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## Nino Burjanadze reappears on the Political Scene in full Force

After a six-month layoff the Democratic Movement – United Georgia has returned to the political scene. Nino Burjanadze, the Chair of the party, talks to the Georgian Times about the current political situation and her future plans, including the participation of her party in all forms of political life.

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# Celebration of Workers' Day Results in Mass Arrests

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

A peaceful student demonstration in solidarity with workers has resulted in mass detentions being made. Policemen accuse the demonstrators of damaging police cars, while the students say that plain clothes law enforcement officers provoked them. Non-governmental organisations are demanding an impartial investigation.

Georgia has celebrated May 1 – International Labour Day – by arresting more than 15 students at a peaceful demonstration which turned into a confrontation with police outside Rustaveli metro station.

About a hundred students had been holding a peaceful demonstration, which had begun in the grounds of Tbilisi State University, calling on the new government to adopt a more liberal Labour Code. After listening to some speeches they marched down Varazis Khevi Street to Heroes' Square, obstructing the traffic. When they stopped outside a police station, having called on several big companies to de-



gressive, throwing bottles at us," he said, adding that some people in civilian clothing were there provoking and insulting the students. According to Gabadaze about 20 students were arrested, and Channel 9 later announced that one of its journalists, Zviad Khujadze, was among those arrested. Another TV station reported that police had also abused Liberali magazine reporter Tina Kip-

Soon after the incident the Laboratory 1918 student organisation, which had organised the demonstration, announced on Facebook: "We promise that the police will remember May 1 and face organised resistance if all the detainees are not set free". The students were in fact released after a few hours but are expected to stand trial.

Some of the arrested students told journalists after their

detaining the students to the public. Transparency International stated that it's important to protect fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech and the right to protest, but the student themselves should also behave in accordance with legislation.

Sandro Tsagareli from Laboratory 1918 says that the students were celebrating May 1 for the first time. "It's important to realise that work is not

only about survival; labour should bring people satisfaction as it is a creative process. We express solidarity with those who work in inappropriate conditions and all those deprived of the opportunity to work, and thus their fundamental right," he told The Georgian Times, emphasising that the students had "very clear demands", which "hopefully won't need to be on their agenda next year". These included declaring May 1 a public holiday "as it is in the rest of civilised world" and providing all the unemployed with benefits they can live on. "We also think each worker should have the opportunity to get involved in managing their company, as a company doesn't belong to its owner only, but to all the workers," Tsagareli continued.

The demonstrators called for improvements in the new draft Labour Code which has been presented to parliament. They hailed the amendments to the law but expressed their apprehension over the threat posed by businessmen, and some MPs, who are trying to maintain employers' existing privileges. Tsagareli promised to organise similar rallies in Tbilisi and the regions on the same theme.

The demonstrators included a group of women's activists, whose placards bore the slogans "Men – to the kitchen, women – to the parliament", "No to sexist Labour Code" and "Equal salaries for women". Ida Bakhturidze from the

Feminists' Independent Group told GT that women's rights are being violated more than men's in Georgia. "Women do all the difficult menial work; their working days are longer and their salaries are lower than men's; they also face problems getting maternity leave. We think the government must pay more attention to these issues. Today there is a chance to change the relevant parts of the Labour Code, as Parliament has begun discussing amendments to the law," she declared.

Mariam Gachechiladze, a student at the Georgian-American University, believes such rallies are very important for protecting workers' rights and everyone must join them. "We belong to a progressive society: if we want to become part of the European Union we should start right here – by adopting European values. The main concern of any state must be people's well-being and prosperity, not cohabitation, a pro-western or a pro-Russian course," she told GT.

The Ministry of Justice of Georgia presented proposed amendments to the Labour Code to parliament in February 2013. Around 70 percent of these were initiated by the trade unions, and they mainly concern improving the terms and conditions of employees. Although employers disagree with these changes, Georgia's labour legislation has been problematic for years, as has been pointed out by a number of local and international organisations.



mand improvements in working conditions there, a policeman asked them to stop obstructing the highway and they refused. When the demonstrators then blocked the road outside Rustaveli metro station the police started driving them back onto the pavement, leading to the confrontation.

One of the protesters, Beqa Gabadaze, told GT that police were dragging protesters off the pavement into the middle of the road and then arresting them. "The police were ag-

shidze and arrested another journalist, Ani Chankotadze. However, head of the Patrol Police Department Davit Tsinaridze denied that members of the press had been arrested, although he did not specify how many arrests had been made, stating merely that "hundreds of students participated in the rally and dozens were arrested". The Interior Ministry later said in a statement that the students had damaged some police cars and one civilian vehicle.

release that policemen had been abusing and arresting them "only because we were walking on the highway". "There were a lot of us, and little room on the pavement," the students explained, adding that some had been arrested because they had "verbally" demanded the Minister of the Interior's resignation.

Some NGOs are demanding an investigation. The Charter on Journalistic Ethics called on the police to act within the law and explain the legal grounds for

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### Free Students Union seeks dialogue with Interior Ministry

The Union of Free students expresses its readiness to begin dialogue with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Nikoloz Metreveli the union's chair declared at a briefing held in the Tbilisi State University on May 3.

According to Metreveli, since the 2012 Parliamentary Elections, young people's human rights are being violated, not only in the political sphere, but in social-economic and cultural spheres as well.

"Existing problems should be overcome jointly by all governmental bodies and Georgian society. Young people have their own responsibility in this process. The government must listen, analyze and resolve the problems that the country faces. We are confident that the incident of May 1 on Rustaveli Avenue will be a lesson for everybody," Metreveli stated, adding that a special prevention mechanism should be set up for similar facts, and the Union of Free Students is ready to launch a dialogue with the MIA and other stakeholders.

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### Ag Minister resigns amidst Arrests

Georgia's former Minister of Agriculture David Kirvalidze stated on May 2 on social networks that several staff members of ministry and company Mechanisatori ltd who were arrested in a corruption scandal, are his friends and that proving their innocence is now of the utmost importance.

"I know those people well and most of them are my friends, including my teacher. All of them are very decent people and I respect them very much. I am sure and looking forward to the truth and the time when all this is finished.

The Minister has taken political responsibility for the latest developments. "I request the termination of my responsibility as minister until the truth is revealed and their innocence is proven," declared Kirvalidze, adding that any kind of interference, pressure and manipulation will be very negative. "Let the responsible agencies reveal the truth."

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# Nino Burjanadze reappears on the Political Scene in full Force

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

After a six-month layoff the Democratic Movement – United Georgia has returned to the political scene. Nino Burjanadze, the Chair of the party, talks to the Georgian Times about the current political situation and her future plans, including the participation of her party in all forms of political life.

*Mrs. Burjanadze, you have not been seen in the political arena for a long time. Why did you decide to step away from it and what are your future plans?*

People have gained the impression that we are not involved in active politics, despite the fact that we have been expressing our opinions on very important issues. Our party has been working intensively both in the regions and Tbilisi and its districts. But six months ago we issued a statement which said that our party would not be criticizing the new government for a certain amount of time. I think this was absolutely the right decision because any new government in a civilized country must be given time to understand the problems of the country and begin resolving them. But of course it should first undertake a detailed study of these problems because if you try and resolve them without a careful study, the solutions will only bring short term benefits and may end up making the underlying problems bigger. So we decided to give the new government the chance to study the country's problems and start proposing solutions. First we wanted to take a hundred-day moratorium, but we saw that the new government faces great danger from the President, who had the right to dismiss parliament. So we waited for the constitutional changes to be made, although we disagreed with some of them, as both the government and the public feared that without these constitutional changes the country would be sucked into a whirlpool once again. But from now on we're back on the scene. We have our positions and will express them seriously, as I be-

lieve they address the needs of the country. We will now take an active part in all upcoming elections and all forms of political life.

*Can you briefly assess the current political situation in Georgia and the course of the new government?*

We appreciate the breakthrough the new government has made, as the improvement in the country is indisputable. There is no longer any fear of the authorities, people do not have the feeling that someone will eavesdrop on their phone conversations and they are not afraid of being subjected to injustices at every turn. It is very important that this syndrome of fear has disappeared. We can say that the new government has given us oxygen. Of course, six months is not a long enough time for the government to resolve all the country's problems, but it is quite a sufficient period for us to determine the government's general tendencies. We maintain that in a number of areas these are not satisfactory. For example, one of the main issues, which affects the greater part of the public, is that injustices are being corrected very slowly - so slowly that it seems as if this is not happening at all. I have not met a single person who has been restored to their job, for example an unfairly dismissed teacher or doctor, or a person who had their stolen business and confiscated property restored. There is also a very difficult economic situation in the country. Of course, this is not the new government's fault, but nothing has changed. A friend and party supporter from Kutaisi who had been arrested and deprived of his business by the previous government for supporting us, is now free, and not afraid to conduct business again, but he is very concerned because there is complete economic stagnation in Kutaisi. These are issues the new government has to pay serious attention to.

*What has become of the promised investigation into the May 26, 2011 crackdown?*

I cannot say exactly. Archil Kbilashvili, for whom I have great personal respect as I think he is a very honest person and a very

good lawyer, has stated that this investigation will be concluded before May 26, 2013. Of course, it may be completed before then, but we will see within the next 20 days whether the investigation really will be concluded. Those members of the United National Movement who now speak proudly and impudently should find themselves behind bars. It is clear with hindsight that the May 26<sup>th</sup> demonstration was a fierce battle for the protection of freedom and dignity. Unfortunately, at that time not only the government opposed us but also the majority of opposition parties, but if it had not been for May 26<sup>th</sup>, the UNM would have remained in power for a long time. That fierce battle and self-sacrifice of May 26<sup>th</sup> forced the October 2012 elections to be held without bloodshed.

*Do you think your meetings with the Russian leadership have affected your reputation in Georgia?*

The black PR of the previous government made even those who agreed with my visits to Russia and supported my attempts to restore Georgian-Russian relations afraid of expressing their position. When Erisoni went to Russia to give a concert recently the UNM again raised a storm of protest, but now the public takes no notice. No one is afraid of expressing his/her opinion any more, they are not afraid that they might be thrown in jail. Time will pass, and people will assess more positively my steps to improve relations with Russia and sharply criticize the previous government for failing to take the fantastic chance I gave it to protect the interests of our country.

On a related note, the Russian President and the Prime Minister of Japan recently met. This was the first breakthrough in Russian-Japanese relations in ten years. For the first time Russia and Japan declared that they would sign a peace agreement and renew negotiations over disputed territory. Do you know what the preconditions of this agreement were? Two years ago the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan stopped describing the Kurile Islands as "occupied territories" in

official documents, substituting the term "temporarily illegally engaged", as calling them occupied was hindering negotiations. Do not consider this self-praise, but I suggested the same thing three years ago on a TV programme, when a journalist demanded that during my visit to Moscow I call Putin an occupier and tell him to leave Georgian territory immediately. I think what I did then was very important for the country. Maybe our country will again have such a chance to improve relations with Russia, but the new government must use it wisely.

*What was the content of your negotiations with Putin?*

I have spoken about this before. After our first meeting a representative of the Russian government stated that there were no closed themes between Russia and Georgia, and both sides could discuss all problems. This includes Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But the government withheld this information from the public because Saakashvili preferred losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia to letting anyone else improve Russian-Georgian relations. He also did not like the fact that the Russian army had left the town of Perevi as a result of the work of the Patriarch, not him, and therefore told the public that the Russian army had returned to Perevi when they had not. It would be good for the new government not to be afraid of seeming pro-Russian and take serious steps to improve relations with Russia.

*What can you say about Ivanishvili's recent statement that terrorists might have been trained in Georgia?*

As I remember, he merely said that this issue must be investigated, and I agree with him, because what happened in Lapantskuri raises serious questions. I do not want to violate anyone's presumption of innocence, and can therefore say nothing more about this, but Ivanishvili did not violate anyone's presumption of innocence either. Why is the UNM scared of an investigation into Lapantskuri and the August 2008 war? Why don't they want to wait for an investigation to prove



them right? Years ago we sent a list of 43 questions about the war to the President but did not receive an answer. If it receives answers to these same questions, the new government will get an absolutely clear picture of what happened during the war.

*Why could you not cooperate with the Georgian Dream in the 2012 elections?*

I think we did cooperate initially. From the first day Ivanishvili appeared on the political scene we helped him. We did not take part in the parliamentary elections because we could not create a united front. If this front had been created Ivanishvili would have fewer headaches in parliament now and the UNM would not be a major opposition force. Parliament would be multi-party and consist of different people with different views. We helped Bidzina Ivanishvili as far as we could and help him now with constructive criticism. I know from my experience of being in both government and opposition that objective criticism is much better than the praise of supporters.

*In one of your interviews you mentioned that there are some people in the Georgian Dream coalition who do not want you to cooperate with the Prime Minister. Whom did you mean?*

Politics is a very complicated thing, and it is impossible to make all people like you. Maybe the main reason for this view being expressed is that if I am part of the coalition my party and myself will stand out more than they do. The Georgian Dream is not homogenous; it is a coalition of people with different opinions and different ambitions. But whether people want me in the coalition is not of principal importance, the proper resolution of important problems is the issue, and we hope this will happen.

*Are you going to take part in the presidential elections?*

I will make a statement about this after Ivanishvili announces who the Georgian Dream's candidate will be. The Georgian Dream and the Prime Minister

have the right to present a candidate who is acceptable for them, but the main thing is to ensure the holding of competitive elections. There are just 5 months left until the presidential elections, but the electoral law is still the same and unfortunately the parliament has no time to amend it. Of course, I know that there will be no arrests, blackmail or any of the other terrible things which took place during the elections organised by the previous government, but this in itself is not enough to create competitive and good elections.

*Is it possible that the UNM could return to power, or does this sound absurd to you?*

It is not absurd. We should not console ourselves that after all the misfortunes the UNM inflicted on the population, after that infamous prison scandal, which shocked not only Georgia but the whole world, the UNM candidates got only 15% of the votes in the interim elections. This actually is a very alarming situation, and has occurred because justice has not been restored. Many UNM members should be held accountable for their crimes, but instead they talk to us brazenly and work on their Western friends a lot. So their return is quite possible. We must not forget that they have a TV station and very big money and support from the West. The new government will have to present serious proof to persuade the West not to support the UNM.

*How do you see the future of Georgia?*

It will depend on how correct the steps we take are. It will also depend on the presidential elections, how the major political forces will behave during the presidential elections and how we manage to restore justice. Restoring justice has nothing to do with revenge or political reprisal. If we do not eliminate the syndrome of impunity in this country there always will be the danger of the recurrence of the misfortunes inflicted on us by the previous government.

## GEORGIAN AMERICAN ALLOYS ACQUIRES 100 Percent of GEORGIAN MANGANESE

On April 22, 2013 Georgian American Alloys, Inc. ("GAA"), a leading manufacturer, supplier and trader of ferroalloys has acquired 100 percent ownership interest in Georgia-based Georgian Manganese, LLC and Vartsikhe 2005 LLC.

GAA's acquisition of Georgian Manganese and Vartsikhe 2005 is seen as a strategically important step for the company as it

establishes a growing network of complementary ferroalloy businesses, which includes Felman Production, LLC, Felman Trading, Inc. and CC Metals & Alloys, LLC. GAA has been providing management oversight of the two Georgian companies for over a year and it was through this experience that GAA decided to invest in the Georgian companies. Georgian Manganese,

LLC is comprised of Chiatura manganese mine and Zestafoni ferroalloys plant that produces silicomanganese. Vartsikhe 2005 operates Vartikhe hydroelectric plant and powers the Zestafoni plant and Chiatura mine. The company's unique organizational structure allows it to control all facets of the silicomanganese production process.

"We are very happy to complete this acquisition, as it directly aligns with GAA's long-term goal of building the world's premier ferroalloys source," said Mordechai Korf, chief executive officer of GAA. "The rare combination of a mine, refining facility and power plant creates a number of unique competitive advantages and cost synergies. Furthermore, this

transaction strengthens the relationship the US enjoys with Georgia and solidifies GAA's international presence capabilities."

Georgian American Alloys, Inc., headquartered in Miami, FL, owns and operates a number of companies, both domestic and international, which manufacture and supply various grades of ferrous alloys. Companies under the GAA umbrella include North

American-based Felman Production, LLC, Felman Trading, Inc., CC Metals & Alloys, LLC, and Georgia's Georgian Manganese, LLC.

"We are pleased to join the GAA family. GAA is recognised on the world market with its high international standards and we are eager to be fully integrated in its operations" said Volodymyr Lozynskyy, director of Georgian Manganese.





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# Ivanishvili Doesn't Rule Out Terrorists Were Trained in Georgia

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

**"It is possible that terrorists have undergone trainings in Georgia. I understand that the Ombudsman's statements as very real, but not as confirmation. Let's wait for the results of the investigation. I have serious doubts that this really happened, though the investigation is not over yet and let's wait, as we may hear much shocking information,"** stated Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili speaking at NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Rose-Roth Seminar in Tbilisi.

Besides raising questions as to the previous Georgian government's involvement in training Chechen militants, the PM's statement has raised concerns among some politicians as to whether the mere talk of such a possibility is damaging Georgia's reputation. As the PM states, Georgia's prestige would be harmed if the Lopota gorge clash case was investigated and confirmed by a "third state" instead of being investi-

gated locally.

The reaction from Ivanishvili's main political opponents to his statement was immediate.

"At a time when the Boston terrorist attacks were arranged by Chechens, when talking about such things Ivanishvili is unlikely to realize in what a dangerous affair he is involving not only me or himself, but the entire country," Mikheil Saakashvili, the President of Georgia told journalists during a visit to the United States, adding that the U.S. had enough intelligent people not to pay serious attention to such statements.

Saakashvili also added that the PM's words entirely corresponded to the propaganda waged by Russia against Georgia over the years "in order to weaken the country and capture it." The president denies there being a possible connection between terrorist groups and his power. He advised members of Georgia's Cabinet of Ministers to explain to the PM that he should not make such statements.

Results of the Public Defender's (PD) probe into the Lopota gorge incident was provided as a separate chapter in a voluminous annual report on the human rights situation in the country, which PD Ucha Nanuashvili presented on April 1.

As stated in the report, in February 2012 senior officials from the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) contacted some "veterans of the Chechen war", as well as representatives of the Chechen community now living in different countries of Europe with the purpose of convincing them that the Georgian authorities were ready to give armed militants free passage in infiltrating Russia's North Caucasus region via Georgian territory.

According to the Public Defender, his findings were based on information gathered from "confidential sources" and relatives of some of those men, who were killed in the armed clash.

"We interviewed family members of those who were killed. There are many controversial facts in the case – the MIA had issued driving licenses and firearms licenses to the



Chechen paramilitaries killed during the special operation. In addition, in 2012 the MIA had established an armed formation of Chechen paramilitaries. The MIA should respond to these facts," Nanuashvili stated during the Human Rights Parliamentary Committee session on April 30.

The Public Defender added that ethnic Chechens received Georgian passports at Georgian embassies in foreign countries. He thinks there are controversial views about the Lapankuri special operation and the investigation should provide answers to all questions that have been raised by society.

Asked about PM Ivanishvili's statement, Irakli Alasania, Minister of Defense of Georgia responded that "according to the information that the Georgian government has today, there is no such basis for claiming that the previous government trained and equipped militants to then send them to Russia's North Caucasus." In 2002, while in the capacity of Deputy Ministry of State Security, Alasania played a key role in a US-led counterterrorism operation in Pankisi Gorge, a Chechen populated area of Georgia located near Lopota. The much touted operation was launched after strong Rus-

sian criticism that the gorge was being used as a base for Chechen guerrillas who sought safety from the Russian army fighting in neighboring Chechnya. The operation led to several summary executions and arrests, and a decade of growing US-Georgian military cooperation.

"In connection with the Lopota gorge clash, the PM said that the investigation is under way and we should not make any preliminary conclusions before its results," he explained.

On August 28, 2012, the MIA launched a so-called anti-terrorist operation in Lopota Gorge near the village of Lapankuri in Georgia's eastern Kakheti region. According to the MIA, the special operation followed the kidnapping of 5 people in Lapankuri forest; the young villagers had gone missing on August 26 and the MIA alleged that an armed group had taken them hostage. The MIA stated on August 29 that eleven gunmen and three Georgian special service personnel, including a military doctor, were killed in a fierce firefight following the alleged hostage-taking incident.

## LOCAL ISSUES

# An Olympic Village or Chinatown?

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

**Discontented Georgians are demanding that the construction of an Olympic Village on the outskirts of Tbilisi be stopped, fearing that it will be transformed into the capital's version of Chinatown. Chinese construction company Hualing Industry and Trade Group maintains that this project is purely commercial, but lack of transparency and a population weary of growing influx of foreigners and prone to exaggeration have created an atmosphere of suspicion around this large scale development project.**

Vazisubani, a suburb of Georgia's capital, will host the participants of the 2015 European Youth Olympic Festival. The agreement to hold this event in Tbilisi was signed by Patrick Hickey, European Olympic Committees President, Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava and Georgian National Olympic Committee President Giorgi Natsvlishvili in Rome on March 7, 2012. Tbilisi was chosen ahead of Brno, in the Czech Republic, and interestingly, Russia backed the Tbilisi bid despite the breach in diplomatic relations between the coun-

tries. This will be the first time this biennial festival, first held in 1991 in Brussels, Belgium, is held in a Caucasus country. It is open to competitors aged between 14 and 18 from 49 European countries. Georgia has created a website – www.tbilisi2015.com – which will provide competitors, officials and spectators with information on all the festival events, and although this webpage is still under construction and information is currently limited, it is believed that the majority of the events will take place in either at the Dinamo Stadium or the Sports Palace in the center of the Tbilisi.

The competitors will be accommodated in the working-class district of Vazisubani. Construction of the Olympic Village began in September 2012, but to the dissatisfaction of Georgians it is being built by the Chinese Hualing Industry and Trade Group. Local residents are alarmed by rumours that the company intends to bring 127,000 immigrants into the district to live and work.

A couple of men waiting at the bus station near the building site talked to the Georgian Times about the government's immigration policy and expressed concern about what

they term a "Chinese invasion". "We all are unemployed ourselves, and they are moving all these Chinese to Georgia to give them jobs! I can't put my kid in kindergarten as it is full of Chinese children; can you imagine what will happen if more Chinese come to Georgia?!" a young man who didn't give his name said. He explained that locals had asked City Hall to stop the construction of the "Chinese district" but their concerns had fallen on deaf ears. The City authorities didn't respond to GT's request for a comment on the deal with the Chinese company.

Tinat Shishinashvili, head Hualing Group's Press Department, told GT that what the local residents are saying does not correspond to reality. "The company is constructing an Olympic Village, not a Chinatown or Chinese district," she explained.

Hualing Group won the bid in early 2012. The construction will cover 414 hectares, and the 25-hectare main complex will be built by 2015. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili attended the signing of the contract between Hualing and the State on March 30, 2012.

"We have contracted to invest USD 150 million in the construction of the Olympic Village, which will be complete

by March 1, 2015. It has been designed to house up to 3,800 guests. According to the contract, we are required to finish building the main complex, of around 250,000 square metres, by 2015; this will include a trade centre and related infrastructure, a five-star-hotel with at least 200 rooms, the eight residential blocks of the Olympic Village, six additional blocks for general sale, roads, etc. During the Olympic Festival the Georgian government will be granted free use of the entire village. Later we will start selling it on the open market," Shishinashvili said, emphasizing that the project is commercial – aimed at turning a profit.

It is expected that the company will then construct a retail and residential area at an unknown cost. Over the next 10 years – the period stipulated in the contract – further construction will take place, dependent on demand.

Shishinashvili says that the company does not yet have an overall plan for the development of the site. However, the overall concept for a 'Hualing International Special Economic Zone' can be found on YouTube. This describes Georgia as "a famous distribution centre in Transcaucasia" and Tbilisi as "a political, economic, educational and cultural center, which without

doubt will become the heart of international investment".

The plan resembles a picture of a flying butterfly. The complex will consist of one axis, two wings and three areas. The axis is a central landscape park; the left wing is a market, processing, trade and commercial zone and the right a residential and seaside recreational zone. There will be customs, a bonded area, a storage and logistics area, and a processing area. A special pedestrianised business zone, the athletes' village itself, a high-rise residential area and schools will also be constructed, alongside an ecological zone.

"The main architect is Chinese, but the project is being undertaken in cooperation with Georgian companies. In addition, 581 workers out of the 659 on site are Georgian citizens. We have more than fulfilled our quota: it is stated in the contract that 70 percent of our staff must be locals, we have exceeded this requirement," Shishinashvili explains.

However, Levani Mindorashvili, a local who lives near the site believes the majority of workers are Chinese. "I see hardly any Georgians working there, except the guard. They have brought in Chinese and housed them in their hotel, 'Fu De'. This used to be a school,

but as the investors were interested in the area the government sold them the land and the school as well, transferring the kids to an old demolished building," said, adding that many locals had gardens where the future Olympic Village is being built, but when they wanted to take formal ownership of these former state land plots the city authorities refused to sell them, saying that they were not allowed to purchase them.

Vazisubani inhabitants say that rumours about the migration of 127,000 Chinese are being spread by political parties – and by Jondi Baghaturia, leader of Kartuli Dasi (Georgian Troupe), in particular. Baghaturia maintains he has documents which prove his allegations, but does not wish to present them. "Do you see the Olympic Village nearby? This is just another lie. They are constructing multi-storey buildings and residential blocks. If we do not stop it, in a few years we will be absorbed by Chinese," he said.

Hualing Group was established in 1988 in Xinjiang, China, as a large private conglomerate. It began investing in Georgia at the end of 2007. The company is involved in the timber industry, animal husbandry and banking. It owns 90 percent of Georgia's Basis Bank.



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# The Georgian Army - 22 Years and Counting

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

The Georgian Army celebrated its 'birthday' on April 30th, this being the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of its creation by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first democratically-elected President, as a paramilitary formation aimed at countering the might of the Soviet military. Since then Georgia's Armed Forces has been reborn several times, in a multitude of manifestations, and there have been several distinct phases in its development.

Georgia has proved itself capable of defending its territory from foreign invaders many times throughout its long history. However, Georgia has not always had an army of its own, as the country languished under both Tsarist Russian and Soviet rule and any Georgian troops formed part of these states' armies. The modern Georgian Army is still struggling to present itself as a serious military force, despite its recent high profile participation in major US-led military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Georgian Army has had to confront significant challenges over the last 22 years, including three civil wars (fought in the capital Tbilisi in 1991 and in the separatist regions of South Ossetia, and Abkhazia in 1991-1992 and 1992-1993, respectively); smaller scale local conflicts (in the Gali region in 1995 and 1998 and around South Ossetia's capital Tskhinvali in 2004), mil-

itary coup d'états or mutinies (the August 1991 revolt of National Guard units, who refused to submit to the President's decree to merge, a troop revolt in Senaki in 1998, and the Mukhrovani mutiny of 2010) and the full-scale attack on South Ossetia and subsequent war with Russia in August 2008. The 2008 war also resulted in the expulsion of Georgian troops from the Khojori gorge in Abkhazia and ultimately a tank mutiny on May 5, 2009 near Tbilisi, which can be more accurately described as a staged event aimed at degrading the Armed Forces in the eyes of the Georgian public. This was orchestrated by President Mikhail Saakashvili as a ploy to improve his standing at the expense of that of the armed forces.

In the potentially explosive South Caucasus region, Georgia finds itself in the middle of a tug of war between the two main global military coalitions: the US-backed North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, a Cold War leftover, and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, its modern counterweight. However, one side is pulling more effectively than the other. The Russian-Georgian war effectively demonstrated that any military alliance with the West was unreliable. Georgia found that it could not expect its allies to come to its rescue, and that the renewed Russian military was willing and able to use its conventional forces to destroy Georgia's hopes of regaining its territorial integrity, thus



effectively depriving it of any realistic opportunity of NATO integration. This "check mate" move has led to a more sustainable and strategic stationing of Russian troops in Georgia: having been withdrawn from Cold War era bases in Georgia proper in 2006, they were then reintroduced to breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 under the guise of regional treaty agreements with the separatist authorities. Russia and a small handful of other countries recognized these two breakaway regions as independent states following the August war.

The Georgian Armed Forces have undergone five distinct phases of development. The success or otherwise of these give some indication of the Armed Forces' future prospects in a changing world.

**First Phase (1991-1992)** – this was the period of the establishment of a paramilitary formation – the National Guard – under the aegis of the Parliament of Georgia, controlled by national liberation movement repre-

sentatives. This was intended as the basic building block for the future Armed Forces of independent Georgia. The National Guard incorporated all the paramilitary formations run by various political movements except the "Mkhedrioni" formation. The first Commander of the National Guard was Tengiz Kitovani. Very soon the NG became a military challenge to President Gamsakhurdia's authority. In August 1991 Gamsakhurdia disbanded the NG and subordinated it to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia in order to avoid possible military clashes with Soviet Army units loyal to the so-called GKCP Communist leadership which had temporarily seized power in the Kremlin. This caused the NG to mutiny in December 1991 which resulted in the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia in January 1992.

**Second Phase (1992-1995)** – this period was very controversial and tragic for the Armed Forces. It could be labeled as "black hole" in which the new government led by Eduard She-

vardnadze found it impossible to create a centralized and unified Armed Forces contingent. Over 50 military groupings existed, the three most important being what remained of the National Guard, the "Mkhedrioni" and the Interior Troops of the MIA. This failure to establish a common Army led to Georgia's utter defeat in the Abkhazian war, the loss of the Tskhinvali region to separatists and the establishment of the semi-independent regime in Adjara supported in each case by a strong Russian military presence.

**Third Phase (1995-2004):** After the adoption of the Constitution and a Presidential system of governance in which the President was Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, their establishment according to Russian military traditions was undertaken by then Defense Minister Lieutenant-General Vardiko Nadibaidze. In 1998 American traditions became dominant under new Defense Minister Lieutenant-General David Tevzadze. Quite radical reforms were undertaken which created a credible and well-subordinated military under a General Staff. The military intelligence service was created, an Air Force and Navy were established to complement the Army; a military doctrine and strategy were developed, etc. The US assisted Georgia through its \$64 million Train and Equip Program, creating US style Armed Forces on the lines of those in Latin American countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, Panama and Colombia). However, budgetary shortcomings and heavy social

burdens destroyed the hope of developing a strong national defense system.

**Fourth Phase (2004-2012)** – the "Rose Revolution" gave new momentum to developing a military strategy. However as soon as President Mikheil Saakashvili seized power in the Rose Revolution in 2003, he began implementing a policy to subdue the Armed Forces under his personal leadership and use them as a means of imposing his political will. He controlled the Armed Forces via the secret police – the Soviet-style Counter-Espionage Department of the MIA – and by spreading militaristic propaganda (in 2006-2008 defense expenditures accounted for 7-8% of Georgia's GDP). Saakashvili's lack of trust in his defense ministers resulting in constant changes and reshuffling (Baramidze-Bejuashvili-Okrushvili-Kezerashvili-Sikharulidze-Akhalia) in order to complete the "politicization" of the Armed Forces. By concocting alleged foreign threats, he tightened his political grip on the Army which culminated in Georgia's total defeat in the August war of 2008 and the downgrading of the Armed Forces from a three-tier system (Army-Air Force-Navy) to a one tier (Army) structure.

**Fifth Phase (2012- to date)** – following the democratic transfer of power in the 2012 parliamentary elections, the complete reorganization of the Armed Forces and the endorsement of a new strategic defense concept compatible with NATO standards has begun. However, the new defense sector leadership needs further sophistication and cohesion.

## Georgia set for Stricter Control on Tobacco and Alcohol Usage

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

Georgia Health officials aim to implement new legislation to ban tobacco and alcohol advertising, increase excise tax and expand anti-addiction outreach. The initiative has been met with mixed reactions within society, with Georgia's Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili calling for people to treat the stricter control on tobacco and alcohol with understanding.

"Cases of adolescents drinking alcohol in cafes and restaurants have increased. I ask people to treat this with understanding. We are a country of wine; we know how to use wine, but stricter control on alcohol for adolescents is necessary," stated Ivanishvili at a meeting with the editors of newspapers and central TV networks. "As for smokers, we'll help them to say no to smoking. Ten people die due to cigarettes every minute and seven out of ten cases are linked with cigarette smoking," he added.

The PM stated that under the new legislation the number of the places where smoking will be banned will increase.

As Lela Sturua, the Head of the Non-communicable Diseases Epidemiology and Health, at

the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia (NCDC) commented that the Georgian Cabinet of Ministers is currently discussing proposed anti-tobacco legislation that would restrict how tobacco products can be sold, advertised and displayed.

"The government has declared tobacco as a priority. In developing new anti-tobacco legislation, all the ministries and many NGOs are involved. After the plan is finalized, it will be sent to the Parliament for confirmation," Sturua said. However, the government remains divided on what role the tobacco industry should play in the process.

According to Amiran Gankrelidze, a former Health Minister and current Head of the NCDC, who authored the draft currently under discussion, "the primary goal of the new legislation is to bring Georgia in line with the recommendations of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) passed by the World Health Organization in 2003."

The FCTC calls for a total ban on advertising tobacco products, an increase in the size of warning labels on packets, a gradual excise tax increase, and the introduction of a gamut of anti-addiction and educational outreach programs.

Levan Agdgomelashvili, general manager of Omega Group Tobacco, whose factory in Georgia produces about 6.5 billion cigarettes per year, said many of the reported details of the bill show cause for concern, specifically the ban on all forms of advertising. "It is already prohibited to advertise tobacco products through traditional media; companies have since resorted to advertising online and on billboards," Agdgomelashvili noted.

He also added that outdoor advertising is a very good way to communicate with customers about innovations, new brands, or new changes in existing brands. "It allows us to present and explain innovations. By restricting this advertising, we think that it will be a violation of the customers' rights to obtain information about the products they consume," he said.

"In the fight against smoking one good approach that works best is to increase taxes on tobacco products. It is also expected to be implemented in Georgia and it will happen gradually," stated Sturua.

Zurab Japaridze from the parliamentary minority responds that the government needs this initiative to replenish the budget. "I think the Ministry of Finance is looking for additional sources of income. They will say that it is a fight against high blood pressure, but

in reality they want to fill the state budget," explained Japaridze, adding that all recent economic indicators show that the country faces serious economic problems. Japaridze calls on the parliamentary majority to summon Finance Minister Nodar Khaduri to Parliament.

There are various opinions within society about the new initiative, but the figures demonstrate the damage caused by smoking in Georgia is worrying. Statistics collected by the Georgian Ministry of Health show that 59.8 percent of Georgian men smoke; 14.9 percent of women and 12 percent of children under the age of 16 are also active smokers. Recent studies by the ministry found that the average Georgian smoker smokes 19.5 cigarettes a day and 11,000 Georgians die of smoking-related illnesses every year.

"I have been smoking for more than 20 years, so it won't be so easy for me to quit smoking; however, if the prices for cigarettes will increase it will definitely have a negative impact on my budget," commented Avto Kobakhidze, 43 year-old consumer of cigarettes. "In general I welcome the government's new initiative for stricter control on tobacco and alcohol. The State should do everything to protect the young generation from being involved in smoking and drinking," Kobakhidze told the Georgian Times.

## NEWS

### NATO Parliamentary Assembly Assesses Rose-Roth Seminar in Tbilisi

NATO parliamentarians call for sustained international engagement in the Southern Caucasus, reads a May 5 statement on the NATO parliamentary Assembly's webpage regarding the recent Rose-Roth Seminar held in Tbilisi.

"An increased long-term commitment by the international community in the South Caucasus is crucial to overcome internal challenges and regional conflicts, as well as anchor democracy in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and firmly embed the region in Euro-Atlantic structures". This was one of the key messages in the NATO PA's 83rd Rose-Roth Seminar.

The seminar on South Caucasus: Geopolitics, Euro-Atlantic Integration and Domestic Challenges was held in Tbilisi, Georgia from April 29-May 1 and was organized in co-operation with the Parliament of Georgia and with the support from the Swiss Government.

Georgia's Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili left no doubt about Georgia's wish to become a member of the European Union and NATO. "We are aware that NATO is not merely a military alliance. It is a great political alliance and a unity built upon shared values. This is why NATO is our conscious choice." Georgia's PM wrote on the webpage.

NATO PA President Hugh Bailey reaffirmed the Assembly's unwavering support for Georgia's membership in the Alliance. However, the occupation of Georgian territory poses an obvious complication. In order to square that circle, the delegates also heard innovative approaches from members of the Georgian delegation to the NATO PA, including a notion that, if need be, Abkhazia and South Ossetia might be excluded from the provisions of Article 5, which states that an attack on one member state is an attack on all.

With regard to Russia and the two breakaway regions, the new government has adopted a pragmatic approach, focusing on less controversial areas of co-operation and modifying rhetoric. However, Georgian politicians made it clear that these steps do not throw into question the country's determination to join NATO and the EU and to preserve its territorial integrity.

Georgia's October 2012 Parliamentary Elections were a critical milestone in the country's democratic transformation. "There is a certain irony in that the real success of the Rose Revolution was shown by the architects of that Revolution accepting their electoral defeat," President Bailey said. While the Georgian political landscape remains exceedingly polarized and the cohabitation process is impeded by still often bitter mutual accusations and counter-accusations, there are some signs of emerging political dialogue and cooperation, such as the adoption of a bipartisan resolution reaffirming Georgia's Euro-Atlantic foreign policy direction. Representatives of both the ruling Georgian Dream coalition and the UNM opposition party stated that Georgia's national interests should prevail over personal or party ones. Several NATO Parliamentarians urged the new government to build upon the many impressive achievements of the previous one, while addressing any deficiencies it inherited.



# STRENGTHENING TOBACCO CONTROL IN GEORGIA

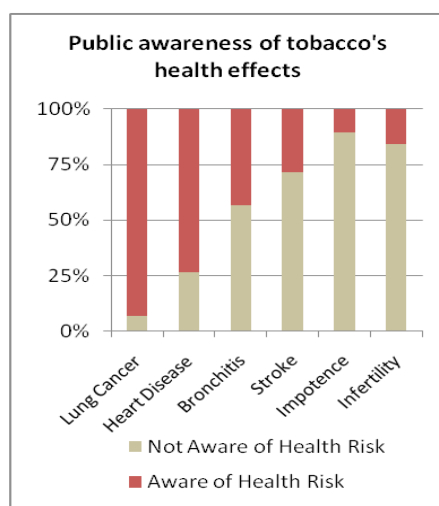
Last month the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and partners published a series of public health papers based in part on research conducted by Georgian Opinion Research Business International (GORBI) of 2200 randomly selected people in Georgia in late 2010. These papers include a brief discussion of the things GORBI discovered, as well as policy recommendations for improving Georgians' health.

Recently, many in Georgia have been discussing the possibility of implementing public health measures such as levying a heavy tax on cigarettes, or even banning smoking in some places. With this in mind, we begin this week with a policy recommendation paper on controlling tobacco use in Georgia: Tobacco-related diseases such as heart disease and cancer are leading causes of death in Georgia. Smoking prevalence is very high: over half of males over 18 are smokers. As half of all tobacco related deaths occur during prime productive years, the economic effect of the tobacco epidemic is considerable. An urgent policy response is required to reduce the prevalence of smoking and its public health impacts.

## KEY STUDY FINDINGS

### Public knowledge of the health effects of tobacco is very low

Though there may be basic awareness among the general public that smoking harms health, they do not fully understand its relationship with specific diseases. If the addictiveness of tobacco and full range of health dangers are not known, people believe they can stop smoking before health problems occur. The reality is that most tobacco users will be unable to stop, and up to half will die from tobacco-related illnesses. The lack of



knowledge also affects those who inhale second-hand cigarette smoke: 1 in 5 respondents did not understand the link between passive smoking and health.

### Gaps in legislation and enforcement on cigarette packaging

Georgia has acceded to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), but enforcement of its recommendations is poor:

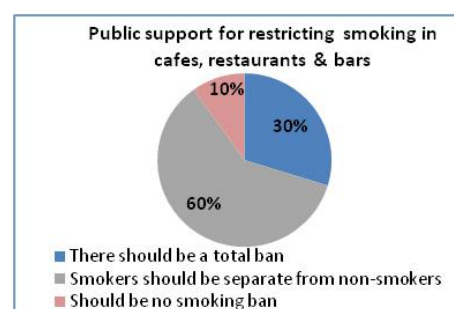
- Deceptive labels such as 'lights' are banned, but frequently appear on cigarette packets and seriously mislead the public. Half of respondents wrongly thought that 'lights' were less harmful.
- It is mandated that cigarette packets carry specific warnings such as 'smoking causes cancer', but packets carry less effective general labels, such as 'smoking harms health'.
- Packets do not carry health warning images, which can be better understood by illiterate groups and children – especially children of smokers, who are

most likely to start smoking.

- Health warnings do not cover the mandated 30% of the front and back of packets.
- Cigarette packets do not display the required quit-line telephone number.

### Public support for stronger tobacco control

A vast majority felt that authorities were not effective or not doing enough to fight tobacco and a third of respondents supported a total smoking ban in social spaces. Improved health warnings would also find support in the general population: 1 in 3 respondents thought that health warning should have corresponding pictures, and 1 in 5 thought warnings should be in larger text.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Educate the public about specific health risks. Knowledge of the health impacts of tobacco are vital elements of behavioral change. Poor awareness of health risks can be addressed by public awareness campaigns and improved health messages on cigarette packaging. Ensure legislation meets FCTC recommendations. It should be mandated that tobacco packets contain information on cigarette constituents. Legislation on

deceptive labeling could also be stronger, as even when deceptive labels are removed, companies can use packet coloring and design to create the impression of a 'light' cigarette. The most effective policy would be a plain tobacco packet with branding in standardized font, complete with recommended health warnings.

Strengthen enforcement of cigarette packaging legislation. Legislation should clearly identify authorities responsible for enforcement and should include a system to monitor compliance and prosecute violations. Stronger enforcement of legislation is needed to prevent deceptive labels from undermining health warnings, and for larger, more specific health warnings and images to better educate the public.

Increase restrictions on smoking in public places. There is substantial popular support for a total ban on smoking in restaurants, bars and cafes. The effectiveness of smoke-free laws is greatly weakened or completely eliminated when smoking is permitted in designated areas, as is currently the case in Georgia. The total restriction of smoking would reduce tobacco consumption and passive smoking and, contrary to the claims of the tobacco industry, such policies have either a neutral or positive impact on businesses.

We at GORBI would like to thank the European Union and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and partners for the opportunity to implement this important social research, as well as The Georgian Times for agreeing to publish these papers as a civil service. In the coming weeks, we will publish similar policy recommendations on topics such as obesity and alcohol abuse.

For further details please contact:

# Illegal Surveillance comes under Increasing Scrutiny

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE, GT

On 29th April a conference entitled 'Civil Society against Illegal Surveillance' was held at the Raison Blu Iveria hotel in Tbilisi. This was a media and civil society initiative in which the Prime Minister, Minister of Internal Affairs, Speaker of Parliament, Public Defender and U.S. Ambassador also took part. It discussed the illegal surveillance and spying which took place during the time of the previous government and how such wrong doings can be prevented in future.

Editor-in-chief of the Rezonansi newspaper Lasha Tughushi opened the conference by stating that the previous government undertook mass surveillance: "Illegal listening in and spying were the main tools the previous government used to pursue its policy. The current authorities should do their best to renounce such methods of blackmailing and controlling people."

Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that the goal of the previous government's surveillance was to terrorize people, so that everyone thought they might be being listened to whether they were or not: "Of course it is impossible to spy on the entire population, but public officials talked about surveillance on purpose so that everyone thought they were being targeted."

Ivanishvili said that his own

family and members of his political team had been victims of illegal surveillance: "They obtained old family photos from our computer illegally and listened in to my cell phone." However, he asserted that with the new government coming to power the days of terrorizing people were over: "We have been in power for about six months, and I'm sure people can see that the present government does not believe in surveillance and spying. If there is still some doubt about this among the public we should do everything we can to demonstrate this is so." He added that he understood that state law enforcement bodies sometimes have to conduct surveillance but the circumstances under which this can be done should be strictly prescribed by law.

Minister of Internal Affairs Irakli Gharibashvili talked about the ongoing investigation into illegal surveillance and the archive of surveillance recordings which will be destroyed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. "Under the previous government a special division of the Constitutional Security Department was assigned to conduct surveillance on people the government wanted to control. Special viruses were created and sent to people's computers and cell phones so they could spy on them. We have already closed that division and brought charges against some of the officials involved in this illegal surveillance. A full investigation is currently in progress and as soon as it is concluded the Ministry of Internal Affairs will destroy all the illegal recordings,"



Gharibashvili declared.

Gharibashvili added that he too had been spied on by representatives of the previous government. "The Ministry of Internal Affairs is ready to cooperate with civil society in order to prevent any reoccurrence of the dreadful practice of illegal surveillance which was characteristic of the previous government," the Minister of Internal Affairs stated.

Speaker of Parliament Davit Usuphashvili said that the people still haven't overcome their fear of surveillance and some still think they are being controlled. "In order for people to have more trust in the current government we should introduce the legal regulation of surveillance," Usuphashvili stated. U.S. Ambassador Richard Norland stated that the United States is ready to share its experience of the regulation of surveillance with Georgia.

Public Defender Ucha Nanuashvili emphasized the importance of holding such meetings where an issue can be discussed jointly by diplomats, members of the government and civil society representatives. "I remem-

ber a time, not so long ago, when we left our cell phones in another room when we met diplomats and representatives of interna-

tional organisations so that no one would listen in to our conversations," he remarked.

Nanuashvili added that the archive of illegal recordings should be destroyed as soon as possible and those who undertook this surveillance must be punished: "The persons actually responsible should be charged according to the law; otherwise this crime could be repeated." He also said that the data protection laws should be reviewed and special amendments made: "The government should make new regulations which will guarantee the privacy of personal information. The existing law allows public and private institutions to

share people's personal data without their permission, and this can be considered a breach of their human rights. Another issue is that details of people's personal lives can be disseminated by the media. This also very often damages a person's dignity."

The Public Defender suggested the creation of the new post, the data protection ombudsman, the holder of which would monitor adherence to privacy legislation and uphold individual's data protection rights. He added that a special monitoring mechanism should be introduced to control state institutions and prevent illegal surveillance occurring.

## PUBLICITY

### Dear ICC Members and Colleagues,

On May 8, 2013, 19:00, Tbilisi State University Concert Hall will host the charity event "Here's to Life!" The event will be dedicated to breast cancer survivors who bravely faced and overcame their struggle and who now serve as examples of perseverance to other women affected by the disease.

The main goal of the event is to promote early detection and diagnosis of cancer in Georgia through breast cancer screening. Though the format of the event differs from a traditional fundraising event, it will serve the important purpose of facilitating a smooth and active integration of breast cancer survivors into society, while providing motivation to other women who are on the path to social and psychological rehabilitation.

Georgian jazz singer Maia Baratashvili (www.maia.ge) and other Georgian jazz performers will perform at the event to acknowledge the courage, endurance and

stamina that survivors have demonstrated in ultimately winning their battles with cancer. Special guests at the concert will be Carlos Alberto Asfora, H. E. Brazilian Ambassador to Georgia and David Moran, H. E. Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Georgia.

An exhibition of professional Georgian artists as well as educational sessions provided by representatives of the National Screening Center will precede the concert at 6 pm. Two hundred breast cancer survivors selected by the National Screening Center have also been kindly invited to the concert.

The project is initiated by Maia Baratashvili and the organizers of the event are the Tbilisi State University's Student Self Government. The event is also supported by the National Screening Center and International Chamber of Commerce, Georgia. It is hoped that the similar events will be organized throughout the year to cover the maximum number of the target group representatives.



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# TOP 50 Companies in Georgia

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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 Georigan 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 MacDonalds
- 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
- LTD Rompertol Georgia
- LTD Elit Electronics
- Bank Republic
- JSC Bagrationi 1882
- GPI Holding
- Company Beeline
- LLC "Barvil Georgia"
- JSC Madneuli Mining
- Georgian Carriage Builders Holding



# Question and Answer with Salome Zurabishvili: Deeds Do Not Lie!

“Believe in yourself and not others, whoever they are, strong or rich!”

By MAKI DEKANOSIDZE, GT

**Salome Zurabishvili, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, career diplomat, Iranian expert and leader of the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee, has become the focus of the local media since Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili suggested they could cooperate in future.**

Zurabishvili has confirmed her desire to cooperate with the new government of Georgia but has not given specific details of what this might involve. However, her UN assignment expires in May and the Georgian Dream will be nominating its presidential candidate around the same time.

Here Zurabishvili talks candidly about the new Georgian political reality. She does not specify what high profile position she might occupy in the future, but her message is clear:

The European Council expected a pro-Russian monster but saw a gentle and frank Georgian

Ms. Zurabishvili, the Prime Minister's recent speech to the European Parliament has provoked different reactions (UNM members called it “shameful” but members of the new government considered it a success). You are well aware of the European diplomatic corps, their mentality ... did the Georgian PM speak in a language they understood?

The PM's speech was very clear and beneficial, firstly due to its frankness ... as the truth is always understandable and self-assertive! The MEPs were especially delighted by his frankness. Saakashvili's well-trained lobby machine was hoping to spin his words and portray him as a pro-Russian monster. Instead a gentle and frank Georgian came across... he answered all questions and left little room for anyone to discredit him. Some of the efforts to do so sounded very artificial, in fact feeble, although some had a bit more substance.

Do you think Saakashvili needs an international scandal? On April 19<sup>th</sup> the UNM were unable to provoke the government at the rally, so what might their next step be?

Everything has its end, and Saakashvili's time is over! This was made especially clear yesterday, when he visited the USA for the opening of the Presidential Library and nobody took any notice, the US media didn't even mention his presence. Coverage of his visit to Dallas can only be seen on Saakashvili's website. I really do not know what the UNM will do next. I can only make

forecasts at best. But I do know one thing: when fortune shows that you have gone too far and there is no way back, your time has gone and you have missed your chance. Now they must think about themselves, their past mistakes, and the consequences of their crimes. I really do not care what their future steps might be; I am concerned about the steps the new Georgian government, elected by the people, should take to bring our country back from the edge of the abyss. Georgia is faced with economic, geopolitical and moral problems but it is up to us to solve our problems, not the deposed rulers of yesterday. There is no reason for us to fear, we should overcome our fear. There is also no reason to use the UNM as a scarecrow: it is misunderstood within its own ranks, and wants to spread this misunderstanding to others. It was an illegitimate government but is now pretending to be an unjustly dethroned opposition by playing a double game. Sometimes it demands cohabitation (for the ears of foreigners), then it undermines the government. Regardless of all ploys, this party will be finished in a few months and something else will come in its place, an initiative of the Georgian people, not something created by rigged elections.

The statement released on behalf of Data Akhalaia, now in France, and about the April 19<sup>th</sup> rally demonstrates that there is much internal conflict within the UNM, does this mean we are already seeing the end of the party?

Their conflicts are their problem... getting too involved in their plans, tribulations and conflicts will be unprofitable. The rally achieved nothing as the public did not take the bait, but it is not worth discussing such a topic. We need to think about how to move away from totalitarian rule and learn from the experience of neo or post totalitarian systems. We have moved on, and if we introduce a democracy and democratically thinking the influence of the UNM and others of their kind will decrease and eventually disappear. I see no need to abolish the UNM, as they will present themselves as victims if we do. They still enjoy around 10% public support and retain a clear influence in certain places through the regional governors, the Tbilisi Mayor, the Court System, and the majority of local government bodies. But let's see who will stay with them.

The former government was strictly opposed to investigating the August 2008 Georgian-Russian war. Do you think it is necessary to do this for the ben-



efit of the international community, or to reveal the crimes committed by high ranking officials?

Such an investigation was carried out by the EU. The commission's conclusion was acknowledged by the international community and the EC within a year. Consequently the facts have been investigated and there is no need for further discussion of them. But domestically many things are not clear, including whether or not we have been told the truth. Some things we were told we false, and we were even celebrating non-existent victories. Two things are important for a healthy society: is the first is to call a lie a lie (as some lies have been so deeply planted in the brains of some people that without proof it is impossible for them to believe otherwise, and some will still not believe even if the evidence is present), and the second, is to bring the guilty to justice. Who is responsible for each dead soldier, for each victim, for the lost territory, and the enlargement of uncontrolled areas (Liakhvi Gorge, Akhlagori, Khodori Gorge, etc)? In a civilized country such an answer would have been demanded immediately, as soon as the Russian troops had left. There would have been no delay in seeking the truth, no moratorium, no postponement! Not doing things in time always brings bad results. We absolved former president Eduard Shevardnaze without asking him to answer for all that had happened. I am not talking about revenge, imprisonment, torture or other forms of vengeance. It is an issue of responsibility, investigating the truth, acknowledging the crime. This action may be too strong for some and not strong enough for others. But it is necessary as a remedy for the country, it is impossible for the country to move forward and flourish country otherwise.

You have confirmed your desire to be actively involved in politics again. You are being spoken of as one of the possible Georgian Dream presidential

candidates, though there has been no concrete statement about this. Do you think that those surrounding Ivanishvili would countenance this?

I am not thinking about this for now, but I am ready to do any kind of work where I can apply my professional experience and knowledge.

You have said that you may join the Ivanishvili team but have also made certain comments and criticisms. Was it difficult for you to express your position? Does the coalition allow its members to take dissenting positions?

I have not joined the coalition but I supported it from the very first day, advocated for it

when needed and supplied constructive criticism where necessary. My position is based on my conscience and belief. I believe that today we have a government capable of moving the country on from the days of the Saakashvili regime and finally take Georgia out of the post-Soviet space and change its mentality. A genuine internal transition is much more important than fake slogans about democracy and western orientation, etc., which are merely designed to make others believe them rather than do any good. We are talking about creating a new internal culture based on our Georgian past, values and prosperity; we will achieve this for sure!

**Which coalition partner do you like the least?**

I cannot say. Probably, some have more in common with me than others, but why should we talk about this?

You are a strongly pro-Western diplomat, and your main achievement was the removal of Russian basis from Georgia, but the UNM says you have made secret transactions with the Russian Federation. Why is this?

They say this because they have no other arguments to make. All they can do is call me names, and they label any opponent Pro-Russian... Actually, the reality is different; all

their actions, not mine, were taken to benefit the Russians. Losing the occupied territories, selling our economic interests, closing off the road to NATO, postponing finding a solution to the conflicts – all these things turn people against embracing the West and pull them in a pro-Russian direction! We have inherited all these problems from the previous government and now have to deal with them. I do not mind what they call me, deeds are more important than words, time will show. Deeds do not lie!

Most Georgians think that behind the cohabitation hidden transactions and the dividing up of businesses and spheres of influence is taking place... what should the government do to remove such doubts and confirm that there will be a return to justice?

You can never prove that there is not a “conspiracy” going on, and you cannot attempt to when the people have lived under a totalitarian regime, thinking about and breathing the artificially concocted conspiracies which keep such regimes in power; there is no way to totally reassure them. It is for this very reason that the UNM are trying to raise such doubts, and by all possible means, even by sacrificing their own members. Doubt belongs to the devil... faith is divine, that's why we have to believe. I am not saying that we have to put all our trust in one person, I am not preaching a new “-ism”, but we have to believe in ourselves and in the future...

I think Ivanishvili's talk about his future departure both provokes such skepticism and shows us how to overcome it: “Believe in yourself and not others, whoever they are, strong or rich!” This is the message he is conveying, as steps are being taken to prevent one-man regimes ever returning.

## NEWS

### Georgian President Meets US Vice President

During his visit to the United States, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili met U.S. Vice President Joe Biden.

The leaders discussed the situation in Georgia and the region in general, Euro-Atlantic integration and the signing of a free trade agreement between the two countries was highlighted.

During the meeting with Saakashvili, Biden confirmed U.S. support to Georgia's NATO integration. It was mentioned during the meeting that progress depends on maintaining democratic institutions and continuing reforms.

The Vice President especially marked the success Georgia achieved in bringing about stability and in terms of nation building. Biden thanked the Georgian President for his immense role in developing Georgian democracy and for the active cooperation between the two countries in fighting international terrorism over the years. Saakashvili thanked the Vice President for America's strong support, including the assuring Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

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### Georgia to celebrate European Week from May 7-11

European week will take place in Georgia from May 7-11. According to the NATO information center, various events will be held in Tbilisi and in Georgia's regions including meetings with students and professors, photo and essay competitions, art exhibitions and contest award ceremonies, a marathon and tree planting/reforestation efforts.

European week is organized by the propaganda arms of North Atlantic military alliance and the European Union along with the support of the Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration.

State and non-governmental sector representatives, diplomatic corps, schoolchildren, students and members of academic institutions will participate in the planned activities throughout the week.

On May 9 the EU will celebrate its 52th anniversary. The EU is a political and economic union of 27 states aiming to ensure peace, prosperity and freedom of its 500 million citizens. The union is exhibiting growing economic difficulties within the Euro zone and political fragmentation, with rising unemployment in peripheral states such as Spain, Greece and Italy, yet it remains committed to a policy of expansion and cooperation with aspirant countries such as Georgia.

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# Childhood, Loneliness and Abandonment: Artist Tato Akhalkatsishvili reveals new Theme

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

**Some people die without knowing what they want to do in their life, for some it takes forever, yet some are just born with it. Some people are lucky to be good at what they like doing. Sometimes it's not quite enough. They try different things, struggle, go bankrupt, or get filthy rich, yet they abandon what they love the most. Being gifted is not enough; one needs to be dedication to it. Georgian artist Tato Akhalkatsishvili has been painting his entire life. He never hesitated in pursuing who he wanted to be and what he wanted to do as an adult. Besides having a gift, dedication and the right mindset, he is in demand.**

I visited his studio for an interview. It was bright, organized and filled with amazing and peaceful paintings on the wall. As I looked around there was another, less peaceful-looking painting sitting on the easel; it was spooky, mysticism and screaming death. As it turned out, it really was about death - part of new series of paintings by Tato, a new theme that no one has seen yet, until now.

**Tato, you majored in architecture at the Academy of Arts. Why did you choose it over painting?**

I thought I could pull off being a painter with the knowledge I already had. I got interested in architecture and I figured I would also have a profession. I didn't really have a goal of being an architect, besides I thought I already knew how to paint well enough.

**When did you change your mind to pursue a different major?**

I soon realized "I didn't know how to paint". I did learn a lot while studying architecture and it turned out to be extremely useful afterwards. It opened me up. It contains a lot of angles. You must know the theory of color, biology, psychology and much more. Architecture has a very specific character; it made me realize that I was not quite into it. I painted whenever I had free time and that was what I really wanted to be doing. So I studied 3 years and switched my major to painting.

**When did you start being a displayed artist?**

I participated in many student exhibitions when I was at school. We formed a Figurative Art Studio. It was four of us: Levan Mindiashvili, Irakli Bugianashvili, Makho Datashvili and myself. We organized a lot of group exhibitions to display our works.

**How does the status of being a student artist differ from that of a graduated one?**

It's the perception and expectation of the visitors. It's different commercial wise as well. When you are a student you put lower price on your work than when you are a graduate artist.

**When did your art reach be-**

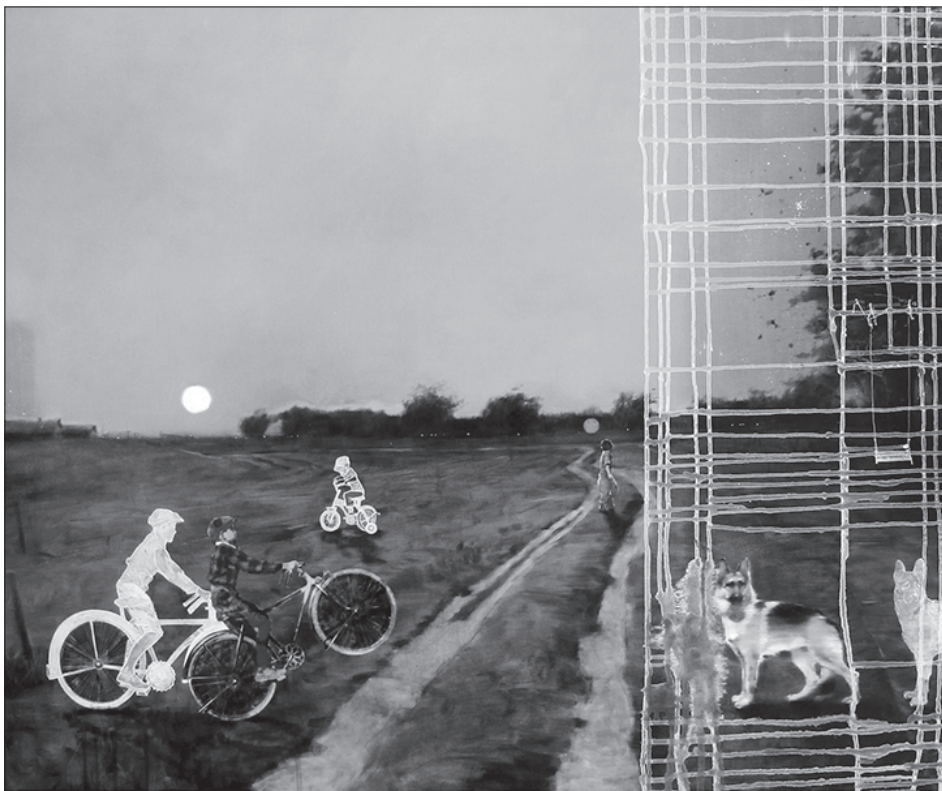
**yond Georgia's borders?**

Just as I graduated I had an exhibition in Germany. A guy from our group named Irakli Bugianashvili decided to continue studying at the Academy of Arts in Germany. While studying he was working hard to find contacts with the galleries. He had an exhibition quite soon and

No, the process itself. I have to reach a certain point. There is a process going on in me as I work on something and all of a sudden I just take one step and fall into a completely different direction. It's not like I wake up and paint something new. Constant working gets me to the point of being ready and mature to do it.

**Is this a habit or a natural**

About three months ago. After all these years of landscaping I discovered that I have been painting the undefined future. I felt the urge of cutting myself off that future and face the present world and paint it. Of course with the metaphors, since I see it impossible to do it without them. The world that is cruel, harsh, scary, mysterious and depressing. This process turned



showed our works to the owner of the gallery. He liked them. First they invited Makho Datashvili, then Levan Mindiashvili and me. We had just graduated, and the timing was perfect.

**Where did you go from there?**

Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, USA, Japan and a couple of other countries.

**What was going on in your professional life in Georgia meanwhile?**

I was displayed in Georgia as well. But it was during a time when people didn't really have time for art. It has changed since, and it makes me very happy.

**What is the difference between being an artist here and abroad?**

People abroad have more room in their mind to appreciate art. Somehow they are more tasteful, more open, more "educated" when it comes to art. I am more in demand there than I am here in Georgia. Commercial wise there is a major difference too. I sell more work and at better price abroad.

**You are about to have an exhibition in Germany in May.**

Yes, I am taking with me requested paintings, though lately I have been working in a totally different direction.

**How many times in your career have you changed direction? And how does it happen for you?**

I have changed my direction quite a few times and it takes quite some time.

**"Some time" meaning, you have to gain courage?**

**process of professional growth?**

It is definitely a natural process. Artist can't be in the same place forever. Inspiration enters your mind and you just follow it. It can come from whatever... You never know when or what... It's just out there... Working advances you, exhausts something, opens a new hunger, it leads you...

**Are you saying that not one swing of a brush is in vain?**

Absolutely, every move the brush makes by your hand is an input for something greater.

**What stage are you on now?**

I have moved to the other step. I have not finished the series yet. No one has seen them. I am not going to sell these. I may exhibit them, but not sell them. They are only for me. I am not quite sure what direction it is - it is a bit of avant-garde, a bit of surrealism, a bit something else... There is a different form of communication with shapes in my new works, the theme itself is more outlined than previously.

**What was before?**

It was a landscape before. I never drew a portrait of a certain place. It was more transcendental. I tried to de-materialize the real world, so I could replace an actual being/living. It was mystic. I used to paint the world I imagined. The world I wanted to see; my imaginary afterlife. It was like a metaphor of a human soul and modes. I have exhausted this theme; I painted all I wanted to say as an artist in that direction.

**When did you move from that?**

very fascinating for me. First of all it was like adopting a new technique, new materials. It is no longer just a canvas and colors; I started to work with new medias: overlay, photo, etc...

**What is the theme?**

It's childhood. There are a few



topics in this series. Like I said there are all metaphors. I want to put it out as a "kid's perception of the world, without knowing what it really is, how cruel it is". This is the moment I want to capture, how inadequate the kid is towards the universe and that it can't possibly be any other way. There is another topic "the time of loneliness" as well and not just social loneliness. I usually don't touch the social theme, but I did a little this time. There are two types or lonesome: abandonment by society, with the financial problems and just lonesome people. Society is still participating in their lives, and it is watching. There are old abandoned buildings, the chairs that symbolize the society. Chairs are facing the buildings, except one

white chair that co-exists with these lonely people and looks at you from their position.

There is also the Aokigahara forest (Japan) theme. Since I went for painting the cruelty of life, this is the forest that is the most popular for suicides. People go there specifically to kill themselves. It's in the series as well.

**Let me use the metaphor as well and ask you with a childish approach: Do you paint just as much as you want?**

No, I wish I painted more. There are a lot of outer circumstances that prevent me from painting more.

**Considering these circumstances are you satisfied with your work?**

I am grateful.

## NEWS

### "Food Line Georgia" disqualified from Ministry of Defense competition

Ruling party Georgian Dream MP Irina Imerlishvili husband's company "Food Line Georgia" has been disqualified from a competition announced by the Georgian Ministry of Defense. According to the Defense Ministry, the company was disqualified after it was found that documents it presented failed to comply with the terms of competition.

The documents submitted by the company were studied by the competition commission along with representatives of the non-governmental sector at the Defense Ministry. Deputy Minister Zaza Broladze, the members of the tender commission and civil society representatives discussed the tender for providing food for military personnel.

The Defense Ministry announced an open tender for the provision of food and canteen services for food companies on February 18, 2013. Proposals are currently being reviewed.

On a meeting, the members of tender commissions discussed the documentation of Food line Georgia Ltd and GMM Ltd. After careful analysis, both companies were disqualified because their documents did not comply with the competition's terms. The Ministry states that the selection commission will award a winner based on the lowest proposed cost.

Two weeks ago it became known that MP Irina Imerlishvili husband's company "Food Line Georgia" won the Defense Ministry competition. In response, Giorgi Kandelaki, a representative of the parliamentary opposition, claimed that the competition was marred by nepotism and corruptive dealing.





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