

The Georgian Times

NO 1 NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA THE GEORGIAN TIMES MEDIA HOLDING

No 9 (1500) Monday, April 15, 2013 Weekly Newspaper, International Edition - Published by "The Georgian TIMES" Media Holding Since 1993 www.geotimes.ge



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Looming August 2008 Georgian-Russian War Investigation Hangs over Saakashvili's Head

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

"Treachery" and "obsequious posturing towards Russia" – this is how President Mikhail Saakashvili's team has described the current authorities' decision to open an investigation into the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war. However nobody is buying the official story about the war, as proffered by Saakashvili and his minions, regardless of the massaged European report which shared the blame for starting the war between Georgia and the Russian Federation. Quite apart from the ledger of truth and innocence, many other issues are involved here, and as a result of any investigation some people may be held criminally responsible.

The change of the government in October 2012 immediately called into question Georgia's foreign policy orientation. Prior to last year's parliamentary elections the former leadership told voters that the then-opposition might return Georgia to the Soviet era, while the Georgian Dream itself assured its constituents that the country would remain committed to its pro-Western course. Since winning the election the new government has been accused of placating Russia on many occasions. Newly appointed Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani's call for the opening of an investigation into the run up to the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, and find out who was really responsible for stating it, has provoked further allegations from the United Nations movement.

The UNM has accused authorities of outright treason, and acting against the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and the country's best interests. This is despite the fact that the country's two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognised as independent states by the Russian Federation days after the cease fire, on the UNM government's watch, and some other countries followed suit, also on its watch. These moves, and the recognition of Kosovo by the West and the policy direction this implies have compromised Georgia's territorial integrity much more severely than any investigation could.

Davit Darchiashvili, a UNM MP, says that, "the authorities are dancing a performance for the benefit of Russia's President ... and if this government decides to concede the sovereignty of its own country, and does this based only on a desire to do what is pleasant sounding to ears of the Russian leadership by addressing the occupiers as peacekeepers, this might encourage wider recognition of the breakaway territories' independence. If this investigation is launched, so-

ciety will lose confidence in the government earlier than the Georgian Dream imagines," Darchiashvili stressed.

It is hard for some to imagine that Russians could ever be called peacekeepers, as it is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. "The only party which can be happy with this decision is The Kremlin. I do not want to think the new government's goal is to please Russia, but it seems so," David Darchiashvili told The Georgian Times.

Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani has reminded the opposition that Georgia, as a party to the Rome Statute, under which the International Criminal Court was established, is committed to investigating any allegations of forcible displacement of the Georgian population, attacks against Russian peacekeepers by Georgian troops, attacks directed against the civilian population by both Georgian and Russian armed forces, destruction of property, pillaging in ethnic Georgian villages in the aftermath of active hostilities and torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including war crimes.

Expressing the need for an investigation, Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that Georgia's Armed Forces being a war footing and "military activities being launched before Russian tanks crossed the



do their work".

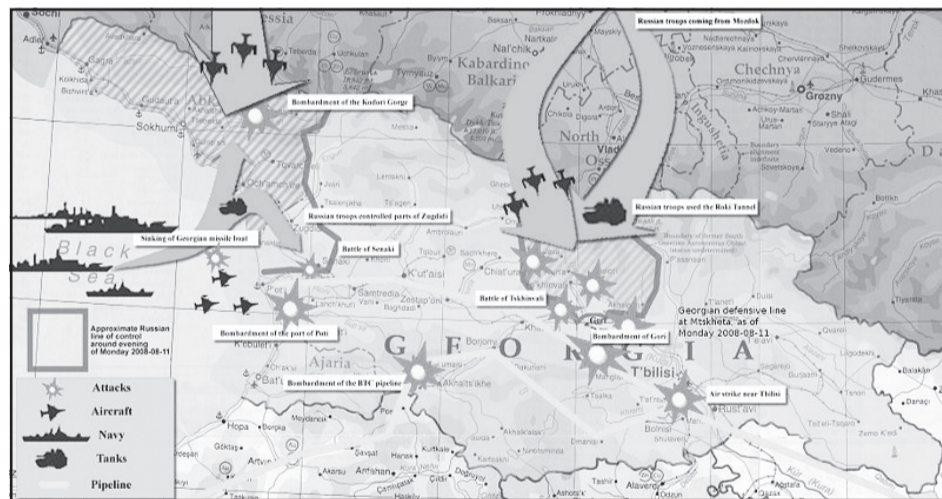
The PM quickly explained that he didn't mean that "Georgia was an aggressor and started the war". "Our army didn't cross the border of another country... it was the Russian Federation which violated the territorial border of a sovereign state and carried out aggression against our state," Ivanishvili stressed, adding that the "questions which society are interested in will not go unanswered."

Georgian officials did not deny or suggest there is any doubt over the subsequent occupation of Georgia's territories and Russia's overall aggression. Maia Pandjikidze, Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasised that exam-

plained that the tension between Moscow and Tbilisi had been caused by President Saakashvili, and it was his government which had broken diplomatic relations between the two neighbouring states. "As soon as Saakashvili hears Bidzina Ivanishvili saying anything positive about Russia he immediately makes a comment; I do not think, however, anyone in this world still listens to him. As for the new government, it was not us who brought it to power. We are satisfied that the government wants to pragmatically resolve the existing problems. I do not think that in the foreseeable future there will appear a political leader who will say, let's forget about Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but at the same time we must accept that in Russia there will not crop up any politician who will say, we were wrong," Lavrov told Russian television channel RTVI.

The special investigative commission to study the war will be established in the Georgian Prosecutor's Office. Chief Prosecutor Archil Kbilashvili says that the commission will question all the people who have any information about the five-day war. The Minister of Justice says that the President of Georgia could be amongst those questioned. Mikheil Saakashvili is refusing to cooperate with what he labels an "anti-state investigation", but the authorities have reminded him that this is not his decision to make and he will be interrogated "as many times as necessary".

Mutual accusations and attempts to justify statements and acts committed in the past or present keep raining down, though the changeable position of the government and aggressive tone of the opposition raise more questions regarding the level of need for the looming investigation. It will be interesting to see how the political landscape responds to findings which may disprove the currently accepted story, which may not only have an impact at home but prove a link with external actors, who may be also held accountable for having started the ill-fated war in the first place.



border" were not justified. "Nothing special had happened. A grenade had been launched at one of the houses and a wall had been damaged, nobody was killed. It would have been enough to take at most a hundred locals from the village and deploy them as armed forces," he is quoted as saying at a meeting with the editors of newspapers and Central TV Networks on April 10.

In response, President Mikheil Saakashvili stated during his visit to Poland that Ivanishvili is the first person after Russian government members and the President of Venezuela to accuse Georgia of starting the Russian-Georgian war. He alleged that "the goal of this investigation is to damage Georgia's statehood and help Georgia's enemies

Nevertheless, the opposition is standing firm in its accusation that "the initiative to set up an investigative commission is designed to strengthen Russia's version" of the events of the August war. Giorgi Gabashvili, one of the leaders of the parliamentary minority, says that "the actions of the new government are directed at pleasing Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov". Davit Darchiashvili added that: "Lavrov is Georgia's enemy, and if he says the country's politics is good then it's not". Satisfied with the Georgian government's decision, Lavrov expressed the country's readiness to expand trade, cultural, humanitarian and sports contact between the countries. He hailed Ivanishvili's pragmatism, and

ing the situation which pertained before and during the war is in Georgia's best interests, as people should know their history. Irakli Alasania, the Minister of Defence, is interested in investigating the specifically military aspects of the conflict. "I guess some people are concerned, as 8 billion GEL was being spent on defence and such massive sums were still not enough to protect Georgia... communications were not upgraded; there were no plans for evacuation of civilians, and the reserve troops were not trained. We need this investigation if we are to avoid making such mistakes in future," he noted.

Experts and government officials are both discussing the need to identify and learn from Geor-

The Georgian TIMES

1 English-Language Newspaper in Georgia

First published in 1993.

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

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The New Georgian Times Wants Your Feedback

The "New Georgian Times" English language newspaper is just over two months old and we would like to use this opportunity to start asking our readers what they actually think of the paper - no holds barred.

GT has been offering a wider variety of stories and analysis, ranging from breaking news to mundane things. We were the only newspaper to cover issues that are especially "sticky" and go places where others fear to tread. When a hot story unfolds, we don't just cover it as a news story - instead we buttress current events with analysis and provide historical depth that few in the country have access to or willingness or guts to publish, like interviews with former political prisoners and persecuted business leaders, as well as those still behind bars charged with terrorism, includes aspects of organized crime and subversive operations involving Chechens dating back years and far-reaching foreign policy implications.

The Georgian Times was the only newspaper to discuss the death of Boris Beresovskiy and his links to the Georgian banking sector and local companies. GT continues to track the current development of the country, bringing you stories about the new influx of immigrants to Georgia from places like Iran, Iraq, Egypt and elsewhere and to openly discuss what they are up to, as well as on the ground reportage of Indian farmers buying up the Georgian countryside.

In addition to agricultural and education issues, GT has been covering ongoing developments in Georgian-Russian relations, and is carefully charting how the political party system in Georgia may be developing back into a one party system with many UNM members looking for greener pastures in the camp of the Georgian Dream.

We hope this variety and approach of coverage has sparked and will maintain your interest, but your direct feedback is needed - as it is necessary for continued improvement and to better reflect the interests and changing needs of society as a whole and how international organizations work in Georgia.

Please send your letters to the editor at editorinchief@geotimes.ge

I am

Sincerely yours,
Ian F. Carver



FITCH AFFIRMS GEORGIA'S JSC PARTNERSHIP FUND AT 'BB-'; OUTLOOK STABLE

Fitch Ratings-London/Moscow-28 March 2013: Fitch Ratings has affirmed Georgia's JSC Partnership Fund's (PF) Long-term foreign and local currency rating at 'BB-' and Short-term foreign currency rating at 'B'. The Outlooks on the Long-term ratings are Stable.

KEY RATING DRIVERS

The affirmation reflects the equalisation of PF's ratings with those of Georgia ('BB-/Stable/B'). Fitch used its public sector entities methodology and applied a top-down approach in its analysis of PF. Georgia's government ability and intent to support the fund's potential issued or guaranteed debt remains key factor determining rating equalisation with the sovereign.

PF is 100% owned by the Georgian state. The fund manages key infrastructure corporations on behalf of the government. The state increased the fund's stakes in strategic assets in 2012 and PF currently has 100% of Georgian Railway ('BB-/Stable'), 100% of JSC Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation (GOGC, 'BB-/Stable'), 100% of JSC Georgian State Electrosystem, and 100% of JSC Electricity System Commercial Operator among other assets.

PF's mandate is to shape and develop private equity investments in viable economic projects. The private equity market is currently undeveloped

in Georgia, limiting country's growth potential. PF targets profitable projects in several key areas - agriculture, manufacturing, real estate and energy. PF's operational track record is relatively short. The



fund launched several investment projects in 2012. As of March 2013, none have been completed in the current year.

Following the 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia, the new government decided to review its strategy for the future development of the fund. Once materialised, any changes in PF's structure or status strengthening its links with the state will support Fitch's view in equalising the ratings with that of Georgia. On the contrary, any decision to dispose material stakes in state-owned infrastructure companies, or changes in the goals of the fund is viewed rating negative by Fitch.

The fund's supervisory board is chaired by the Georgian prime minister and composed of five leading cabinet members and four independent directors. Blending corporate structure with strong state control

should, in Fitch's view, ensure the fund's accountability to Georgia's government, and hence its adherence to mandated policy objectives, as well as adding investment expertise.

The debt of PF is low and limited to an open credit line (USD5m) and a loan from its subsidiary (USD50m) - GOGC. PF had taken the loan to make an advance payment for Gardabani Power Plant project in 2012. PF considers an exchange of debt to equity with GOGC in 2013, which will effectively reduce the fund's debt liability. PF has no plans to issue own debt.

RATING SENSITIVITIES
A sovereign upgrade would be positive. An upgrade of Georgia, coupled with continued support from the state, would be rating positive, as PF is credit linked to the sovereign.

Weaker links with the state or its downgrade would be negative. A downgrade of the sovereign or changes that would lead to dilution or reassessment of state support could exert downward pressure on the rating.

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Additional information is available on www.fitchratings.com



Applicable criteria, 'Tax-Supported Rating Criteria' dated 14 August 2012 and 'Rating of Public Sector Entities - Outside the United States' dated 4 March 2013 are available at www.fitchratings.com.

Tax-Supported Rating Criteria http://www.fitchratings.com/creditedesk/reports/report_frame.cfm?rpt_id=686015
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Applicable Criteria and Related Research

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DRIVERS CAN NOW USE SOCAR ENERGY CARDS AT ITS GROWING LINE OF NATURAL GAS STATIONS

Various kinds of promotional cards exit to collect points throughout the world. The priority of such cards is based on the need to afford customers the possibility for higher savings and better terms. In the autumn of 2011, SOCAR first offered its customers an energy card and today tens of thousands of drivers are using this card on a regular basis.

SOCAR's Energy Card is issued free-of-charge to customers. When a customer purchases petrol with cash, a portion of the amount spent is refunded as points to his/her card. Customers are then able to pay taxes for public utilities, cover cell phone costs, or simply exchange the points for petrol coupons. The amount of money paid for the cell phone calls, taxes and public utilities using SOCAR's Energy Card point system amounts to 3 million GEL thus far, while the total volume of petrol that customers have received in the form of redeemed bonuses has totaled 400,000 liters.

From April, 2013 the Energy Card can be used at SOCAR natural gas stations as well. There are already 4 high-class SOCAR gas stations functioning in Tbilisi. Two of them are multipurpose, where customers can purchase five different types of petrol in addition to natural gas. The number of SOCAR gas stations will soon increase to 20 throughout Georgia.

SOCAR's petrol stations, equipped with Argentine brand Galileo's last generation's gas-compression equipment, provide a speedy, safe and convenient service for auto drivers. The facilities' high tech air compressors do not need to be housed in a building, as it is placed inside a small container equipped with state-of-the-art fire preventive equipment conforming to the latest international safety standards.

SOCAR is the best choice for those who seek high quality service and a comfortable fueling experience. The number of customers using SOCAR's Energy Card increases with each passing day.

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Kakha Kaladze: Georgia has all the resources to become an energy exporter

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

Kakha Kaladze, the former Dynamo Kiev and A.C. Milan footballer who is now the Georgian Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and First Deputy Prime Minister, has granted GT an interview. Despite his youth and inexperience in the field, Kaladze is an up and coming politician. On May 31 he will bid his farewell to football in a special match, but according to rumours he may announce before then that he is a candidate for the presidency. However, he tells us that he remains very interested in the energy sector and does not intend to leave his present post any time soon.

Minister, what problems have you found in the country's energy sector since being appointed?

As for the energy system itself, I have always said, and want to repeat here, that many important and good projects have been undertaken in this sphere. However, many problems exist and we are currently working on them. The most pressing issue is that the country has almost never had a long-term energy strategy. It is necessary to determine priorities for the future, and in a month we will present a concrete sustainability action plan. A presentation will be held and our future plans will be fully transparent.

The previous government boasted that it had provided the whole country with a constant supply of electricity. Do you think this is true?

It is the fact that during the government of former President Eduard Shevardnadze the electric power produced here was not used by the Georgian population. Almost all Georgia's electric energy was sold to other countries. Thus, the achievement of Saakashvili's government was to re-divert most of the electric energy produced locally for the local population's use.

What are the differences between your priorities and direction and those of the previous government?

Our top priority is the construction of new hydro-electric power stations which will strengthen the country's energy generating capacity. When we have these it will no longer be necessary to depend on electricity imported from Russia for much of our supply. But ultimately we want to produce additional electric energy in order to become a net energy exporter. It will be very profitable for the country's economy to sell electric energy to other countries. The new hydroelectric stations will be constructed in accordance with all standards of environmental protection, while the previous government did not take these into consideration.

What is the role of foreign investors in new energy projects?

Energy production is one of the most important spheres for Georgia, and has also always been extremely interesting for investors. The majority of all investment in Georgia is connected with the energy system, and if I am not mistaken 80 percent of foreign investment has been made in this area. We will try to utilise all of Georgia's resources, and this means we must intensively develop the energy sector. Our main aim is that in the

near future Georgia will become an energy-independent and energy-exporting country. One of the largest companies in the world, Tata Group, is interested in investing in Georgia. After several weeks it will complete negotiations with the Norwegian company Clean Energy, with whom it will launch a new project - the construction of four hydroelectric stations on the rivers in Adjara. This projects will cost approximately \$600-700 million. Yesterday I signed an investment project with Anadolu - a Turkish company which will build a hydroelectric power station with the capacity of 85 megawatts. When the Prime Minister was in Davos, Switzerland, he met potential investors at a business forum. Some of these then promised to invest in Georgia. Representatives of the Tata group have visited Georgia and become acquainted with the country's energy resources. I am constantly having meetings and negotiations with foreigners. Only today, for instance, I met with representatives of the largest energy companies in Russia, who are especially interested in investing in Georgia. Americans are also included in our list of potential investors, and some are already implementing projects, such as the Daryali Gyroelectric station. But a very strong interest has been demonstrated by India, which wants to participate in the construction of the Hydron hydroelectric station. Representatives of the State Bank of India have visited Georgia in this connection and we are now considering their offer.

Which countries' investments are most acceptable to you? Whose projects do you prefer?

All interesting suggestions are considered, as no one country is



a priority for us. The most important thing for us is to live up to the terms of the contracts we sign and fulfil all the terms and conditions for the completion of various projects.

What about the projects initiated by the previous government? Have you cancelled these?

There are projects initiated by the previous government which will continue despite various problems. No project has been cancelled but some are bogged down, and some investors have complained to us about the previous government, which gave big concessions to some companies but imposed great restrictions on others. There were also cases where investors were excluded from a project because

it was not possible to complete it according to schedule. This selectivity negatively influenced foreign investors and the reputation of the country as a whole. Laws and regulations should be the same for everyone, and all the contracts signed with investors should have the same basic terms.

Are you going to introduce something new into the Georgian energy system?

Yes, in the near future we will build a wind farm, with a capacity of 20 megawatts. This will be pilot project. We want to test how such a system will work and how far it meets our expectations. Such projects are less expensive than many of the alternatives and this will positively

affect consumer energy bills. Our primary goal is the implementation of projects, which will both meet the needs of consumers and reduce tariffs.

There are unofficial rumours that the Prime Minister will present you as his coalition's candidate for President at the end of May. What can you tell us about this?

I don't know anything about this. We have not talked about this. Most importantly, I have no intention of running for President. My present work is very interesting and I still have a lot to do in the field of energy together with my team. So, let us wait for the decision of the Prime Minister, which I will learn when the public does.

EUMM will perform its Functions regardless of Political Changes in Georgia

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

For more than four years the European Union Monitoring Mission have been contributing to normalising the situation in the areas adjacent to the South Ossetian and Abkhazian Administrative Boundary Lines. EUMM was established after the five-day-war in August 2008; it has significantly enhanced the stability and security level in the country. Gerard A. Fischer, Deputy Head of EUMM in Georgia, told The Georgian Times about the obstacles the Mission faces and the tasks it implements.



How are staff members selected for EUMM assignments?

EU Member States contribute staff to our Mission, both women and men, from a variety of civilian, police and military backgrounds. Whenever a post is vacant, we advertise it to Member States through the Headquarters in Brussels. Member

States may then propose their own candidates for the post. The tour of duty for international staff depends on each and every Member State's policy with regard to staff contributions. On average, international staff members are usually entrusted to us for a maximum of two years. At the moment we have about

200 international observers in the field in Gori, Mtskheta and Zugdidi and 50 at our headquarters in Tbilisi. When it comes to national recruitment, openings are publically advertised. Each suitable candidate, whether international or national, undergoes a competence-based interview carried out by our senior man-

agement.

To whom do the members of the Mission report and how often?

The Mission reports on a weekly basis to the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), which is part of the European External Action Service (EEAS) located in Brussels. Our reports contribute to the European Union's policy-making and thus to the future EU engagement in the region.

What sorts of problems does EUMM usually observe?

We observe all kinds of issues on a daily basis, from occasional shooting and explosions to people being detained when crossing the Administrative Boundary Lines to attend a family member's funeral, collect firewood or retrieve missing cattle.

Our monitors patrol day and night to observe the overall situation on the ground and report on incidents, as well as on the observance of the ceasefire agreement. By our presence, we contribute to security, in particular in the areas adjacent to the South

Ossetian and Abkhazian Administrative Boundary Lines. As part of our tasks, we also gather timely information on a range of issues, including the needs and concerns of local communities.

Nowadays, we have observed an increase in the installation of fences along the Administrative Boundary Lines. We pay particular attention to this phenomenon, as it has a huge impact on people's everyday lives. In some instances, it prevents people-to-people contacts and hampers agricultural work or the collection of pensions, which are often people's only sources of income.

We also observe human security issues and look into the possibility of 'fast-track' crossing for medical emergency or the cooperation amongst parties to establish water irrigation systems or other installations crucial to local communities' livelihood.

What are the main issues in which the members of EUMM are involved in?

Besides providing objective information to our Member States through EEAS in Brussels,

EUMM's mandate is mainly to normalise and stabilise the situation on the ground. This is why we monitor the impact of the conflict on people's everyday lives, with a particular focus on freedom of movement.

It is also our role to contribute to confidence-building activities amongst the parties of the conflict. Together with the OSCE we facilitate monthly Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings bringing together all parties. At these meetings, we encourage constructive responses to problematic issues.

On an everyday basis, we encourage direct interaction between security actors on either side of the Administrative Boundary Lines. Through our 24-hour Hotline all parties can address and clarify issues. Over the years the Hotline has proved particularly efficient in identifying urgent problematic situations and preventing escalations of emerging tensions.

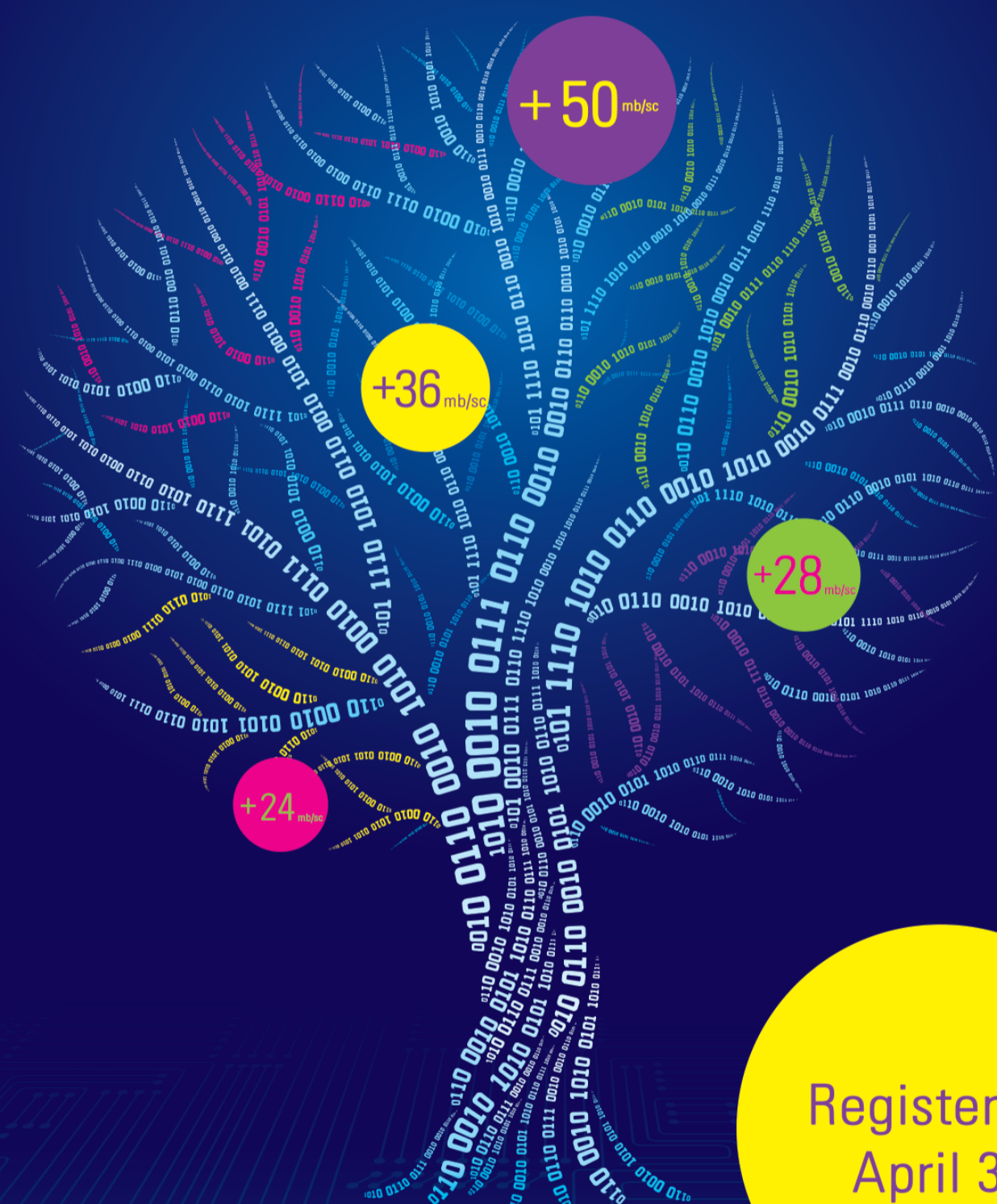
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Mikheil Saakashvili Working Visit to Turkey

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili paid an official visit to Turkey last week. During his working tour he met with the Turkish Prime Minister – Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his Turkish counterpart – Abdullah Gül and ethnic Georgians living in the northern industrial city Bursa. The leaders of two countries talked about bilateral ties and regional as well as international issues.

Mikheil Saakashvili's first meeting was held with the Prime Minister Erdoğan, who welcomed the Georgian President at Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Palace. During the face-to-face meeting, the sides discussed bilateral relations and perspectives of how to enhance existing cooperation between the two countries.

After the meeting with the prime minister, Saakashvili said they discussed the issue of Rabati Castle, along with other important topics.

"First of all we spoke about the issue of NATO integration, and Turkey promised to help us in this direction," he commented at a joint press-conference held after the meeting, "Our main guide to NATO integration is Turkey."



The two sides also discussed the economy.

Commenting on the reconstruction of Rabati castle, a hot topic during the last couple of weeks, Saakashvili said that the Turkish prime minister assured him that there weren't any categorical demands about the castle.

"The prime minister agreed with me that the dome should remain gold. All the other issues should be discussed in detail together with specialists not to harm the interests of any party," Saakashvili explained.

The President of Georgia stated that he had agreed with the Turkish prime minister that Georgian specialists will be al-

lowed onto Turkish land to study Georgian heritage sites there, which is important, he said, because this cultural heritage needs to be saved.

"Let them leave Rabati dome alone. We need to conduct a respectful policy regarding foreign affairs," he added.

During the visit, Saakashvili also met with ethnic Georgians living in the northwestern province of Bursa, home to many Turkey's ethnic Georgians. Locals gathered to meet with the president. They handed over a letter to him, which describes in detail the resettlement of Georgians from the village of Machakhela, Adjara region of Georgia, in 1887.

The letter states that they are citizens of the Turkish Republic, but they want close ties with their homeland. Mikheil Saakashvili promised everyone, who has preserved their Georgian language and culture, that they would be granted the status of Georgian citizens. He granted Basri Ildirim and his wife Makbule Ildirim with Georgian citizenship.

"Georgia will accept all citizenship applications from Georgians living in Turkey and they will be provided dual citizenship. You are a bridge between the two states that is of great importance to boosting bilateral ties," Saakashvili told to the Bursa citizens.

As part of his trip to Bursa, President Saakashvili also attended a meeting of the Ynegöl Caucasus Folklore and Culture Foundation and met with Turks of Georgian origin there. During the meeting, Saakashvili said that the foundation is important in keeping Georgian culture and traditions alive.

Saakashvili was to have met with his Turkish counterpart and leave Turkey on the second day, but postponed his plans due to an injury he sustained to his shoulder while riding a bicycle.

According to a statement released by the Georgian presidential administration, Saakashvili crashed into a trailer in Antalya during his daily bicycle ex-

ercise. He was taken to the American hospital in Istanbul where he was operated on and the triple fracture he received on his arm was fixed with metal plates that came with 40 stitches. Based on the latest news posted on the President's Facebook page, Saakashvili will need more than a month to recover.

Despite having a broken arm, Saakashvili continued his tour of Turkey the next day and met his Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gül.

The Georgian President's administration said in a press release that the presidents discussed relations between the two states and future cooperation. It was noted at the meeting that Turkey is Georgia's strategic partner and fully supports Georgia's integration with NATO.

The leaders of the two states talked about important projects carried out jointly by Turkey and Georgia.

During his visit the President of Georgia awarded a Turkish businessman – the President of *Nurol Holding*, Nurettin Carmikli, with the Presidential Order of Excellence. Nurol Holding is one of the largest companies to invest in Georgia's port city of Batumi, located near the Turkish border.

After Turkey, the Georgian leader continued his working trip to Poland.

Georgia's Borjomi Mineral Water Wins Russia's Approval

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

Moscow has finally agreed to begin re-importing Georgia's Borjomi mineral water after nearly seven years of sanctions. Borjomi is the third Georgian company to win the approval of the Russian consumer rights organization following months of testing and paperwork.

Relations between the two countries, shattered by the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, have improved since Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia's wealthiest businessman, came to power as Prime Minister in October 2012. Regaining access to the Russian market was one of Ivanishvili's pre-election promises. The less aggressive and confrontational rhet-

oric coming from the Georgian government since his election has soothed the Kremlin and brought both parties to the negotiating table, first in Geneva and then in Moscow earlier this year.

Six members of Rospotrebnadzor, Russia's consumer rights organization arrived in Georgia on February 25 to conduct tests. All in all, 41 wine and mineral water companies were inspected in the capital Tbilisi and in the eastern wine growing regions of Kakheti and Kartli. A follow up inspection took place on April 2, covering wine factories and wineries located in the western part of the country.

Several days ago Georgia's Minister of Agriculture Davit Kirvalidze said that there were about 80 wine and four mineral water companies, which

wanted to export their products to Russia and, according to preliminary indications, permission to enter the Russian market would be granted to 60 of them. To date, however, only three companies have been declared eligible to export their products to Russia: two wine companies (Kindzmarauli Marani and Dugladze's Wine House) and now the mineral water producer Borjomi.

According to Russian Chief Sanitary Inspector Genady Onishenko, there had been some problems with Borjomi mineral water. "They sent us one consignment but we rejected its registration," he said. However, a repeat inspection has produced a positive result, and in the near future, Borjomi will receive confirmation that it can regis-




ter with the authorities as an exporter.

Borjomi told the Georgian Times that no official approval notice from Rospotrebnadzor has yet been received. "We've heard the news on the TV and are waiting for official approval. Until then we can't comment on when exports will begin or how big the first consignment to Russia will be," the company's PR service stressed.

Borjomi exports its products to more than 35 countries. Russia imposed a ban on its products, along with Georgian wine and other agricultural products, in 2006 due to "poor quality", depriving Georgia of its largest buyer.

Russian analysts predict the once popular mineral water will face an uphill struggle as during the last seven years it has lost the confidence of Russian consumers. It was re-

placed by cheaper products from other foreign manufacturers and will have to compete in a higher price bracket. The head of Rospotrebnadzor also doesn't believe that Georgian mineral water and wine can regain the niche they occupied before the ban. This notwithstanding, Georgians are optimistic about the long-awaited return of Borjomi and other products to Russia's store-shelves.

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How to improve your business...

Having someone point out exactly what you are doing wrong and what they think you can be doing better, is never easy to take. Business advisory services are all about building a relationship with a company based on trust and mutual understanding, to the point that an otherwise complete stranger, the consultant, will not be afraid to tell you directly the truth however painful.

The success story of a metal production company based near Tbilisi is a clear illustration that even though this process is challenging, correct management, combined with hard work and a willingness to listen, will always pay off. Thanks to the Business Advisory Services (BAS), a programme offered by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and funded by the European Union through its Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Flagship Initiative for the Eastern Partnership countries, the company has obtained a quality certificate and increased its production efficiency, tripling its sales within few years. A journalist of the EU Neighbourhood Info Centre visited the company to find out more.

Text by Maia Edilashvili
Pictures by AFP©EU/Neighborhood Info Centre

TBLISI - "We've started to feel more motivated. And now that we are better organized, our workload doesn't seem so heavy anymore..." says Vakhtang Vakhsishvili, a 24-year old shop steward at the metal production company Monoliti, commenting on the changes introduced by the company in its effort to obtain a quality certificate.

"In the past, the production of one ton of metal would take two hours, now this has been cut down to 45 minutes," explains Gocha Tsulukidze, Director of Monoliti, adding: "A new organisational model has been introduced; last year's sales tripled compared to 2010."

Monoliti has been on the market since 2007. It imports raw materials and sells the end products - rebar, welded wire mesh, bends and hooks, wire rod, gold wire - to a Georgian company, a wholesale distributor of building materials. In Georgia, most construction companies use homemade reinforcements with no certificate of origin. "We purchased a new machine by the end of 2010, but despite the up-

grading of the equipment, we still needed to change something in the organization of our work. We also started reflecting on how to introduce the certificates of origin, because foreign clients were asking for them," recalls Tsulukidze.

While searching for information on the internet, Monoliti's management came across what turned out to be excellent opportunity: the BAS programme, or Business Advisory Services, an EU funded programme developed by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

ALMOST 700 SMALL PROJECTS STARTED IN GEORGIA

Between 2004 and 2007, Georgia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) saw an annual average growth of 10.5%. This figure fell back to just above 2% in 2008 and following negative growth in 2009, the economy bounced back and grew by 7% in 2011, following more or less the international trends. Georgian economy is thus already connected to the international mar-

ket. However, like many other post Soviet countries, Georgia has yet to grow into a full-fledged market economy, with what is commonly seen as the backbone of an economy - strong Micro, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (MSMEs). In fact, the share of small and medium sized businesses to GDP stands at a modest 15%, compared to some 60% in EU Member States.

Launched in 1995, the BAS service assists Micro, Small and Medium size Enterprises in a wide range of areas including market analysis and planning, partner search, reorganisation, computerized manufacturing and production systems, energy efficiency and environment, as well as quality management and certification. Currently, BAS is supporting around 600 projects in 25 countries in Southeastern Europe, Russia, Mongolia, Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and the South East Mediterranean (SEMED) region.

But how does the programme work? Local consulting companies go through a qualification process in order to join the BAS database. When an enterprise



applies for assistance, the BAS team helps it find the most appropriate consulting company from their database, which then assists the firm in identifying its business needs and providing the required recommendations. The cost of the service is covered jointly by BAS and the beneficiary.

Severian Gvinepadze, the BAS Georgia National Programme Manager, says that BAS offers a flexible grant, ranging between 25 and 70% of total cost, with a maximum amount of •10,000.

"Our goal is to create successful examples," he says, adding that companies in rural areas receive more funding than those based in the capital. Since 2003, BAS Georgia has received a total of •6 million in donor funding from the European Union, the Early Transition Countries (ETC) Fund, EBRD Shareholder Special Fund, Canada and Taipei China. In total, 698 projects were started in Georgia, engaging more than 180 consultants.

INCREASING COMPETITIVENESS

In the case of Monoliti, the project's cost was •12,300, half of it covered by BAS. Despite having new technological equipment, there were malfunctions in the production and sales area, and a need to improve personnel management practices. It

took around one year for the company to introduce the required recommendations, but in December 2012, Monoliti was able to obtain the ISO 9001-2008 quality certificate, the international reference for best practices in quality management.

"The advice from the consultants concerned the 'production culture' in general, starting from the workers' outfit and behavior, and ending with how to deal with the workforce," says Temur Dzidziguri, Quality Manager of Monoliti.

Thanks to the elimination of overlapping jobs and the introduction of a more structured approach, the company was able to increase production efficiency. The work was redistributed among the workers in a new way. The reduction of waste and the increase of product output have led to cost optimization. Products are now labeled with a special tag containing a short description. The company has become more competitive on the local market and more appealing to local and foreign construction companies.

BUILDING A 'CONSULTANCY CULTURE'

The secret to a successful advisory project is for the company to be open-minded. According to Jaap Sprey, Head of the Regional Programme for the South Caucasus and Turkey, the

beneficiary must be willing to take advice from consultants, especially given that the countries of the Southern Caucasus are only just starting to build a 'consultancy culture'.

"Businesses are not used to getting somebody from the outside having an opinion on what they should be doing. So building a relationship with the company is an essential part of the work," he says.

One year after the grant's payment, BAS staff evaluate the progress achieved by the beneficiary companies. According to the national statistical office, the turnover of Georgia's construction sector in 2011 nearly doubled to approximately •1.5 billion from around •800 million in 2010. With these positive dynamics in mind, Monoliti's owners have high expectations.

"A time will come when construction firms will be unable to work without holding quality certificates for building materials. So we have taken a big step forward," Tsulukidze said.

The Eastern Partnership
http://enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=506&id_type=2

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) completes the EU's foreign policy towards Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus countries as a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Launched in May 2009 at the Prague Summit, the EaP fosters the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Voucher Websites offer New Ways for Advertising

By GEORGE KHUKHUNASHVILI, GT

The growing interest in special daily deals from Georgian customers promises to establish a new advertising system on the Georgian market, which could help small and new businesses to draw necessary attention from buyers.

Success of a business in the 21st century depends heavily on its marketing and advertising. Nowadays, companies spend a lot of money and resources on creating ads and delivering them to customers. However, now there is a useful tool in Georgia that can solve both problems with one strike - vouchers websites.

The big boon of these websites is also very timely. The recent arrival of PayPal on the Georgian market allows consumers to spare their private financial information when making online purchases. As Georgia's Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Dimitry Kumsishvili announced on April 11, Georgians will now be able to safely buy products online in thousands of shops. PayPal could add extra security and push customers to buy from these websites without shredding

a doubt about the legitimacy of the website.

Today, there are around eight websites that offer special deals and discounts on a wide range of products. According to the Most Popular Providers in Georgia (top.ge), the most visited websites are www.swoop.ge, www.the.ge and www.hotsale.ge. On average, each website gets over 15 thousand hits a day, which means there are this many potential buyers searching for the best offers. What has triggered this interest from Georgian customers?

Versatility and simplicity are key factors for the growing popularity of voucher shopping. User friendly designs and endless offers persuade viewers to scroll down the pages with their minds set on clicking the "buy" buttons. There are two types of offers - services and goods. Services include discount coupons at food outlets, saloons, movies, theatres, entertainment centers, etc. As for the goods, they can range from electronic devices and holiday trips to dart boards and kitchen accessories. Based on research conducted by Ilia State University in December of 2012, 87% of respondents have heard about these websites and 78%



have bought a voucher at least once. This kind of activity encourages companies to come up with interesting deals and cut prices on their products in order to secure a good number of buyers. On the other hand, improved lists of offers lure more customers who are willing to spend money on vouchers - and the circle starts all over again.

What motivates companies to reduce prices of their goods and services?

Discounts ranging from 30% and sometimes reaching 90% may raise questions regarding profitability of such offers. Obviously, customers pay smaller prices and save quite a lot on every product, but what about

the providers? How much profit do they gain? According to the Iliauni Business Review, producers have reasons for using voucher websites. The research demonstrated that 60% of those companies that put up free vouchers on the web primarily want to advertise their businesses, and only 10% focus on selling their products.

In an interview with the Georgian Times, Tornike Gogisvanidze, the Manager of Corporate Relations at www.vovovo.ge, stated that "the most important service that we offer is a chance for new businesses to advertise their merchandise and stores to a vast audience," adding that "there are many companies that

gained popularity using our platform as a main source of their marketing strategies." These daily deal websites are perfect tools to generate a lead for the businesses involved and they look at these sites in the same way as other lead-generating media - TV, radio, or advertisement banners. With minimal expenditure, thousands of viewers learn about new companies and stores and their merchandise are displayed to customers for several days in a row.

The first website to offer discounted goods and services to the Georgian market was www.swoop.ge. It was opened in 2010 with the help of Liberty Bank and has been in the leading position ever since. However, Liberty Bank is not the only Georgian bank to find this type of service attractive for its product portfolio - Bank of Georgia has also jumped on the bandwagon with www.ideals.ge. Even though there is fierce competition on the market today, new websites are steadily emerging and, certainly, there is a demand for them.

Seventy percent of the companies that participated in the research conducted by Ilia State University use multiple voucher websites in order to increase the odds for success. This proves that online marketing has achieved

new heights in Georgia, which is profitable for all the parties involved. Gogisvanidze argues that these websites are essential for developing businesses, especially if they are relatively small. He says that "even well-known brands like Coca-Cola and McDonalds always try to come up with interesting offers and discounts in order to attract more customers. This practice is necessary for retaining and attracting new buyers."

Daily deals websites is a relatively new concept on the Georgian market, but it has been a big boon in the western countries for several years already. One of the most popular websites is www.groupon.com. Groupon operates in a very similar manner - they offer both services and goods yet the scale is certainly different. It was launched in November, 2008 and in less than 5 years Groupon already operates in 48 countries. The main difference between the Georgian websites and their US counterpart is outreach and accessibility. However, this is a luxury that comes with time and Georgian websites appear to be on the right track. One of the websites - www.vovovo.ge - is already expanding the range of their offers and now they boast food delivery systems and cash-back services.

April 9th - A Day of Unanimity, Dying we live forever!

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE, GT

Georgian politicians, public figures and ordinary citizens gathered in front of Tbilisi's former parliament building on April 9 to mark the day when approximately 20 peaceful protesters were massacred by Soviet soldiers 24 years ago. People lit candles and laid flowers to honor of the victims of the terrible tragedy which led to complete Georgian independence from the Soviet Union.

demanding full independence from the USSR. Although His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II warned the protesters about the imminent danger and appealed for them to leave the site, they didn't head his ominous warning of what might happen. On the night of April 9, troops garrisoned in Tbilisi were ordered to violently disperse the protesters using sharpened trenching spades, batons and poisonous gas.

The clash resulted in 21 deaths while hundreds of others were injured and poisoned. Two

Georgia was signed by the Supreme Council of Georgia headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who soon after became the first democratically-elected president of Georgia. Soon thereafter Georgia received international recognition as a sovereign state, free at last from the yolk of the Soviet Union.

The date is declared as the day of unanimity and those of all political opinions and walks of life pay tribute to the victims of the massacre. A public prayer was held at the site to remember the souls of those who perished.



Growing discontent with the Soviet system and longing for greater freedoms, in early April of 1989, brought thousands of Georgians in front of the former Parliament building on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi. They had

years later March 31, 1991 a referendum was held in which 98% of the Georgian population opted for full independence from the Soviet Union. On April 9, 1991 the Act of Restoration of Statehood Independence of

PM Bidzina Ivanishvili visited the memorial with his family and laid tulips at the memorial.

Various ministers were also on hand in honoring the dead. Irakli Alasania, Georgia's Minister of Defense, stated, "April 9 isn't

only a day when we remember the heroes who sacrificed themselves for the independence of Georgia; this day is also the symbol of unanimity. I wish that the Georgian nation will continue to be strong and without any such tragedies."

Representatives of the diplomatic missions also laid flowers, US Ambassador Richard Norland being among them. "This is a tragic day for the Georgian people. We all shall remember this day very well and we pay tribute to their memories," Norland stated.

A reception was held in the former parliament building to honor members of the Supreme Council who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1991. Both representatives of the majority government and various opposition factions were present.

"As you know twenty-two years ago Georgia's Declaration of Independence was signed in the session hall of the parliament during the period the Soviet regime. Such a decision was tantamount to heroism as the

Soviet Empire could have prevented the restoration of Georgian. Independence. We were ready to sacrifice our lives for the country and as demonstrated by the tragedy of April 9, 1989. I want to express my great respect for the members of the Supreme Council who signed the Declaration of Independence and pay tribute to the memory of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, chief creator and inspirer of this process. This historical event became the premise for the sovereignty of Georgia and we will all what it takes for the independence of our country and for not to be ever jeopardized," told the Georgian PM Bidzina Ivanishvili to the crowd on hand.

Davit Bakradze, the leader of the United National Movement, was among the speakers of the meeting. "In history of every nation there exists a day that changes the past, present and future of a nation, such a day for Georgia was April 9th. Georgians exercised their right to have an independent country and after

two years this moral right transformed into political and legal independence. Thus, this date can be regarded as a day of sorrow and at the same time a day of hope. I think that there isn't a more important date than April 9th - the day when people of different political viewpoints can be unanimous and stand together in order to serve their country," Bakradze stated.

"People of different viewpoints have gathered here in order to recognize that April 9th is the day of victory and restoration of the independence of Georgia. Although many people sacrificed themselves for that, we consider this day to be the date of victory which belongs to everyone - ethnic Georgians as well as ethnic minorities. Concerning this date, we should mention the great merit of the first president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Supreme Council," stated Tanel Phutkaradze, one of the members of the Supreme Council who stood up for Georgian Independence during that difficult period.

Free Textbooks for Georgian Pupils Spark Controversies

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE, GT

Textbooks will be provided free of charge for all public school pupils in Georgia in the 2013-2014 academic year. Giorgi Margvelashvili, Minister of Education and Science of Georgia (MoES), announced that free textbooks would be provided for the 650,000 pupils of Georgia's 2,084 public schools during a press conference at Public School number 145 in Tbilisi. The initiative has sparked controversy among publishing houses and textbook authors, who claim that reducing the publishing costs may harm their profits.

Until now students and their families have had to pay for the textbooks, with the full package schoolbooks costing between 100-160 GEL (65-100 USD). According to the press depart-

ment of the MoES, about 12 million GEL will be spent on printing the textbooks.

Many questions have arisen over the years concerning the quality of the Georgian books and what interests govern the process of identifying preferred publishers of approved textbooks. European and Georgian experts have questioned why they have been "dumbed down" and why references to the contribution made by other ethnic groups to Georgian history has been stripped out in certain instances.

Regardless of these issues, however, the Georgian Constitution requires that secondary education be free, and this principle should therefore be extended to books. Giorgi Margvelashvili said that the Ministry had been working on this issue for five months and different options had been considered.

The initiative has sparked

controversy among publishing houses and textbook authors, who claim that reducing the cost of producing the books may harm their publishing houses and prevent the textbook authors receiving appropriate royalties. This will be the first time in post-Soviet Georgia's history that free textbooks are supplied to all pupils: the previous government sometimes made book bags available, but the motivation for this was more political than educational.

"The MoES wants parents to have more disposable income so they can satisfy other pressing needs of their children," Margvelashvili stated. However, Tamar Lebanidze, head of the Diogene publishing house, said that "During the negotiations about the books we argued that the prices of the textbooks were too high but this wasn't taken into consideration. The Ministry simply ignored our knowledge and experience in the publishing field."

The publishers claim that the

Ministry got what it wanted by activating an article of the textbook approval rule which the publishers were forced to sign by the previous government in 2011. Under this the publishers gave the Ministry the right to administer the publishing of textbooks. The MoES can thus print the textbooks on its own, in the printing houses it chooses, bypassing the publishers and paying them only 10 percent of the circulation price, which is about 18-20 Tetri per textbook. There was a verbal agreement with former minister Dimitri Shashkin that the state wouldn't enforce this article provided the price of one textbook was less than 10 GEL, but that has now been overridden.

"We were forced to sign that agreement during the time of the previous government but the article wasn't brought up until now. We thought that under the new government the oppression of publishers would end, but the opposite has happened," Leban-

idze explained.

"That article was put there to control the price of the books. If it is enforced the publishers will have financial problems, i.e. they won't have enough resources to develop their business," former minister Shashkin has commented. However, many people working in education have made serious allegations of corruption against Shashkin, saying that a "textbook mafia" worked in close collaboration with the former Minister and his supporters to gain mutual profit from textbook production.

Giorgi Margvelashvili asserts that "everything will be carried out according to the law and the publishing houses will be paid more than enough for the textbooks. We have been working on lowering the cost of publishing books. Their quality is another issue we are still working on," he emphasized. However, Kakha Kudava, director of the Intelekti publishing house, stated that "Paying about 20 Tetri for each textbook is mocking intellectual property, and the publishers have plenty of the expenses to pay, including royalties, state taxes etc. "This intervention will bankrupt the publishing business," he states.

The MoES believes that the publishers have artificially inflated textbook prices and collaborated with the previous govern-

ment on various illegal schemes: "The cost of producing the books was nine times less than the retail price of the textbooks. The savings we are making are staggering: providing free textbooks for all pupils in Georgia will cost us 12 million GEL, while the previous government spent 10 million providing free textbooks for the children of socially vulnerable families only," The Minister stated.

The publishers have appealed to Giorgi Gakharia, Georgia's Business Ombudsman, stating that: "The desire of the state to reduce the prices of textbooks is good; however, this shouldn't be done at the expense of the rights of the publishers and authors of the books."

Publishing house representatives say they will continue their struggle to defend their rights. However, many issues are involved here. Are the present textbooks suitable, at a period when many libraries have closed in Georgia? Many educators and parents agree that the quality of textbooks was better during the Soviet period and what they have been required to use over the years were either poor translations or books which had been censored. Quality is thus an issue the Minister of Education needs to address as he strives to improve the level of education in Georgia.

Rising and Falling of Political Stars Define Georgian Politics

A Prognosis for Political Parties and Multi-Party Democracy in Georgia

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY, GT

For the first time in Georgia's political history there effectively is a two-party system. Previously politics has been monopolized by a single dominant party, such as the Citizen's Union or United National Movement, and before that the Communist Party. But what is a political party? In Georgia, who do they represent? Are they sustainable?

A possible definition of 'political party' is that it is a group of citizens organized for the purpose of attaining and exercising political power, principally through successfully contesting elections so as to form a government. Its principal functions are organization, information provision and ideology and policy promotion.

Theoretically there have been many political parties in Georgia over the last few years, including pseudo-opposition parties such as the Christian Democrats, introduced in a lame effort to show that there is a thriving opposition in what was essentially a one party state. However, the vast majority of these parties have no actual power and little popularity, and only by abandoning their own identities and coming together as the Georgian Dream coalition, under non-political figure Bidzina Ivanishvili, have some of them been able to defeat the United National Movement, UNM. Now these major two political parties dominate elections; authority is somehow shared out between them, and the Georgian Dream is, as yet, unable to dominate as the UNM once did because the court system is still greatly influenced by the UNM, which appointed the judges to their posts. New deals are also still being made between MPs keen to stay in power and compromise to do so, and the pattern of these alliances may define party structures and dynamics in the future.

In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Georgian Dream gained 55 percent of the votes, the United National Movement 40 percent, the Christian Democratic Union 2.05, Labor Party 1.24, etc. Other credible parties suffered from funding problems, since individual supporters are unable to support parties with small donations and supporter funding is largely an alien concept to Georgian voters anyway. But some experts

and members of the public have questioned the legitimacy of the 2012 parliamentary elections, claiming that many anti-UNM votes were stolen, as was the case in the 2008 elections. The previous government did its best to create "black PR" against the former opposition with the help of hired gun polling organizations funded by the National Democratic Institute, NDI, and the International Republican Institute, IRI, both of which are supported by the US Congress. The ruling UNM government also misused administrative resources at every opportunity, even hitting up some banks for donations. With all these resources at its disposal, the UNM did come close to stealing the election again while many, including international observers, turned a blind eye as ever.

Anyone who disagreed with the party line of Saakashvili's UNM and allegedly pro-Western and pro-NATO government was regularly labeled a Russian stooge, or worse, and some were even charged with being an enemy of the people or a spy. There are also many documented instances of the UNM using bribery and intimidation against people in the regions. Members of ethnic minorities in particular felt obligated to vote for the party in power, regardless of their own views and preferences. If they didn't, jobs were at stake, or family members could be arrested on trumped up charges.

But the sudden political changes in Georgia have brought some improvement in the political culture. Democracy is indeed on the march, although not necessarily in step. According to the New York Times, "In the meantime, the two leaders will have to find a way to coexist. But a divided government is healthy and just what Georgia needs." Both parties are struggling to gain more support, as neither can take the electors for granted any more, and consequently some good social programs, which meet the needs of voters, are being launched: increasing pensions, providing more medical insurance, etc. But the situation is very far from perfect as more needs to be done to find a way to pay for these initiatives without racking up expenses and then leaving the other side to foot the bill or take the unpopular decisions necessary to balance the books.

Change has also had some



negative effects: the decision-making process is still very inflexible, especially in the judiciary, and there is a lack of qualified staff at various levels of government. Georgian politics does not have the healthy checks and balances built into other systems, as so much power is vested in whoever is running the country at a given time – there is little parliamentary, public or judicial oversight of the government. There appears to be a degree of balance at present because the new government is exacting revenge, bringing known and possible criminals to justice and finding out where the money went. However, there is no more check on this government than there was on the last one, and the test will come when its supporters start arguing about what they should be allowed to do as a reward for their loyalty.

In countries which have developed two party systems the two major parties receive the overwhelming majority of the votes cast in an election, preventing smaller parties from ever gaining power unless the two big guns are so equal in popularity that they need the support of minor parties to form a government. A single party which gains a plurality may not need to listen to any other party, or its supporters, for the duration of its mandate. In multi-party systems no one party is big enough to rule alone, and therefore coalitions of parties form governments. In most cases, they also stand for election with the stated intention of working with certain other parties if elected. Georgia's new system has characteristics of both two party and multi-party systems, being similar in this respect to that of

Sweden, where elections are a contest between the Social Democratic Party and the 'coalition of the right', which is basically all the other significant parties put together. Both systems have advantages and disadvantages, and Georgia has yet to develop a pluralistic model in which it has chosen what disadvantages to accept for the sake of the advantages gained.

The greatest disadvantage of a two-party system is lack of choice. Very often people don't like either main party but would waste their vote by supporting a smaller one, and this depresses turnout and leaves electors feeling that those voted in were imposed upon them and do not represent their views or interests. Many electors feel they can only vote for the lesser of two evils, and in some countries they already know what the result will be because the real decision has been made elsewhere, the vote being a sham. Parties which can gain and exercise power without having to work with other parties can claim every conceivable lever of power, and this is not to the advantage of most people. This has always been the case in Georgia, and despite the fact the UNM lost the last election many of its current MPs would still not be in parliament if the elections had been totally free.

Georgia has come a long way from the Soviet-style one party system but still has a long way to go. All the time spent over the years on refining rhetoric about territorial integrity and blaming everyone else for Georgia's problems could have been better spent developing real political parties and a responsible electoral system. Some of the top rated TV shows

in Georgia are not soap operas, light entertainment or sports events but political talk shows, a strange phenomenon which shows how interested Georgians are in politics, but electors have little idea what any party or politician stands for, whether they be "left", "right" "centre", "moderate", "radical" or whatever. This is a grave indictment of Georgia's political system and the parties which are part of it. Individuals, rather than ideologies, dominate Georgian politics, and consequently political parties rarely outlive their leaders. Furthermore, the electors are aware that all the Georgian elections from President Shevardnadze onwards were rigged, but only in 2003 did the West choose to reject the official results, meaning Georgians cannot expect anyone to help them develop the democracy that all sides claim to want.

Georgian politics is a reincarnation of the notorious old Italian 'trasformismo' system, in which friends become enemies and enemies friends on the basis of favors and opportunism, regardless of whether their ideologies are compatible or not. It will be interesting to see how the two main blocs hold together now, as neither has a defining ideology, and whether the UNM will survive the demise of Mikheil Saakashvili. It is premature to suggest that Georgia will develop a viable multi-party system, with a greater degree of plurality and diversity, when Georgia's electors themselves do not know how their views can be described, and therefore do not have parties representing strands of opinion rather than individuals. In theory a multi-party system creates checks and balances through competition for sup-

port, but in practice parties often feel they have more to gain by destroying consensus than creating it, and Georgia has no history of political compromise or consensus, as the strongest bloc has always imposed and enjoyed absolute rule. Many social problems, ethnic tensions and economic differences between rich and poor have not been adequately addressed by any Georgian government, because doing this would create a class of newly empowered people who might topple it. Consequently there remains a big social and class divide between the core values of those who govern and those who are governed.

A report from 2004 on the 2003 Parliamentary and 2004 Presidential Elections stated that, "rather than a multi party system where political parties occupy contrasting positions on an ideological spectrum, Georgian party politics is an undeveloped and highly fluid mixture of competing [networks] of patronage, regional and economic groups" – all tainted with long-term rivalries. There are also issues around the funding of elections, which remains obscure. When all is said and done, Georgia's politics is not about the Georgian people expressing their views but the rising and falling of various political stars; these stars who are not ultimately put there by the people or removed by the people. Such a system cannot be called a democracy, but under a democracy Georgia's first post-independence government remains the legal one, whatever faults it may have had, and any talk about bringing democracy to Georgia will be no more than hot air unless acknowledged as its starting point.

Ongoing Russian Military Preparations aim to deter Western Intervention in Regional Affairs

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

With geopolitical events unfolding around the world (an unpredictable North Korea, the deteriorating situation in Syria, US intentions to tighten its embargo on Iran, etc.), Russia has been demonstrating a tendency of reinforcing its current military might. There are several concrete examples of such policy-implications that indicate politically “unhealthy” perceptions of the current Kremlin administration.

At the end of the March of 2013 the Russian Far Eastern Military District together with the Supreme Command of the Strategic Air Force conducted military drills involving TY-22M strategic airlift. The drills saw simulated air strikes against US military installations in Japan, including the state of the art air defense “IJIS” system as well as radio-electronic station for air defense system “X diapason”. It was the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union that the Russian military so openly practiced an attack on American defense installations.



The well-known and prominent Russian website www.vpk-news.ru published an article titled: *How to Arrange a Blitzkrieg of NATO where the author claimed how to efficiently defeat the alliance's joint forces and sap the alliance's political will to fight.*

In Early April 2013 based on the decree of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the country's Defense Minister and Head of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces were made full-fledged members of the Anti-Ter-

roristic National Committee, which is chaired by the Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB). The committee's main activities are focused on regional affairs of the North Caucasus with one of its key missions to monitor the situation in Georgia located just to the south of this region. In addition, the Russian Ministry of Defense has been elaborating a draft strategy on how to use tanks and other combat vehicles for urban (city) warfare, as if another war with Georgia broke out. This is

quite telling in term of the Russian military preparations toward Georgia. In tandem with this exercise, Russian forces recently moved advanced the Russian-Georgian border 200 meters into Georgian territory in the area of South Ossetia. This is not good sign and can be viewed as coercive measures by Russia.

Concurrently, well-known and highly-respected Russian political scientist Alexander Dugin made a special TV announcement where he predicts

a Russian strategic military campaign against NATO forces with the aim of occupying the Western European countries. Meantime newly appointed NATO Supreme Commander and Commander in Chief of US European Command General Philip Breedlove vowed that Russia remains a source of instability, stating that “Russia will remain the primary actor of regional concern through 2020 by virtue of its geographic position, natural resource wealth, military forces, and desire for regional influence. The U.S. and NATO will need to continue to assure our allies and partners, who live in the Russian self-declared sphere of privileged influence, of our resolve.” The general added that Russia remains an aspirational superpower but noted that the country was hindered by what he called “endemic deficiencies.” The statement reflects the continued breakdown on any semblance of oft-mentioned US-Russia “reset”.

Based on the above developments, it is clear that the Russian side is seeking to prevent any possible US military engagement in the regional affairs in those areas deemed part

of Russia's “near abroad”. From a perspective of a possible war with Iran due to further escalation in Syria or the tightening grip over Iran's nuclear program development, the Kremlin considers there to be a high probability of using Georgian territory as a backyard as part of its strategy in deal with US designs on Iran and within the greater region.

This was the reason why during the Georgian-Russian war in 2008, Russian jets bombed Georgia's Vaziani, Marneuli and Bolnisi military airfields, which had no connection with the Georgian invasion of South Ossetia. The attacks could be seen as a preemptive strike in order to prevent the facilities being used during a hypothetical US-Israeli attack against Iran. Taking out such targets also sent a clear message to Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili not to join in on an anti-Iran coalition in the future.

Hence, the current Russian military preparations and policy adjustments aim at responding a crisis situation that results from the unfolding situations in Syria, the Korean peninsula and Iran and are increasing designed to deter any western military intervention.

EUMM will perform its Functions regardless of Political Changes in Georgia

Continued from p. 4

We support civil society organisations to participate in confidence-building measures and peace-building initiatives and share relevant information with NGOs regarding human security concerns. Our Field Office in Zugdidi, for instance, organises monthly meetings with NGOs and international organisations active in the area, such as UNHCR, UNDP or ICRC, providing a regular information-sharing platform.

How much did the Mission succeed in confidence building between the parties – Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian?

Since the start of our mandate in October 2008, we have noted a decrease in incidents. Thanks to the IPRM and our 24/7 Hotline, parties to the conflict exchange information, discuss incidents and quite often manage to agree on ways to minimise the impact of the conflict on local communities' everyday lives. In numerous instances, these mechanisms have allowed anticipating, dissipating or solving tensions.

What are the main achievements of IPRM Meetings and Geneva Talks?

The IPRM, which consists of monthly meetings and a 24/7 Hotline, has often allowed anticipating tensions, solving misunderstandings and finding com-



mon ground with regard to issues pertaining to the freedom of movement of local communities living in the areas adjacent to the Administrative Boundary Lines. When it comes to the international discussions in Geneva, our Mission's role is to provide all parties with security updates.

In April 2012 Abkhazia accused the Head of Mission of ignoring its requests and declared him persona non grata. How has the situation improved since then?

Unfortunately, our work is

subjected to political agendas that, at times, further complicate our ability to perform our mandated activities. While we are ready to listen to the views and positions of all sides, we will not compromise on our principles and will not be dictated to terms of conditions that we find unacceptable. Since the disruption of the IPRM in Abkhazia, we have made every effort to resume these meetings and have made proposals that could have overcome this deadlock. We continue to urge for unconditional resumption of this impor-

tant mechanism and are ready to re-engage at any time. In the meantime, other mechanisms such as the Hotline, for instance, remain in place allowing us to monitor the situation and react to incidents or developments in a timely manner.

How well are all sides maintaining agreements of the ceasefire?

The situation on the ground has over time significantly improved. We can say that the absence of conflict is maintained – there is no use of force, no hostilities. However, the Six-

Point Agreement signed by Georgia and the Russian Federation on 12 August 2008 is not yet fully implemented.

Are there any no-go regions to EUMM?

Our Mission's mandate is valid throughout all of Georgia, within its internationally recognised borders. The *de facto* authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however, have so far denied access to the territories under their control. Since we are an unarmed civilian mission, we cannot enforce it. We are also aware of the presence of mines and unexploded ordnances (UXOs) along the Administrative Boundary Lines. This is one of the issues we regularly discuss at our IPRM meetings. Thanks to these discussions, an international organisation is currently carrying out de-mining activities.

How does EUMM see its future involvement in Georgia, based on the country's political changes?

Irrespective of the political changes in Georgia, EUMM will further implement its mandate and do the utmost to keep the situation on the ground quiet and free from hostilities. We also want to work to diminish the divisive effects of the Administrative Boundary Lines and facilitate people-to-people contacts. In 2013, no obstacles should restrict freedom of movement.

There is consensus among all

parties that EUMM's presence has significantly enhanced the normalisation and stabilisation of the situation. There are fewer incidents along and across the Administrative Boundary Lines, and mechanisms such as the IPRMs and the Hotline have improved communication and helped to defuse incidents or situations that could have quickly escalated in the absence of EUMM. In that sense, our involvement will continue in the same manner.

The installation of fences and other obstacles along the Administrative Boundary Lines have recently increased, however. In the springtime, agricultural work is at its peak and these obstacles may have a significant impact on people's income and livelihood. Rest assured that we will keep a very close eye on this and regularly update the EU Member States and the international community on the whole.

Finally, I would like to seize the opportunity to call upon your readers to tell us about events, which threaten stability on the ground, about their grievances and troubles. This will help us perform our tasks. The more we know about the situation on the ground, the better we are able to contribute to further stabilising the situation, preserve the present situation and build confidence across the Administrative Boundary Lines.

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- LTD Heidelberg Cement Georgia
- LTD Zedazeni 2012
- "Goodwil" Chain of supermarkets
- JSC Georgian Bank
- LTD Gaz-Energy
- Company Geocell
- LTD Sokar Enegy Georgia
- JSC TBC Bank
- "PSP Pharma"
- LTD "Raddisson Blue Iveria"
- LTD "Averssi Pharma"
- LTD "Rustavi's Azot"
- JSC Wissol Petroleum Georgia
- LTD Barambo
- GIG-Georgian Industrial group
- JSC Nikora
- "T and K" restaurants MacDonaldds
- San Pertoleum Georgia Gulf
- LTD Coca-Cola Bottlers Georgia
- Carrefour Chain of Markets
- JSC Bank "Kartu"
- Zestaphoni Manufacture "Fero"
- JSC Telasi
- JSC ProCredit Bank
- JSC Telavi Winery
- Rustavi Metallurgical Company
- LTD VTB Bank
- Silknet
- JSC "Davit Sarajishvili and Eniseli"
- Company Caucasus Online
- LTD Marshe
- Dairy products manufacturing company "Ecofood"
- GWP "Georgian Water and Power"
- LTD Georgian Sugar
- "Sante GMT Products"
- "Natural Mineral Water - Nabeghlavi"
- Georgian Bear company Natakhtari
- LTD "Lukoil Georgia"
- "Aldagi BCI" Insurance company
- GPS Pharm Company
- JSK Smart Retail
- LTDRompertol Georgia
- LTD Elit Electronics
- Bank Republic
- JSC Bagrationi 1882
- GPI Holding
- Company Beeline
- LLC "Barvil Georgia"
- JSC Madneuli Mining
- Georgian Carriage Builders Holding

Bidzina Ivanishvili: No Apparent Problem in using Offshore Companies

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY, GT

Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili answered questions on a wide range of issues at a press conference with senior editors from local print media outlets and television channels on April 10. Questioned about the recently released secret files which exposed details of the offshore accounts held by members of global elite including the PM, Ivanishvili claimed that holding such accounts was nothing new and are used for "tax optimization." In spite of the fact that so much has been written about the need for transparency and good governance, we now learn what many have long suspected - that Bidzina Ivanishvili is cut of the same material as those that many of his supporters claimed that he was different from - at least at first impression.

This should come as a big disappointment to many Georgians, including some of the PM's staunchest supporters. So much has been written about the need for transparency and good governance and now we learn what many have long suspected - Bidzina Ivanishvili is cut of the same material as those that he claimed to be different from - and falls into the same pot - at least at first impression.

Ivanishvili doesn't see a problem with holding offshore accounts simply because it is a normal practice. But at least he's being open about it. How many of the former ruling party have their fingers in the Cypriot pie? Did Rustavi 2 attend the recent press conference, and if so did they ask questions about this or

just sit shame-faced in the back? French President François Hollande has just declared war on offshore tax havens, or wants to at least. He won't get far however because unraveling all of these financial networks is akin to unraveling several swimming pools full of worms - companies would collapse, governments would be brought down, and people would be killed. This really is a complete mess, and there is no single organization that is bold enough or incorruptible enough to take on the forces involved.

Ivanishvili is right, in a way, but wrong too. It clearly IS a problem to all the poor people of this world who don't have their finger in the pie or a foot on the gravy train. But, give them that and they switch sides - that is all that the majority of people want, a piece of the action. Until and unless we reach the kind of Utopia envisaged by Jacques Fresco then, sadly, everyone will have their price and therein lies the real problem: the world we live in today is rotten to the core and there's not a damn thing we can do to turn that around while we live and breathe. It'll take several generations - if anyone would care to press the start button on that one.

Billionaires often hide funds in offshore accounts to avoid tax clearly is a problem for all the poor people of this world, who don't have their finger in the pie or a foot on the gravy train. But if people are given the means to do the same themselves they generally switch sides - that is all the majority of people want, a piece of the action, as the

As water swirls, so does the intrigue. International journalists have been conducting a wide-ranging investigation into



tax havens for the past 15 months. A KPMG report for the United Kingdom government indicated that the British Virgin Islands was the domicile for approximately 41% of the world's offshore companies, making it by some distance the largest offshore jurisdiction in the world by volume of incorporations. Nevertheless, The British Virgin Islands has until now avoided the scandals which have tainted less well-regulated offshore jurisdictions.

By obtaining millions of leaked bank records at least 120,000 offshore companies and trusts, and therefore the hidden dealings of politicians, con men and the mega-rich the world over, have been exposed. These hidden accounts are found not only in the British Virgin Islands but the Cook Islands and other notorious offshore hideaways.

An impressive list of the rich and famous: despots, Wall Street swindlers, Eastern European and Indonesian billionaires, Russian

corporate executives, international arms dealers and a sham-director-fronted company which the European Union has labeled a cog in Iran's nuclear development program are the owners of these accounts, alongside a few ordinary people lucky enough to have such resources.

The leaked files provide facts and figures - cash transfers, incorporation dates, links between companies and individuals - which illustrate how offshore financial secrecy has spread aggressively around the globe, enabling the wealthy and well-connected to dodge taxes and fuel corruption and economic woes in rich and poor nations alike.

The records detail the offshore holdings of people and companies in more than 170 countries and territories. The hoard of documents represents the biggest stockpile of inside information about the offshore system ever obtained by a media organization. The total size of the files, measured in gigabytes,

is more than 160 times larger than the leak of U.S. State Department documents by Wikileaks in 2010.

To analyze the documents, ICIJ collaborated with reporters from *The Guardian* and the BBC in the U.K., *Le Monde* in France, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* in Germany, the *Washington Post*, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and 31 other media partners around the world.

Banking scandals are nothing new - and many in this part of the world, Georgia and Azerbaijan, are predicting that the best is yet to come. The meltdown in the tiny tax haven of Cyprus, where local banks' assets have been inflated by waves of Russian cash may be just one in a number of dominoes, and former and the current Georgian president may be implicated as well.

One only has to note the FDI figure showed a sudden surge from Cypriot investors around the

same time of when everyone was writing how well the Georgian economy was doing. The FDI figures seem to tally with the \$93 million bid for the mining license back in 2011. Let's focus on that particular mining license and also on the mysterious companies formed in Cyprus just a few weeks before the auction, as it should be raising a few eyebrows right now.

Caucasian Mining Group won the auction for the 30-year mining license, which allows them to mine for gold, barite, copper, and "polymetallic" ore deposits in Georgia's Bolnisi, Mameuli, Dmanisi, Tsalka and Tetrtskaro municipalities. The starting price was 30 million GEL and the only competitor was "Anglo-Georgian Mining Company".

Caucasian Mining Group had only in Georgia on August 30, 2011, and is a subsidiary of a Cyprus-registered company called Pamtilon Holdings Limited which, itself, was only registered on June 6, 2011.

This start-up's winning bid was 93.5 million GEL which, according to Civil.ge, had to be paid within two months. No other information about this company was available on the website of Cyprus's Department of Registrar of Companies and Official Receiver. Moreover, no information whatsoever appears to be available about "Anglo-Georgian Mining Company" either.

It is interesting that the current news is that Cyprus now has to find twice as much money to pay for their bailout as they first thought only a couple of weeks ago. How does that work? Before it is over there will be links found to Georgia and many companies with close links to members of Georgia's former ruling United National Movement party and possibly with some in the current government.

International Tourism Fair opens in Tbilisi

By LIKA MOSHIAVILI, GT

The 15th International Tourism Fair and 2nd Caucasus Incentive, Business Travel and Meeting Exhibition were held on April 12-14 in the exhibition hall of Expo Georgia. According to representatives of the Georgian government, such events are a good opportunity for the country to show its potential to foreign companies and will help to develop business relationships with international organizations.

"The main goal of the exhibition is to promote Georgia as tourism destination, provide a meeting place for foreign and local tour operators, and present information about local and foreign travel destinations to the public," explained the representatives of exhibition center Expo Georgia, the organizers of the fair.

Dimitry Kumsishvili, First Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia opened the 15th International Tourism Fair and 2nd

Caucasus Incentive, Business Travel and Meeting Exhibition in Tbilisi.

"These exhibitions are very important for the development of our country's tourist potential and for its promotion on the international market," commented Kumsishvili at the opening ceremony. "I wish this fair great success," he added.

Approximately 100 exhibitors from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates met Georgian and foreign visitors to introduce travel companies, hotels, resorts and spa centers. Tour operators presented cultural, historic and wine tours, as well as extreme and adventure tours.

"The Ministry of Culture presented Georgian national manufacturing, which is our country's main pride. I think it will attract attention of many visitors' today," commented Manana Berikashvili, Deputy Minister of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, who also participated in the opening ceremony.

During the exhibition, regional representatives introduced different regions of Georgia; provided information about nature



sties, sanatoriums, guest houses, hotels, spa centers, etc.

As Kumsishvili said in an interview with journalists, the number of participants of the International Tourism Fair in Georgia is growing every year.

"Today more than 100 people expressed interest towards our company. If the flight tickets are available at good rates I am sure tourists from Georgia will start coming more and more to Dubai. Our organization has participated in many fairs in different countries, but it's our first

exhibition here and I believe it will not be the last time," stated Jalal Azar, Director of Danat Al Khaleej Tourism L.L.C, Dubai tour agency.

Georgian National Tourism Administration, Agency of Protected Areas and USAID's Economic Prosperity Initiative are official supporters of the exhibitions.

"For such a country as Georgia, which tries to establish itself on the world tourist map, these kinds of events are very important. We did our best to make

this fair interesting, attracting and diverse for our guests from abroad," stated Mariam Qvrivishvili, Deputy Minister Georgian National Tourism Administration. "These kinds of exhibitions are vital for getting success in international tourism."

Visitors of the 2nd Caucasus Incentive, Business Travel and Meeting Exhibition received information about event management and suppliers of the services.

This year, the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protec-

tion initiated participation of Georgian craftsmen. Participants crafted souvenirs, performed master classes and sold items to interested visitors.

Special entertainment was offered on April 13th. Georgian folk singers *Chvneburebi* entertained the public, and clowns and acrobats of *Theatre Synthesis* performed amazing tricks.

As Qvrivishvili told the Georgian Times, the next International Tourism Fair is scheduled for May, 2013 and will take place in Batumi.



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Sayat Nova and the Musical Dialects of the Caucasus

By KENDRA PARADIS, GT

The Sayat Nova Project has recently gained funding to continue their research of ethnomusicology in the Caucasus and it wasn't a moment too soon. The project is based in Tbilisi and run by Ben Wheeler an ethnomusicologist studying Georgian Folk Music at the Tbilisi State Conservatory; Stefan Williamson Fa a social anthropologist, with a keen interest in music, from Gibraltar; and Ana Harbaugh a specialist in Russian and Soviet history who was recently admitted for a PhD program. Their goal is to record the musical dialects of the Caucasus to promote and preserve the diverse traditions of the Caucasus; many of which are in grave danger of dying out. Diversity is certainly the name of the game here.

Harutyun Sayatyan born in 1712 in Tiflis is better known by his adopted name Sayat Nova meaning "Master of Songs" in Persian. Sayat Nova is considered the bard of the Caucasus and made a considerable contribution to poetry and music of his century. At least 220 songs have been attributed to Sayat Nova,

who wrote his songs in Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani and Persian. Sayat Nova was skilled in writing poetry, singing, and playing the Kamancheh, Chonguri, and Tambur. He performed in the court of Erekle II of Georgia, where he also worked as a diplomat allegedly helping to forge an alliance between Georgia, Armenia and Shirvan against the Persian Empire.

Ethnic diversity in Tbilisi wasn't limited to Sayat Nova and the 18th century. Tbilisi has always been home to peoples of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Georgians only became the majority of residents in Tbilisi in 1926; prior to that comprising as little as 21% of the population. Today, around 89% of the population is ethnically Georgian, with significant populations of other ethnic groups such as Armenians, Russians, and Azeris. Along with the three main South Caucasian nationalities, Tbilisi is also home to more than 100 different ethnic groups including Ossetians, Abkhazians, Greeks, Jews, Kurds, Assyrians, and others. The Sayat Nova Project seeks to embody the legacy of the poet and the experience of the city itself. Their philosophy is simple: create a space where the true nature of Caucasian traditions can be shared and provoke discussion about and within ethnic communities.

"We don't want to say anything... We're not going to stop any wars with this site but we want to create a place where people can have a conversation." They believe that music really can bring us all together. In spite of the recent history of the "history wars" as Thomas de Wall often refers to the phenomena, the ethnic groups of the Caucasus do have shared history and shared culture which doesn't always fit into national boundaries. "We're by no means saying that all music is the same in the Caucasus. Each tradition is unique. For example the UNESCO recognized polyphony of Georgian singing..." The project has adopted a policy of purposeful terminology where they carefully avoid phrases like, "national music" or "music of ethnic minorities." The Caucasus are often referred to as *mountains of languages*; since music is its own language they try to work in that parallel, seeking to document the *polyglot dialects of music* in the region.

They have made field recordings and musician interviews in two Udi villages here in Georgia, where a staggeringly small population of only 200 residents still know their own language (a member of the Lezgin group of Dagestani languages). They have also traveled to several Avar villages around Chantliskure in the Kazbegi Region and to those of



north-western Kakheti. During one of their expeditions they found a village, by the old name of Sarusso, which only had one traditional instrument left, in serious disrepair, and had to travel to another two villages to find someone who could play it. The Sayat Nova Project has also recorded unique traditions in the Pankisi Gorge and northern Racha, as well as a wide range of different traditions in Tbilisi itself, including Kurdish and several Azeri traditions.

By encouraging the documentation of lesser represented traditions, the Sayat Nova Project has highlighted the positive interactions of the diversity in the Caucasus. They believe that tradition is retained through these types of interactions; not destroyed. Many of these traditions and interactions are overlooked when considering music only through a national scope and seeking collaboration between musicians, scholars, and an interested community both locally and internationally can help save these traditions from ex-

inction. "We're trying to lay the groundwork for everyone to contribute." The project relies mostly on crowd-sourcing and the cultural tradition of openness of the Caucasus. The end result will be a website where an interactive map of the Caucasus will display the recordings and serve as a network to promote creative and aca-

demic works related to the music of the Caucasus.

To read more about their research you can visit Ben's blog Caucasapades.wordpress.com and to contribute you can contact the Sayat Nova Project via their Facebook page: [facebook.com/SayatNovaProject](https://www.facebook.com/SayatNovaProject).

It Was Around Us: No Typical Exhibition

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

It started as a regular story of a few friends with a hunch. Temo Machavariani, Levan Pcia and Levan Asatiani came up with an idea of creating an online magazine called "We Are Sweet". Though the magazine is no longer functioning at present, these guys are still in the market. Temo Machavariani and Levan Pacia found partners, supporters, sponsors and of course artists to hold an exhibition on April 6th in the former hotel "Sakartvelo", naming the event "It Was Around Us".

Held in a club like setting, this was no typical exhibition. Art by Levan Maisuradze, Kvachi, Dato Machavariani, Serga, Alexandre B.D., Pepilot, Lûnâ Nîñê, Irakli Shonia and David Meskhi was on display on the second floor. Naturally, there were also DJs: Gacha, Sîkha and Amiko Ninua. Different types of art were on display and quality music was playing and made available for purchase, along with photography, graphics, drawings; guests could even create their own T-shirt design on location. The event organizers knew exactly their target audience, and this was just the first of many planned events in the lineup.

The Georgian Times sat down with Temo Machavariani for an exclusive inter-

view to find out more about what is going on.

Why an exhibition and why hold it in a club venue?

We wanted to exhibit the art created by our friends and not just friends, but people we knew somehow. There are not too many exhibitions like that in this city: illustrations, graphic, painting, photos; so we thought it would do well. We wanted to show what is around us. So we reviewed possible participants and selected several of them. I would point out Pepilot; she draws in books and her corner was pretty outstanding. She had books put on plates like it was food. It looked like a dinner table, people liked it a lot. We took a look and noticed what was and is around us and we displayed it. Some of the participants have created art but have never but it on display. It was a wonderful and fun experience.

Did the exhibition turn out well?

Yes. We received great feedback; people loved it. There are other events coming up too, so those who weren't able to participate in this one will have a second chance.

What's next?

I won't name it now, but we do have plans to hold more events. We may arrange just club nights, or more exhibitions, or something else. We want these events to be positive, but aggressive. We'll have sweet events only.

It was just two of you; it's pretty hard work. Are you planning



on getting more people to it?

Absolutely, we will gather a team soon so we'll have more people helping to prepare for our events.

When do you expect to begin making money out of these events?

Never. We are an NGO, and money is not the aim.

Pepilot:

What inspires you for such exceptional art?

Emotions – weather they are negative or positive, but it's always the emotions. I draw on everything and every time and everywhere I can. That's how my books were born.

I have been drawing since I was a kid. I graduated from the Academy of Arts, but I can't say

that I learned much there. I have been working on various little projects, nothing major. The job I received had nothing to do with art and consequently drawing moved to the back. I had a favorite book I was carrying around with me all the time. I used to make little drawings in it, so little by little I got carried away and I found it super fascinating to be drawing in the book. By word of mouth it got spread. The GCA (Georgian Copyright Association) with their magazine Copy Right and

love surrounding my art with strange and warm space. The first exhibition had a touch of "Alice in Wonderland" and people loved it.

Isn't that how "We Are Sweet" discovered you?

Yes. I received an invitation to participate in the group exhibition "It Was Around Us", which was a great pleasure for me. I had the opportunity to display my art alongside beautiful and interesting pieces of art by other participants. The event itself was fascinating. It was a chill re-



Kristy Kipshidze the author of the section "New from Kristy" discovered me. I made the design of the cover for the magazine and thanks to them my first exhibition was held in the Holiday Inn in February. It was a great success. It gave me the impetus to devote more time and energy to art. My exhibitions are presented as fairy tales. I

laxed exhibition accompanied by great Electro Music. It was not something you see every day.

Did anyone else discover you?

Presently I am holding negotiations with a few people who became interested in me. I am really thrilled as I may have some shows abroad. I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

Number of Psychiatric Patients in Georgia Increases Every Year

By UTA BITSADZE, GT

The number of people suffering from mental illnesses and nervous disorders has reached a critical level in Georgia. The already high numbers were topped up by the recent release of more than 8,000 prisoners by the new Georgian government under an amnesty for both political and regular inmates. According to public health experts and physicians, the dire conditions in the prisons in recent years, which include overcrowding and torture, have severely impacted on the mental health of prisoners, who upon release have had to go to hospitals for treatment for mental illness as well as tuberculosis.

Financing of the mental health sphere has increased to 13 million GEL but the situation remains difficult. This sector is not a priority in Georgia. Upwards of 450 million people worldwide are registered as suffering from mental illness and behavioural disorders, and in Georgia the number of new mental health cases has been increasing since 2010. In 2011 this increase was relatively small but still significant – the number of registered patients increased from 79,000 to 81,000. However, in 2012 the number of people with psychiatric problems increased to a staggering 100,000. Many consider this figure but the tip of the iceberg, and most are unable to seek the help of poorly accessible mental health services.

According to the Human Rights Centre there are 17,000 registered schizophrenic patients in Georgia. However, experts maintain that the actual

number of people suffering from this problem is higher, as registering as a schizophrenic has a social stigma attached to it. Many people will not seek professional help. There is a clear need for additional financing to serve the mental health needs of the country but the support being given does not come close to meeting the need. Since Georgia continues to have dire social-economic problems, the government needs to assume responsibility for treating mental health as a disease which harms the public good, so that patients do not stand alone.

Specialists in this sector and civil society organisations have discussed the necessary measures with the state. On February 25 2012, the Georgian Ombudsman's report about the situation in psychiatric institutions was published. This points out that "non-voluntary treatment" of patients in hospitals is still the

priority, and 70% of the financing is being spent on this.

When a patient is in a very difficult condition and is taken to a hospital, the Georgian government spends 840 GEL on him/her. If the individual has to spend a longer period in a hospital, the state spends on average 450 GEL months, but for discharged patients, the state support is very insignificant, amounting to 16 GEL in a month.

According to Manana Sharashidze, Chair of the Association for Psychological Health, financial resources are distributed unequally. Patients outside the hospital setting cannot obtain high quality medicines and cannot use the psycho-social rehabilitation service; this problem is very common for patients all over the world.

"It is impossible to buy 100 GEL worth of medicine and keep up a treatment programme with the 5-16 GEL allocated to these patients for medicine. It is more cost effective to isolate someone than provide costly medicine. Outpatients don't have access to psycho-social rehabilitation programmes, and that is the main reason they are sent to psychiatric hospitals in the first place. Being confined is a big stress for them and their families," Manana Sharashidze says.

As Archil Begiashvili of the Centre for Psychiatric Health says, people with mental illness

and behavioural disorder are often the most sensible people. However, left without treatment they become involved in family conflicts, break with their families or remain unmarried. It is said by specialists that psychiatric disorder is a genetic problem. If medical treatment is not received or continued, the illness might become more severe over time.

According to psychologist Ramaz Sakvarelidze, patients who do not receive treatment are potentially a danger to themselves as well as to others. "People with mental disorders who are left without medicine or psycho-social rehabilitation and end up wandering the streets. They are like "time bombs" waiting to go off. Failure to provide appropriate medicine and social environments and breaking the essential rules of treatment contribute to people behaving inadequately. Patients often become aggressive and are therefore dangerous not only for themselves but others as well." Sakvarelidze has told GT.

Sopo Morgoshia from the Ministry of Healthcare told the Georgian Times that mental health institutions do not take advantage of what little money is budgeted for them. She notes that only 70,000 GEL is allocated for psycho-social rehabilitation centres per year, but they do not spend all of this money, which is why the Ministry won't increase

the amount. However the Ministry of Healthcare is not interested in finding out why this money is not being spent, saying that this is a matter for the Ministries of Economy and Finance.

Psychiatric patients also run the risk of losing their property. Tbilisi's Human Rights Centre says that relatives or other interested persons frequently seize the private property of psychiatric patients. Those with mental disorders also lose the ability to live on their own in their own flats. Often they end up on the street or have to live in a hospital for years and years. People left in the streets regard themselves as fortunate when they are able to get back into a hospital again.

It is clear that those suffering with psychiatric problems feel themselves alienated, not only from friends and family but the government. They become victims of widespread societal stigma, and consequently even after the remission of their illness, unemployment remains an acute problem for them. When a prospective employer finds out that an applicant is a former psychiatric patient, he will refuse to give them a job. Georgia still lacks an encompassing public health policy and vision for psychiatric healthcare; that's why the number of patients is increasing. Providing psychiatric healthcare services is one of the priorities of a responsible government.

Contraception and the Commercial Use of aborted Fetuses

By NICQUITA COLE, GT

The birthrate in Georgia has been decreasing over the past few years, and this has affected the country in a very negative way, as the number of abortions now exceeds the number of live births.

The average abortion rate in this country was once 3.1 abortions per woman; the highest documented rate in the world. The USA only has a rate of 0.02 in comparison. Of course there is no acceptable number of abortions for any country, especially when it is used as a form of birth control as it is in Georgia. Such an issue should be decided by the expecting parents, but it is clear that some are treating abortion as a primary form of contraception and husbands and boyfriends are not even aware or don't want to know about how many abortions are carried out in the relationship.

It is ironic that a country which parades itself as having such high moral and religious values is facing such a problem. So what is fuelling this double standard? One of the main reasons for the high abortion rate is that people here do not fully understand contraception and its uses. It is clear from talking to Georgians that some do not have a good understanding of sex education. It is not taught in the schools and so little social marketing, only when associated with some foreign funded reproductive health initiation that has a budget for this.

Stories can often be heard of young married women washing condoms out after using them, not knowing that this will decrease their effectiveness. Therefore, when they get pregnant they resort to the only thing they can do if the child is unwanted; abortion.

Furthermore, some women believe that contraception is dangerous, and that using it can have serious side effects such as breast cancer or sterility, however this is very unlikely, and the risks are minimal compared with those

associated with the alternative; mutable aborting, the leading killer of women in this country.

Due to near sighted politics nothing has been done to address this situation. Women are still in danger, as the government still refuses to cover contraception costs within the state funded healthcare program for the poor, although there is no evidence that doing this increases the birth rate, as people merely resort to cheap abortions. It is little wonder why Georgia, a religion country has the highest abortion rate of any former Soviet Republic, even higher than Russia.

Georgia's low birth rate is now a hot political topic, as the country already has an aging population: the number of tax-paying age people is decreasing and the number of pensioners increasing. The birth rate determines the number of future taxpayers, and therefore it will become even more difficult to provide welfare in the future if current trends continue.

Georgia is not the only country facing such an economic threat, and the UK and other countries have been troubled by this issue for many years and are trying to find a solution. One possibility is to increase the number of immigrants living and paying tax in the country, but a more effective way is to increase birthrates by making having large families more appealing. This takes time however, as children also drain public funds until they reach taxpaying age. Georgia has the 9th highest level of youth unemployment in the world, 35.5% of people aged 15-24 being out of work, so having more children will not increase tax income unless there are jobs for those children to fill when they come of age.

The number of births in Georgia has recently increased to less than two per woman, and that is not all ethnic Georgians. This of course is partly due to the initiative of the Patriarch, who has stated that he will personally baptize every 3rd child of a family. Those living in the regions are not suffering the same degree of birth

dearth. Consequently the Patriarch now has around 1,500 Godchildren. However the Church has said nothing about how it will help families afford to raise their children in light of difficult social economic conditions. Although it is very nice to have a child baptized by the Patriarch there is still a need to clothe and feed that child, which is especially hard for those living on the minimum,



many in dire poverty. This is the problem which needs to be solved if the birth rate is to grow and Georgia is to develop.

The abortion rate has now dropped to 1.6 per woman, a 48% decrease compared with five years ago, at least officially. It is well known that many abortions are done off the books, and even at home with crude and often dangerous methods. However, this is regarded as a consequence of wider use of contraception rather than fewer pregnant women seeking abortions. USAID and the United Nations Population Fund educate doctors and nurses here in Georgia, market birth control on T.V and subsidize the unaffordable costs of condoms, pills and IUD.s to make them more appealing to families on lower incomes. It is currently estimated that 40% of Georgian women in rural areas would be unable to afford birth control (at 9-12 USD per cycle) without the USAID – UNFPA program.

Understanding of contraception is still limited and therefore women still seek abortions. But

has anyone stopped to think what happens to the aborted fetal cells when they are taken away? It is well known that aborted matter is used in medical research all over the world to help find cures for a number of deadly diseases. But aborted children are also put to many other 'uses' which are perhaps less well known, and many industries surreptitiously fuel what is now a lucrative market in abort-

nology, states that; "Embryonic stem cells cannot be used directly [as] they form tumors when transplanted into mature tissues. The most profound drawback, which has not been adequately disclosed, is that [embryonic cells] cannot be used directly to treat mature tissues and organs."

Despite this, there are many 'clinics' around the world which use untested embryos to make millions selling 'cures' to very sick people. Dr. William C. Rader, a psychiatrist, made 33 million USD injecting patients with fetal stem cells from Georgia before being kicked out of the Bahamas where he was practicing. He promised to cure everything from autism to spinal cord injuries when he knew he had with no hope of actually helping anyone. It is clear that some disregard morals for bank notes.

There are many other disturbing uses for aborted human fetal tissues, one of which is to test the effectiveness of various synthetic flavoring agents. They are thus used by Senomyx, a biotechnology company, in San Diego and other places. According to reports there are many other ways to test the flavoring of products which do not raise such moral and ethical issues, but for whatever reason the company shows a complete disregard of those ethical values and carries on using fetal matter even after many pleas for it to stop.

Senomyx's website states that the company helps develop "savory, sweet and salt flavor ingredients that are intended to allow for the reduction of MSG (monosodium glutamate), sugar and salt in food and beverage products." It explains that it is able to do this by "isolate[ing] human taste receptors," which sounds harmless enough, however the nonprofit group Children of God for Life (CGL) claims that this is just a marketing term for what they are really doing; using human fetal matter. This of course is not made public, and another method of tasting could easily be put in its place and achieve the same results, according to the Director of CGL, Debi Vinnege.

Not only small companies but large household names such as Kraft Foods, Nestle and Solae, and even Campbell's Soup, have previously sent their products to Senomyx for testing but the big players have now decided to stop doing so after finding out how it is done. After a months' long boycott PepsiCo has also decided not to use Senomyx testing in future.

Even though the aborted children do not end up in the end product, and no matter what your standpoint is on abortion, it must still scream of wrongdoing that there is a whole food and beverage manufacturing industry using abortions to make its products. What would happen if one day the supply of valuable fetuses do not meet the demand? There are already shocking stories about newborn babies being stolen after birth and killed for their costly tissues, in such countries as Ukraine, and the demand for these is steadily increasing. Is this what is in store for us if we let abortion get out of hand? It is overwhelmingly apparent that we are no longer able to rely on people's moral compass when it comes to a business which makes billions.

The unethical use of aborted fetal matter is clearly linked to high abortion rates. Therefore the best way to address this issue would be to decrease the levels of abortion by promoting contraception. It is also clear from past history that banning abortion will just turn it into a black market industry which will put more lives at risk.

Regulating the disposal or distribution of fetuses is crucial if we are to protect babies from the profit motive, as we have organ donors. This decision should not be left to the clinics, which have a vested interest in selling them and making a profit, but the patient undergoing the treatment. However, it will be difficult to regulate this without government action. We will have to leave it up to the government members' ethical consciences, and hope that these are not as entangled in profit considerations as they seem to be in some places.

Anthony Bourdain was Wrong about Brunch

By KOBA SAMSONIDZE, GT

Thirteen years ago chef and writer Anthony Bourdain published *Kitchen Confidential*, a book about the restaurant industry from an insiders perspective. He divulged a number of trade secrets that earned him both respect from diners and the ire of restaurateurs across the globe. Some of the advice he gives includes telling diners not to eat sushi on Mondays; never order meat well done (unless you want the worst cut in the kitchen); and, at all costs, avoid brunch. Yes brunch, the mainstay of Mother's Days, and the mornings after a long night of drinks.

Bourdain explains that the ingredients, which comprise the average brunch menu are less than ideal, usually made up of the left overs from Friday and Saturday nights, and the chefs who work with these ingredients are not the A-Team from the busy weekend dinner service, but instead the B-Team, dishwashers trying to move up the kitchen hierarchy or young chefs relegated to pay their dues in the early mornings by making omelet after omelet after omelet...

Thirteen years however is a long time for anyone, and in the make or break restaurant industry it is several lifetimes. In that time, Bourdain himself has modified his decade old views about certain topics in light of changes and evolutions in the restaurant industry. The brunch of 2000 and the brunch

of today are different beasts.

Brasserie Tartine, in Meidan Square serves the best (and what may be the only) true brunch in Tbilisi. While Tartine offers standard a la carte French inspired fare all week long, the real jewel of the restaurant is their prix fixe brunch menu. Only available Saturdays and Sundays till 4pm, the meal comes with your choice of coffee or tea; a glass of wine, mimosa or bloody Mary; a soup; green salad and your choice of entrée. The entrées range from eggs any style with potatoes, to a French twist on *juevos rancheros*, all the way to a classic hamburger. The soups and salads vary with the season. The salad commonly consists of simple leafy greens drizzled with olive oil, while the soups, vary, ranging for example from

gazpacho in the summer, to pumpkin in the winter.

Myself, whose Sunday morning breakfast for years during childhood was a bagel with lox (smoked salmon), always order the *Oeufs Norvégien* as my main course. Poached eggs with hollandaise sauce over smoked salmon on top of homemade English muffins and a side of fried potatoes. The English muffins are soft, fluffy and excellent for mopping up the runny yolk of the eggs, and the smoked salmon is just the right combination of salty and savory. The dish itself is versatile, with variations replacing the salmon with spinach or ham.

Bourdain himself warns diners to be wary of hollandaise sauce. However, after eating brunch at Tartine a dozen or so times I can attest to no ill

effects after dining aside from a loss of motivation to do much else the rest of the afternoon other than possibly ordering another round of bloody Marys.

Regardless of which of the ten or twelve entrée options you choose, you will be delighted at the competent service and will be completely stuffed by the time the meal is over. Luckily for you, if you are in no hurry on a lazy weekend morning, Tartine pairs your meal with the sounds of a true Parsian brasserie, featuring live performances of guinguette music on accordion and bass.

The décor at Tartine is iconographic French, reproductions of classic French advertising posters adorn the dining room walls along side old LP's and 45's of French vocalists,

while bottles of Perrier and Pernod flank the ceiling. The vintage looking wooden chairs round out the feeling that you could be anywhere from Normandy to Nice. In the warmer months, outdoor seating is available to take in the sights and sounds of Meidan Square. The Abashidze location, which recently went through a brief renovation, previously did not participate in the brunch menu, but is now reported to do so.

While the Prix Fixe brunch at Tartine is not cheap at 24 lari per person, you get what you pay for with an expansive and well-executed meal, excellent service and live music.

Brasserie Tartine is located at 6 Samghebro in Meidan Square and 22 Abashidze. Brunch is served Saturday and Sunday from 10-4.

It Was Love

“Paris is Always a Good Idea” – Audrey Hepburn

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

I traveled to France in October 2012. I visited a few cities and did my best to spend as much time in Paris as I could. So in total it was 4.5 days. I had been wishing to do so for the past 10 years. I couldn't believe where I was landing as the plane started going low. I took the train from the airport and headed to my friend's place. It was close to midnight I was tired as hell. I was texting back and forth with my host to make sure I was on the right lane when I accidentally lifted my head and saw the Eiffel Tower all sparkling above the river Seine. It was the kind of a moment when you remember not only the visual, but the warm feeling rushing through your body that gives you chills and the greatest gratitude because of seeing what you are seeing and feeling what you are feeling. It was like the top notch for me until I looked to my left and saw a couple looking in the same direction at the very moment. They were somewhere from Sweden I believe. A tall blond girl and a dark tall guy were sitting on the train, holding hands and talking. It was the second thing catching my mind in Paris. It was love between them. The way they were holding hands, talking, looking at each other, kissing and smiling. As much as I was drowning in their utopian foreign love there was just one question crossing my mind: why don't couples have the same look in Tbilisi? So instead of checking in at the airport (like everyone does as soon as they go somewhere) my first French



status on Facebook was that very same question.

It was my second time in Paris, so I knew exactly where I wanted to go and what I wanted to see. I walked just as much as a healthy human being can. It was marvelous. It was fairly warm and that made Paris even more beautiful. Des Champs-Élysées Avenue was as always fancy and fabulous. I took a long slow walk on the avenue

looking around, absorbing all that my eyes could catch. As I was crossing the little street, I had to stop as the car was coming into the alley. It was a young handsome guy driving a red Ferrari. There was a hot girl with long blond hair sitting next to him. She was wearing leather pants; she was all dolled up, had fake nails and was holding his hand. When I saw that I got jealous. I figured that's when

luck meets love. And that is just superb.

It's easier to be in love, to look like you're in love, to be kissing your partner all over when you are on a trip to Paris, or you live in Paris and he takes you to a fancy restaurant on Champs-Élysées with his fancy Ferrari.

Last week I was walking on Marjanishvili Street when I saw two people. They were beggars,

most likely homeless too. The man looked about 50-55 years old. He was wearing a cylinder, had messy grizzled beard, he had a dark shabby jacket on, brown velvety torn pants, his laced boots were without laces and worn out and he was leaning on a cane with his right wrinkled hand with blood vessels falling out of the fractured skin. He was talking to a woman in front of him. She was dark

haired, and judging by her skin and hair it has been a long time since she stopped taking the slightest care of herself. She was wearing a pink warm coat gone brownish. Her skin was greyish and dry as the pavement. He was a bit taller than her. She was looking up into his face as he was looking down to her with the sweetest warmest smile ever. He was kissing her on the lips interrupting as she was speaking and was petting her on the face with his old, rough veined dirty wide spread hand. It was a scene of a lifetime. The look they had was something I can honestly say I have never seen in Tbilisi. So many families divorce after a husband loses his job, or get in any kind of financial problems, yet a couple of beggars were just in love. What I saw was love. I was born and raised in Tbilisi. I saw many sweet, disturbing, ugly moments over the years, but that moment was phenomenal. These two people were just in love. They were not dolled up, were not on vacation, were not driving a Ferrari to a fancy restaurant, they weren't going anywhere even cheap to eat; they were just standing in the street with no plans and discussing something. Most importantly they were completely loving each other and showing it to one another like there wouldn't be a tomorrow. What I saw in the street was love, nothing else but hungry, poor, dirty, honest, shared, bare love. And it rocked my world. Trust me, it would have rocked yours too if you saw it.

What good will money bring to a man? He has to have a good horse!

By IRAKLI MAKHARADZE, GT

As one wise man has said the dog is indeed the best friend of a man, but the horse is what created a civilization. The horse and horsemanship helped to protect various nations from the threat of extinction. Georgians were no exception.

Georgia is an ancient country situated to the east of the Black Sea, and surrounded by the Caucasus Mountains in the North. A former republic of the Soviet Union, it shares borders with Russia, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. It has been an Orthodox Christian country since 337 A.D. The history of Georgia, which dates back to 3000 years, is a never-ending battle for freedom and independence. Wedged between the competing interests of multiple Empires - Roman and Byzantine, Ottoman, Persian and, Russian, the Georgians were forced to fight; they were warriors.

Eighty percent of Georgia is mountainous. That is why throughout the centuries, a new kind of a horse was bred, which would survive well in the difficulties of the precipitous area. This is a small bodied, tight, well-built local horse. It was developed from an old Georgian type of a horse, which was bred in Georgia during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. It was used for warfare as well as nomadic animal farming. This horse is ideal for work in swamps and mountains. It stands out with its vigilance, boldness and strength. From ancient times, those who bred horses were highly respected, and good breeders were always needed and well regarded by the various Georgian kings. Although a lucrative position, it was also politically risky, because breeders were responsible for providing the king with a strong and reliable cavalry. The fact that Georgian ancestors paid special attention to horsemanship is proven by the discovery of horse decorations, the figures of the horse riders and other objects. According to archaeological data, the horse, as an animal utilized in the warfare coach as well as transportation, entered the lifestyle of the tribes living on the Georgian territory in the late Middle Bronze Age, or 15th century BCE. It was during this time that the process of including horses in burials had started in Georgia.

The Tabals, Georgian tribes that lived during the 1st century BCE, were famous for having the best kinds of horses. Horse skeletons were also discovered in the ancient burials. As it turns out, the ancient horses had thin legs and small hoofs. The Greek Apollonius Rhodios, author of *The Argonautika* (the only surviving epic of the Hellenistic era, the tale of Jason and Argonauts who sailed to Colchis, the ancient area of Western Georgia, in order to obtain the Golden Fleece) wrote: "They went on the ship, and sailed toward the field of Ares, situated at the bank

of the river, with the view on the entire city... The Colchis would hold various athletic competitions and horseback riding spectacles here, commemorating their heroes and kings". As described in Greek mythology, Colchis was a fabulously wealthy land, where in the sacred grove of the war god Ares, the legendary King Aetes hung the Golden Fleece until it was seized by Jason and Argonauts. By the legend Colchis was also the homeland of women warriors - Amazons. In real life Georgian women didn't fall behind Georgian men. As one Italian missionary had commented, "They know how to horseback ride, carrying falcons on their hands as well as bow and arrow." Another missionary wrote: "It is not hard to believe that Georgian women are indeed amazons since they horseback ride like men and they are quite skilled at using the weapons."

Horse and horsemanship was a mandatory spectacle during church holidays and other public rituals. In the III century BCE, the first racetrack for horse competitions was built near the city of Kutaisi, Western Georgia. It was known for more than



360 horse games in Georgia. One of the most exciting horse games certainly remains Isindi. It simulates a military battle with spears. Isindi reproducing the battle between groups of riders, using throwing spears 1.5 meters in length, with blunt ends, which has a protective head of leather or rubber. Also very fascinating is the mounted archery game Kabakhi - when a rider at full gallop has to hit the target (a bowl, cup or any other small object) located on a high pole.

Georgian kings and statesmen would send horses as a very precious gift to the kings and noblemen of their allies and patron countries. In 141 AD, during the reign of Parsman, King of Iberia (Eastern Georgia), an invitation was extended from Rome to participate in a riding contest in honor of Mars. The king, along with his son Radamist, and a small group of Georgians were proud to accept the invitation and the chance to exhibit their skills. At the conclusion of the contest, Emperor Antonius Pius was so impressed by their performance



that he ordered a statue of Parsman to be built.

Georgian kings often trained their army themselves. One of these trainings performed by the Georgian King Irakli (1720-1798) in the middle of the XVI-II century is documented in the text kept at the Manuscript Institute in Tbilisi, Georgia. King Irakli was a great rider and swordsman himself. He fought ferociously and never left his horse till the very last minutes of his life. His contemporary, King Friedrich the Second of Prussia

other members of the aristocracy. Charmed by the performance, Her Majesty, Queen Victoria presented the Georgians with a gold engraved album with photos of their performance (Presumably, the album was kept at Ivane Makharadze's house in Guria and was destroyed during a fire) and the British society issued a letter of gratitude signed by 20,000 people.

In 1893, Georgian horsemen traveled to the United States where for more than 30 years they performed under the name

of "Russian Cossacks" in Buffalo Bill's Wild West as well as other American circuses and shows. The riders were called Cossacks for different reasons, perhaps, the most important of which was the fact that Georgia was part of the Russian Empire at that time (Georgia was annexed by the Czar's Russia in 1801 and by Soviet Russia in 1921) and so each Georgian was referred to as Russian. Regarding this confusion, it might be worth mentioning that employers were responsible for creating this initial mystery in the media by declaring that the riders came from the southern part of the Russian Caucasus, where the Cossack family in Lord Byron's "Mazepa" came from. Even the riders boasted that they were awarded medals for bravery but it was a con, of course. *The Hutchinson Leader* (July 24, 1908) went even further, "The Cossacks were the real thing, right from the Czar's army. Splendid horsemen and brave fighters, they are also fierce and cruel. They were members of the same regiment that charged upon

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a throng of men, women and children in the streets of St. Petersburg two years ago and shot and sabered, murdered a thousand". No wonder such stories helped make them popular heroes.

Imaginary Cossacks won widespread recognition and significantly influenced cowboys. Dee Brown, the noted western historian wrote, "Trick riding came to rodeo by way of a troupe of Cossack daredevils imported by the 101 Ranch. Intrigued by the Cossacks stunts on their galloping horses, western cowboys soon introduced variations to American rodeo". Brown traced a link to the Georgian trick riders that is still found in the present day. "Colorful costumes seem to be a necessary part of trick riding, and it is quite possible that the outlandish western garb which has invaded rodeo area can be blamed directly on Cossacks and trick riders." Out of all the international performers, the Georgian riders' performance was perhaps the most popular feature of the Wild West show. Only Native American Indians and cowboys enjoyed similar popularity.

Some Georgian and foreign sources claim, rather unconvincingly, that they rode the Georgian breeds. They rode American ponies. Author Sarah J. Blackstone wrote that "the Wild West horses took a while to become accustomed to such strange riding habits as a Cossack riding backwards or standing on his head in the saddle". Georgians rode in the arena four times each show. They first rode in the Grand Entree, and their second entry was a race between Cossacks, Indians, cowboys and Mexicans. Their third event was to give a performance of native song, dance, and riding. It represented the perfection of man and horse and the Georgians did the most unbelievable stunts while galloping. The riders performed a series of maneuvers: at full gallop they were standing on their heads up, standing straight in the saddle, swing themselves parallel with their horses' sides, riding three-four horses simultaneously, diving under their horses' sides, jumping to the ground and then back, riding backwards, picking up stones, whips, handkerchief, hat, rifle and other objects from the ground; some of the tricks were very popular with the spectators: the rider at full gallop standing on horseback and shooting, also very admired was the game - "Hold the handkerchief" - when riders were pursuing the one who was holding the handkerchief in his teeth and trying to take it away). Georgians performed some risky tricks, carried out only by a chosen few. One of these tricks was when a rider removed his saddle and dismounted while riding at a full gallop and then remounted again fixing the saddle back on a horse. This trick wasn't documented, but it is said that it was carried out by female rider Maro Zakareishvili. The author Frank Dean wrote: "The Russian Cossacks specialized in drags and when they dreamed this one up they definitely threw precaution to the winds. Picture the Cos-

sack blithely off the air to dangle by one foot against the shoulders of his horse. Remember that he did this in the full military dress of the Czar-and often included a long saber clenched in the teeth".

Their trick riding style called dzhigitovka (a Turkic word taken to mean skilful and courageous rider) or jiriti in Georgian. History of dzhigitovka comes from the depth of centuries. Horse riding stunts wore military-applied nature; that's why since ancient times, the Georgians paid special attention to the military upbringing as an opportunity of developing the stamina and courage at the battlefield. Such kind of training started in the early childhood.

From the beginning of the 20th century the Georgian officers from the Czar's army successfully participated in various competitions held in Russia and Europe. In 1912, Count Chavchavadze took part in the Olympic Games held in Stockholm, Sweden. The same year, the first time in the history of the Russian Empire, Konstantine Avalishvili won the Liverpool Grand Prize in the steeplechase competition, one of the most complicated horse racing events ever.

In the twenties of the XX century many Georgian emigrants started out their activities on new American soil as horsemen. That's how well-known sculptor and author George Papashvili (1898-1978) describes his first steps in the United States in his book *Anything Can Happen*: "In Hollywood there wasn't much choice of jobs at that time except to be in the movies. So I went in the casting office and the next thing I'm in the movies! But they always called me to play a Cossack. No variety. One day, I forget if I was turning back the hordes of Genghis Khan that time or was I being mean to the Volga boatmen again? Well anyway, I got disgusted. I said to myself: If I wanted to ride a horse all day and wear a cherkesska (traditional Caucasian male dress) and a fur hat you could have stayed home in Kobiankari." Another Georgian émigré Prince Dimitri Jorjadze (1898-1985), a nobleman, car racer and playboy, who was exiled after Soviet Russia occupied Georgia in 1921, bought historic plantations in South Carolina known as Boone Hall. Jorjadze was known as an equestrian genius and top bloodstock-breeder. Most notable of his horses was the World's champion Princequillo, who in 1943 was the fastest distance runner in the United States and who became a two-time Leading sire in North America and a seven-time leading broodmare sire in North America.

Today the horse does not have the same importance in Georgia. But only 100 years ago famous Georgian poet Vaja Pshavela wrote about the importance of the horse in the following way:

"What good will money bring to a man,

He has to have a good horse!"



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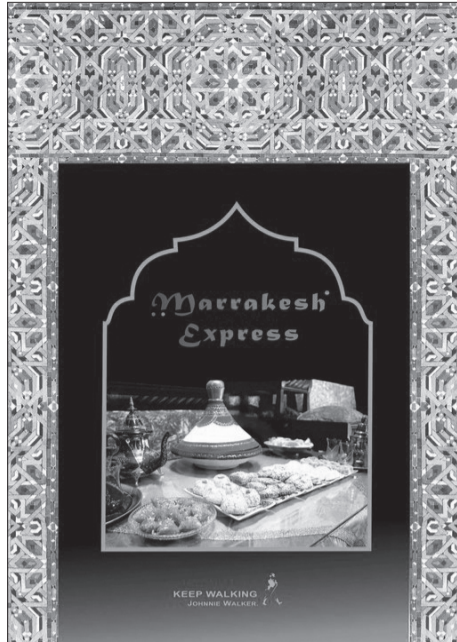
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