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NATO Secretary General: elections will be the next important test for Georgia's democracy



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NATO Secretary General: elections will be the next important test for Georgia's democracy

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

“Yes, Georgia is close [to NATO] but there's still a lot of work to do,” NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated during his two-day working visit to Georgia last week. Rasmussen, who met PM Ivanishvili on June 26 and President Saakashvili on June 27, said that the presidential elections of October 2013 would be the “next important test” for Georgia's NATO aspirations.

The Secretary General and NATO member states Permanent Representatives who comprise the North Atlantic Council (NAC) began a two-day meeting in Tbilisi on June 26. Following the first session of this the NATO-Georgia Commission meeting, chaired jointly by the Georgian Prime Minister and the NATO Secretary General, was held. “After you took up your position your government showed a distinct loyalty to the necessary reforms and to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations,” the NATO Secretary General told the Georgian PM at the joint press conference following the meeting.

Rasmussen confirmed that NATO remains committed to the decision made in Bucharest in 2008 that Georgia will join the alliance as soon as it satisfies the necessary conditions. “I will be straight, frank, open and say – when I look at the developments in Georgia since I first visited it some years ago as the Prime Minister of Denmark [in November, 2008] we have seen clear progress, and during that period of time Georgia has obviously moved closer to NATO, because it has implemented certain reforms and continues to implement neces-

sary reforms. Having said that, there is still work to do – the Georgian government knows that, we know that – and we will work in collaboration and carry through the necessary reforms. So, yes, Georgia is closer but there is still work to do,” Rasmussen declared.

Since Ivanishvili took office last year dozens of politicians linked to President Mikheil Saakashvili have been arrested, triggering warnings from the West that the Georgian government should avoid selective justice and the persecution of political opponents. Asked about these arrests and legal proceedings against members of the previous government, the NATO Secretary General responded: “I want to make clear, that we are following the recent arrests of former government members with great concern.”

“I have in my conversations with representatives of the government stressed that we expect the Georgian authorities and Georgian courts to fully respect the fundamental principles of rule of law and ensure due process,” Rasmussen commented at a joint news conference with President Saakashvili, who added: “We spoke very openly and frankly about issues related to rule of law, human rights and democracy in Georgia. I think this is a very difficult moment for Georgia in this regard. In the long-term perspective Georgia will overcome all its difficulties and of course become a NATO member ... but now we are going through a very difficult phase as we are facing serious, problematic issues.”

Former Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili is one of the former ministers arrested since Ivanishvili rose to power. He is accused of abuse of power, cor-

ruption, illegal imprisonment and illegally obtaining personal information. However Ivanishvili dismissed accusations that he is using courts to settle scores with his political rivals, saying that any wrongdoing, by anyone, must be dealt with according to the law.

The NATO Secretary General said that Georgia must ensure that the presidential elections in October satisfy democratic standards.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

One of the most important issues discussed at the NATO-Georgia Commission meeting was Georgia's relations with Russia.

“Russia is not being pleased with [Georgia's NATO aspirations] and will not be pleased with them in the future, and we know this very well, but the Georgian people are pleased with them and it is the Georgian people whose views we take into consideration. This is not my decision or the decision of the previous government, it is the choice of the Georgian people,” Prime Minister Ivanishvili declared at the press conference. “Integrating with Europe and the Euro-Atlantic space is our strategy, and we will continue along the road to fulfilling this aspiration. This issue is to be decided by our people and NATO member countries. It is clear that some of our neighbors, including Russia, are not pleased with it but I think we will manage to provide relevant explanations which will not damage the country's interests,” he continued.

Ivanishvili also promised to resolve problems in relations with Russia. “The successful steps we have taken in terms of trade with Russia are wel-



come, but what is concerning are the events of the last month, which are still going on, i.e. Russia's border encroachment – in some places the fences have been moved 300 meters,” Ivanishvili said. “I expressed [my concern] to the Secretary General that it is unclear how Russia can have such a misunderstanding parallel to taking positive steps. These actions do not fit the positive context of general relations development and do not show Russia in a good light. On the contrary, they raise many questions about Russia. I assured the Secretary General that we, the new government, will be principled and consistent in our relations with Russia and will do everything we can to resolve relations with our neighbor in a way which will not hinder our eventual membership of NATO,” he added.

“ISAF IS NOT A TICKET TO NATO”

Anders Fogh Rasmussen also expressed his appreciation of Georgia's “major contribution” to the ISAF mission, adding however that, Georgian soldiers “are not in Afghanistan to gain Georgia's entry into NATO.”

“In Afghanistan Georgian troops carry out a United Nations mandate as part of a coalition of 50 nations... they are there to serve Georgia's security interests, because by depriving terrorists of a safe haven we are also making our own countries more secure,” The NATO Secretary General said. He added that the Alliance was now planning a new mission “to train, advise and assist Afghan forces after 2014.” “This will not be a combat mission, and I thank Georgia for its continued commitment to our joint endeavour,” Rasmussen declared.

At the joint press conference Ivanishvili reiterated that Geor-

gia is ready to contribute to the Afghan operation even after 2014. He also stated that Georgia is conducting railway construction work in order to quickly connect Azerbaijan with Turkey, as this route will be used in the future to transit cargo to and from Afghanistan.

During his working visit the NATO Secretary General and North Atlantic Council members also met Parliament Chairman Davit Usupashvili and senior lawmakers from both the parliamentary minority and majority groups. “Georgia is taking firm steps towards NATO membership, a course which is the choice of the Georgian people, the goal the current government seeks and the goal the previous government sought,” Usupashvili commented after the meeting, adding that “the Georgian people, parliamentarians and politicians expect that there will be

reciprocal steps made by NATO and its member states next year to demonstrate that the integration process has deepened.”

Davit Bakradze, the UNM parliamentary minority leader, said at the same meeting that the major political groups in the country were unanimous in respect of Euro-Atlantic integration. “It's difficult to find an issue which many politicians agree on, but NATO membership is an issue we all agree on,” Bakradze explained.

Georgia has hosted North Atlantic Council meetings three times over the last five years, which according to Tbilisi confirms the strong relations and successful cooperation between NATO and Georgia. Before wrapping up his two day visit on Thursday evening Rasmussen addressed Georgian troops preparing for deployment in Afghanistan.

NEWS

Joseph Danford : It is up to Georgia whether to participate in the ISAF mission or not

It is up to Georgia whether to participate in the ISAF mission or not, ISAF General Joseph Danford at the Defense and Security Conference under way at the Sheraton hotel in Batumi.

Joseph Danford said he welcomed the Georgian soldiers' participation in the ISAF mission after 2014 too, as the Georgian contingent is distinguished with its professionalism and competence.

“Of course, it is up to Georgia whether to participate in the ISAF mission or not, but I, as the ISAF's commander, can only welcome the fact that Georgian soldiers will stay in the ISAF mission after 2014 too, as the Georgian contingent is distinguished with its professionalism and competence. The Georgian soldiers can make unique contribution into stability and peace in Afghanistan”, said Joseph Danford.

ISAF General Joseph Danford is one of the reporters at the Defense and Security Conference.

The main theme of the conference is: the ISAF operation - progress and common vision for the future.

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Yermukhamet Yertysbayev: Persecution of businessmen was a step against the economy of Georgia

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

The new Government of Georgia is trying to restore relations with those investors who refused to continue investing in Georgia because of the negative attitude of the previous government. These efforts seem to be getting somewhere, as some Kazakh investors who abandoned their huge investments here are now intending to return. Here Ambassador of the Kazakh Republic to Georgia Yermukhamet K. Yertysbayev tells The Georgian Times about the problems Kazakh businessmen had with the previous government and a number of other issues concerning relations with Georgia.

Your Excellency, did the situation in Georgia meet your prior expectations?

I knew a lot about Georgia even before coming here, as I was fond of Georgian literature during the Soviet period, particularly the works of Nodar Dumbadze and Fazil Iskander. I would like to mention that I did not distinguish between Abkhazian and Georgian literature and writers, as in general this is a very interesting literature. Georgian cinematography is known all over the world and Qartuli Estrada are also well known, so I have always had great respect for Georgian culture. I remember reading the memoirs of Ilia Erenburg, "People, Years and Life", in which he describes the travels of two American journalists in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, and being struck by one phrase: Everyone in the Soviet Union admires Georgians. Although at that time Stalin (of Georgian origin) was head of the Soviet Union Georgia's folk songs, dance, culture, cheerfulness and hospitality still impressed everyone. My expectations, as you correctly implied, did coincide with what I have seen here. This is a very beautiful country with an ancient civilization, which has very beautiful nature, architecture and historic monuments. The phrase in the song Tbiliso: "there is no other such beauty in the world" conveys the truth.

Do you think Georgians are Europeans or Asians?

It has always been difficult to define whether Georgia is situated in Europe or Asia, or where the Caucasus as a whole is. I think Georgia is situated in Eurasia. If you are coming from the south Europe begins here. We Kazakhs have much in common with Georgians. We are both cheerful, hospitable and debonair peoples, more optimists than pessimists. Although Georgia has experienced a very serious and difficult

transformation and prolonged crisis since the 90s the Georgian people have not surrendered, and on the contrary become stronger. Now life is boiling and bubbling here.

How do you assess the political situation here? Can you compare this government with the previous one?

Of course I can compare them, I am well aware of the political situation in Georgia because I am a political scientist, but as a diplomat, and the ambassador of another country, I do not want to make political assessments or analysis. What I can say is that when I handed my credentials to President Saakashvili told him that I hoped that whoever becomes the next President of Georgia will continue his reformist course. In my opinion, since the Rose Revolution the country has seriously changed for the better. Mistakes and gross violations have been identified by the Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of the Interior, but the Court must be the place where such issues are independently examined and resolved, as in all democratic countries.

Do you think our government can maintain good relations with both Russia and the USA and Europe?

Yes, and I can give you a classic example of this. Kazakhstan has excellent relations with Russia, China, the USA, the EU and Uzbekistan. When a country presents itself as part of a great power, for example, Russia or USA, this just creates relapses into old ways of thinking, dating from when the world was bipolar and divided into two systems, which conducted a Cold War which at any moment could turn into a hot war. By conducting wise politics it is possible to establish good relations with both the West and Russia. Kazakhstan is in a customs union with Russia but at the same time our Defence Ministry has close contact with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Of course we are not NATO members, and are not going to become so as we do not need NATO, being already members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), alongside Russia, Belorussia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan and Armenia. However I see that in Georgia the desire and aspiration of the new government is to enter NATO at any cost.

Why does Russia seek to derail this process?

Because it has a large military base in Armenia. You want to bring NATO and Russia into the same region, side by side, and this could lead to serious, powerful conflict. The way out of this situation would be to adopt a new policy. I am convinced that the new Govern-

ment of Georgia will build normal relations with Russia. The Russian market is opening for Georgia. Of course NATO is your own choice, but do not forget that the US and EU need no problems of a military-strategic character. In my opinion you need to conduct a realistic policy based on improving the economy. In a country where 50-60% of the population is unemployed economic improvement, creating jobs and strengthening internal stability, should come first. Do you think NATO needs a member with so many unemployed? The economy should come first, then politics. This must be Georgia's strategy for the next 10 years.

Did you see those terrible prison videotapes? Should such things be part of a democracy?

I did not see them, but my co-workers did and have told me everything. No, they are not part of any democracy; they are evidence of its decomposition. Some say that Hitler came to power through democracy and by means of elections, but this is not so, because at that time Germany was in crisis and its democracy was decomposing, and he seized the power by taking advantage of that negative situation. On the wave of success and euphoria after the Rose Revolution some of the Georgian elite believed that they would be in power for a long period and thus began violating the law.

The President has stated that he did not know about these violations. Do you think it is possible that Hitler did not know about the concentration camps or Stalin about mass repression?

We had the same situation in Kazakhstan during the mass riots in Zhanaozen in 2011, when 16 people were killed in clashes with the police. At that time I was an advisor to the President and I can tell you that the President wanted to go and meet the rioters twice but twice the local administration and his inner circle convinced him that the situation there was absolutely normal, the demands of the striking oil workers were illegal and the rioting was petering out. So I witnessed the sheer deception of our President by other politicians. Sometimes such things happen, but please understand that I do not want to interfere in your internal political affairs and make serious assessments.

You remember that a few years ago a group of Kazakh businessmen left their investment projects in Georgia unfinished and stated that they had had problems with representatives of the previous government, while our President contrarily stated that the Kazakh businessmen had not fulfilled the terms of their invest-



ment agreements. What was actually going on at that time?

This is a good question and I will answer it. At one time, following President Nursultan Nazarbaev's official visit in 2005, Kazakhstan was the number one foreign investor in Georgia. President Nazarbaev conducts a multi-vector foreign policy and believes that Kazakhstan should have transport corridors running in different directions (through Russia, China, Turkmenistan and the South Caucasus) and have good relations with all neighbouring countries. Kazakhstan made 100 million dollar investments in Borjomi-Likani, Batumi Port, KazTransGaz Tbilisi, BTA Bank etc. through BTA bank of Kazakhstan. We made a lot of big investments here, but BTA Bank of Georgia then illegally seized 51% of the stock in these. We were excluded from the management of KazTransGaz, our own company.

In 2006 12 million tonnes of oil products passed through Batumi port to Kazakhstan but last year 5 million tonnes. Commodity turnover was 250 million dollars in 2006, but last year 180 million dollars. So turnover has fallen. For many years the Georgian government has also owed Kazakhstan 40 or 50 million dollars, I cannot remember the exact figure. The Kazakh side, seeing such an attitude, began to abandon its investments in Georgia.

I have spoken to Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and he told me: tell your President that the new government will do its best to reliably protect the assets invested in Georgia. And we believe him, because he comes from a big business background and big businessmen never throw away or waste a word. I have also twice met Archil Kbilashvili, the Public Prosecutor, once here and once in Astana, where he and his Kazakh counterpart signed a cooperation memorandum between our two countries. So we know all our investments will now be protected here.

We, the Government of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh business elite are glad to see this

new attitude of the Government of Georgia because Kazakh businessmen want to invest in Georgia, this is a tourist country and this sphere can develop here and we want to contribute to this. For example, one Kazakh Company has invested 5 million dollars here and is now looking for oil wells in Georgia.

When freight turnover falls and the flow of cargo through the port of Batumi is reduced by half this is a very disturbing, and the reason for it is that Georgia has its own tariff policy concerning the carriage of goods, Azerbaijan another and Kazakhstan another. If we want the South Caucasus transport corridor to work properly, have cargo passing continually through Georgia's railways and ports and create jobs in Georgia our three countries must have a common tariff policy. Georgia is Kazakhstan's quickest route to the Black Sea and then onto Europe via the Mediterranean. In fact we have a great window to Europe in Georgia. Kazakhstan, which is 2,744,000 square km. in area, has no way of accessing either the sea or the ocean within its own territory, strangely enough. This access is very important for us and so we want to make huge investments here. But Georgia also has to encourage this process, or "turn to face us", i.e. Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

If Kazakhstan and Central Asia and the three South Caucasus republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia create something like an economic confederation in future it would be a very strong bloc, as this region connects Europe and Asia. As China is now the industrial workshop of the world a huge quantity of Chinese products goes to Europe, so through which countries do they pass? We now are constructing the China-Europe Autobahn which will pass through Kazakhstan and Russia. Georgia and Azerbaijan must be interested in the Chinese traffic going through their countries, and therefore in creating an alternative transport

corridor. Every country is always interested in cargo traffic because it is a great source of income. The Caspian Pipeline Consortium – which involves Kazakh oil, American investments and Russian territory – is a good example of international cooperation, but Russia will get the lion's share of the profit on transporting our oil – 52% – because the pipeline goes through Russian territory.

Has the new Government of Georgia asked KazTransGaz to reduce the gas tariffs?

This is a difficult question for me to answer. Recently Georgia's Minister of Energy was in Kazakhstan and our two countries signed an agreement about returning the company to Kazakh management, so let's see what will happen. The Kazakh side asked for either there turn of its investment or the restoration of its management rights. It is impossible for us to both lose our money and be excluded from the company's management. But this problem has been resolved now. Of course we were surprised by the negative and irresponsible attitude of the previous government towards Kazakh businesses, Turkish businesses, Israeli businesses... those who run small and medium sized businesses are very active and enterprising people, they are the salt of the earth and the support of the nation, and pressuring these people is a big mistake because it hurts the economy. One businessman is worth ten ordinary electors, because he creates jobs, pays higher taxes and so on. So that persecution of businessmen was a step against the economy of Georgia.

What can you say about the cultural relations between Kazakhstan and Georgia?

I was once Minister of Culture and I remember our cultural relations with Georgia. For example the arrival of the National Ballet of Sukhishvili was a grandiose event. Georgian singers who are also popular in Russia, such as Vakhtang Kikabidze, Tamara Gverdsiteli and others are also frequent visitors to Kazakhstan.

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The American Friendship Club invites you to the celebration of the American Independence Day on July 4th.

You will get a chance to enjoy your time with your family members and friends in the nature of the open air Ethno-

graphical museum in the city center on the way to the Turtle Lake.

Various entertainment ac-

tivities are planned throughout the event. McDonalds will organize an island for kids. The children will participate in dif-

ferent sport activities and the winners will be given prizes. There will be free rock climbing on the specially installed artificial wall. A few artists will display their paintings. You will get to taste Georgian wine and beer on the background of live jazz music. Georgian State Folk Group "Erisioni" will present folk dancing by children. We will have a special super lottery with lots of memorable and valuable prizes. Cost of a lottery ticket is 2 GEL. At the end of the event the fireworks will go together with the American National Anthem and a cake dedicated to the American Independence Day will be cut. There will be a sale of various gift accessories with prices ranging from 5 to 25 GEL. Participants are encouraged to bring American flags and wear red, white and blue articles of clothing to show their support for American Independence Day.

We have invited diplomats accredited to Georgia with families, representatives of culture and business spheres, and members of the Georgian Government to the celebration. The territory will be fenced and protected by the security service. Parking lot will be available. Plan to spend the afternoon pleasantly with the family and friends and let's celebrate the American Independence Day together. **RED, WHITE AND BLUE DRESS REQUIRED.** We would like to offer you the tickets to attend the Celebration of the American Independence Day. Tickets will also be sold (10 GEL) - The price includes: 2 Beer, 1 hamburger, 1 lottery tickets, 1 Coca Cola, 1 Lemonade. The event starts at 5 p.m. and ends at 10 p.m. Address: 2 Turtle Lake Highway, Tbilisi Ethnographical Museum. Please confirm your participation at the 4th of July Celebration to reserve free tickets. Contact person: Iliia Zukakishvili, President of the American Friendship Club. E-mail: zukakishviliilia@yahoo.com Mob : 597 34 55 00



The American Friendship Club invites you to the celebration of the American Independence Day on July 4th.

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You are welcome to bring folding chairs, tents, mats, other necessary items and enjoy your time comfortably. You can bring your own snacks and drinks and enjoy your picnic. Please Bring the red white and blue colors. Parking lot will be available. Plan to spend the afternoon pleasantly with the family and friends and let's celebrate the American Independence Day together. The event starts at 5 p.m. and ends at 10 p.m. Address: 2 Turtle Lake Highway, Tbilisi Ethnographical Museum.

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P.S. The museum is located west of Turtle Lake on a hill overlooking the Vake district, Tbilisi. It is essentially a historic village populated by buildings moved there from all main territorial subdivisions of Georgia. The museum occupies 52 hectares of land and is arranged in eleven zones, displaying around 70 buildings and more than 8,000 items. The exhibition features the traditional darbadz-type and flat-roofed stone houses from eastern Georgia, openwork wooden houses with gable roofs of straw or boards from western Georgia, watchtowers from the mountainous provinces of Khvsureti, Pshavi, and Svaneeti, Megrelian and Imeretian wattle maize storages, Kakhetian wineries (mirani), and Kartlian water mills as well as a collection of traditional household articles such as distaffs, knitting-frames, chums, clothes, carpets, pottery and furniture. There are also an early Christian "Slon" basilica from Tianeeti and a 6th-7th century familial burial vault with sarcophagus.



Ucha Nanuashvili: The government should respond to the civilized world with a full and proper investigation

By MAKHA DEKANOSIDZE, GT

Georgia will not be able to join the EU or NATO unless it has high human rights protection standards. As the new government has found and published plenty of human rights violations committed by the previous government, including the infamous prison torture videos, violations of privacy and discrimination against minorities, ensuring the rest of the world that Georgia is moving in the right direction can be quite difficult.

Here Ucha Nanuashvili, the Public Defender, says in an exclusive interview with The Georgian Times that the international community is awaiting the reaction of the government and law enforcement agencies to specific cases of human right violation and will assess how democratic Georgia is by how well it reacts to them.

Mr. Nanuashvili, how should Georgia demonstrate that it upholds human rights?

The government should respond to the civilized world with a full and proper investigation of each possible violation. The footage we have seen merely confirmed what has been said for years but was difficult for anyone to believe either within or outside Georgia. Cases of torture and similar inhuman treatment create a very serious problem for the country. The new government must react and all the perpetrators should be punished, as they have not been until now. This is what the international community is demanding from us.

The quantity of these recordings demonstrates that this criminality was systematic, not just the private acts of a few rogue operators. Therefore this footage should not be destroyed, but information gained illegally such as unauthorized surveillance material, should be.

The Public Defender is the protector of minority groups. On May 17 your office was widely criticized for allowing the sexual minority rally to take place. A large part of society considers that the protection of minority rights equals the violation of the majority's rights. What do you have to say about this?

The Public Defender is required by law to protect people regardless of which group they belong to. In some countries, like Georgia, the rights of minorities are violated more often than the rights of the majority, though there are also cases when the rights of the majority should be protected. However, we have to remember that everybody has equal



rights. The direct mandate of the Public Defender is to respond to any violation. This is what happened on May 17, I fulfilled my obligation.

Everybody has the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, these rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, which in all countries is drawn up and ratified by the majority agreement of those involved, it is not the work of one person. The same principles are reflected in the European Convention on Human Rights and any other international convention Georgia has signed. So I do not see any problem in the fact that we mainly protect the rights of minorities, as through the world it is mainly minorities whose rights are violated.

Who violates the rights of minorities, is it the majority?

In most cases it is government structures, or individual officials or politicians, so it would be difficult to say that the majority violates the rights of minorities. There are also cases where the majority's rights are violated. The attitude of the public and media is another issue, and a sensitive one.

The UNM and various Western politicians are claiming that the former ministers arrested are victims of political harassment. Do you see such a political motivation in the cases of Bacho Akhalaia and Vano Merabishvili?

We have discussed this issue with the NATO delegation. I told them, and I repeat here, then when we are talking about detention on political grounds, the most important is that the legal process followed should be transparent. If it is not, there is no evidence of political persecution either way. The Court hearings and legal process generally are now open. A new law allows videos and photos to be used as evidence. Consequently nobody will have a problem seeing case materials, filing cas-

es or defending themselves.

Several NGOs are observing the investigation of these cases; the OSCE human rights office is observing it through a special mission and the EU special advisor, Thomas Hammarberg, is aware of all developments. The Public Defender's office is also observing the investigation in detail. When it is clear how firm the arguments of the investigation are we can draw a conclusion about whether it is a genuine criminal investigation or a political act. Until this is done, any statement regarding political detention is merely a political statement itself, with no content. No international organization has made such a statement, merely certain politicians and documents the PM has spoken to and seen. This means that the claims of political persecution are not accepted by the NGO sector but stem from direct relationships between political partners.

You have recently returned from Brussels, so can you tell us what the West's real attitude towards this question is?

My visit was within the framework of the one day Human Rights Dialogue meeting which is held regularly. The discussion was about developments during the last year. It should be noted that the recent amendments to the Georgian Labour Code have significantly improved our standing on this area compared to other countries, and there are now specific fields in which even EU member states have less robust indicators than Georgia. EU representatives have admitted as a body that positive developments have been seen in Georgia, in areas from the penitentiary system to freedom of expression, and even in the media there are fewer problems than last year, when there were cases of hindering journalists. Though certain practices here are being questioned, the Mer-

abishvili and Akhalaia detention is not among them. The EU is concerned about unfair dismissal, pressure being applied to the municipal assemblies after the election and the prison death in Geguti.

You mentioned Geguti case; despite general improvements in the penitentiary system there are still cases of suspicious deaths in the prisons. So how can the system become fully healthy?

This is the most difficult system to deal with, as there has been a very bad situation there for years and it is impossible to change this overnight. There might be individual incidents, but there is now almost no torture or inhuman treatment. The treatment of inmates has changed and inmate health has radically improved. As for the case in Geguti, it should be investigated promptly. To prevent such cases occurring in future, it is necessary to have an efficient monitoring system.

The Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance has asked your office to set up a new prison monitoring group, when will this start functioning?

The Public Defender has always had the right to undertake such monitoring, but has not often used it. In only a few cases have independent experts been involved in this monitoring. We have created a 40 strong expert group, which will undertake unannounced visits to all the relevant institutions. We have a meeting of group members on July 3 and 4 and only after this will the full list of monitors be published. We are also developing a code of conduct for them and when this is agreed it will be published.

No professional limits were set; therefore there are several journalists, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, experts on under-aged issues, gender experts and twenty NGO representatives amongst

the group members. The lack of such a group before has led us to the present situation in the system. There are still many problems, but the reaction mechanism is now different, as we react to each report. However over liberalization is not possible when we are talking about the penitentiary system.

Has the minority rights situation radically worsened since the present government came to power?

As for the incidents of deprivation of religious rights, this office was involved in three such cases before I became Public Defender. Then and now, some minorities were addressed, but unfortunately some have not been yet. I have recommended a response to each case in order to prevent some people being above the law.

Regarding ethnic minorities the situation has changed for the better, as their integration into state structures has increased. Members of ethnic minorities can also now take exams in their own languages. Last year 500 ethnic Azeri graduated to higher educational institutions, this year 1,200. Though there are still some violations, they are not on such a scale as previously.

Who protects the rights of foreign citizens whose countries do not have an embassy in Georgia?

They can apply to the Public Defender's office. NGOs used to work in this field before, but unfortunately not many organizations are interested in this field now. As I am aware of certain cases of this type I have decided to conduct systematic monitoring of the conditions of foreign residents of Georgia and of asylum seekers. There are many asylum seekers now and they are housed in a special centre until their applications have been decided. We are writing a report

on this topic in order to outline any problems there may be in this area.

You talk about positive changes, has anything changed for the worse since last October?

There were a number of illegal dismissals of public service workers after the election. People who were not guilty of any crime or been part of any violation were dismissed. When more than 2,000 people suddenly resign from their jobs it raises questions. This is a continuation of the former practice of each new government bringing in its own people.

Misuses of power have also taken place. In some cases procedures were violated when former ministers were detained, as in the cases of Kalandadze and Gunava. We are moving towards democracy, so these violations will not be permitted. The biggest problem is the use of condemnatory language in Parliament, which has been so frequent over the last few months.

What is happening with the Lapankuri investigation?

The final decision has not yet been made by the Parliament. The case was investigated by the MIA, which is an infringement in itself. As the special order of the Minister of Justice signified that a police crime was suspected the case should have been investigated by the Prosecutor. This investigation has now begun following the publication of my report. But we will also demand the establishment of a committee of investigation which will include parliament members, famous faces and representatives of the Chechen community. Many people want to share specific information with the investigation but are refusing to do it because they do not trust the investigators involved in the proceedings so far.

NEWS

4 candidates of the National Movement to take part in the primaries

4 candidates of the National Movement will take part in the primaries. Davit Bakradze, Giorgi Baramidze, Zurab Japaridze and Shota Malashkhia will be the candidates, Giorgi Vashadze, the representative of the National Movement, said at a press conference today.

'The National Movement decided to hold a primary despite the serious political pressure. Registration of candidates ended yesterday. Davit Bakradze, Giorgi Baramidze, Zurab Japaridze and Shota Malashkhia will take part in it. 6 regional conferences will be held throughout Georgia', Giorgi Vashadze said.

According to him, the presidential candidate will be selected by the end of July.

'I hope the election process will be normal despite the existent political attacks', Vashadze said.



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Afghanistan After 2014: Taliban vs. Karzai or “Georgian scenario”???

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

Afghanistan, a country which has become the dominant geopolitical vector in contemporary Georgian politics, is somewhere between peace and war. No one can predict what will happen in the country after 2014, when the NATO ISAF mission ends and the incumbent pro-Western government of Mohammad Karzai gains full authority to run the country. The NATO ISAF Command has transferred all military operational planning into the hands of the new Afghani Armed Forces HQ and national units since May 2013, but how successful this will be in bolstering the state is doubtful, as Karzai's government controls barely 30% of Afghanistan's territory and is deemed very corrupt.

The probability of a ‘Saigon 1975’ scenario developing is very relevant to Afghanistan's ongoing political development and there is a serious possibility that the Taliban will regain power. This was partially confirmed by a statement by Commander of the NATO ISAF mission General Joseph Dunford, who maintained that there is a possibility that the mission



will negotiate with the Taliban. The non-exclusion of this possibility indicates that the plan is either to transfer power from Karzai's government to the Taliban movement (presumably its moderate Islamist faction led by Mullah Daddalah) or convergence the two parties, as happened in Tajikistan, where the Islamist opposition and pro-Communist Rakhmonov government formed a coalition. In the latest incident in the insurgency, on June 25th in Kabul, a Taliban military unit of 8 warriors attacked the very protected Ariana hotel and killed two

American Generals, several other American servicemen being wounded. This demonstrates that the Taliban forces, like the pro-Communist Vietcong guerillas in South Vietnam, are capable of waging combat operations at operational level in the Afghan capital, not a situation under which it is wise to hand over control to an inexperienced government.

It is pretty difficult to forecast, based on these latest events and the massive operational attrition in Helmand province, how the Western “happy ending” scenario in

Afghanistan can come about. The NATO ISAF mission effectively ended the day Al-Qaida leader Osama Bin Laden was killed in Karachi, Pakistan, and the rest of the Al-Qaida network left Afghanistan and moved to Pakistani regions not controlled by the Pakistani government. With the Al-Qaida problem thus resolved, the Taliban could no longer be seen as a challenge to the coalition forces or Western society. Hence a time has come in which it is considered possible to launch a dialogue with the Taliban and consider a form of cohabitation

between it and the government, based on the current Georgian model, in order to promote stability and the peaceful resolution of the internal problems of the country.

Having been given a guarantee by the Taliban that it will not allow Al-Qaida to return to Afghanistan, the NATO mission believes that the complete resolution of the Afghanistan geopolitical “headache” is now possible. It is not by accident that the Taliban, which like the government controls about 30% of the country, has opened a diplomatic mission in Qatar. Qatar has a very strong American military presence (the big Al-Udeid American military base is located only 40 km from the capital, Doha) and is thus considered an appropriate place in which negotiations, at least unofficial ones, between the Americans and the Taliban, and later Karzai's government, can be launched. The aim of these would be to turn Afghanistan into a federal state dominated by Pashtuns (mainly the Duran and Hilzai) but giving other ethnic groups (Khazars, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Kyrgyz, etc.) broad autonomy and cultural independence under the terms of federation.

The coup d'etat of 25th June in Qatar itself, in which

Amir Sheikh Hamad ben Khalifa Al Tani was deposed in favour of Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Tani, can be seen as being part of this same strategy. Sheikh Tamim is a 33 year old graduate of the UK Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, but is also very conservative and has fostered links with the Muslim Brotherhood, which is a partner and ally of the Taliban movement and one of its ideological mentors. This convenient change of government in Qatar provides further evidence that negotiations with the Taliban will actually happen and could be successful. In such a situation Georgia could contribute to the Afghan peace process not only by military and economic means but by adapting its own governmental cohabitation between the Georgian Taliban, the United National Movement led by the Georgian Mullah Omar, Mikheil Saakashvili, and the democratic government led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili. But the question if Afghanistan, as in Georgia, is—who will moderate this cohabitation?

Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia
Military expert, Associate Professor at Sukhishvili Teaching University
Director, the GT Azri Strategic Studies Centre

People with Private Insurance Cannot Transfer to the State Insurance Programme

By LELA TSINTSADZE, GT

The new State Insurance Programme will be launched on July 1. It will cover all the people who had no insurance on February 28, 2013, the day the pilot programme was launched.

The Extended Universal Insurance will cover the costs of home callouts, various services provided by doctor-specialists and certain laboratory tests, including general blood and urine tests. All these medical services will be funded at 70-100% of their cost.

Urgent home callouts and in-patient services will also be funded at 70-100% of cost, but only up to a limit of 15,000 GEL.

A wide range of planned surgeries will also be 70-100% covered, again up to an annual limit of 15,000 GEL. Oncological treatment and the drugs provided in relation to this will be 80-100% covered, with an

annual limit of 12,000GEL.

Healthcare Minister David Sergeenko says that there are two basic kinds of medicines, those for chronic diseases, which a person has to take for their entire life, and those needed as and when a person is ill. The costs of these second types of medicines will be funded under the expanded programme during in-patient treatment. The minister added that the age range (6-60) of those covered by the insurance programme is that of those less vulnerable to chronic diseases. “The treatment costs for such diseases, like diabetes, are covered by the state programme. Those of many rare and infectious diseases are also covered, and arterial hypertension has been added to that list,” said Sergeenko.

Pregnancy care and delivery are also funded by the extended programme, standard delivery costs covered up to a maximum of 500 GEL and caesarean operation costs up to 800 GEL.

“The extended programme



does not include gynecological services, as these are still covered by the vertical state programme, which funds four consultation visits at designated centers, planned tests, etc. though very soon the pregnancy care service will also be expanded,” said Sergeenko.

Beneficiaries will be given the right to select their treatment centre of choice, which can be anywhere in Georgia. A patient can also change their initially selected clinic once every two months. “There is no limitation on this; it does not matter whether the clinic chosen is private or state. 90% of medical institutions are private, and

we have no interest in restricting the work of private clinics,” said the minister.

Sergeenko said that the treatment of skin and venereal diseases is covered by the funding of family doctor and other specialists' services, however if more complex treatment is needed, the patient will have to cover such costs themselves.

However the programme will not be available for those who already have private insurance, as this could damage the insurance companies. “The new programme refers only to those who did not have private insurance by February 28. The numbers affected are not so

great that they will create a mass movement of the privately insured to state insurance. This risk was well calculated, and we do not think that this programme will cause the collapse of insurance companies,” said Sergeenko. He added that the state programme would also not include those who have lost private insurance for any reason.

The minister believes that the long queues of people trying to claim their insurance currently seen in medical institutions will soon disappear. “This was one of the key risks we evaluated before launching this project. We have profiled the medical infrastructure, assessed these risks and do not expect these queues to remain,” said Sergeenko. He added that correct management would solve this problem.

In cases of emergency and home callout treatment, no prior registration with the programme is required. Notification will be made by the medical institution when the patient

applies.

The insurance will continue to cover home callouts for trauma, fractures, wounds, thermal injuries (burns/freezing), poisoning, nosebleeds, allergy management during anaphylactic shock development, urinary retention, acute laryngitis (croup), cardiovascular diseases (hypertonic crisis, heart arrhythmia) and various acute pains. The extended programme now available also includes the costs of cardiologists and neuropathologists, laboratory and instrumental research and planned status management. The funding of heart surgery and interventions and the treatment of children's heart defects will also be continued.

The programme will involve 425 provider institutions, and 1,347,658 beneficiaries have been registered since February 28. Urgent services have so far been provided to 41,713 patients, and 15,275 urgent inpatient cases have been funded. In total, 6,361,132 GEL has been paid out so far.

PM Ivanishvili calls first visit to Israel “successful”

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili paid a two-day visit to Israel on June 23-24. He held meetings with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres, Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilus III, the Speaker of the Knesset, the Israeli business community and émigré Georgian Jews. Ivanishvili said that the visit exceeded his expectations and had been his “most successful” foreign trip so far.



“I think this was my most successful visit,” Ivanishvili told Georgian journalists on June 25, adding that “the two countries will stand side-by-side in trying to overcome the problems we are both facing.”

Ivanishvili said that his meeting with Netanyahu had lasted an hour and 45 minutes, much longer than had been scheduled. The diverse issues discussed included security and a possible free trade agreement. “We also had talks about easing and lifting visa requirements,” Ivanishvili said.

Netanyahu remarked that the two countries had “great” relations and that bolstering these ties is even more important. “We want to expand this

relationship in every way – in trade, in agriculture, in cultural exchanges, and I would say strengthening and building the human bridge between our two societies,” the Israeli PM said.

During their press conference Ivanishvili and Netanyahu did not mention defence cooperation. However prior to the visit Georgian Defence Minister Irakli Alasania had told Israeli newspaper Ma’ariv (via BBC Monitoring) that “We are no longer at war with Russia, and can therefore advance our security relations with Israel.” Ma’ariv also reported that Georgia was seeking to buy Israeli weapons, including UAVs, anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. Georgian Foreign Minis-

ter Maia Panjikidze, however, explicitly denied those reports, saying “Cooperation in the defence sphere might be touched upon, but will in no way be related to arms procurement [from Israel] or anything like that.”

The military ties between the two countries once included the Israeli forces training Georgian soldiers and a small, but significant, number of arms sales. Israel has sold Aerostar and Hermes-450 unmanned aerial vehicles to Georgia, as well as mobile rocket launchers. But the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia ultimately led to a break in Georgia-Israel ties. After that conflict Russia reportedly pressured Is-

rael into stopping arms sales to Georgia by threatening to step up its own arms sales to Israel’s regional foes, Iran and Syria. Subsequently embarrassing reports emerged, via Wikileaks, that Israel had given Russia the data link codes to some of the drones it had sold to Georgia, which would allow Russia to remotely control them and force them to ground. President Saakashvili alluded to this incident last year when Georgia rolled out what it said was an indigenously produced drone.

During Ivanishvili’s meeting President Shimon Peres the two sides discussed the prospects of intensifying bilateral and multilateral relations. They also spoke about the impor-

ance of trade and economic cooperation between Georgia and Israel and the development of energy and cultural relations.

President Peres confirmed that Israel is a friend of Georgia. “Traditionally relations between Georgia and Israel are good,” he said, telling Ivanishvili that “I am sure your visit is timely and will bear fruit.”

The Georgian PM also opened a Georgian-Israeli business forum organized by the National Investment Agency of Georgia, the Georgian Embassy in Israel and the Israeli Export and International Cooperation Institute on the second day of his trip. This event was attended by about 80 Israeli and 25 Georgian businesspeople. The Israeli companies represented various sectors including agriculture, industry, real estate and energy. Within the framework of the event several bilateral business meetings were held.

“The biggest concern today is felt to be agriculture, as the state is conducting major infrastructure investments in this sector and in future will invest even more to rehabilitate the irrigation system. Israeli companies are also keen to have co-investors in Georgia, and I think that this is an interesting area,” Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Minister of Economy, commented after the forum.

Ivanishvili also visited the holy places in the Old City of Jerusalem and met Jews who have emigrated from Georgia. He then visited the National Fund of Israel, laid a wreath at the memorial of victims of the holocaust and took part in a tree planting ceremony.

Irakli Menagarishvili, co-Chairman of the Centre for Strategic Research and an ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, has told The Georgian Times that, “We have a long history of cooperation with Israel in the economic, cultural and security sectors. The new government’s goal is to develop these relationships, and I think Ivanishvili’s trip was a step forward in this process.” Economic expert Irakli Lekvinadze has added that Israel is one of the most powerful countries and therefore official visits to this country are always very important. “Ivanishvili’s visit was very useful for Georgia’s economy, as Israeli businessmen have already expressed their interest in the Georgian Investment Fund. On the other hand, after the article published in The Wall Street Journal, it was crucial to answer all questions and prove that Georgia is safe for any foreign investments.”

Last week The Wall Street Journal published an article entitled “As Sanctions Bite, Iranians Invest Big in Georgia,” which detailed Iranian nationals’ recent activities in Georgia, including investments in private airline FlyGeorgia and JSC InvestBank.

Ivanishvili was accompanied by Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze, Minister of Economy Giorgi Kvirikashvili, State Minister for Diaspora Issues Konstantine Surguladze, advisor Gia Khukhashvili and head of the Georgian National Investment Agency Giorgi Pertaia. Since becoming PM in October 2013 Ivanishvili has also visited Belgium, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey.

IRI poll produces mixed results

By TAMTA ASANIDZE, GT

The International Republican Institute (IRI) was published an opinion poll conducted between May 17 and June 2, 2013. 3,998 Georgian residents aged 18 years and over responded to interview. The questions asked, and responses given, were as below.

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

If Presidential elections were held next Sunday 41% of poll respondents would support the Georgian Dream candidate and 11% the United National Movement candidate. Of the other possible candidates, Salome Zurabishvili would be supported by 7% of poll respondents, Nino Burjanadze 5% and Giorgi Targamadze also 5%.

PUBLIC TRUST

According to the poll 93% of Georgians trust the Georgian Church and the same percentage trust the army, making these the two most trusted institutions in the country. The police enjoy 88% public trust, the media 81%, parliament

81%, the government 79%, the education system 63%, the prosecutor’s office 60%, the courts 55%, the Central Bank 50%, the Ombudsman’s office 49%, the Central Electoral Commission 47%, local authorities 47%, political parties 46%, the President’s office 37%, governors 32% and trade unions 20%.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND FAILURES OF TBILISI CITY MAYOR

The majority of poll respondents found it hard to name anything the Tbilisi Mayor has achieved. The question asked was “What have been the major achievements of Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava?”, to which 44% replied they didn’t know and 10% said they hadn’t been any. Of the achievements mentioned, infrastructure improvements were cited as his major achievement by 13% of respondents and as his second most important by 17%. However the question “What have been the major failures of Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava?” produced a similar pattern of responses. 47% didn’t know, 2% said that he hadn’t failed in anything and 3% that he had failed

in everything. The specific failures most frequently cited by respondents were high transportation costs (8% his biggest failure, 11% his second biggest); indifference to the people (6 and 7%); corruption (6 and 8%); wasting the budget (5 and 6%); being politicised (4 and 4%); low quality of buildings constructed during his tenure (3 and 3%); failure to address social problems (2 and 4%); and combining the taxes for city cleaning services and electricity (2 and 4%).

COHABITATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION

73% of respondents answered yes to the question, “Do you think the Government and opposition should continue their dialogue or not?” 13% considered that this dialogue should not continue and 14% didn’t know.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

The majority of respondents supported continuing the dialogue with Russia. 82% fully supported this, 11% somewhat supported it, 2% somewhat opposed it, 3% strongly opposed it, 2% didn’t know.

JOINING NATO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

61% of respondents fully supported Georgia joining NATO, 19% somewhat supported this idea, 5% somewhat opposed it and 6% strongly opposed it, with 8% don’t know. To the question, “When will Georgia join NATO”, 1% said this year, 4% next year, 18% in 2015 and 14% never. 64% didn’t know. 67% of respondents fully supported Georgia becoming a member of the EU. 20% somewhat supported this and 8% were don’t know.

COMMENT

Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili is convinced that Georgian Dream presidential candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili will win the election on the first ballot, although this poll suggests he will fall short of the 50% plus one vote required. “Polls are polls; there is always a certain margin of error in them. It’s very important how you put the question. I tell you with great assurance that our candidate will win. It is a great probability that the National Movement candidate

will not take even second place, as this party’s image is very bad in our country”, the Prime Minister said.

Giorgi Margvelashvili said that the IRI poll was interesting, but “we are at an early stage, this is preliminary data, the spectrum of candidates has not been established and an election date has not been set”. Free Democrats presidential candidate Nino Burjanadze stated that polls do not reflect reality and she does not agree with such surveys. “I do not comment on this poll at all, as the IRI has previously declared that the information released by me does not correspond with the results of its polls. I have proven over the last few years that I know the public attitude much better than any poll does,” she said.

The head of the New Rights Party regards such polls as unreliable and thinks drawing conclusions on the basis of them is unrealistic. “Polls cause great excitement from the political point of view, and give very interesting information, but the veracity of this information is variable,” says Pikria Chikhradze. The Labour Party does not trust the poll either.

According to its leader Giorgi Gugava faked polls can be used to manipulate the people. “Manipulation through faked polls should end. The former government did this, but ultimately failed to keep itself in power forever, and the same will happen with the current government. According to our internal polls, Shalva Natelashvili has four to five times higher rating than anyone else in the Presidential race,” he said.

The UNM’s Shota Malashkhia has told The Georgian Times, that such polls are useful in internal party work as they identify where to focus. “In these polls an incumbent government always scores highly. During the last parliamentary elections the Georgian Dream was scoring 11-9% in these polls and we were getting more than 50%. But I think these ratings are a realistic reflection of the present situation and I do not suspect them, in contrast to the Georgian Dream. More mobilisation of our support is needed. The poll results are good for the party, as we now have more information on where to focus our efforts and what strategy we should formulate, both for the party itself and its presidential candidate,” Malashkhia said.

Whether this poll is an accurate guide to genuine voting intentions will be revealed in future.

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Arrests, Releases and Rearrests at Tbilisi City Hall

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

Four senior officials from the Tbilisi municipality have been detained in connection with an ongoing investigation into the “embezzlement and misspending” of GEL 48.9 million from the Tbilisi Development Fund, the municipal entity designed to finance the restoration of the older parts of the capital city. The Finance Ministry’s investigations service, which is in charge of probing into financial wrongdoings, announced this on June 28, only for President Mikheil Saakashvili’s opposition United National Movement to announce that it would boycott parliamentary sittings in protest at the arrests.

Deputy Mayor of Tbilisi Davit Alavidze, Davit Avaliani, the head of the Tbilisi Development Fund, Alexi Tabuashvili, head of the Procurement Service of the Mayor’s Office and Dimitri Chkheidze, deputy head of the Krtsanisi district, were arrested along with 23 others from the Tbilisi municipality almost simultaneously in various locations early on Thursday; the other 23, two of

whom were UNM members of Tbilisi City Council (Sakrebulo), were released by noon the same day, but the four named persons were later rearrested.

Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava reacted to his staff’s detention by calling an emergency press conference at night, calling the detentions unlawful. “As soon as the NATO Secretary General left the country they started arresting people on trumped-up charges again. They are trying to put pressure on the Tbilisi local authority, where our party, the United National Movement, retains a majority,” Ugulava commented.

On the same day NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, during his two day trip in Georgia, had announced that the organisation was following the arrests of UNM officials “with great concern”.

Ugulava, seen as one of Saakashvili’s closest allies, was charged in February with misusing state funds and money laundering. Former Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili, another top ally of the President, is currently in jail awaiting trial on graft and abuse of power charges. PM Ivanishvili publicly stated on June 24 that he does “not exclude” the possibility that Saakashvili himself could

be arrested after he leaves office following the presidential elections in October.

Georgia’s Minister of Finance Nodar Khaduri told journalists the law will be applied strictly to everyone who has misappropriated funds in a government position. “An investigation is underway. It will be very transparent and objective. No former, current or future position gives anyone immunity from being held accountable for past crimes,” he noted, adding that the arrested persons were detained as stipulated by Georgian law.

The Finance Ministry’s investigations service states that Tbilisi’s Deputy Mayor and the three other arrested persons are suspected of “along with other persons, having embezzled and misspent” over GEL 48.9 million. The case consists of three episodes related to using public funds to cover UNM party expenses in 2011-2012.

The first episode, according to the authorities, involved funneling GEL 13.85 million of Tbilisi municipality funds to finance the UNM and its activists through creating 719 fictitious jobs in the Tbilisi Development Fund; this money was allegedly transferred between November 2011 and June 2012 in the form of monthly wages on salary cards

issued to persons fictitiously employed by the Tbilisi Development Fund as “building research specialists.” These persons, according to the investigations service, were not even aware of the existence of these salary cards, which were allegedly in the possession of Alexi Tabuashvili, Davit Avaliani, Dimitri Chkheidze and several dozen other employees of the capital city’s municipality, who during the given period thus withdrew and “misspent” GEL 13,852,497 of public funds.

The investigations service also said that “most of these 719 persons” had been employed in 2010, also fictitiously, by TbilService Group, an entity run by the Tbilisi municipality to provide waste management services for the capital city. Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava, is facing “misspending and embezzlement” charges in connection with this alleged creation of fictitious jobs.

The investigations service says that in the second episode, related to the first, Davit Alavidze and then head of the Tbilisi Development Fund Giorgi Sabanadze, “cancelled” these salary cards in June 2012 and started withdrawing funds directly from the bank account of the Tbilisi Development Fund; a total of GEL 34.32 mil-



lion was thus allegedly withdrawn and “misappropriated” in seven installments from June-October 2012.

In the third episode, the investigations service alleges that in February 2012 the Tbilisi Development Fund contracted two private companies to provide buffet services for events hosted by the UNM; GEL 719,862 was allegedly spent for this purpose from the budget of the Tbilisi Development Fund. “Overall, GEL 48,930,822 was embezzled from the Tbilisi Development Fund and misspent” the investigations service said, adding that the probe into the case was still ongoing.

Saakashvili’s United National Movement Party (UNM), which lost the parliamentary elections in October last year to a coalition led by current Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, condemned the arrests as part of an “unprecedented” government attack on the party. “I do not know anyone who is more honest than one of the detainees, Davit

Ninidze. He is the builder of a new Georgia. He designed the new Batumi, new Signaghi, new Mestia, new Telavi and new Tbilisi,” Saakashvili declared. “The arrest of Davit Ninidze as a wolf will remain a “shameful stain” not only on the government but everyone living in this period,” he continued. The President called the arrests “nauseating”.

The UNM MPs walked out parliament to protest against the arrests of several party members on June 28. “We are conducting a political boycott. The [UNM] parliamentary faction has walked out of the parliamentary sitting and all its members are going to Tbilisi to continue the struggle for legality and truth,” stated MP Levan Bezhuashvili, standing alongside other UNM lawmakers in the Parliament building in Kutaisi.

Irakli Abesadze, the Head of the Legal Service of Tbilisi City Hall, announced later that the arrested persons will sue for wrongful arrest and demand the punishment of the offenders.

Candidates for UNM Presidential Primaries Named

Four candidates, including former parliament speaker and now leader of parliamentary minority group Davit Bakradze, will be running for UNM presidential nomination in October, 2013 elections.

Other three candidates are UNM lawmakers Giorgi Baramidze; Zurab Japaridze and Shota Malashkhia.

The candidates will be contesting for the presidential nomination in primaries winner of which is expected to be announced at a conference in Tbilisi on July 28.

Previously Bakradze sounded reluctant over the prospect of running for president. Explaining his decision to agree on being a candidate in the UNM’s primaries, Bakradze said on June 28 that recently emerged videos showing torture of two men by law enforcement officers reportedly in 2011 played a role in his decision in favor for running in the primaries.

“I want to tell you frankly that it was a very difficult and serious decision for me. I thought very much about it before making this decision,” Bakradze told Rustavi 2 TV’s talk show Position late on Friday.

“I have a sense of obligation as I was part of the political team [in previous authorities], chairman of the parliament and I feel that I have moral obligations before those people who

became victims of unfair treatment or violence from the previous authorities. Instead of standing aside – that would have been comfortable in such a situation, I feel that it is my moral obligation now before those people who were victims of violent actions or injustice over the recent years to apologize before these people and to spare no efforts in order not to let such things reoccur again in the future and to help them in restoring their rights today because I failed to do it yesterday,” Bakradze said.

“It is also my moral obligation before the United National movement supporters not to stand aside, but to stand beside them and to struggle together with them, because absolute majority of our supporters are today in the state of trauma, pain and shock against the backdrop of torrent of accusations that is directed against [UNM],” he said.

“It is my obligation before these people to look them in the eye and to tell them that we should be proud of achievements that we have made over the past nine years... But in order to be proud of our past, we should also face the problems that persisted in the past; we should analyze and acknowledge all those problems that persisted in the past. For me being able to face the prob-



lem, to analyze it and to apologize is a sign of strength not weakness.”

“So I want to tell [UNM] party supporters and members: I am not standing aside, I have obligations before you and I will stay with you to the end and we will be able to bring our past [deeds], both negative and positive ones, to the people objectively,” he said.

He also said that “the direction in which the country is now moving is dangerous”, adding that “such level of polarization, confrontation, hysteria and hatred between politicians is inadmissible.”

“So it is my moral obligation before this country to stay where I am and to do everything possible to make processes move towards calming down, reconciliation and development,” he added.

Bakradze also stressed that it was important to realize what

the upcoming presidential elections would not be about change of the government. After the presidential elections new constitution will go into force, which will significantly reduce powers of the president and increase those of the prime minister.

“These elections are not about change of the government and we should take it into consideration when speaking about opposition’s chances in these elections. These elections will not lead to change of the current government and [Prime Minister] Bidzina Ivanishvili; the current government will remain. Upcoming elections have to define one thing: whether or not all the posts [in every branch of government] will be held by a single political force,” Bakradze said.

“Past experiences, including our own [UNM’s] experience, shows that when a single political force is in possession of all



the posts, it is not good for the country,” he added.

In March, 2013 poll, commissioned by NDI and fielded by CRRC, Bakradze enjoyed with highest favorability rating among UNM figures with 48% (question asked to respondents was “do you like or dislike”), far ahead of many UNM politicians, including President Saakashvili who had 25%.

Giorgi Baramidze, who is also a candidate in UNM’s presidential primaries, had 19% of favorability rating in the same poll in March.

Baramidze was the longest serving cabinet minister when UNM was in power; first he held interior minister’s post after the 2003 Rose Revolution and then defense minister’s post in June-December, 2004. He was the state minister for Euro-Atlantic integration issues from December, 2004 to August, 2012 before being named UNM’s majoritarian MP can-

didate in Batumi single-member constituency. Before joining the executive government in 2004 he spent almost ten years as a lawmaker.

In 2012 parliamentary elections Baramidze lost majoritarian MP race in Batumi to GD’s candidate Murman Dumbadze; Baramidze garnered 31.3% of votes against Dumbadze’s 63.3%. Baramidze, however, became a lawmaker through UNM’s party-list.

MP Shota Malashkhia, who is also running in the UNM’s presidential primaries, was chairman of the parliamentary commission on territorial integrity in the previous Parliament.

Unlike three other contenders, MP Zurab Japaridze is relatively newcomer in politics who joined the UNM ahead of the October, 2012 parliamentary elections and became a lawmaker through UNM’s party-list.



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Georgia Inspires me: American Director Brings Hollywood To Tbilisi

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

Hollywood came to Georgia in 2012. It has 'broken camp' here too. An American screenwriter and filmmaker has found lots of things to write about in Georgia. He intends to make films here and has no intention of leaving until all his big plans have become a reality.

Stacey Paul Rugely is a Hollywood boy. His parents met in Hollywood and as a family they have travelled the world. He has worked in the entertainment industry for many years. From 2003 onwards he commuted from San Diego to Hollywood to work on different TV shows, then he got into writing when he realised he had a lot to write about. All the movies he worked on (sometimes as a volunteer) made him hungry to make his own.

Stacy writes nonstop, wherever he is, however he is feeling. He just writes. After selling tons of scripts he figured it was the perfect time to travel, see the world and write about it, have adventures and write about them, live stories and write them down. That's how he came to Georgia, it was just another

stop. But like I said he 'broke camp' here for several reasons.

First of all, tell me about your Hollywood achievements.

My film 'My Trip Back To The Dark Side' premiered at Cannes this month, on the 17th. I produced and acted in it. I play the DJ at the club where mayhem and shady deals take place. It was a fun filming experience. The film was directed by my buddy Shane Stanley, who I also worked with on the first film in the 'Dark Side' series. I also produced and acted in that first instalment.

Does it make any difference where you are at the time, writing wise?

I can write anywhere really, but I'm inspired by different places. Different places often have different themes, and I'm inspired by nature, people and sometimes history. But if a story is strong enough and comes to me while I'm some place where it doesn't take place, I write it anyway.

Which place has been the most productive writing wise?

Norway. I had my best friends there. Tons of positive feedback and energy and the nature there is the best I've ever seen. I wrote three screenplays



there.

You have sold tons of scripts. What happens to the ones that aren't sold?

I've sold many - shorts, features, and have been hired to write for others. The ones that don't get sold I try to produce myself - that's an ongoing process.

Tell me about the script which brought you here.

The script is called THE NYMPH. It is about a guy who becomes a man over the period of time he takes to travel, open his mind and find inspiration and creativity for a new novel

he's trying to write. I came up with the concept and wrote it in Norway, but it borrows elements from my own experience of travelling and soaking up culture.

Why do you want to film it here?

Georgia is a place I was told about by many friends when I was in Ukraine and when I visited Turkey. I went back to Ukraine after my time in Scandinavia and the UK and decided to pop over after some digging around and checking out the nature. Those would be my favourite things about Georgia - my

girlfriend and the nature. This particular story has a lot of outdoor scenes; wilderness, mountains, fields, etc. and I feel the backdrop outside the cities here can really enhance the story.

How about the crew and the actors?

I have a good team here, starting with local talent. My friend, actress and fellow filmmaker Crystal Pistol is in the leading role, but we also have some local cast interested, we are auditioning them. One or two leads from France, Germany or London planning to come out once we actually get this going. As

for crew, there are some talented and hungry Georgian camera, light and sound operators, production assistants, etc. All this will come together like glue once we get a green light and perhaps initial production funding.

When are you going to start filming?

I see an orange light right now - that's the voice of positive thinking, and I will begin when that light turns green - so, I'm waiting for that green.

What other projects you are working on in Georgia?

I have met some music artists here - some folks would like me to direct their music videos, so we're in talks. I'm also directing a web series which Crystal Pistol wrote and will star in once she's back from the UK.

You have travelled the world, what country has inspired you the most?

Vietnam is one of the best places I've ever visited, so I definitely owe thanks to my time there. Nice place, probably the best non-Western country I've been to yet. Love my time there, and I did write a lot there, while engaging in frolic and general bliss.

Where do you feel at home now?

California is home, definitely.

SOCIETY

A letter from Georgian citizen Besiki Adamia to:

- The President of France, Mr. François Hollande
- The Ambassador of France to Georgia, Mr. Reno Salins
- The Ambassador of France to Azerbaijan, Mr. Pascal Meunier

The Georgian Times has received this letter from Besiki Adamia, a resident of Kutaisi, in which he proposes that the word 'peace' in Georgian - 'შეშვიშობა' be added to the 'Wall for Peace' between the Eiffel Tower and the Ecole Militaire in Paris on 14 July (Bastille Day). At present the word 'peace' is written on this wall in 49 languages.

Request '49+2' - this is a great chance for France to become a honorary envoy of peace in the Caucasus region!

"We, as foreigners, can only prove ourselves heroes of France in this way - by giving our life for it". These were the words of Dimitry Amilakhvari (1906-1942), who after his death was awarded the Supreme Order of the Legion of Honour by President of France Charles de Gaulle. His name was given to the Military School of Saint-Cyr (1954-1956) and a street in France.

Dimitry Amilakhvari was an example of heroism and devotion. It is known that he broke into the enemy's camp alone

and removed a wounded man from there with his bare hands. Impressed by the courage of French officer Amilakhvari the enemy stopped firing and when he had disappeared from the field they applauded the fearless Georgian.

In a second half of 1942 Amilakhvari took part in the bitter battle of El-Alamein in Egypt. On October 24 this battle became his last. He was buried with great honor in the Libyan desert.

It would be good for Col. Amilakhvari to be reburied in his homeland, Georgia. I also believe that if Charles de Gaulle were alive today, the word "peace" would already appear in the Georgian language on the "Wall for peace" in Paris. Achieving this is now one of my goals of my life, I will fight for it till the end!

My friends, please support my idea - known formally as Request '49+2', and join me in asking the President of France to add the word peace in Georgian - 'შეშვიშობა' and Azerbaijani - Sülh, (there is already an inscription in Armenian) to the "Wall for Peace" between the Eiffel Tower and the Ecole



Militaire on the 14 July (Bastille Day) and let us give each other the same word so that we will do everything to achieve peace in our region - the Caucasus.

As you know, Mr. President, the Georgian language is among the world's 14 most ancient written languages! This will be a great support from you for our small countries - Georgia and Azerbaijan - and a great support for their two great faiths - Christian and Muslim! The people of these two faiths will support you.

Maybe it is now the time to add to the 32 columns near the

languages of the conflict regions of my country). There I made a special appeal and took some impressive photos, which were sent to a disk and then posted on my Facebook page.

This topic has also been discussed in Georgian (Asaval Dasavali and Kviris Palitra') and Azerbaijani (Zerkalo, on 13 April 2012) newspapers and on Georgia's Rioni (2013, Kutaisi), TV9 (31 April 2013, Tbilisi) TV stations and the Azerbaijani station ANS (23 March 2012), but as yet not in France!

15 June 2013, Kutaisi, Georgia.

NEWS

Joseph Danford- Georgian soldiers are professionals and brave, and they have good relations with the Afghan people

Georgian soldiers are professionals and brave, and they have good relations with the Afghan people - Joseph Danford ISAF General Joseph Danford has made a comment about the article published in the New York Times about Georgian soldiers. The Radio Liberty journalist's question why nobody rejected officially the article which said Georgian soldiers were thieves, robbers and have bad relations with Afghan people, Danford noted he was going to make that statement today.

According to him, the information published in the newspaper was not true, because the Georgian soldiers are professionals and brave, and they have good relations with the Afghan people.

"I'll deny this information published in the newspaper now. On the basis of my personal experience, after my 20-year-old relations with the Georgian army, I can say that the information published in the newspaper is not true. The Georgian soldiers have good relations with the Afghan people," said Joseph Danford.

The General made the above-mentioned statement at the Defense and Security Conference under way at the Sheraton hotel in Batumi.



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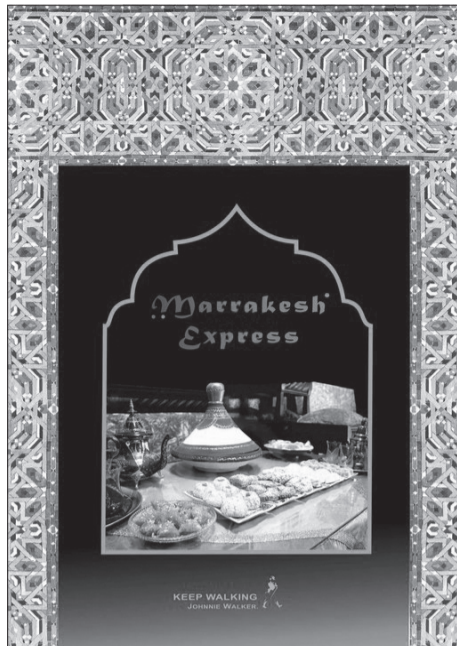


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