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UNM's Staying Power Tested in Face of Mounting Challenges



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Mr. Davit Kirvalidze, Georgian Minister of Agriculture confirms to the Georgian Times that the development of agriculture is a priority direction for the country. Along with support from USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact, the Ministry of Agriculture is now also receiving assistance from European Union in the amount of 40 million euros. The GoG and the Ministry of Agriculture are trying to create the necessary conditions for the development of the agricultural sector in order to produce competitive products.



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UNM's Staying Power Tested in Face of Mounting Challenges

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

The long-awaited and widely-promoted United National Movement rally has passed with no surprises as the opposition promised. There were no provocations as the government expected. Only resounding speeches of UNM leaders, including President Mikheil Saakashvili. Such words fell on deaf ears for much of the government including majority MP's – and most of the populace could care less.

The much touted rally by Georgia's former ruling elite turned opposition was a subject of discussion for months in Georgia. The government was assuring the opposition intends to bring the country to chaos; UNM was constantly accusing the government of putting obstacles in the way of its party's supporters with arrests and intimidation. On the threshold of the rally ruling Georgian Dream coalition declared about the need of re-investigating the Georgian-Russian war, an announcement seen by the opposition as a betrayal that can bring Georgia grave consequences.

A loaded statement with lots of finger-pointing was released on behalf of Data Akhalaia, the Minister of Internal Affairs' former top-ranking official, accusing UNM's Secretary General Vano Merabishvili for a range of wrongdoings – from the infamous pre-election "prison scandal" to the clashes and special security operation in Lapankuri, which has been considered a false-flag operation to garner support for the then ruling UNM party. Moreover, ahead of Friday's rally, the Prime Minister's coalition accused Georgia's President of wasting vast amounts of government funds on foreign trips, entertainment and luxury gifts for attractive female guests and Georgian officials.

In spite of this, according to various sources of information, the meeting gathered from 10-20,000 people. The area in front of the former parliament building was overcrowded though the supporters' ranks became to thin out near Rustaveli cinema and Kashveti church. Some analysts assure Saakashvili's team didn't manage to consolidate all the resources it could, while others say the number of rally participants surpassed all expectations. PR and marketing communication company GEPRAs senior consultant Soso Galumashvili emphasizes that the UNM has much more supporters than Merabishvili could mobilize. "He has failed the task," the expert summarized, adding that the reason for that could be that the wrong messages were sent to society. Meanwhile, Ghia Nodia, ringleader of the Caucasus Institute for Peace,

Democracy and Development, and staunch supporter of the UNM, stressed that society is slowly getting disappointed with the new government and is turning its attention to the UNM again. "This was inevitable as the Georgian Dream Coalition gave such promises that are impossible to be fulfilled," he told The Georgian Times.

During the day, the entire area from Freedom square to Rustaveli metro station and adjacent streets were blocked off by patrol police. There were not many ambulance cars present though.

UNM's supporters started traveling to Tbilisi from the regions early in the morning hours. As some of the party leaders said the patrol police were stopping cars and blocking the streets in the capital in order to prevent people from coming to the rally. After these accusations, the Minister of Interior issued an order to free up all the roads.

The rally began on time and it was opened by Giorgi Vashadze, who announced to the crowd about the establishment of a new national movement that will "lead us to a new and developed Georgia".

The leaders of UNM fully satisfied with the number of supporters declared their party has not died; it's the strongest opposition Georgia has ever seen. "Today's event has shown that statements made about our death were exaggerated, we are alive. It is a national day today. It does not matter whether you are members of our party or not. The main thing is that you love the country," minority leader Davit Bakradze said at the rally, emphasizing that present-day opposition is responsible and, unlike its forerunners, isn't calling on its supporters to overthrow the government.

"Six months have passed since the elections. What has been improved in this period? Have we eliminated poverty and unemployment? Only the government's relatives have been employed. That's why we are so critical. Ask the owners of small businesses, and they will tell you that the situation has worsened in the country," Bakradze added.

The appearance of Vano Merabishvili, Secretary General of UNM, was met with applause. It was expected that he would name himself as a presidential candidate. However, Merabishvili only warned the government to take their hands off of Georgia's independence. "April 19 has already gone down in history. By your arrival here, you removed the danger facing Georgia. Hence, neither Ivanishvili, nor his ministers or Putin will even dare to dream that Georgia will ever be separated from Europe. We will win and the current government saw today that there are a lot of people who will not let Georgia



return to the past," he stated at the rally. Later on "Rustavi 2" TV Channel he added that "Georgia can't afford the luxury of waiting four years in terms of this government", offering to exert pressure on the authorities daily "to make them do something good," as all their initiatives are aimed at destroying or stopping something.

President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili was another leader of National Movement who won applause during his appearance. Crowds chanted "Misha, Misha" for a few minutes; however, he didn't mount the platform or speak up at once, instead allowing the other UNM leaders address the supporters. While waiting for his turn to speak he took a couple of photographs with the party's young activists.

The first thing he did was criticizing Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili – this time for his statement concerning Nino Burjanadze becoming more active in politics. According to Saakashvili, Burjanadze is "a friend of the Kremlin" and the government itself is "a semi-friend of the Kremlin".

"The new government wants the opposition to be Nino Burjanadze, who is a friend of the Kremlin, because the government wants people to make a choice only between bad and worse. I want to tell everyone that people will make a choice not between betrayers and semi-betrayers, but between patriots and greater patriots. If we choose indignity, we will receive full occupation of the country. If we choose dignity, we will liberate the whole country," he said.

The president spoke ironically about another statement made by Ivanishvili in which he called Georgia "a small village". "Georgia has a lot of worthy villages, but Georgia is not a small village. It is a worthy country," he continued, adding that today's government is "angry" though the opposition is "reassuring".

"I came here because you

brought me here... I will win with you or die with you. Now it's our bad times. You had been questioned, fired, intimidated for the last seven months, but you still came here. Many cannot under-



stand that everything is not sold for money. We came here for our dignity and motherland," the president emphasized.

Friday's rally was a peculiar test for the National Movement that filled the party's leaders with enthusiasm. Shota Malashkhia, minority MP, expressed a firm belief that Georgia's population will not allow the government to go backwards – to the Soviet era. "People showed they share UNM's values; they don't want criminality and corruption, they want territorial integrity. These

people deserve it and they will get it for sure," he told The Georgian Times.

Another MP, Mikheil Machavariani, assured that their hopes were realized: people came to support them as they were disappointed with the Georgian Dream. "Now our main goal is the presidential election. We need to work on this and prove that the way we had chosen is the only true way," he told GT.

The optimism of UNM leaders transferred to their supporters. Lela Kobaidze from Khashuri said she was preparing for this rally for a month and headed to Tbilisi early in the morning by train. "I'm extremely happy. I support the UNM though I am not a member of any political party. But it's not possible to turn a blind eye to what was done by the president and his team during these nine years. The last six months have been a period of stagnation," she noted.

However, not all came to the rally to thank or praise the National Movement. There were people openly displaying their discontent, though they were attacked by UNM supporters. Political divide in the country is far from coming to an end, with the situation expected to remain strained at least till the presidential election scheduled for October 2013.

Letter to the Editor

I'm a visiting scientist from New York for 3 days program in Tbilisi. Your paper is the only news source for me to receive the local news. Modern look and fair coverage with content is a desirable news paper, qualities I think you captured. I would like to read you in the future as I visit again.

Keep up the good job

Best,

Güven Yalçıntaş, Ph.D.

President & CEO

Applied Professionals International

Sent from my Verizon Wireless 4G LTE DROID

The New Georgian Times Wants Your Feedback

The new "Georgian Times" English language newspaper is just over two and a half months old and we would like to continue 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. These have included interviews with former political prisoners and persecuted business leaders, as well as those still behind bars charged with terrorism; aspects of organized crime and subversive operations involving Chechens dating back years and their 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. We continue to pay special attention to Georgia's agriculture sector, providing our readers with on-going investigations and on the ground reportage of Indian investors and others buying up the Georgian countryside, as well as the impact of various foreign agencies and organizations operating in the country.

In addition to agricultural and educational issues, GT has been carefully charting the warming of Georgian-Russian relations, monitoring the affect of a more curtailed US foreign policy in the region, while keeping a close eye on 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.

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

I am
Sincerely yours,
Ian F. Carver

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AMAZING SOCAR-MCDONALDS ON THE BLACK SEA COAST IN BATUMI

Minister of Agriculture Davit Kirvalidze expects Harvest of “Real Results”

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

Mr. Davit Kirvalidze, Georgian Minister of Agriculture confirms to the Georgian Times that the development of agriculture is a priority direction for the country. Along with support from USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact, the Ministry of Agriculture is now also receiving assistance from European Union in the amount of 40 million euros. The GoG and the Ministry of Agriculture are trying to create the necessary conditions for the development of the agricultural sector in order to produce competitive products. However, it is hard to achieve this without International aid and expertise, and this is why Georgia continues to receive international assistance in support of its agricultural and rural sector.

What is the role of foreign investors in ongoing projects of the agricultural sector and with which countries is Georgia now working?

The main direction of reform is to get investors more involved in the agricultural sector. Hence, current reforms are strategically aimed at ensuring that investors are presented in the Georgian agricultural sector to the maximum degree possible. It is first necessary to create an agribusiness environment where investors will be able to turn an expected profit, as otherwise it will not be possible to draw the necessary investment to this sector.

Moreover, along with supporting the interests of investors, it is also necessary to consider the current reality in Georgia. We are currently evaluating some interesting proposals from different countries, and these include commercial offers from Israel, the US, South Africa and from Argentina. Now we will wait to see how events will develop and consider all options. I have presented today a report at the International Chamber of Commerce, and noticed that the agricultural sector of our country has drawn substantial interest from abroad. Agriculture is the sector that can not develop very quickly, and its development requires sufficient time and lots of management. We are considering all proposals of foreign investors and are ready to work with all investors which will offer us a healthy investment and the necessary expertise. It is paramount to take into account various features unique to Georgia: natural resources of our country and the principles of sustainable development, as we are working according to established principles of sustainable development. This means that we have to take care of both current and future generations and leave the environment in as good as shape as we found it so we have something to pass on to future generations: the soil, climate, water, and other renewable resources.

Does Georgia already have modern technology necessary for the development of agriculture? And how do you work in this direction?



No. Georgia does not have the necessary technology yet. It is impossible to produce competitive products without it. That is the main reason we need the help of investors, for technology transfer. And again, agricultural technology should also match the specific needs of Georgia.

Georgia was trying for a long time (from 2006) to return to the Russian market. How will the access to the Russian market affect the Georgian economy? Is the Russian Market really important for Georgia?

The Russian market is now topical because it was closed for many years. All other markets are also very important for us. Yes, the Russian market is very important for Georgia, but despite its importance, it should not be the only one. Diversification is an important principle in exports, not to put all our eggs in one basket. The Russian market is interesting because of its sheer size and we are also working to develop other markets for some exports. Our products, for example wine and other alcoholic products today are exported to 40 countries. The Russian market will be the additional destination, but this does not mean that we will be paying less attention to other markets. Exports to the Russian market are very important for the farmers cultivating fruits and vegetables. The whole world wants to enter the Russian market. And besides, we are geographically close to Russia, so that we can easily reintroduce our products without great expense. Of course, there are still difficulties that must be overcome over the next few years. But we are working on the problems and Georgian agricultural products will soon return to the Russian market.

What was the situation in the agricultural sector in the period when you were appointed as minister, and what challenges stand before you now?

A year ago, I faced a really difficult situation. The main problem is that the manufacturers of agricultural products, including farmers and peasants have no identification documents in proving their private property. In addition, the infrastructure had all but been destroyed, irrigation systems did not work, no drainage, no available rural credit, have not been established rural advisory “consultation centers” – and hence was no required direction for food safety standards. It is clear that we have a long way to go. Much has been accomplished but we still have much to accomplish in a short period of time.

What about the law of land property? As you know, after the State reform in the 1990’s, many farmers and peasants lost their land plots. I mean, how will this

problem be solved?

First of all, we can not fully assess the reform undertaken by the government in terms of land deprivation. The above-mentioned reform was not completed, but because only 30% of landowners have document certificates of their real estate. It is necessary to classify existing plots of land and survey them under the Unified Land Code. This issue is not the prerogative of the Ministry of Agriculture as land registration task are within the scope of the Public Registry; however, our ministry is interested in resolving this issue, as secure land rights are essential to sustainable agriculture. We are intensively working as a commission and this will involve different ministries: the Ministry

of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Environment. In the nearest future, we will present a scheme, i.e. a concept on how after the initial registration, each individual will have his or her certificate of private property.

Almost half of the villages in the regions are empty. Their population either comes to the capital or departs for foreign countries. Do you think that they will be able to return to their villages?

We cannot make them return. But of course at the time when agriculture was not a priority, people began leaving their villages. The peasants should have necessary conditions for the development of their agriculture and we will create such conditions. For example, in Kakheti a few families which had been working in Europe came home. They were back, engaged in new projects and work here. The irrigation system is almost entirely destroyed in the regions. There are 300,000 hectares to be provided with water, but the former government has provided irrigation water only a fraction of this amount, less than one-tenth of the actual need. In western Georgia, at least 150 villages need drainage projects.

Is the situation the same in each region?

Yes, the situation is the same everywhere; the irrigation problem remains. We are carrying out serious work in this direction. It will take only 3-4 years to resolve this problem.

What about the assistance provided by the European Union?

The Ministry of Euro-integration of Georgia and the European Union signed an agreement that provides assistance to Georgia in the amount of 40 million euros. This contract provides direct budgetary support. From this amount 15 million euros will be allocated to non-governmental organizations under tender rules, which will be monitored by the European Commission. Non-governmental organizations should create the conditions for co-operative development in agriculture, i.e. for the creation of cooperatives in agriculture.

A few words about preferential Agro-loans which have already begun issued...

The Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia has developed a project “The preferential agro-loan project”. This is a program, which includes most of the banks existing in Georgia. Virtually all banks and microfinance institutions will issue loans. Then, after the issuance of loans, the “Agriculture development fund” will be activated which will reduce the interest rate to three percent. Percentage may be also

be reduced to one or two percent, depending on what percentage the banks give loans. (This is the preferential low-interest long-term loan). The program consists of the three components:

1) Interest-free commodity loan of 5,000 GEL for six months (Installment) for small farmers - %.

2) Preferential agro-loan for small and big farmers – not more than 8% (financing circulating assets and the purchase of reserves for a short term (2 year) from 5,000 to 100,000 GEL.

3) Preferential agro-loan for Agricultural Enterprises – not more than 3% (financing of fixed assets and technology for a long period for 1 million GEL).

When can we expect to see progress in the Agricultural sphere of Georgia?

In autumn of the current year, we can say that progress is being felt. A lot of time is needed for the agricultural sphere to stand on its own two feet. On this basis, for the final result we will need at least 3-4 years, although the first results we are able to see in the Autumn. We are working in all directions, all this will continue, and the nature of the work will take on a more intensive character, as we have much to restore, to correct past mistakes and try to learn from the mistakes of the last 20 years.

NDI Research: Unemployment is Georgia’s Biggest Problem

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

Georgians support the new government’s policy of restoring relations with Russia and believe unemployment is their number one problem, according to ‘Public Attitude in Georgia’, the second public opinion poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) since Georgia’s 2012 parliamentary election.

After the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 and the subsequent Russian occupation of Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which it then declared to be independent states, diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia were broken and relations in other spheres damaged. This is the first poll since then in which Georgian citizens have expressed a desire to improve relations with the Russian Federation.

The amicable tone and less confrontational rhetoric of Georgia’s new government towards Moscow has changed the public mood. The vast majority of Georgians (84 percent) welcome the negotiations on returning Georgian products to the Russian market, from which they were excluded by an embargo imposed before the war. The current relations between Georgia and Russia are not acceptable for 49 percent of poll respondents, and 38 percent approve of the warming of relations.

42 percent of poll respon-

dents believe that the threat posed by Russia is real but exaggerated. 26 percent believe that Russia is a real and current threat, while 23 percent said that it’s not a threat of any kind. This notwithstanding, the majority (63 percent) approved of the government’s pre-election promise to restore the country’s railway link with Russia through Abkhazia. This was severed in the lead up to the bloody civil war which followed the region’s attempts to gain independence from Tbilisi in 1993.

Though there is now a marked difference in the public opinion concerning relations with Russia, nothing has changed regarding aspirations to join the European Union and NATO: 76 percent of poll respondents, in line with previous figures, support Georgia becoming an EU member, as it desires, and 73 percent agree with NATO integration. Perhaps reflecting this desire to join Euro-Atlantic structures, 38 percent of respondents considered that there is no democracy in Georgia, while 43 percent believe that Georgia is a democratic country.

“The priority issues for Georgians have not changed. People continue to be optimistic over the direction Georgia is heading and the ability of the government to make the changes that matter to them,” Luis Navarro, NDI’s Country Director in Georgia, told journalists on April 15, adding that jobs remain the number one priority for 61 percent of Georgians and territorial integrity and affordable healthcare are the second and third priori-



ties, cited by 34 and 32 percent of respondents respectively.

“I think these are problems Georgia has been facing for years. For us, as the representatives of the new ruling team, these are the greatest challenges. We need to improve the situation in healthcare and unemployment. I think that in the near future some revolutionary steps will be taken in these directions. As for territorial integrity, I do not believe anyone thinks that this issue can be resolved in a short period of time,” majority MP Zviad Dzidziguri told GT.

President Saakashvili’s United National Movement looks at the NDI survey differently, and feels that the most important element is the concern about the increased unemployment rate. “For me the most important thing is the public’s feeling that the economic situation has worsened since last year. Instead of fighting the past and destroying the things we built, we call on the new government to help our economy with us, create jobs and make Georgians’ lives better,” David Bakradze, Leader of the UNM, said.

The poll suggests that the UNM’s approval rate has dramatically decreased since it fell from power. Only four percent of poll respondents maintained that Saakashvili’s team ran the country more effectively than the new government. Not surprisingly, the initiatives of the new government are being widely supported. About half of respondents hailed the amnesty granted to over 8,000 prisoners, even though the majority of these recognise that this would possibly lead to an increase in crime.

The NDI poll was conducted between March 13th and 27th via face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of Georgian speakers from throughout the country involving 3,103 interviews. The poll asked questions on issues of public importance, perceptions of democracy, attitudes toward reforms and various domestic and foreign policy issues. It was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and conducted by interviewers from the Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRCC).



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Tragedy of the Commons: lands of Ditsi's farmers sold off to Indian Businessmen

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

The small village of Ditsi, located in close proximity to Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia, once on the frontline during the war of August 2008, has recently become another flashpoint – not between the two parties to the conflict that is still in the minds of locals – but between them and foreign investors. The villagers, with no official ownership papers, claim that the land plots in the area actually belong to them; they have worked the land for years and is something that has been handed down from generation to generation. They are adamant that foreigners will not work their land. However, foreign investors – recent arrivals from India – have in hand all the legal documentation, and with appropriate stamps and seals. All is properly registered with Georgian institutions and the Indians can prove without a doubt that they are the new rightful owners of the land. Both parties plan to take the matter to court in order to prove their case but this may just be the beginning of the story.

The agricultural settlement of Ditsi lies approximately 120 kilometers to the northwest of Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, on the divide with the breakaway region of South Ossetia. The Georgian-Russian war in 2008 resulted in the state recognition and occupation of South Ossetia

by the Russia Federation. Border delineation was implemented between the region and Georgia proper, as instigated by the Ossetian side with its mountains and control of the river head being used to mark off the territory. The water supply to Ditsi and other Georgian towns in the border area has been diverted. Negotiations between Tbilisi and the separatist capital of Tskhinvali did not yield any agreement as how to share water rights. The problem of irrigation field crops and orchards remained unsolved for years. Farms on the Georgian side are now left with having to depend on the whims of Mother Nature to bring forth a successful harvest.

In December 2012, villagers were presented with a new set of problems: 82 out of 140 hectares of Ditsi's shared commons were sold off to foreign investors. Four Indian companies registered with Georgia's National Agency of Public Registry (NAPR) from October 15 to November 30, 2012 purchased a total of 819,405.00 sq meters. G.H. Agro Ltd, LLC S.K. Agro Farm Ltd, Aman City I Ltd and LLC G.G. Agro Farm Ltd are registered at the same address – 49-51, Gakhokidze Street, Tbilisi but have different directors. The Agreement on Land Purchase was notified on December 3, 2012 by notary public Ekaterina Kitsi and registered with the Public Registry the next day. However, Ditsi villagers were kept completely in the dark, and not involved in any hearings as how this would impact their lives. They were only informed in April, 2013 when Indian farmers arrived in the village and

started preparing the ground for a new crop.

"When we heard the news that our lands had been sold off

bought as shared pastures. "In fact they deprived us of our property. We don't know who sold them the land but we are not going

longed to Madli Ltd registered in Gori (the administrative town in the region). Interestingly, Madli purchased the land in the end of



to Indians; we were shocked. We went to the fields and saw that they were going to plant apple trees. We told them to stop as this is our land, and they tried to convince us of being the new landowners but we stood firm and didn't let them work. They gave up and left the village and we filled in the pits that they dug out. The Indians haven't come back since then," local resident Giorgi Sosiasvili told *The Georgian Times*.

TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

Sosiasvili says the locals lack adequate grazing lands for their livestock and now they use the lands the foreigners had

to turn over the plots without a fight. The locals are convinced that the land was sold on the sly with a number of violations, so they have addressed the Prosecutor's Office and Tbilisi court," he added.

However, based on NAPS's documents, there was no violation in legal procedures. According to extracts from the Registry, there was no lien, injunction, mortgage or debts registered for the lands that the Indian citizens purchased. The document does not contain information about the land's previous owner, though Head of Agriculture Service of Gori's Municipality Local Government Giorgi Khidasheli informed the land be-

November 2012 – a couple of days before being sold it to foreigners. In the online data of Public Registry, there were a few companies named Madli but they were all registered in 2013.

Khidasheli admitted that the foreign citizens have done nothing illegal, although he expressed his misgivings about Indians who he claims are then selling the land to Russians, who are positioned a few kilometers away from Ditsi. "Georgians should not sell land at such strategically important areas," he concluded.

The fear of finding themselves squeezed between Russian servicemen and Indian tillers cropped up not only with Gori officials but the mayor of Ditsi

as well. "Do you see that mountain? Tskhinvali is on the other side. We fought for this land during the 2008 war, no one left his or her home during that period. For Indians this land is just a source of income and they can sell it to anyone for a good enough price, even to the Russians, if they want. What will we do then? These plots belong to our village and locals will not give up fighting, though I can understand foreigners as well – they bought the land and want to work it," Zaqaria Vatiadze told GT.

According to Vatiadze, in 1992 when the privatization process began the then Prime Minister of Georgia Tengiz Sigua issued a decree which allocated 1.25 hectares of arable land for each family living in the rural countryside. Ditsi residents, decided to accept only 1 hectare and leave the rest as a reserve area for new families in the area and to be collectively used. On the territory of an old Soviet "kolkhoz" (agricultural collective), the "Ditsi" farmers cooperative was founded to assist peasants with plowing and sowing crops. It remains unclear just what happened in the late 90's after the cooperative, "farmers association" was dissolved but the issue of the reserve land has been unsettled till now. The only document Ditsi villagers have today is Meeting Minutes on the kolkhoz collapse and the founding of the new cooperative, which reflects that each Ditsi dweller refused 0.25 hectares in order to preserve some land for new families; the document is kept in Gori's archive.

Continued on p. 8

"Rut Hog or Die" – Problems of Georgian Agriculture in a Nutshell!

By JOHN B. BRADFORD AND IAN F. CARVER, GT

For the Georgian Minister of Agriculture and those working in regional economic development, there needs to be a change in approach and understanding of the main problems facing Georgia's agricultural and rural sector. There does appear to be a divide between the thinking of the current government and the previous one, at least based on the policy direction. But this does not necessarily involve looking for innovative ways for projects and programs to be more need-driven rather than donor-driven. Rural development does not only mean agricultural development; rural communities themselves must understand what needs to be done in order for them to be to sustainable and discourage youth from flocking to the larger towns where jobs and opportunities are already in short supply.

Then too comes the problem of agricultural imports, and how the previous government opened the door to cheap Turkish and Iranian products (like lemons and potatoes), which has put local producers at a great disadvantage. It is not only due to the apparent inability to produce high quantities and quality of such products (economies of scale) but how to effectively market their products where the gate keepers of the markets are those that would rather cater to the needs of importers, middlemen and backhanding politicians.

Georgia may have been too quick in the early days after receiving World Trade Organization membership "not" to ask for a transition period to regain its agricultural competitive advantage, which was permitted under WTO rules, before opening the flood gates for cheap imports from its more developed neighbors. Hence, in combination with liberal trade relations, including WTO and cozy political ties with Iran and Turkey, Georgian farmers have come out with the short end of the stick; part of the problem is at-

tributed to their own attitude towards being able to work together (such as in farmers associations and processing cooperatives) and produce adequate volumes of an acceptable quality.

Nonetheless, the question remains how is it possible for Georgia to compete? With which products is Georgia competitive and what potential is there. Wine? Even this sphere is questionable based on price and the sour taste that Georgian wine left in the mouths of many who were impressed with the sample but not with the delivered product. Georgia should thank Russia for drawing attention years back to the issue of low quality of Georgian wine, made out of concentrate in some cases. Former Minister of Defense Irakli Okruashvili did not help matters in the PR field when he infamously stated how "Russians would drink anything put in a bottle, even piss."

Why are there so many "run-of-the-mill" fruits and vegetables found in the Georgian market? Much has to do with the lack of any uniform grading standards and collection points where farmers can pool their harvests and sort and pack and organize trans-

port to markets. There are also obvious problems when it comes to agricultural input supplies, access to credit, cold storage facilities, transportation, etc.

However, the real issue is the lack of access to rural advisory services, cooperative extension, and even some of the most basic management practices: pasture and land rotations, sub-soiling, use of green and livestock manure, liming the soil to improve soil chemistry and nutrient uptake, not to mention appropriate and timely use of chemicals and integrated pest management practices.

Is there a basic plan to address these problems? The previous government established dozens of agriculture equipment depots, parking shining tractors and other equipment alongside highways prior to elections. It is still an open debate just but how effective these were, and will be in the future. It does appear, however, that these were organized not really with the interest of the farmers in mind. Many small farmers can't even afford the fuel let alone rent these tractors, and their land plots are often too small, even mere kitchen gardens.


One should also question the approach of the many foreign development initiatives in the country, including those funded by USAID, and what impact they are having. There have been countless such programs over the decades and more are planned, but the same problems still exist. Old reports as to what should be done are still unread and the lack of resolve on the part of many stakeholders is only making the agricultural sector even worse. Foreign NGO staff in this sphere are often rotated in and out of the country based on the project cycle and lack local knowledge. When new grant money is made available, they rely on a close network of "old in-country contacts" still desperately looking for employment, albeit who more often than not lack institutional knowledge and technical expertise in the agricultural sphere. Most local hires are from Tbilisi and when they go out to regions they lack empathy and cannot effectively communicate or relate to rural populations, not because of language but attitude and being able to relate to rural people.

This begs the question as to whether the Georgian govern-

ment can do anything on its own (and whether foreign governments actually want it to) and whether the local government can do anything that is more effective than what outsiders have offered? Aid under the guise of rural and agricultural development provided under such a scenario is more politically motivated than need-based.

Meanwhile, Georgia is struggling to reconcile the need for investments by selling off land to foreigners with the needs of locals while not compromising its national interests. Is it that Georgians are financially unable or just unwilling to develop their country's agricultural sector themselves? The Georgian Times has already discussed these issues extensively through interviews with Indian farmers and locals in Kakheti, with a new article this week about a new simmering conflict between peasants near South Ossetia and recently arrived Indian investors. We also interviewed the Minister of Agriculture this week for his comments on these timely issues.

It is not time to really let the market decide – but to provide stimulus to growers to go for larger scale and work together in collective efforts in this difficult transition period, and if not, tax land that is not being used – and support efforts to seed down that land where at least it will be available to future generations when Georgians are unable to afford imported food products and will have to do like their ancestors – make a living off the land or get off and let others take their place.

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Businesses Warn Against New Labor Code

By LIKA MOSHIAVILI, GT

This week the Parliament of Georgia will continue its debate on the planned amendments to Labor Legislation. Comments and recommendations proposed by local NGOs and interested organizations have been taken into account by the authors of the draft Law. Nevertheless, issues remain which still require improvement in order to achieve the key objective of the Labor Code: to make the relations between an employer and an employee as balanced and as equal as possible.

Parliament's decision to change the Labor Code of Georgia has raised concerns within Georgia's business community. Representatives of the business community say the new labor code may have a negative effect on employment, business growth, investment and the people's well-

being as a whole.

The draft law, prepared by the Ministry of Justice, is focused on regulating and balancing the interests of employers and employees, aiming to create fair labor conditions for all. During a five-month period, the ministry held meetings with business and trade unions, employers' associations, as well as local and international organizations, to ensure that the Labor Code was just and impartial.

The amendments underline tolerance in pre-contract relations and address issues related to overtime. As stated by the draft law, the probation period must be paid and the amount should be determined by the agreement between the parties; while overtime wages must be paid hourly and at an increased rate.

Additionally, the most criticized article in the current law – dismissing employees without providing a reason – is addressed in the draft, requiring the employer to clarify the motive, notify the employee 30 days

prior and to compensate the employee with one month's salary.

"In my opinion, fair labor legislation is beneficial to both the employer and employee. The approach of our company is to create the best conditions for employees, since a contented employee is more committed, productive and motivated," commented Khatuna Chkhaidze, HR and Administration Director of the Natakhtari Brewing Company. "I can state with certain pride that Natakhtari has been using the principles which are to be implemented under the amended code," she continued.

American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Georgia and International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) of Georgia released statements calling on the Parliament and the government to urgently consider their concerns.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia has been actively engaged in the working process of amending the Labor

Code together with other business associations. The chamber welcomes the initiative of the government to create a balanced and fair Labor Code, but believes that some of the points should be urgently reconsidered in order to reach a fair Labor Code that promotes employment and business growth "rather than one that creates unemployment and business stagnation."

AmCham states firstly that the companies must be allowed to make one-year term contracts with employees, granting them stability and better financial and administrative planning for companies. Secondly, the draft code does not allow companies to include a mutually agreed upon provision in their contracts that prohibits employees from sharing confidential knowledge and information about a company with its competitors. They note that this is a very standard provision in European and American employment agreements.

AmCham also raises concerns about the required 40 hour work

week in the draft code. Specific types of jobs require more than 40 hours in one week and less in others, so AmCham suggests granting the company the right to contract employees for more than 40 hours a week based on a mutual agreement and governed by the requirements for equivalent rest time.

At this stage, government members do not agree with AmCham and ICC of Georgia. According to Aleksandre Baramidze, the Deputy Minister of Justice, the balanced labor relationships and employees' legal guarantees were the key concerns throughout the creation of the draft, as well as the obligation to pursue them under international standards.

"There is no Labor Code in Georgia at present. According to the current code, only one side – the employer, has all rights and almost zero obligations and the second side – employee, has only obligations and no rights at all," stated Baramidze.

Georgian Young Lawyers' As-

sociation (GYLA) positively evaluates the new Labor Legislation.

"During the working period we provided the Ministry of Justice with our recommendations and some of them are involved in the amendments. But the draft has its flaws and some of the issues still need to be improved," explained Lina Gvinianidze, Parliamentary Secretary of GYLA. "We do not agree with the contract termination part. There is not substantial changes made in it and the employer still has large amount of rights."

According to Gvinianidze, GYLA is going to announce its recommendations at the coming parliament sessions.

The planned amendments to the Labor Legislation should have been discussed on April 17 but Dimitri Khundadze, the chairman of Healthcare and Social Issues Committee of Georgian Parliament asked to postpone it for the next week to review all the details related to this problematic issue.

Uncertain Fate of Khudoni Hydropower Construction Amid Enviro and Social Concerns

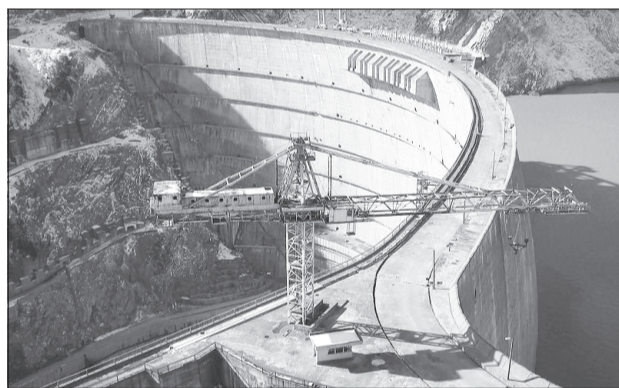
By LIKA MOSHIAVILI, GT

A Group of Dutch experts, specially invited by Georgia's Ministry of Environmental Protection to review the Environmental Impact Assessment of the controversial Khudoni hydropower project, presented their preliminary conclusions and recommendations. According to the experts, the EIA report prepared by the Georgian experts has flaws and requires corrections if it is to meet international standards. As the foreign experts stated, the report contains very important issues that require attention; they recommend the MoEP to not grant permission for the facility's construction if the investor does not properly take the report's findings into consideration.

"We advise to postpone of the Khudoni hydroelectric power station's construction for at least a year to prepare a full report on the possible consequences of the construction," commented Arent Kalkhof, head of the international expert group.

Georgia invited NCEA (from the Netherlands), which has been studying the EIA report on the construction and exploitation of Khudoni power plant for over half a month. A few weeks ago the group also visited Khaishi, a village in Georgia's mountainous Svaneti region where Khudoni is planned to be built.

"We met local people in Khaishi. They are very worried about their houses, their jobs... These people have a great distrust towards the government and investors. There is almost no communication between the sides," explained Kalkhof, add-



ing that "the resettlement plan, involved in the environmental and social assessment does not meet international standards."

As Zurab Nizharadze, a teacher from Khaishi stated "the locals fear an ecological and economic catastrophe that will be caused by the project if it is realized."

"Our church, where our ancestors prayed, where we and our children are praying now will be flooded. Cemeteries dating back to the early Middle Ages and new ones will be flooded too. No one in this village will leave the grave of his/her ancestor. We will take our graves with us," Nizharadze told the Georgian Times.

"We are against these constructions. Yes, we want the energy and hydropower to develop and the country to move forward but not at the expense of the local people's livelihoods," he continued.

Aiming to start construction on the 702 Megawatt capacity Khudoni hydropower plant, which envisages a 170 meter-high concrete arched dam and a 3.5 mln cubic meter artificial reservoir, Trans Electrica Ltd, an Indian company, has signed a deal with the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia in 2012.

If the Environment and Social Impact Assessment docu-

ment of the Khudoni project is approved by the Ministry, its construction will be launched. The hydropower plant will require 528 hectares of the highland Svaneti region to be covered by water, flooding the houses of more than 260 families and others from adjacent settlements, as well as an 11th century church.

Estimated at a value of USD 1 billion, the Khudoni project is the first Indian venture in Georgia's energy sector. Construction is scheduled to start as soon as permission is granted, with the project expected to take 6 years to complete.

The international expert group working on the Khudoni project includes geologists, seismologists, hydrotechnologists, experts of biodiversity, social and replacement issues, as well as experts of energy economy and environmental impact assessments.

During the presentation, Dutch experts underlined three main issues that need more attention from the government's side before any final decision is made: firstly, social aspects have not been properly studied – the population does not have enough information; secondly, the life expectancy of the Khudoni power plant may be reduced from 95 years to 30 years; and the third-

documents reviewed by the Commission do not show what economic benefit the country will receive from the Khudoni construction.

International experts will release the final report on the Khudoni project in three weeks.

Georgian Energy Minister Kakha Kaladze suspects the experts were not fully informed and the Energy Ministry is ready to cooperate with them by providing full information on the project to enable them to form their expert opinion.

"Our approach is to maximally use the country's resources, that is, build the hydroelectric power stations to make Georgia a self-sufficient country in terms of energy use," Kaladze said, adding that energy security is of great importance for Georgia and the ministry will do everything to achieve this goal.

As Khatuna Gogaladze, Minister of Environmental Protection of Georgia stated, they absolutely trust the recommendations of the Dutch experts.

"This is a very experienced, authoritative and independent commission that provides consultations on environmental impact assessments to many countries around the world," she stated. "We are waiting for their final report to make a decision."

"According to the report created by the international experts, the MoEP is unable to make a positive decision on the Khudoni power plant project," stated Nino Chkhobadze, ecologist and ex Minister of Environmental Protection after the viewing the presentation.

The construction of the Khudoni power plant has long been a controversial topic. Construction started in the late 1970s under Soviet rule, and was just as contentious then. In the late 1980s construction works were put on hold amid mass protests against the project.

Tragedy of the Commons: lands of Ditsi's farmers sold off to Indians Businessmen

Continued from p. 6

DODGY DOCUMENTS?

Meanwhile, Indian citizens claim that they hold stronger legal proof, and in fact they are the new landowners. As Ravinder Singh, director of S.K. Agro Farm Ltd, told GT, he hired a notary to provide legal assistance. After studying the documents the notary public approved the agreement and took it to the Public Registry to re-register the land in the foreigner's name.

"I along with my companions started cultivating the land in December 2012 but no one came and told us this was their plot. We went back to India for awhile; when we returned and traveled to Ditsi again to plant apple-trees, the locals came and prevented us from working. I don't know at whose instigation they come but [those] villagers had no legal right to drive us away as we didn't break any law. We addressed the police but no action was taken till now. If they do not investigate the case we will take it to court," Ravinder Singh stressed.

Singh added that he initially was brought to Ditsi by Georgians, who told him the land was for sale. The Indian investor was neither informed that the land was situated near the occupied territory and belonged to reserve area of the village, nor that it suffered irrigation problems. "I paid 2,000 USD per hectare and now I can't even work my land. If there were any problems with this land your government should put a ban on it instead of selling it to foreigners. How should we know what's going on in Georgia? We just checked the ownership status and as long as everything checked out, we proceeded with the agreement. Now the

government should protect us and our right, otherwise no one will come to Georgia and invest their money. If they don't want foreigners coming to Georgia they should say it clearly," he emphasized.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Meanwhile, Georgia's Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili has hailed foreign farmers' desire to take part in developing Georgian agriculture. The Head of the Cabinet emphasized that the new government does not have the right to renege on previous concluded agreements signed legally by the previous authorities, and even those implied in law. "If we commit an illegal action then the consequences will be severe. It will only take 2-3 land ownership cases and our economy will be damaged," implying that the demands of Georgian peasants to nullify the contracts on land purchases signed with foreign citizens is not in the best interest of Georgia.

According to informal sources, agricultural land in Georgia has been sold to foreigners in upward of 70 villages. Mainly purchasers are citizens of Pakistan, Turkey, India and China. It is clear to many that such actions are predominately financially motivated and that all options to develop the agricultural sector have not been pursued. The legality of such land purchases is open to further discussion – but one thing is certain, buyers must be beware and those working in government should be aware of the social, economic and cultural aspects of selling land to foreigners – especially in times when the agricultural sector is the most promising part of the economy for sustainable development.

Ex intelligence Head attacks Vano Merabishvili

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

Ahead of the planned rally on April 19, President Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) party was racked by a number of controversies, involving allegations voiced against secretary general of UNM Vano Merabishvili purportedly by his former subordinate and senior interior ministry official Data Akhalaia, as well as the release of previously secret Presidential spending records. "UNM is a strongly united team based on values and there is no internal strife within the party", stated President Saakashvili, who is also a chairman of UNM.

A message posted on Facebook allegedly by a former official who fled from Georgia after the October parliamentary elections has triggered a massive outcry in the country. As Akhalaia's statement reads, "one man – Vano Merabishvili is guilty of all disasters that happened in Georgia."

"I have been observing the ongoing painful situation in my country over the seventh months I've been away from my homeland. I think, analyze the

past and I am becoming more and more convinced that only one man triggered all the disasters that happened in Georgia; the man who destroyed the government and the country in his struggle against me and my brother," Akhalaia stated.

In addition, Akhalaia wrote that the Lapankuri incident was planned by Vano Merabishvili and implemented by Giorgi Lortkipanidze against his brother Bacho Akhalaia.

The authenticity of the message, which probably belongs to a strongman of Saakashvili's government, cannot be verified, but it has caused strong reactions and a heated discussion in the country. Although Data Akhalaia's lawyer Irakli Zakareishvili twice confirmed that this letter really was written by his client, family members and friends call it a fabrication.

Data Akhalaia led the powerful constitutional security department within the Interior Ministry for years and then served as deputy defense minister before the October 2012 parliamentary elections.

Data Akhalaia, now in exile, according to several Georgian media in Turkey, and is wanted in Georgia for crimes involving assault on a police officer, is the

elder brother of Bacho Akhalaia, the former defense minister who now is in prison and going through several court hearings. Their father is Roland Akhalaia, a former prosecutor who now is MP with the opposition UNM party.

The day after Data Akhalaia's statement, Marika Verulashvili, a member of parliament who left the UNM faction after the parliamentary elections and became an independent MP, said that she thinks "it is a crime to be together with Vano Merabishvili."

"The failure of the National Movement in the parliamentary elections is because of Merabishvili," she commented at the Tbilisi City Court, where she attended the trial of Bacho Akhalaia.

As she claims, Merabishvili is not accustomed to listening to the truth, but "he will have to listen to the truth and many unpleasant surprises await him in the nearest future."

Asked about allegations voiced by former UNM MP Marika Verulashvili and accusations purportedly leveled by former senior interior ministry official Data Akhalaia, Merabishvili responded: "Unfortunately many of my friends failed

to resist pressure, blackmailing and I can only regret it. But the core team of the National Movement is firm and the current government will fail to terrorize the majority of them."

Merabishvili added that the latest events were related to the UNM's April 19 rally, which he claimed the Ivanishvili's government was afraid of.

The statement spread in the social network reads that Akhalaia plans to come to Georgia in the near future and answer questions. The chief prosecutor told journalists at a press conference that if Data Akhalaia returns, he will be detained immediately.

In the interview with Georgian TV station Rustavi 2, President Mikheil Saakashvili denied UNM infighting. "I don't even want to talk about it; it's simply not serious," he commented.

As President commented he had never had close ties with Data Akhalaia and since the Rose Revolution he had met him only "two or three times." "I do not think that he was an activist of the National Movement at all," Saakashvili stated, adding that in the Parliament the UNM "has a very good team" of lawmakers.

Saakashvili also downplayed allegations of misspending pub-



lic funds and called on the government "not to make fun of it."

Irina Imerlishvili, the Chairwoman of the parliamentary committee of procedural issues, this week made public documents, involving spending records from the Special State Protection Service (SSPS), which the ruling Georgian Dream coalition claims shows misspending of large amounts of public funds by President Saakashvili.

Giga Bokeria, the Secretary of the National Security Council, terms Data Akhalaia's statement as raving. "We had some members in our team that then

degraded and started raving absurd things," Bokeria said.

On April 19 UNM held a rally, where UNM leaders, President Saakashvili, Vano Merabishvili, Tbilisi mayor Gigi Ugulava as well as Secretary of National Security Council Giga Bokeria addressed to their supporters gathered outside an old parliament building on Rustaveli Avenue. Less than seven months after their defeat in the parliamentary elections, UNM senior figures are speaking about their party's "renewal" and launch of a new campaign, which they dubbed as "new national movement".

American Journalist Jeffrey Silverman's Interview Prompts US Embassy Response

By IAN F. CARVER, GT

A "dump" of controversial information last week by an American journalist has touched upon a number of highly sensitive topics in Georgia. It created a flurry of media activity that subsequently went viral on social networking sites, prompting a response from the US Embassy in Tbilisi.

The information, which includes allegations of US military contractors involvement in the Georgian-Russian war, the death of the country's former Prime Minister and a recently established 150 USD million biological reference laboratory near the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, was both supported and discounted by local officials and influential elements of in the country.

On April 16, Jeffrey Silverman, a long term resident of Georgia, 20 years plus, and former US Army Scout, who had provided advisory services to incumbent Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili prior to coming to power with the 2003 Rose Revolution, was interviewed by the local newspaper Kvela Siakhle (All the News) and followed up with interviews with all main TV stations (with the noted exception of Rustavi2).

In his interviews, Silverman claims that shortly after the suspicious death of Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in 2004,



a intimate contact of an agent of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) who had been assigned to Georgia and provided him the name of the person who had destroyed evidence that would have showed that Zhvania did not die from a faulty Iranian gas heater, but was murdered.

Silverman claimed that FBI agent Brian Parmann, directed by the then leadership of the United States, had destroyed the forensic evidence because the real cause of the murder would have damaged the image of Saakashvili and negatively impacted US foreign policy in Georgia and the wider region.

The American journalist also claimed that there is a biological weapons laboratory in Tbilisi

which houses deadly bio agents that can be weaponized (anthrax, measles, and black plague and H1N1 bacteria). Similar information has also been alleged by a Norwegian journalist who was attacked during a site visit, as reported in the Georgian Times several years ago.

As Silverman describes in his recent interviews, the "bio weapons laboratory" was constructed in 2007 by US construction engineering company Bechtel National. Anna Zhvania, the former head of the Georgian Foreign Intelligence Service, was the appointed laboratory director. He claims that the laboratory is scheduled to produce biological weapon components, which are prohibited in the United States.

"If there is an emergency at the laboratory, Georgia will be wiped off the face of the earth," Silverman said, adding that there are plans to produce Anthrax, measles, black plague and H1N1. "It is possible that these viruses are being artificially spread, and in fact measles is a serious problem in this country today."

Silverman asserted that a counterpart laboratory has also been operating in Georgia's Black Sea coastal city of Kobuleti under the auspices of the UK's Ministry of Defence that deals with plant diseases, and that there is also a smaller satellite biological laboratory in Kutaisi.

Perhaps most timely, following the Georgian government's recent announcement to conduct a thorough local investigation into the causes of the Georgian-Russian war in 2008, Silverman told that during August 2008 he was behind the Russian lines in South Ossetia, the breakaway region that the five-day war was fought over. There he observed events as part of a fact-finding report that he sent to Matthew Bryza, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state at the time, who Silverman asserts was well aware of the timing of the war before actual hostilities broke out.

Silverman states he himself knew that the war would break out two months beforehand, having learned this from representatives of Cubic and Archangel, two private American companies established by former ser-

vicemen and retired military officers and that David Kezerashvili, Georgia's Minister of Defence at the time of the war, had hired these companies to assist in military planning and training. This "intelligence leak" was also reported by the current editor-in-chief of the Georgian Times in a US newspaper shortly before the actual war broke out and the date of war was shared with the Georgian Human Rights Centre.

"A group of snipers trained by Archangel was operating in Tskhinvali, even shooting civilians prior to the actual start of the war. Honestly, this was not a war but a Great Game; the military command and control structure had been intentionally disabled, for example, the electronic warfare unit of the MoD. Georgia could have won this war, but chose not to, and this was intentional – as part of game theory to test Russian resolve and technology," Silverman explained to GT in elaborating his comments during the interviews with local media.

These allegations have been widely publicised in Georgia since they were made because they confirm longstanding rumours. The US Embassy promptly released a statement in response to Silverman's serious allegations, stating "The United States strongly supports freedom of speech and the press and has long advocated for a free and pluralistic media environment in Geor-

gia and elsewhere. Nevertheless, with journalistic freedom comes responsibility, including the responsibility to corroborate information before reporting it. The interview excerpts Kviris Palitra published today on its website and Facebook page contain a number of statements about U.S. policy that are absolutely without any basis in fact, and that, unfortunately, reflect on the veracity of their apparent source," the statement reads.

The US Embassy has long maintained that Mr. Silverman is not a reliable source of information. However, diplomatic protocol requires an Embassy to counter apparent misinformation by simply stating what it believes to be the correct information but this does not appear to be the case.

The Georgian Times followed up with the US Embassy and was told by its press officer that "journalists should make sure that when they report things, they are accurate and trustworthy." But when asked about the US Embassy's response to Silverman's comments on US military contractors' involvement in the Russian-Georgian war, the Embassy told GT that such allegations are "false" but "has no additional comments on the matter" because it is a question for the US Department of Defence. It also stated that to its knowledge that Mr. Silverman has never been employed as a defence contractor.

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The order of the following is a list of participants has no significance

- 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 "Aversi 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
- LTD Geoplant
- 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"
- Georigan 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

Perks for Georgian President or Blatant Elite Corruption?!

By UTA BITSADZE, GT

Funds from the state budget allocated for the Special State Protection of Georgia (SSPS) were apparently spent for the foreign trips of the President of Georgia, his family members, friends, political advisors and government officials. Irina Imerlishvili, chairperson of Procedural issues and Rules Committee of Parliament and Davit Saganelidze, leader of the Parliamentary majority recently talked about the possibility that tax payers' money was not spent appropriately. A press conference was held in association with the claims and now the Ministry of Internal Affairs is interested in this issue, and an investigation is being instigated.

President Mikhail Saakashvili, the star leader of the much touted 2003 Rose Revolution often blamed former president Eduard Shevardnadze and his minions for wasting state finances and elite corruption. Apparently, based on official documents, the shoe is now on the other foot. Millions and millions of GEL have been spent on things that are not envisioned by governmental rules, and in fact, this constitutes fraud and corruption. Most often this is called elite corruption in Georgia.

On March 12, 2013 parliamentary majority members addressed the general prosecutor for information about SSPS expenditures. Previously the Special State Protection of Georgia was subordinated to the president, and such expenditures were classified as secret and not publically transparent.

"Information about SSPS expenditures was secret when this office was under subordination of President. After being subordinat-

ed under the current government, the secrecy status was removed. Documents include some shocking information" – underlined Parliamentary member Irina Imerlishvili.

As Imerlishvili says there were two schemes used for spending SSPS money. It was possible to get information about salaries of SSPS employees and expenditures during visits of foreign officials, but information on finances spent for the president and those of his staff was kept completely secret.

Official documents give us all information about millions of GEL which were spent for comfort under the president's private order. The following is an incomplete list of SSPS money expenditures for no special purpose:

President Saakashvili and Tbilisi Mayer Gigi Ugulava spent their time in Austria in one of the most expensive hotels in 2010. Their one week long stay cost 115 000 GEL.

In 2011, February 12-17 Giorgi Arveladze and current Parliament member Giorgi Bara-

midze took the time to relax with the president in Merano sanatorium, Italy, for a price tag of 37,492 Euros.

Spending leisure time with the Georgian president with budget money is nothing strange for other MPs. Both former and current UNM members celebrated 2013 New Year with Mikhail Saakashvili in Dubai. Expenditures added up to 240,000 GEL, again at taxpayers' expense.

State finances were also spent for the trip of president's family members to various foreign countries. While the first lady was visiting the United States, 16, 618 USD were paid for hotel lodging. A total of 26,793 GEL was spent for air tickets for family members; 1,190 GEL for their clothes.

According to these documents, from 2010-2011 19, 900 GEL of Georgian taxpayers' money was spent for the president's elder son to study abroad and for his younger son's schooling.

Moreover, documents con-

firm that large sums of money were also spent for personal gifts. Under the president's order, in 2011, 3,500 GEL was spent on a gold bracelet for UNM activist and current Parliamentary Mariam Sajaia. Also, 1,599 GEL was spent for a IPHONE 4 for Tinatin Bokuchava.

It appears that Georgian cuisine could not satisfy the president's taste. He hired a Spanish cook. With expenditures reaching 25, 000 GEL per month. The cook served the president for two years and a total of half a million GEL was spent for such services.

Experts say that these documents confirm what many have suspected for years: elite corruption. UNM Parliamentary deputies think that publishing those documents is unjustified. They say that it harms the SSPS' image.

"Government thinks that UNM is developing steadily and fast...their only target of these documents is to discredit UNM. The government must take care

of elite corruption amongst their members" – noted Parliamentary minority member Giorgi Kandelaki in a conversation with journalists.

Parliamentary majority members say that some current parliamentarians are also participants of spending money for purchases that are unjustified. For this reason, they feel it is important to create Parliament commission which will investigate such facts in more detail. Parliament will continue to work on the documents in nearest future and in cooperation with the general prosecutor.

Experts think that SSPS expenditures must have become the sphere of interest for State Audit office of Georgia. As is apparent, the head of Audit Office never became interested in the expenditures made by the president and his family members with indifference to opposition political parties.

After these facts were openly revealed, many people started talking about morality and ethics. It is clear that the new government is obliged to put a law in place that will prevent such things from happening again. Moreover, those experts dealing with accountability are calling for answers to be provided to all questions being asked by the society in light of the recently released secret documents.

Giving up on the Georgian Idea of Love: An American Girl's Experience in Georgia

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

People tend to travel to fall in love. Somehow we get the idea of finding someone abroad has a touch of romance. There are quite a few disappointed foreigners in Georgia. People hear the myth of old fashioned Georgian love. Georgian men pay for dinners, buy flowers, write poems to the loved ones and are family oriented – this is the popular myth. It's like an epidemic, guys stopped being romantic, making the magic, fighting for love. They call you up here and there, and give you a big fat option of bailing out if you are not satisfied with something.

America – the country of dreams coming true – faced difficult times a few years ago. People fell into a search of a better future. A lot of them found jobs abroad. An American girl came to Georgia three years ago. She was looking for a job, to get away from the financial troubles she got into. Georgia offered her a stable job, but disappointed her in the means of love big time. Cultural and mental differences led her into major mistakes, yet her story still sounds brutal even for Georgians who know about it. Her story is quite unusual and unfortunately not a happy one either.

Why Georgia?

It was the time of recession in US. I worked as a teacher and I owned two houses at the time. I got pink slipped [laid off from work]. I lost my houses. I figured getting away was the best thing to do. So I filled out a few applications to go abroad to teach. My picks were – Chile, Korea, Georgia and a few other countries. I received the fastest response from Georgia. So in like a month I was on the plane flying over here.

Had you heard about Georgia before?

No, but after being accepted I did some research online.

What impression or idea did you get about Georgia from the internet?

That it is very traditional, old country with a lot of wars throughout its history. It seemed scary. It appeared underdeveloped, and I thought I would be walking into a war zone.

Was it anything like you imagined?

Well first we got here, people would just stare. Now it's different and people have become used to seeing foreigners everywhere.

How did your Georgian dating life start?

I had lived here for almost a year. I started dating my host family's friend. Everything was great. We would go to traditional "supras" and it was really fun. Yet his relationship with his sister would freak me out. She was possessive toward him. She would have her friends over and they would sit around me and ask me

tons of questions about the celebrity glamour of the US. I was like an alien to them from a different galaxy.

What was their attitude to you as an American girl?

Georgians think Americans are sluts. I get that idea a lot.

When did the violence start?

I took him to the party with all expats. We were drinking and I got too "friendly" with some girl. He got pissed. He basically dragged me into the cab with my hair; we went to his place and were fighting. And all of a sudden (it was very stupid of me) I said that his sister was acting like a wife and he started beating me up.

Was the sister present when he was beating you up?

Yes, she was there and she just sat there. She didn't do anything.

What did you do about it?

I talked to my manager and we both had an interview. He kept denying it, but eventually he admitted it. My female manager had my back, unlike the guy manager who wanted to exclude me from the program. She wanted me to press charges against him. But when he found it out he threatened that his family and friends would kill me.

Did you believe that?

At the time I did. I didn't realize how much power I have being an American here, how my government protects me.

How did it end?

I would have to still see him, because he was friends with my host family.

Did they help you?

No, they said it's an OK thing to do here in Georgia.

How did you go back to love life?

I started a new job; as a private tutor for a very rich family. I fell in love with their driver. He hardly spoke any English. He was beautiful; it was the love at first sight. I never paid attention to the fact that he had "a low status job". Georgian women pay attention to that; they are interested in money and status. Nobody ever warned me about this kind of thing. He was from the village. I never understood what that meant socially. I never knew people would look down on me dating a driver from the village.

But he managed to ask you out.

Yes, the winter holidays were coming and I was going to travel in Europe. So after I got back we went out and I paid. I paid for everything. I rented the apartment, he basically moved in. I fed him, did his laundry. He never chipped in to help. I paid for every date we've been on. Once we were wrestling and his phone fell out of his pocket and the screen got cracked. I said I was sorry and offered to buy a new phone. It was not an expensive one, but he accepted it. I actually bought him a new phone and he took it. What kind of a man does that?!

What else did he do that could give you the hint of his agenda?

He asked me to lend him \$2,000. Of course I didn't give

the money, but I kept on taking care of him in every way possible.

Did anyone tell you that he could have been using you?

Just one friend did. But somehow I didn't want to believe it. He was cheating on me. He would be here in my house and would talk to this model girl online. I would go through his phone and find out that he was lying to me about being at work till late. He would come to my place after seeing her. He would show me her pictures and told me she was just a friend. I don't know how, but at some point I believed in it.

Were you ok with that?

No, we broke up; then got back together again. I believed him again. But this girl never went out of the picture. He cheated on me again it was late summer and I broke up with him again. She knew about me, she referred to me as a "bitch". But he was telling her that he was just using me, so she didn't take it seriously. It was when I told him that I was going to call that girl and tell her everything, when he threw me against the wall and threatened to kill me. He actually took a shower after this, got ready and left all fresh and nice looking.

Did he ever push you into a marriage or just taking him to US?

Yes, but I never took it seriously. He used to tell me to leave together, and get married. He would put his hand on my belly and ask me "where is my baby".

He would say you are my life, and my wife, tell me you love me. But he never said he loved me. Even if we did go abroad, what the hell was he going to do in the US? He is a driver in his own country, what can he possibly do there? He never thought that far.

Did you have protected sex?

At the beginning yes, but then we stopped. I could have gotten pregnant anytime, I'm lucky I didn't.

Did he leave you alone easily?

When school started I saw him all the time. He charmed me. The girl ended their relationship, she chose another guy over him. We got back together again when I found his Facebook chats with his friends about me. He was saying that he was using me and that what he actually wanted was just to get to the US and then he'd dump me and move on with his life. That was hurtful. It was the last and final time we broke up.

What did he say?

He said that it was different in the village; that his friends from the village would never understand this kind of relationship. They all thought I was a slut because I was an American, so he had to take that position to justify himself. That was his apology.

How are you feeling now?

I'm leaving in the summer. I don't want this anymore. I don't believe that a Georgian guy can love an American girl. I gave up on the Georgian idea of love.



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April 19 Rally - Getting a Herd collected in one Place

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, Chairman, Foreign Policy Association of Georgia

Standby methods of drawing a crowd has not proved as successful as before, even with the mobilization of governmental and administration resources, including vast financial means that have less than transparent headwaters. The UNM could barely mobilize and bring together more than 10,000 thousand staunch supporters from all corners of Georgia. The political rally, held on Rustaveli Avenue last Friday has perhaps been a tell-tale sign of the maturing of the Georgian people in terms of political participation.

It was all fanfare and little performance, which became only too evident by the "catastrophic political avalanche" for the ex-leadership, of standing president Michael Saakashvili, as most especially evident during the last stage of the rally when the Secretary General of the party and ex-Minister of Internal

Affairs Vano Merabishvili openly showed his disagreement with the chairman of the ruling party, Mikhail Saakashvili.

Vano storming off as soon as Saakashvili began his speech was a sign to many rally participants as what they could expect in the future. The two hour rally was supposed to be some kind of "re-branding" for the ex-ruling party but in actuality it only too clearly demonstrated the new low of Georgian partisan politics – and that the party was more like a fish grasping for air.

This was one event that few were interested, not only those that had been bused in from the regions in a last ditch attempt to show popular support for a declining political party. The low-level of support from the population of Georgia, indifference of the international and national public societies (NGOs, mass-media, etc.), only confirmed the apathetic look on those that stood listening to their purported leaders. The crowd pleaser, President Mikhail Saakashvili, no longer lives up to his billing, and



in fact may be the reason for the less than impressive turnout.

It appeared that the vast majority of those standing were from the heartland of Mingrelia (the region well-known with sta-

ble and unwavering support to the ex-ruling political party, and

UNM, who have risen to top positions in the party leadership;

they are the frontline "movers and shakers" – for instance parliament member Roland Akhalaia, father of infamous brothers: Bacho and Data Akhalaia, most trustful and loyal ex-high-level officials to the President of

Georgians know well the core of support for the now fledgling

Georgia. The Akhalaia Brothers' recent verbal clashes with Vano Merabishvili and Mikhail Saakashvili himself increased a "breach" and politically tore up the ex-ruling party into pieces. The so called "Mingrelian" contingency has been overshadowed by the party's leadership, a rather hard blow to Mikhail Saakashvili's image (it is important to stress that namely Mingrelia region was critical in launching anti-governmental protest massive rally against then President Eduard Shevardnadze's governance, which ended with so-called "Rose Revolution" in 2003).

A new wave of political rivalry inside the ex-ruling party touched off by new scandals is to divide the ranks. The ex-Justice Minister and political figure Zurab Adeishvili is ready to explore very delicate and sensitive information about some of his former colleagues as part of damage control. One thing is certain, such rallies for the sake of having a good old fashion meeting are no longer effective in Georgian politics – if they want rallies then hold them in the regions, and at least this will save on transport cost and perhaps local issues can be discussed.

Georgians are growing up to more sophisticated means of political communication and sooner or later the so called politicians of the last eight years need to grow up themselves and understand that times have changed and it is time to let the next generation take up the cause and learn from the mistakes of the UNM and its most staunch supporters.

A Manifesto for Justice

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE, GT

The Tetrebi ("Whites") political party presented its "Manifesto for Justice", which addresses the major challenges facing Georgia, at a press conference on April 16. This will be sent as a set of recommendations to the current Georgian authorities in the near future.

Tetrebi was founded on April 7, 2009 by Teimuraz Shashiashvili, a former member of President Eduard Shevardnadze's government. It has since conducted a thorough study of Georgia's major problems with the help of academics and experts in different fields. The summary of this analysis, called "Ultimatum of Dignity", provided concrete suggestions on how to overcome the country's problems. It was presented to President Mikheil Saakashvili on November 23, 2009 but was completely ignored.

"We called that document Ultimatum of Dignity because under the previous regime the [Georgian] people lost their dignity. The main priority of the previous government was not the welfare of human beings; it was more interested in building roads, etcetera. There was a reason for this: if the government had thought about the people, and, for instance, increased pensions, it would not have had the opportunity to steal money from the pension allocation, while it

could take about 50 percent of the sums allegedly spent on building roads," Teimuraz Shashiashvili stated.

Tetrebi didn't take part in the 2012 parliamentary elections because it supported the Georgian Dream coalition, which was ultimately successful in changing the previous government. It does however plan to field its own candidates at future elections. In the interim it has transformed the Ultimatum of Dignity into the Manifesto for Justice, which outlines 25 major issues, which the party believes need to be addressed. It will be sent to experts, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Prosecutor's Office. The party leader says that they will ask the new government to consider their suggestions and demand that the Prosecutor respond appropriately to the wrongdoings of the previous government.

Shashiashvili says that the Georgian Dream should pay more attention to the issues discussed in the document and reflect this in the state budget. He points out that the government is responsible for addressing the most serious problems facing the country as well as punishing the wrongdoers of the previous government. "In order to overcome the present crisis the government should do two main things: 1) create a competitive employment environment in Georgia, i.e. people should have the opportunity to realise their poten-

tial here, and 2) provide social security for those who are unable to support themselves," Shashiashvili declared.

Among the 25 major problems identified in the document is the lack of a guaranteed minimum level of pensions and salaries. Shashiashvili states that the government should set the same basic minimum level for all salaries, pensions, student scholarships, IDP assistance and unemployment benefits, below which they should not fall, from January 1st of next year, but this level should not be determined by the state but by unbiased experts.

Shashiashvili also believes that people in different professions (scientists, teachers, soldiers etc.) should be appreciated respectively and their pensions should reflect the significance of their work and level of previous earnings. "However, a limit must be set for the salaries of government officials, the president and ministers – they shouldn't be paid more than 20 times the pension and minimum wage," he asserts.

The manifesto calls for investigating all the wrongdoings of the previous government, including confiscations of private property, misappropriations of state funds and murders. Shashiashvili says that illegally confiscated property should be given back to its previous owners. "All the illegally spent money should also be tracked down. We have information that this sum around USD 10 billion. The murders which were committed should also be investigated and the per-



petrators punished properly."

The Manifesto for Justice also includes a demand that the privatisation of strategic objects and selling of Georgian land to foreigners be suspended until the new constitution is ratified. Party member Shalva Tsiklauri says that the rights of Georgians living abroad are often breached but foreigners enjoy extra privileges in Georgia.

"130,000 Chinese people have settled in Georgia and received citizenship straight away, whereas in Europe and the US a person needs to live in their new country for many years and pass exams in its language and history in order to gain citizenship.

In Turkey, Georgian emigrants have to do undignified work to support themselves and are restricted in practicing their Orthodox Christian faith while Turks want to build more and more mosques in Georgia," Tsiklauri states. He says that such a policy is not consistent with democratic values and works against Georgians.

Tetrebi believes that health-care and education should be the main priorities in next year's state budget. "Students should pay only 10 percent of their tuition fees and the state should pay the rest. There must also be full financing of children in kindergarten, regardless of their

numbers. Concerning healthcare, the state should provide comprehensive medical insurance for all," Shashiashvili says.

The Manifesto for Justice also demands that the government creates a competitive business environment, as this will regulate the prices of products and services according to its own mechanisms. It also mentions the problem of the high interest rates of the loans offered by Georgian banks, stating that these are much lower in European countries. Shashiashvili says that the state should learn from the experience of other countries and ensure that low interest rate loans are provided.



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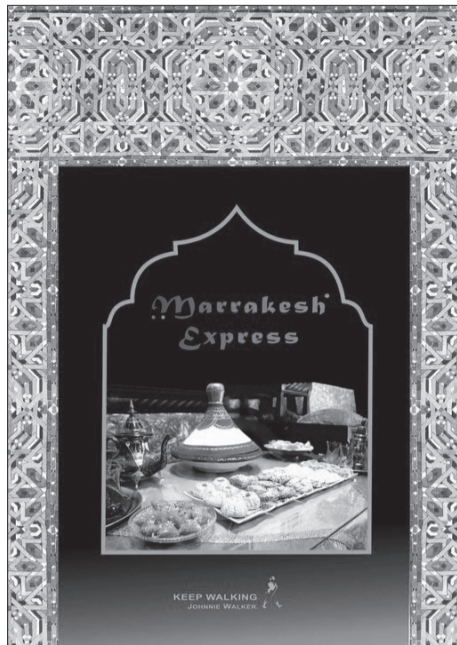
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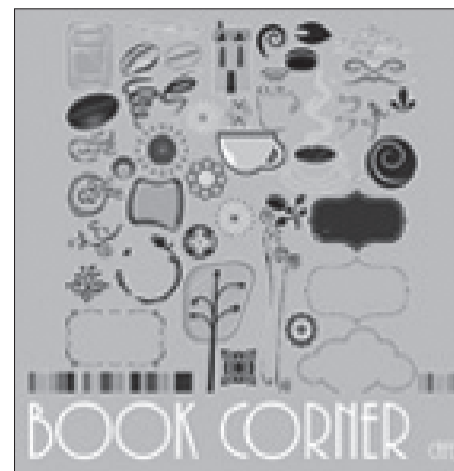
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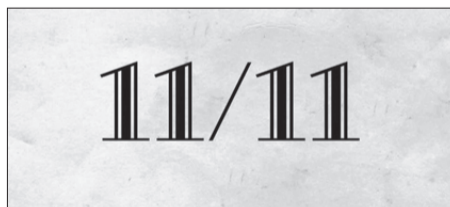
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	ინგლ. სექტ 4560 ლარი ქართ.სექტ 3960 ლარი	ინგლ. სექტ 3540 ლარი	ინგლ. სექტ 3540 ლარი
კონსტრუქციული მედიცინის აკადემია Hum.F.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ამერიკის-მცოდნეობა 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ამერიკისმცოდნეობა აშშ-ს საგარეო ურთიერთობები თურქული ენა და ლიტერატურა 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ამერიკის-მცოდნეობა თურქული ენა და ლიტერატურა
	ინგლ. სექტ 3960 ლარი	ინგლ. სექტ 3540 ლარი თურქ. სექტ 3540 ლარი	ინგლ. სექტ 3540 ლარი თურქ. სექტ 3540 ლარი
განათლების აკადემია Edu.F.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ინგლისური ფილოლოგია 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ინგლისური ენის სწავლების მეთოდოლოგია განათლების მენეჯმენტი (3000) ინგლისური ფილოლოგია 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> განათლების მენეჯმენტის მეთოდოლოგია
	ინგლ. სექტ 3960 ლარი	ინგლ. სექტ 3540 ლარი	ინგლ. სექტ 3540 ლარი

- ერთიანი ეროვნული გამოცდების შედეგების მიხედვით, საქართველოს მასშტაბით პირველ ხუთ ასეულში შესული სტუდენტები, ისწავლიან უფასოდ.
- ჩაწერეთ შავი ზღვის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი პირველ ადგილზე და მიიღეთ 15% - იანი ფასდახედა.
- ეროვნული სასწავლო ოლიმპიადის მესამე ტურში გასული აბიტურენტები ჩვენთან ისწავლიან უფასოდ
- ჩვენ გთავაზობთ გაცვლით პროგრამებს ამერიკის შეერთებული შტატებისა და ევროპის უნივერსიტეტებში.
- სტუდენტებს შეუძლიათ გადაიხადონ სწავლის გადასახადი მ ნაწილად.
- შპს-ში ასწავლიან მსოფლიოს სხვადასხვა ქვეყნებიდან მოწვეული პროფესორები.
- სწავლა მიმდინარეობს ინგლისურ და ქართულ ენებზე.

შპს-ს ჰაიბენიფიკი უნივერსიტეტები

- ვაშინგტონის უნივერსიტეტი (Washington, USA)
- ნიუ იორკის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი (Delhi, USA)
- ჩრდილოეთ აიოვას უნივერსიტეტი (Iowa, USA)
- სამხრეთ პოლიტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტი (Marietta, USA)
- ჩრდილოეთ ამერიკის კოლეჯი (Houston, USA)
- ნიუ იორკის უნივერსიტეტი პრაღაში (Prague, Czech Republic)
- ლიდსის მეტროპოლიტანის უნივერსიტეტი (Leeds, England)
- კოზმინსკის უნივერსიტეტი (Warsaw, Poland)
- ვისტულას უნივერსიტეტი (Warsaw, Poland)
- ბიზნესის ადმინისტრირების სკოლა (Riga, Latvia)
- ეპოკის უნივერსიტეტი (Tirana, Albania)
- ბურჩის უნივერსიტეტი (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- ფათიჰის უნივერსიტეტი (Istanbul, Turkey)
- ათათურქის უნივერსიტეტი (Erzurum, Turkey)
- ცხრამეტი მაისის უნივერსიტეტი (Samsun, Turkey)
- იალოვას უნივერსიტეტი (Yalova, Turkey)



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