enterprise, where we will make 5,000 to 10,000 wagons a year, and therefore it will cost much less. I'm already negotiating with investors. I am also working with banks on obtaining long-term credit on low interest.

The cast components project is very interesting. To us it is beneficial because when we have such an enterprise we will be able to recycle our construction waste. With no metallurgical enterprise we have to throw away our waste. For example, if you sell the waste metal generated by a repair job, you get just 250 GEL, but if we turn this waste into new products by recycling it we can make a profit of 1,500-2,000 dollars. In general I will recycle waste and cast parts.

I want wagon building in Georgia to develop and grow, so



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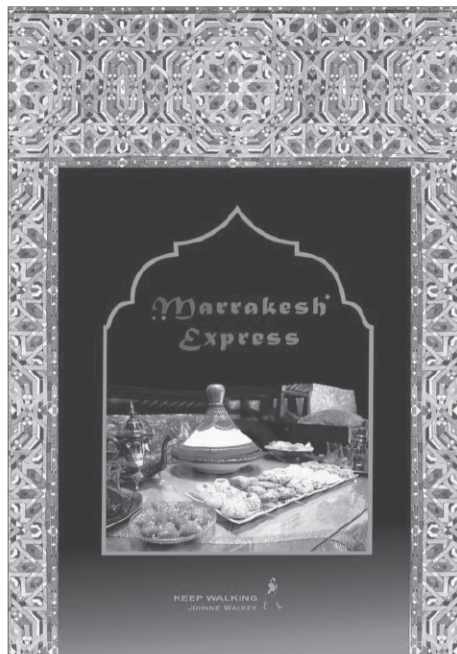
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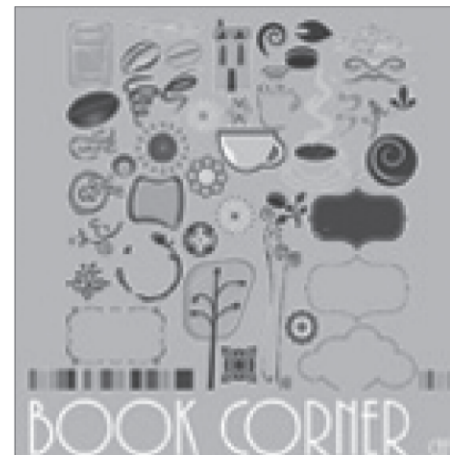
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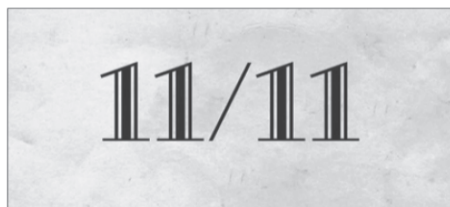
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## SOCAR'S MULTIFUNCTIONAL BUILDING WAS RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR



The world's leading architects have become interested in SOCAR's multifunctional building located on the Gori superhighway. This piece of art is to be shown to everybody! The world's leading countries granted the building the status of a best and most popular construction! SOCAR's multifunctional building was opened officially on November 28, 2011

Such multifunctional constructions are planned to be opened throughout all of Georgia. The project is implemented for the purpose of developing Georgia's main international highway.

SOCAR Georgia Petroleum completed construction works of the building in only 9 months which can be considered a record. The building was designed by famous German architect Yurgen Mayer, who is the author of other modern buildings in Georgia, among them the Queen Tamar airport Mestia and the Sarpi Customs Check Point at the Georgian-Turkish border.

The multifunctional complex covers 4,000 square meters of space, which includes a SOCAR's petrol station that fully complies with EU standards. The infrastructure is designed in a way to provide maximum comfort and convenience to customers.

Upwards of 100 people are employed in the complex, most of which are Gori residents. The multifunctional complex also hosts a Goodwill supermarket, fast food restaurants, a bank, tourism service centers, a children's corner, a pharmacy and an internet café.

Mr Mahir Mamedov, Director General of SOCAR Energy Georgia declared that the construction of the multifunctional complex cost 10 million USD.

"This is a unique building, in terms of design and high quality. Full comfort is provided to travelers and tourists can purchase Georgian souvenirs," says Mr. Mamedov.

Foreigners are very interested in SOCAR's multifunctional complex. The complex is often attended by representatives of international organizations accredited in Georgia, as well as foreign tourists.

The architectural webpage Architizer revealed the winners of the first annual competition "A+". The aim of the competition was to reveal the best modern architectural constructions in the world.

The competition was divided into 52 categories – starting with the best memorial construction and ending with the best multi-storied office building. The best buildings were revealed through two methods – jurors' decision and people's choice. Two hundred international architects competed in the jurors' choice.

"The best popular building" was chosen through people's choice in 100 different countries. Among the winners was the SOCAR's multifunctional complex in Gori. This building holds its own place among the most popular buildings of the world.

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