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## European Commissioner visits Georgia



Stefan Fule, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, has visited Georgia. On July 9 Fule met President Mikheil Saakashvili in Tbilisi before travelling to Armenia. He then returned on July 11 to participate in a two-day conference in Batumi. The Commissioner also held meetings with Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, government members, lawmakers and civil society representatives.

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# Chief Prosecutor will not reverse grant of immunity

By LIKA MOSHIAVILI, GT

**Chief Prosecutor Archil Kbilashvili will not satisfy PM Ivanishvili's request to reverse his decision to give former prison officer Vladimer Bedukadze immunity. "The law does not give me any possibility to change this decision, even if I wanted to", Kbilashvili said at a news conference on July 9. "So the decision will stand."**

Bedukadze was granted immunity under a special plea bargain deal because he helped expose the "systemic crime" of the inhuman treatment of inmates. He added that by making the videos public Bedukadze not only exposed these crimes but implicated himself in committing them, and did so despite the threat to his own personal safety and without having any "self-interest."

Minister and other members of the government. Kbilashvili commented that he respects the Prime Minister's position, which he said was a product of the "highest moral standards," but his own position is unchanged.

Kbilashvili stated that Bedukadze had managed to sneak the videos out of the prison and hand them over to someone who could make them

person a year before they were made public. He said that the videos showing the abuse of inmates were "recorded on the orders of a not-so-poor person."

"A lot of money was paid for this," the President said. "These tapes then appeared in the hands of this not-so-poor person, who then used them for political purposes." He pointed out that the videos had been



Following the prison abuse scandal, which broke a couple of weeks before the October 2012 parliamentary elections after videos showing inmates being tortured and raped emerged, seventeen prison officers were arrested and subsequently tried. On June 14 Tbilisi City Court found sixteen of the defendants guilty but also approved a motion from Chief Prosecutor requesting that Bedukadze not be found criminally liable. Bedukadze maintains that he filmed some of the videos, which depicted abuse at Gldani prison No.8 in Tbilisi, and then sneaked them out of the prison and made them public in order to expose the widespread mistreatment of inmates. Like the other defendants, he was facing charges of torture and inhuman treatment of prisoners.

Article 218 of the Criminal Code allows the Chief Prosecutor to file such a request "in special cases" if the accused person helps expose a grave crime. He explained that

Kbilashvili noted that neither the PM nor members of the government were aware of his decision to request immunity for Bedukadze. "Such decisions are to be made by the Chief Prosecutor. I consulted my colleagues prior to making the decision, but the matter was not the subject of political discussion. Even the Justice Minister did not know anything about it," the Chief Prosecutor declared.

In a written statement released on July 8 PM Ivanishvili said that the arguments Kbilashvili had made for granting Bedukadze immunity were "insufficient and unconvincing."

"I want to ask the Chief Prosecutor, who unlike the judiciary is part of the executive government, for which reason I can directly appeal to him, to critically review this decision and, if he shares my views, to find the legal means to reverse it," the PM stated. Ivanishvili's position was supported by the Justice Minister, the Interior

public in September, 2011. Bendukadze named that person as Giorgi Lomia, a former inmate he had met while he was serving his prison term. Lomia, who was working with Tbilisi-based media outlet Obieqtivi and its head Irma Inashvili on this story, confirmed that he received Bendukadze's videos in September 2011 but explained that he was not able to make them public until September, 2012 because more such videos were needed in order to prove that these crimes were of a systemic nature, and involved a large number of prison officers, rather than the isolated actions of a single rogue officer. Lomia claims that only after another prison officer who had agreed to cooperate managed to secretly film the beating of inmates by prison guards was it decided to make the videos public.

Commenting on this issue, President Mikheil Saakashvili drew attention to Kbilashvili's admission that Bedukadze shared his videos with another

handed over just before Bidzina Ivanishvili announced his intention to, as Saakashvili put it, "take over Georgia," referring to Ivanishvili's October 2011 statement that he would enter politics with the intention of becoming Prime Minister.

"We know very well how compromising materials were used to gain power or oust someone from power in Russia in 1990," Mikheil Saakashvili continued. He also dismissed as a "fairy tale" the Prime Minister's claims that the Chief Prosecutor took the decision to grant Bedukadze immunity independently, without prior consultation with him.

"The Justice Minister can, upon the instruction of the PM, demand Kbilashvili's dismissal and I will accept his dismissal right now. If this is a real dispute between them and not some kind of game let them propose this and I will approve it. But I hope Kbilashvili and Bedukadze will then tell us how much was paid [for the prison abuse videos]," Saakashvili said.

Otar Kakhidze, co-founder of Georgia's Reforms Associates, commented that "I think the reason for these confrontations is that the Georgian Dream is not satisfied with the work of the Prosecutor's Office. At a press conference held on July 3 PM Ivanishvili said that this institution is very weak." He added that in the near future "Kbilashvili will resign himself."

Eka Gigauri, Executive Director of Transparency International Georgia, stated that monitoring has revealed many problems at the Prosecutor's Office: "the staff is not even

sufficiently qualified. However it would be unfair to blame only the Chief Prosecutor for these problems".

Gela Nikolaishvili, a human rights lawyer, thinks that Kbilashvili made an appropriate decision with regard to Bedukadze. "All the minuses and pluses must be compared. I think the pluses of this decision outweigh the minuses. I do not say that Bedukadze is an angel or hero, but he has disclosed a sadistic regime of torture and abuse in the prisons and this should be taken into account."

## NEWS

### Parliament Overrides Two Presidential Vetoes

The Parliament overturned on July 12 presidential vetoes on two bills – one related to amendments to the law on broadcasting and another envisaging cutting of President's powers over the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission.

The presidential objections concerning the package of bills, passed by the Parliament on May 31, envisaging reforming composition of the public TV's board of trustees, transforming Adjara TV's status into public broadcasting and providing measures for more financial transparency of broadcasters, mainly concerned part of the legislation, which envisages giving the Parliament the right to disband GPB's board of trustees in case of GPB's budget problems or failure to fulfill its content-related programming priorities.

Another bill on which the presidential veto was overturned will shift the right of appointing chairman and members of the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission from President to Prime Minister.

In his objections President Saakashvili was demanding to postpone enacting of the amendment till the end of his presidential term.

If the President again refuses to sign the bills, Parliamentary Chairman Davit Usupashvili will become eligible to do that.

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# Federica Favi: It is as a result of our efforts that Italian business delegations are coming to Georgia

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

**The charming Ambassador of Italy to Georgia, Federica Favi, here shares her opinions on Georgia and Georgians and cultural and economic relations between Italy and Georgia.**

**Can you give us your impressions of Georgia?**

My first involvement with Georgia came while I was in Geneva. I was there as Counsellor on Humanitarian Affairs to the permanent mission of Italy to the UN. I was appointed in early September 2008, meaning that the first crisis I had to deal with was the Russian-Georgian war. This was my unexpected introduction to Georgia. I immediately felt very attached to this country. Subsequently I had many other crises to deal with, but Georgia was the first. I also came here

and the international community in Tbilisi were all very kind, nice and amenable to me because Italians and Georgians share a particular set of emotional affinities. I feel Georgians are very close to us. Both our countries have long histories and established traditions and both our peoples are very family oriented. You share the same values as us. We both love our countries. So I was really happy to come to Georgia. I can say that I really feel at home here. Even your nature is very similar to Italy's.

**What sort of cultural and educational relations do Italy and Georgia have?**

There are many bilateral technical agreements between our universities and yours. We also have four archaeological missions here, financed by the



language school, where 400 students study Italian arts and the Italian language, is also here. You might remember that only last October the famous Giancarlo Giannini came to Georgia and many other Italian singers have also been here in recent years. We are involved in a lot

of Italian business delegations are coming to Georgia. The Italian company Ferrero, the chocolate manufacturer, has already invested in Georgian agriculture. This project, in Zugdidi, which involves establishing factories to process hazelnuts for use in confectionery and training locals in hazelnut cultivation, is a veritable challenge and will continue through 2015.

In general we have significant economic relations and last year we achieved a record trade turnover between our two countries of over two hundred million euro. We also have direct flights between Rome and Tbilisi twice a week. Alitalia flies from Tbilisi on Tuesdays and Sundays and from Rome to Tbilisi on Mondays and Saturdays, using Airbus A320 planes offering business and economy class services. Georgian passengers in transit elsewhere also take these flights.

The visa application process for Georgians has also improved. The Embassy has seen a huge increase in the number of visa applications. Last year there were about 8,000, and the latest figures show that in the first five months of 2013 visa requests from Georgian citizens increased by 106.7%. However the application process took a long time because we did not employ any extra personnel, and arrived at the point where two employees were simply not enough for the job. We want to comply with the rules and have shorter waiting times for appointments, and therefore asked a private company to help us. We issued an official tender, and in the end only one company proved able to meet its terms and take on this extremely important task, which is Visa Management Services (VMS) a renowned Italian company legally registered in Georgia, which is based at Rustaveli 27 and

supplies the same services to the Italian Consulates in Russia and Ukraine. They manage a huge number of Italian visa applications. They take care of all the procedures, but the actual decisions remain the prerogative of the Italian Embassy. VMS has a lot of staff and can therefore offer appointments within a very short time - currently, this process takes only a day). A successful applicant can receive a visa within a maximum of ten days.

**What was the political situation in the country when you came and what it is like now?**

I think Georgia achieved great success by holding fair and democratic elections last October. This was very important for the country. The new government has succeeded in reconfirming the Western oriented policy of Georgia. This is extremely important for us. We are happy to see that Georgia is still interested in NATO and the European Union. We support Georgia in this direction. We also believe in Georgia's territorial integrity. I think that the decision of the new government to restore contact with Russia demonstrates courage and pragmatism. It is simply not possible for Georgia to thrive without cultivating positive relations with such a large neighbour. We note that Georgians have been clear in terms of what the red line in relations with Russia must be. Of course, we will continue to contribute to facilitating the peaceful resolution of the existing conflicts; we support the Geneva talks, in which Georgia is deeply engaged.

I also believe that the country needs to combat the culture of impunity, and must pursue this ambition and establish rule of law and justice, as these are very important. It seems that very high ranking opposition figures are under investigation, and therefore the maximal attention must be given to ensuring transparent process, respect for the rule of law, respect for privacy and respect for the presumption of innocence. It is important to conduct a sound investigation, especially in those cases involving members of the opposition. There must not be the feeling that selective justice is being applied and that there are political reasons for prosecutions. So I respect and support the rule of law and the establishment of good, proper justice as this is in the interests

of the country.

**What do you think about the cohabitation process taking place in Georgia?**

It has been very difficult until now. Sometimes I see positive elements in this parliamentary cooperation, such as during the recent meeting on constitutional reforms, but sometimes as foreign observers we see difficulties between the two sides. However I believe that even difficult cohabitation can be positive and constructive. I think it is good for both political sides to conduct their fight inside the country and not broadcast their problems to the rest of the world. If you aspire to membership of important international organisations you should demonstrate as far as possible that you can conduct constructive internal dialogue.

**But surely, as the world thought that Georgia and its previous government were extremely democratic, while in reality we lived in a disgustingly undemocratic environment, we now have to show the international community what the reality was?**

No. I do not agree with this. I disagree completely. I think the rest of the world is able to judge for itself.

**But does it do so?**

Of course. You need to understand that the small details of your internal affairs must be addressed inside the country, because making your problems public can damage the image of the country, whether this is done by the government or the President. Georgia should be presented in the best way it can be, as the country deserves it.

**Do you think there is enough a proof that the previous government was a brutal regime which stayed in power by intimidating people?**

We cannot judge this. I cannot judge the country by the videos I saw. The courts must decide whether crimes were committed or not. What I saw on the videos was a crime, but I do not know how I can determine who committed it. I have no instrument with which to judge. I can only observe.

There was no need to show those videos to us. They should only be shown to the judges and the courts. I support all the initiatives being taken against the culture of impunity but I think that in order to pursue its Western oriented political course Georgia must conduct transparent investigations and not engage in selective justice.



as Ambassador unexpectedly, because I was asked to come here by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was given half an hour to decide. They just said: are you going to Tbilisi? and I said OK, I will go to Tbilisi.

**So did you like the idea of coming here?**

Of course, being an Ambassador in a nice country is always perfect. I had general information about this country from September 2008, even though I had not been to Tbilisi before, and this was extremely positive. To become an Ambassador for the first time is something which interests every diplomat. I found it very easy to adapt to the country when I arrived. My predecessor and the whole Embassy staff welcomed me very warmly and the Georgian authorities and peo-

ple and the international community in Tbilisi were all very kind, nice and amenable to me because Italians and Georgians share a particular set of emotional affinities. I feel Georgians are very close to us. Both our countries have long histories and established traditions and both our peoples are very family oriented. You share the same values as us. We both love our countries. So I was really happy to come to Georgia. I can say that I really feel at home here. Even your nature is very similar to Italy's.

What sort of cultural and educational relations do Italy and Georgia have?

There are many bilateral technical agreements between our universities and yours. We also have four archaeological missions here, financed by the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy. They have been working in Georgia for many years, and have done some very extraordinary things. We also have a tradition of offering scholarships to Georgian students. Not long ago we held a transparent selection of Georgians for these scholarships with the help of the Foreign Affairs Minister, and the winners included a number of singers who have since become famous after studying at Santa Cecilia and the Teatro De La Scala, so we are proud of this programme. We also conduct a number of cultural exchange activities. We teach the Italian language at Tsiskari School and we have an Italian professor at Javakhsishvili University who was sent here by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is financed by it. The famous Dantaliani lan-

of cultural and theatrical activities here and many Georgians also go to Italy for an Education.

**How can we persuade Italian Investors to come to Georgia?**

Georgia did a lot to encourage this under its previous government and this government is doing the same. Business delegations from Sicily, Rome and northern Italy visit Georgia regularly to get acquainted with this country and obtain necessary information. One delegation was interested in hydroelectric power stations, as is now in the process of studying the Georgian market and the conditions of and opportunities for investment. The Italian Embassy promotes this country as much as possible, because we believe in Georgia, and it is as a result of our effortst-



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# Centre Point Group founders face 11 years imprisonment

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

The two owners of one of Georgia's largest property development and construction companies, the Centre Point Group, which has gained notoriety for allegedly duping thousands of its clients, have been charged with large-scale fraud and embezzlement. Maia Rcheulishvili, Rusudan Kervalishvili, and their associate Ivane Tsaguria, may each face up to 11 years in prison.



According to a statement made by the Prosecutor's Office, Rusudan Kervalishvili, an MP in the previous parliament, Maia Rcheulishvili, her sister and a 33% shareholder in the Dexus company, which was given the management of the Centre Point Group a few years ago, are accused of skimming off millions of dollars which should have been spent on constructing apartment blocks in Tbilisi, helped by Tsaguria.

The Centre Point Group became very popular soon after it was founded in 2004 and thousands of people paid for apartments it promised to build which never materialized. Some buildings which according to the contracts issued should have been completed by 2007 were not constructed at all. The Prosecutor's Office said on July 11 that the completion of these projects became impossible after Maia Rcheulishvili and Rusudan Kervalishvili, the founders of the Centre Point Group, embezzled GEL 11 million through "various illegal schemes."

After the Centre Point Group announced it could not meet its obligations the com-

pany's management was handed over to the newly established firm Dexus in September, 2010. The latter pledged to deliver Centre Point Group's outstanding projects within three years, but required additional investment to do so. Some of this was attracted by asking clients to make additional payments on top of those they had already paid to Centre Point Group when purchasing their yet unbuilt flats. Dexus, says that as of March 2013 it had fulfilled its obligations to 2,200 clients of the Centre Point Group, but the latter terminated its management contract with Dexus at that point, citing disagreements over how to fulfill its obligations to the remaining customers.

While the two owners of the Centre Point Group were released from the Prosecutor's Office after interrogation, Tsaguria remained under arrest. The Prosecutor's Office claims that in 2011 Tsaguria helped Rcheulishvili and Kervalishvili embezzle USD 615,000. He denies the charge.

Rcheulishvili has commented on the proceedings and insisted she is not guilty. She maintains that she and her sister handed over property in the

amount of 94,215,000 dollars to Dexus Management and this capital should have been sufficient to cover all debts and complete all the constructions. Rcheulishvili also said that her company remained "fully operational" despite her arrest.

"I am not pleading guilty. I have not fully familiarized myself with the documentation concerning this case. They will send me the papers and I will study them," Rcheulishvili said after being indicted at the Prosecutor's Office.

Asked by a journalist whether she thought the charges had a political motivation or not, Rcheulishvili noted that she could see no such connection.

"I will cooperate with the investigation in order to improve the situation of the company. I am surprised to be indicted in an election period shortly after the statements made by the Justice Minister and the PM about refraining from further detentions," Kervalishvili said.

Although Kervalishvili was a UNM MP and Deputy Speaker of Parliament from 2008 to 2012 she was never been an especially active political figure and completely distanced herself from politics af-

ter serving her four-year term in Parliament.

Maia Rcheulishvili's husband, Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, was an MP in the 1990s and early 2000s but left politics after the 2003 Rose Revolution. He has commented that the company will have no complaints from customers "within a year" if left to get on with its work but "unfinished apartments" will be the only things its customers receive if its founders and managers Maia Rcheulishvili and Rusudan Kervalishvili are found guilty of unlawful appropriation of money by the court.

Tbilisi City Court partially upheld Public Prosecutor's petition and as an executive measure imposed a fine in the amount of 250-250 lari for the founders of Centre Point Rusudan Kervalishvili and Maia Rcheulishvili. The Court rejected Prosecutors' petition about imprisonment of the founder of Dexus Ivane Tsaguria. Ivane Tsaguria was released from the Court room on bail of 100 thousand lari which he has to pay within 30 days.

## NEWS

### CDM Leader Runs for President

Giorgi Targamadze, leader of the Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM), announced on Friday about intention to run for president in the October 27 election.

Targamadze said that he's expecting presidential elections to go into a runoff as none of the candidates will be able to win an outright victory in the first round on October 27.

"We have a great hope that Georgian people's major value, Christian democracy, together with my team and my candidacy will become one of the main motives for the representative of Georgian Christian Democrats to be in the second round of election," Targamadze said.

CDM, which was established in 2008 and represented parliamentary minority group in the previous parliament, failed in the October 2012 parliamentary elections to clear 5% threshold required for endorsing members to the legislative body and garnered only 2.04% of votes

Other candidates who have so far confirmed their intention to run in the October presidential election are Georgian Dream coalition's Giorgi Margvelashvili, who is the Education Minister; Nino Burjanadze, leader of the Democratic Movement-United Georgia party; leader of Labor Party Shalva Natelashvili and former Labor Party member Nestan Kirtadze.

President Saakashvili's UNM party is now in the process of selecting its presidential candidate through internal party elections, which is held in six stages involving regional conferences and debates between primary candidates; after two regional conferences former parliament speaker and now leader of UNM parliamentary minority group Davit Bakradze is leading in the primaries.

The deadline for submitting applications to the Central Election Commission for being registered as a presidential candidate expires on September 7.

### Akaki Bobokhidze: President Should Resign from the Chiring of UNM

Akaki Bobokhidze, the member of Parliamentary Minority states during his interview with the newspaper "the Versia", that he would demand resignation of a president of Georgia from the UNM party chair position. He considers, that the party should be led by the people who did not make a mistake, or were not direct participants of the crime which happened

"I consider, that the president of Georgia should leave the post of the UNM chair!., This is my position and I tell you about it for the first time with you, I have not offered it to the party year, though I am going to do it in nearest future with my peers.

I hope it will be shared by others, as the party should lead by the people who did not make the mistake or were not directly involved in the crime! Generally, initially the mistake was made, by integration of party and power structures' leaders. Such mistake should not be done by any party, as consolidation of political and power levers will bring to the wrong actions. Of course, in my statement I consider myself first of all, as I had to foresee the mistakes, but I had missed,"-says Bobokhidze.

# Parents face stricter sanctions for the behavior of their children

By LELA TSINTSADZE, GT

**The Ministry of Internal Affairs has asked parliament to make amendments to the Administrative Code which would strengthen the existing sanctions against parents who do not keep their children away from drink and drugs.**

Under the existing code, if under aged persons take drugs without a prescription from a doctor or get drunk in a public place their parents or guardians are given a warning or a 200 GEL fine. Under the bill submitted to parliament this fine will be increased from 200 to 500 GEL.

Head of the MIA's legal department Zviad Okropiridze says that insufficient attention has been paid to this issue in the past. "Actually, these were

sleeping or dead articles in the Code of Administrative Violations, either partially implemented or not implemented at all. In some cases, the person who bore administrative responsibility for the young person's actions was not involved in the case in any way," said Okropiridze.

Article 135 of the Administrative Code, which concerns buying and selling alcohol, is also being amended. There is currently a gap in the law, which the MIA rather than parliament is responsible for amending. From now on, the selling of alcoholic beverages to underaged persons will carry a fine of 500 GEL. A repeat violation within a year will carry a fine of 800 GEL. If a parent or any other person gives alcohol to a minor this will also attract a fine of GEL on each occasion it occurs.

The MIA believes that Article 135 as it stood was unworkable and was therefore not implemented appropriately. "Parents did not pay relevant attention to it as the sanctions it imposed were very low. Parents' sense of responsibility will increase when the law becomes stricter," said Okropiridze.

"This is not only about bringing children up. The Article clearly states that parents and guardians are responsible in law if those they are responsible for in law the rest of the time take drugs without prescription, join them in doing so, get drunk in public places and buy, receive or drink alcohol," he added.

Teona Kuchava, UNICEF Programme Coordinator, says that the main focus of the amendments is to reduce problematic behaviour, and therefore it would be better to pro-

vide the family with support so that it can cope with the problems posed by the child and overcome them rather than punish those families by means of legal sanctions.

"Support for families would involve consultation with the social services, child protection and education sectors. Some work should be undertaken with the child themselves in order to overcome certain problems," said Kuchava.

According to the Civil Code of Georgia, a parent is obliged to bring up a child in a healthy environment, under normal conditions, and to care for its appropriate development. Therefore, the law considers the parent responsible for any breaches of the law committed by their children.

"The family plays a great role in this regard, and in most cases anti-social behaviour is



provoked by dysfunction within the family or other problems which make it impossible to overcome without intervention. Therefore, we have to strengthen the skills and capacities of families to cope with such behaviour. We cannot limit ourselves to involving the law enforcement system. Other factors are at work here, and in most cases involving other agencies may produce better results," said Teona Kuchava, who added that a family's financial problems are also a significant cause of anti-social behavior among their children.

"When a parent tries to avoid fulfilling their parental obligations this is another matter. In such cases severe measures should be taken by the law. But when we are dealing with a child's problematic be-

haviour and the family being unable to cope with it, it is more effective to offer support to the family," she said.

The UNICEF child protection unit provides as well as lobbying for family support rather than sanctions. The Ministry of Justice has also developed a crime prevention strategy aimed at minors. This contains three levels of prevention, and special focus is placed on the second level, which is aimed at those who are at risk of committing a crime. The strategy seeks to minimize the risk factors which might provoke them into criminality. Proper identification of minors at risk of criminal involvement and the development of effective referral mechanisms are important for the achievement of the goals of second level prevention.

## Do Not Drink and Drive!

### Drunk drivers may be deprived of their licenses

By TATIA GAGUA, GT

**Everyone acknowledges that a drunk driver is a potential killer. Yet despite this, and the set penalties for drunk-driving, we often hear that a car accident has been caused by a drunk driver. The imposition of a 200 GEL fine for drunk driving, under Article 116 of the Administrative Code, has seemingly had little effect.**

Therefore the Interior Ministry is planning to make the law stricter. It is proposing to punish anyone caught driving after they have drunk more than a set legal limit, as determined by the standard on the spot breathalyzer test, by depriving them of their driving licence for a year rather than fining them. If the person is under 18, they will lose their licence for 2 years.

According to the Office of National Statistics 5,359 car accidents were reported in 2012. Of these, around 5% were caused by drinking. The Georgian Times has conducted a driver survey and found a broad measure of support for the new



proposals. The majority of drivers we spoke to agreed that the existing 200 GEL fine is no deterrent to those who wish to put themselves and others at risk by driving whilst under the influence and approve of the initiative to make penalties stricter. Some disagree with the idea of an immediate deprivation of licence, but even these drivers support doubling the fine and reassessing the legal alcohol limit. Most describe depriving drink-drivers of their licenc-

es for a year is quite a humane sanction.

Western countries traditionally have low tolerance of drunk drivers. In the United Kingdom a drunk driver can expect several months imprisonment AND a fine AND disqualification from driving for at least 12 months. U.S. legislation varies from state to state but follows a similar pattern. In California for example drunk driving carries a prison sentence of between 96 hours and 6 months

or a fine and deprivation of driving licence, and repeated violations carry stricter sanctions, specifically imprisonment of between 90 days and 1 year, a further fine and loss of driving licence for 2 years. In most countries the size of fines imposed depends on the degree of drunkenness registered by the breathalizer test.

Zviad Okropiridze, head of MIA's legal department, told GT that the 200 GEL fine is clearly not sufficient as statistics show that drunk driving is becoming more common, and in recent times much more common. Stricter penalties are therefore being proposed in order to control the situation. He added that in some countries drunk driving is a criminal offence and Georgia's mere administrative punishment is quite inadequate. He added that a driver who has already been deprived of his licence will also be fined 700 GEL, and have their licence taken off them again for a further year, in cases of repeat violation.

The proposals have been incorporated in a draft bill which is currently under discussion in parliament, and its passage would significantly increase public safety.

## NEWS

### The Georgian delegation getting familiar with the situation on Georgian bases

The delegation of Ministry of Defence of Georgia paid a week-long visit to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. First Deputy Defence Minister Levan Dolidze and First Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff of Georgian Armed Forces Brig. Gen. Vakhtang Kapanadze arrived in Kabul to see the Georgian Platoon deployed there and visited 33rd and 42nd battalions in Helmand province. The MoD delegation got familiarized with all the engineer activities already performed or ongoing at the Georgian bases with the purpose of strengthening security measures there. The military personnel serving in the ISAF mission briefed personally the MoD officials about the situation on the ground.

As Brig. Gen. Vakhtang Kapanadze highlighted, the Georgian soldiers' motivation is highest and they are ready to fulfill entrusted tasks effectively. "A main goal of our presence here is to check the readiness of our soldiers for rotation. We also got familiar with fortification and engineer works carried out in the wake of the well-known incident. A lot of things have been done to ensure a maximal security of the bases. Additional activities are also in progress for this purposes."

Within the visit, meetings were held with Commanding-General Southwest Maj. Gen. Walter Miller, Commander of Task Force Belleau Wood James Stopa, Commander of 7th Combat Regiment COL Austin Ranford and Chief of Staff LTC Christian Rankin. The sides talked on the importance of the ISAF mission. Allied Command officials extended their gratitude to the MoD representatives for the contribution provided by Georgia to the ISAF mission.

"We have been assured once again that interoperability of our armed forces and military personnel with our partner states within the NATO is improving and our military servicemen are fulfilling entrusted mission at a high-level. We have had very important consultations with ISAF leadership to ensure additional security for our combat units in Afghanistan" stated First Deputy Minister Levan Dolidze.

Up to 1600 Georgian troops are deployed in Afghanistan. They are performing the full spectrum operations shoulder to shoulder with the U.S Marines. Their main task there is to combat terrorism, to provide patrolling in their area of operation for the safety of population and set mobile control posts there.

# Iran Has Been Encouraged to Threaten Georgia's National Security

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

In recent times the international press has most often mentioned Georgia within its ongoing coverage of the so-called "Iran problem", in other words the Western concern over Iran's involvement in regional affairs. Since the Syrian crisis evolved and the "Iranian nuclear dossier" was published this story has gained added impetus. Both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Algemeiner*, highly respected international newspapers, have devoted leading articles to Iran's involvement in the affairs of its neighbors and the South Caucasus, highlighting the role played by its special services, specifically what is known as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

The Wall Street Journal article of 20 June 2013 has provoked much discussion. This identifies the "Iranian Revolutionary Guard" (IRG) as one of the customers of the Iranian company "Farsi Civilization Development Co." which sells various products in Georgia ranging from tomato sauce to bathroom tiles. On 9 July *The Algemeiner* followed this up by stating that "The EU Must Designate Iran's Revolutionary Guards as Terrorists". This article, by Stephen Hoffman, underscored the impact of the IRG's activities at international level. It said that: "The IRG is a branch of Iran's government committed to protecting Iran's Islamist revolution. They do this through brutally suppressing democracy at home and by exporting revolution abroad, generally through terrorism.



This is either through the creation of terror groups, for instance Hezbollah in the 1980s, or sending their own operatives into countries including Argentina, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, Kenya, Venezuela and the United States. This is often done through the IRG's external branch, the Quds Force, which has been engaged in terrorist activities as well as train-

ing and providing financial support for groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas". The newspaper's list of countries in which the IRG has been active included Georgia.

In 2010, Georgia decided to lift visa requirements for Iranian nationals. It is one of just three countries in Europe and the Middle East which granted Iranians such easy access. The

number of companies registered in Georgia by Iranians shot up to 1,489 last year, having been just 84 in 2010. According to both Georgian government officials and Iranian businessmen themselves, the warm welcome given them has more recently led to growing numbers of Iranian nationals moving to Tbilisi from Dubai—which, under U.S. pressure, has tightened its restrictions on Iranian businesses.

All this makes it very clear why the President of Georgia and his most prominent supporters, including then Prime Minister Nika Gilauri, so frequently visited the Middle East and Persian Gulf countries during their tenures. One of their favourite destinations was certainly of interest to Iran - namely Dubai. These visits need to be evaluated, at the very least from the perspectives of conflict of interest and corruption, features

endemic to the nine years of UNM rule, before the terrorism aspect is even considered. However, if this were not enough, one further factor needs to be taken into consideration. Two major newspapers have suddenly discovered and written about this story in back-to-back articles when the Georgian politicians implicated have little standing left in Georgia. Are there not grounds for concluding that these individuals might have been cooperating with foreign special services whilst encouraging IRG activity in Georgia, and receiving money for doing so? This also needs to be seriously investigated and proper decisions taken.

Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia  
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# Egypt and Turkey: Clash of Civilizations – Truth or Mystification???

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

In 1993 the famous and influential journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article by Professor Samuel Huntington entitled: "Clash of Civilizations???" in which he expressed some interesting thoughts on the future development of global politics (Huntington later expanded on the thesis of this article in his 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*). In sum, for Huntington the "clash of civilizations" is a new historical progression. In previous epochs, the international system was mainly about struggles between monarchs, nations and ideologies, primarily within Western civilization. But after the Cold War global politics moved into a new phase in which non-Western civilizations were no more the exploited recipients of Western civilization but important actors in their own right, shaping and moving world history alongside the West. Huntington also argued that civilization conflicts are "particularly prevalent



between Muslims and non-Muslims", identifying the "bloody borders" between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations. This conflict dates back as far as the initial thrust of Islam into Europe.

More recent factors contributing to a Western-Islamic clash, Huntington wrote, are the Islamic Resurgence, the demographic explosion within Is-

lam and the Islamic fundamentalist annoyance with Western universalism—that is, the idea that all civilizations should adopt Western values. A combination of all these historical and modern factors, Huntington suggested in his *Foreign Affairs* article and in much more detail in his 1996 book, would lead to a bloody clash between Islamic and Western civilizations. Huntington wrote all this almost 20 years ago, but the

"Clash of Civilizations" he describes has now emerged in two Islamic countries, Turkey and Egypt, where clashes on religious matters are striking at the heart of the state.

In Turkey conflict arose due to ecological disagreements and has now become a political-religious standoff between moderate political Islamists, led by Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party and those po-

litical groups who promote the ideas of Atatürk, who can be described as secularists. The Army is observing this process keenly and is ready to intervene as it did in the coup d'état of 1982. Developments are steadily reaching the critical point at which all scenarios are possible.

In Egypt the situation is worsening on a daily basis. It is assumed that the escalation of conflict in the Sinai Peninsula is being coordinated by Sheikh Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the brother of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and himself a leader of the Egyptian Salafi-ji-

Zawahiri issued a fatwa, authorising a jihad against Egypt's secular opposition, military and police force. This puts Egypt on the slippery slope to a civil war which the jihadists appear happy to provoke.

The global jihadist discourse orchestrated by Al-Qaeda is stepping up its propaganda against Egypt's security forces, secular opposition and Coptic Christians, all of whom it sees as bitter enemies of Islam who wish only to thwart Egypt's transformation into an Islamic state. The clash between the military and the Islamic Brotherhood has come as the country's new civilian authorities are seeking to project an air of normalcy. On 9<sup>th</sup> July Interim President Adly Mansour appointed a new Prime Minister and Vice President and laid out a pathway to holding quick elections, amending the constitution and ensuring a return to democracy. Then at the last moment he proposed to the Brotherhood that it participate in forming the new government, but the Brotherhood unsurprisingly rejected this proposal.

Egypt is now in serious danger of destabilization, and its newly established democratic institutions are made particularly vulnerable by the fact that the military are perfectly capable of running the country. They did in fact do so, without a break, from 1952 until the Arab Spring (all three Presidents during that period, Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, were high-ranking military officers).

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# European Commissioner visits Georgia

By LIKAMOSHIASHVILI, GT

**Stefan Fule, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, has visited Georgia. On July 9 Fule met President Mikheil Saakashvili in Tbilisi before travelling to Armenia. He then returned on July 11 to participate in a two-day conference in Batumi. The Commissioner also held meetings with Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, government members, lawmakers and civil society representatives.**

"In order to make Georgia's transition a genuine success we still need to see further strengthening of its democratic institutions and deeper efforts to pre-

sioner stated that the EU expects the Georgian authorities to pursue justice in these cases "impartially and free from political motivation."

"No one is above the law, but at the same time a free, transparent and impartial process needs to be adopted and applied," Fule noted.

Speaking at a joint press conference with the Commissioner PM Ivanishvili commented that Georgia is moving into "a new stage" of relations with the European Union which "will make Georgia's EU integration irreversible." He expressed hope that the Vilnius summit would be "historic."

Georgia expects to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, which includes a deep and comprehensive free trade treaty, at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in No-

it have to be taken in a European way. There is no other way to get there," Fule explained. He added that the summit would mark a watershed in EU-Georgia relations.

During the meeting PM Ivanishvili stressed his government's commitment to the cohabitation process, and in this context mentioned his recent meeting with United National Movement parliamentary minority leader Davit Bakradze, and Parliamentary Chairman Davit Usupashvili at his private seaside residence in Ureki, western Georgia, on July 6. He also noted that the October presidential elections would demonstrate that "the country is moving ahead in terms of democratic development."

Stefan Fule praised Ivanishvili's July 10 statement that his government had "an



vent polarisation within society," commented Fule in his speech.

The Commissioner said that the EU fully respects the pledge of the new government to the Georgian people to address any legacy of the past, but trusts that this will be done in full conformity with Georgia's international obligations and European values.

"It is necessary to proceed with fairness and relevant process. Georgia should move forward, not stay in the past, and not constantly talk about what was done by the former government. It should look to the future and do its best to continue its development of democratic processes," explained Stefan Fule.

Regarding the arrests of former ministers, the Commis-

sioner.

"We are on the verge of signing an historic agreement which will strengthen Georgia's place within the Eastern Partnership. I call on Georgia to seize this opportunity with both hands," Stefan Fule said, adding that Georgia must adopt European values and make the country more attractive for its citizens. "We will do all we can to stand with Georgia as we enter this exciting new phase in our common history," he continued.

The Commissioner stated that although there is a lot of hostility between the current Prime Minister and the previous government after the fierce election both parties remain pro-Europe.

"The path which leads to Vilnius has to be a genuinely European path, and steps along

ambition and desire to hold an exemplary, clean, free and fair" presidential election on October 27." Let me also express my appreciation for your declaration of yesterday, which, I think, has set the right tone for this important event in Georgia," Fule said. "However, we still need to see a further strengthening of Georgia's democratic institutions and the promotion of political pluralism and media freedom," he added.

Also on July 11 Stefan Fule and State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Alexi Petriashvili, signed a financing agreement. This stipulates that the European Union will allocate EUR 16 million to Georgia to help enhance Georgia's border management and migration services.

## NEWS

### Governor of Samegrelo Sentenced to Four Years in Prison

Tengiz Gunava, governor of Samegrelo region in western Georgia, was arrested in courtroom on July 12 after the Tbilisi City Court found him guilty of embezzlement while serving as head of the Interior Ministry's internal investigations unit in 2012.

Gunava, who pleaded not guilty, was sentenced to four years in jail. His lawyer said that the verdict will be appealed to higher court.

The guilty verdict against Gunava was delivered in connection with two separate cases, involving embezzlement of 3,000 liters of petroleum and GEL 49,500.

At the time when President Saakashvili appointed Gunava as governor of Samegrelo region in January, 2013, the latter was already facing criminal charges.

Apart of embezzlement, Gunava was also facing charges of exceeding official powers with use of firearm; he was accused of inflicting light bodily injuries to his driver when he served as chief of police of the Samegrelo region in March, 2012.

The Tbilisi City Court acquitted Gunava of these latter charges.

Gunava came into public attention in mid-November, 2012 when he was arrested on charges related to illegal possession of arms and drug. Gunava, whom the court at the time released on bail, said charges were fabricated and accused the police of planting weapon; in late December the Interior Ministry said it sacked five of its employees in connection to Gunava's arrest.

Later in November 2012, Gunava was again arrested and charged with embezzlement; at the time Gunava was again released on bail.

### Bidzina Ivanishvili: I don't think Guanava's detention was politically motivated

I don't think Guanava's detention was politically motivated - Bidzina Ivanishvili We cannot say that everything is politically motivated, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili said while commenting on the National Movement statements about the detention of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor Tengiz Gunava.

According to the PM, everybody, including the minority, should respect law-enforcement agencies and court.

"I don't think that Gunava's detention was politically motivated. The opposition makes such statements during each detention and it is not right. Law-enforcement agencies should be respected, including by the minority. They should be given possibility to work properly. We cannot say that everything is politically motivated", Ivanishvili said.

Tengiz Gunava was sentenced to 4 years of jail by the City Court yesterday.

### Margvelashvili will presumably be replaced by Tamar Sanikidze

Margvelashvili will presumably be replaced by Tamar Sanikidze Reports say Giorgi Margvelashvili will name his deputy Tamar Sanikidze for the post of the Minister of Education and Science. Sanikidze had been Financial Director of the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs from 2010 to 2012. She was appointed as a Deputy Education Minister when Giorgi Margvelashvili took the Minister's post.

Giorgi Margvelashvili will officially name the ministerial candidate on 15 July. According to him, he has already negotiated the new candidacy with the PM.

## NEWS

### David Usupashvili: Mikheil Saakashvili's statements are out of comments

Parliament Speaker, David Usupashvili does not comment on the President demand about submission of the document on Kbilashvili resignation by the Government.

Usupashvili advises president as a friend and a colleague, not to hinder conducting of the pre-election campaign of their party peers.

"It was discussed much whether decision of Kbilashvili was right or not, but as for Mikheil Saakashvili statements, I am not commenting on it, as it is a long time that it is out of comment. But I would have one advice to him as a past colleague, friend and now as a country president, do not hinder his party, his party members from election campaign," said David Usupashvili in Batumi after meeting with Stefan Fule, European Commissar.

# Nino Kambegashvili: Music is Not Only Art, it Breaks Boundaries

By EKA BUCHUKURI, GT

**Nino Kambegashvili, the famous pianist, is in Tbilisi now conducting charitable activities for children throughout Georgia. She is giving new musical instruments manufactured in Germany, music and teaching manuals to local school pupils. Some of these are also being interviewed, auditioned and selected for participation in the Golden Key festival, which will support them in their future career not only in Georgia but outside the country. Here she talks about her life and work and hopes for the future.**

*Can you tell us about your work in Germany?*

I have been in Germany 14 years, since I graduated from

children were brought to Frankfurt on May 17 and performed in concert with the German-based kids. The Ministry of Defence supported this endeavour, and I would like to personally thank the Minister, Irakli Alasania, who covered the expenses of the trip together with their parents. I sorted out their accommodation. We have also conducted a live concert for Georgian soldiers at the base. The Ministry of Defence is trying to create good conditions for our soldiers.

This year we are selecting two children from each of eight Georgian municipalities to take to Frankfurt to participate in the Golden Key competition. We will conduct master classes. In May I brought the director of the Petres publishing house from Frankfurt here along with the founder of the German Pianist Awards, Maria



to myself at present, although I have a great desire to visit Gali and for children from Gali to participate in our competition. There are three music schools

became interested in how the young inmates live in the juvenile units, what conditions they are given and what interests and needs they have. They have well furnished rooms, sports playgrounds, gyms and a perfect Director, Tato Gelbakhiani, who has lots of ideas. I suggested we could open a music school for the young people. Of course most youngsters are not interested in classical music, especially the more active ones, and therefore they told me that they are interested in learning the guitar and bass guitar and percussion instruments. Finally, we have organised such project and they will study music for 6 months, with music teachers delivering classes for them 4 times a week, and they will enter the new school after the completion of its refurbishment on July 20, only if they study well and learn music. I promised them that they would hold a joint open air concert on the great veranda of the penitentiary building.

These children are from economically deprived families and got there due to their difficult life conditions. We have to support them in everything so that they can find their way in life after leaving the penitentiary institution. I promised them that if they learn music they will go on to study at music school and then teach music professionally at other juvenile institutions. Let us create some kind of employment institute.

**What other plans do you have, are you going to be undertaking any more projects in near future?**

We are planning quite a big and grandiose project. It will be a German-Azeri-Georgian Summit in 2014. We would like to invite Bill Gates as a speaker, though this is still under

in Gali. Let us see what happens. The famous German conductor Daniel Barenboim once won the Nobel Peace Prize for creating an orchestra of Palestinian and Jewish children and conducting them in a concert in Gaza. I wrote him a letter saying that I would like to do something similar within the framework of my competitions, as children can grow closer through music and remain above politics, and suggested that he could either be a member of the jury or greet the children at the final concert. To my surprise he responded immediately, saying that he would accept my suggestion.

**It has been reported that you are going to undertake a similar project for juvenile convicts. Can you tell us more about this?**

During my previous visit I



the Conservatory. I am the founder and President of the Georgian-German Music Association in Frankfurt am Main, and also the founder and organiser of The Golden Key, an international piano competition for children. Children from crisis countries, like Afghanistan, Iran, Palestine and Israel, as well as from the Caucasus, Georgia and Russia participate in this competition. Last year children from Afghanistan participated for the first time. In 2008, a children's music school was opened in Afghanistan under the auspicious of NATO, and I was invited there in spring. I taught children and conducted concerts for ten days. I met Georgian soldiers serving in Afghanistan and thus we had the idea to invite the children of Georgian soldiers to enter our competition. Four such

Malek, and other colleagues. We brought music literature, donated by Petres, and five electric pianos; we conducted master classes and selected the children who will be taken to the Frankfurt music school. They will take German Language courses in the first half of the day and the music classes in the second. The Ministry of Culture and Tbilisi City Hall support the implementation of this project very much, and I would like to thank them for this. I would also like to thank the head of the City Hall's economic and political department, Zviad Archvadze, who has supported us very much. I would like to conduct online master classes for regional music teachers, which will be given by German musicians. There is one further project we are planning but I would like to keep the details

negotiation. Big entrepreneurs and business people will be invited from all three countries, and this is also under negotiation now. The summit will last 5 days, and we plan to include economic as well as cultural events. Business meetings, business lunches, and conferences will be held in the first part of a day and the second part will consist of cultural events such as concerts and exhibitions, and I would like to involve theatre and cinema representatives as well. Artists from all three countries will take part. I have great hope that participants from many other countries will be involved in future summits of this type and they will increase in scope.

## NEWS

### PM calls on the parliamentary majority to refrain from 'tough talking' with the opposition

PM calls on the parliamentary majority to refrain from 'tough talking' with the opposition Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili has called on the parliamentary majority to refrain from 'tough talking' with the opposition. According to the Prime Minister, the confrontation between the opposition and the majority should be diffused.

'I asked the majority to refrain from 'tough talking' with the opposition. We should somehow manage to diffuse the confrontation between the parliamentary majority and minority. I offered my team members to take the first step as they represent the majority', Ivanishvili said.

According to him, members of the government and the opposition should not forget they have a common country.

'I told them – don't forget that we have a common country. We should spend our energy not on conflicts but on efforts aimed at developing our country', Ivanishvili said.

The PM also called on members of his team to refrain from making statements that can affect court decisions.

getimes.ge

### Kote Kublashvili cannot see any sign of pressure in case of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor

Kote Kublashvili cannot see any sign of pressure in case of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor Kote Kublashvili, the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Georgia, cannot see any sign of pressure in case of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor Tengiz Gunava. According to him, the case had not been considered in the Supreme Court. Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor Tengiz Gunava was sentenced to 4 years of jail. He was sentenced to 8 years by the judge, though on the basis of the amnesty, the punishment was reduced to 4 years. Tengiz Gunava was taken to the penitentiary facility after the court's judgment was declared.

geotimes.ge

# Full Hotels and 31% More Tourists

By LELA TSINTSADZE, GT

**The summer tourist season officially opened on May 1. In this hot summer the resorts are becoming more and more overcrowded. The Black Sea coast hotels are full and there are more foreign tourists enjoying the country than before.**

In the first 5 months of 2013, i.e. including only the first month of the summer season, a 31% increase in tourist numbers was registered, and a 37% increase is projected for the whole year. The greatest contributor to this growth has been tourists from Russia and other foreign countries. Including June as well, 2,188,721 international visitors entered Georgia, 29% more than in the corresponding period last year. Tourism from Poland has increased by 98%, from Ukraine by 73%, from Russia by 69%, from Armenia by 55%, from Kazakhstan by 34% and from Israel by 32%.

The highest numbers of foreign tourists have been recorded in Anaklia, Kutaisi, Borjomi, Batumi, Kobuleti, Kazbegi, Signaghi and Telavi. In Adjara, the chain hotels are proving much more popular than the local independent ones.

Giorgi Sigua, head of the national tourist authority, says that Tbilisi and Batumi see the greatest number of visitors and that the hotels in Batumi are full of Georgian as well as foreign tourists.

Room prices are rising on demand, and prices will not be regulated until more hotels open. Batumi's hotels are now overcrowded. "We have hotels, but the demand is much higher, the tourists need more. Demand is now so high due to the Georgia's image as tourist country that whoever is able to build a hotel should do so, in the resorts but first of all in Tbilisi



and Batumi," said Sigua.

The majority of the chain hotels in Adjara are in Batumi, and consequently Batumi is seeing 58% more visitors than any other location in Adjara. The other resorts are more seasonal, which is why Kvartsi, Kobuleti and Gonio see more visitors in June than in the preceding months. There are fewer beds in Gonio and Kvartsi than in Kobuleti and consequently the occupancy rates in these towns are higher. In June occupancy rates were Batumi 54%, Kobuleti 33% and Khelvachauri 22%.

Due to the popularity of Batumi lots of events take place there. Andrei Makarevich will be appearing there on July 20. The Black Sea Jazz Festival which will be headlined by the American seven times Grammy winner Al Jarreau, who will open the festival on July 18. Mike Stern tops the July 19 bill and Jose James will perform on July 21. Nights of Barry White, Stevie Wonder and

James Brown's music will also be held between July 18-20. Batumi Tennis Club will host the main events of the Jazz Festival and the Batumi Summer Set, another music festival, will take place in August.

## GEORGIA - THE ANTI-DOTE TO MODERN LIFE

Georgia's main Black Sea resort of Batumi attracts tourists from all over the world. It is known for international events such as the Black Sea Jazz Festival, which attracts some of the top names in music and enthusiastic crowds. It also has many other things to offer - they include yachting, open and closed swimming pools, clubs, bars and restaurants, a dolphinarium, sport complexes, casinos, art galleries, museums, tennis courts, futsal courts, basketball courts, ice rinks, Batumi Boulevard, the aquarium, the zoo, the aqua park, Tsitsinatela Park near Kobuleti and many other plac-

es. All those seeking sun and excitement need look no further than Batumi.

But of course there are many other holiday destinations in Georgia, including mountain and health resorts. The best known of these are Tskaltubo, Kakheti, Tusheti, Khevsureti, Phshavi, Racha, Svaneti, Akhaltsikhe and Aspindza, and each has its own particular centre and charm.

The Aspindza tourist complex, unique in Georgia, is fully equipped for all-inclusive tourism. It has also offers perfect conditions for people with special needs. Tusheti is also a well-developed and well-equipped resort.

Grigoleti is one of the most distinguished summer resorts in Guria in Western Georgia. Its seashore is famous for its with sandy health beach, which has balneotherapeutic features and is good for the treatment of bones and joints.

There is a special microclimate in Kobuleti, which is 25

km from Batumi. This is the Black Sea resort nearest to actual sea level, being only 3-4 metres above it. Its main attraction is this warm and humid climate, which comes directly from the Black Sea.

Ureki is also located on the Black Sea coast and is a significant climate resort. The sea here is shallow for quite a long distance from the shore, and thus it is an especially good resort for children. The high magnetic field around Ureki also makes it a health resort like Grigoleti.

Bakmaro is in Guria, and is 2,050 metres above sea level. It is the highest Georgian resorts. It is famous for curing lung disease, peritonitis, malaria and secondary anaemia. Red blood cell and haemoglobin levels increase here due to the resort's elevation.

Beshumi has similar features, as it is also a mountain and balneological resort. It is in Khulo, 1,930 metres above sea level. Its main assets are the

transparency of its air and low humidity, lack of ultraviolet rays and good drinking and mineral water supplies.

Shovi is located in Zemo Racha, 25 km from the town of Oni. It features a good pine forest, clean air, a peaceful environment and mountain rivers.

Borjomi is located in South-Eastern Georgia. It is surrounded by a coniferous forest and therefore summers there are rather cool. Borjomi is world famous for its mineral water, which has a positive effect on the stomach and intestines.

Tskaltubo is a comprehensive resort especially famous for its thermal mineral baths. Tskaltubo's springs have incomparable curative properties.

Georgia is the place to regain your health but also has an endless variety of resorts. Consequently the country caters for tourists with any taste. Its range of mountain and sea resorts gives visitors a wide choice of location, environment and price.



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# In the sweat of the crowd the inspiration is born: DJ Sikha (London) from Medical student to mailroom assistant to DJ

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

A couple of years ago I was invited by an admirer (at the time) of mine to a super cool very close friend's party in a little bar on Shardeni Street. When I got there I learned that DJ Sikha (a Georgian guy who lives in London) would be spinning with his friend the multimedia (I would say) artist Kakadu (Datto Machavariani). I can say without fear of contradiction that this was an unforgettable party. A lot of party animals there said that they hadn't heard such music in a while.

George Sikharulidze, aka DJ Sikha, is a 90s kid. He was raised on alternative, punk rock, grunge and progressive rock. His world was ruled by the music by David Bowie, early Genesis, Peter Dinklage, the Doors and the Mahavishnu Orchestra which featured John McLaughlin and others. His world was then broken apart by the British electronic group Underworld. Then came Bjork, Massive Attack and the Prodigy and he found he had a wonderful fusion on his hands. All this music collaborated in his mind, and most importantly he started developing and advancing it.

Sikha is a stable, confident, fun, enthusiastic, absorbing, curious, well behaved young man. After talking to him in a low key environment you certainly get the impression that he doesn't go under the influence easily. His mind, taste and choice don't wonder to too many 'places' before he eliminates the unimportant, sets his target and achieves it. Being an only child he entered medical school. He still thinks he could have been a linguist. Instead he is now pretty famous in the nightlife industry. You know what to expect when you go to a club when you have seen his name on the poster.

Although Sikha still thinks that being a doctor is a more respectable and stable job for a guy he provoked a major family dra-



bing (for work and for fun).

Now Sikha is back in Tbilisi and considers it home. Most importantly he seems satisfied here. I am not sure if this is due to his Georgian mentality (I doubt it), or Georgia improving (I doubt that too) or him developing more realistic expectations of 'home' while he lived in London. But apart from that, his story is all here.

**Can you take me back to where it all started for you?**

I am a 90s kid—they were dark times. I was in the band called Afternoon Version: I played bass guitar and sang. It was typical Georgian underground music. We were contemporaries of the band Mother of Monday who were our inspiration.

**There were many bands back**



ma by dedicating his time to a band. His father threatened to break his guitar when he heard that his only son George was intending to quit medical school for the sake of 'fifteen minutes of fame'. "I felt like we were stars", says Sikha, who dedicated 10 years of his day life to a medical charity and his night life to club-

**in the day. Was your significant?**

Yes, I can say that we were. We performed on Georgian Broadcasting's Channel 1. We won a few festivals. David Evgenidze (a famous Georgian musician) spotted us and told us we were the stars of Georgian music. In 1997 Catherine Roberts, the fashion designer who worked

with U2, visited Tbilisi as the guest of the GIFT Festival. She came to our studio to listen to us. She loved our music. She encouraged us to find our way abroad, but we couldn't find it together as a band at the time.

**Why did the band break up?**

I had already started making music on my own, and besides, I was occupied by the idea of going to London.

**What made you choose to be a DJ?**

As funny as it sounds, it all started from me being a doctor and aiming to go to the USA. I graduated from medical school and had part time jobs here and there. I worked for the ambulance service as well. My family had plans for me—I was to go to USA for medical training. Nobody talked about Great Britain,

switched to survival mode. I did get support from my family, but after 9 months I came back to Georgia having exhausted all their resources. Then I could either have stayed here in Tbilisi, or gone back to London and earned my own living.

**Were you already a DJ by this time?**

I was in touch with music and producing electronic music (computer based).

**So obviously you returned to London, but how?**

I found a part time office job at a medical charity. It was a common day job.

**Are we getting close to you becoming a DJ?**

I was living the regular life of a foreigner in London. Then I came across an old friend who had been living in London before me and was doing music. This was Levan Javakhishvili (a member of Mother of Monday). He introduced me to his world of music, he was doing drum 'n bass back then and working at a big club in east London. The company I was working for applied for a work permit for me because I held a medical diploma. I did pass my medical license exams, but a medical career was no longer a priority for me. The work permit was a fast track direct to citizenship. Of course this was top of my wish list.

**So you had two careers, clerk and DJ?**

I worked in that office for 10 years. I got promoted from mailroom assistant to head of services. It was a small office of 50 people. I led a double life: I 'saved people' 5 days a week and partied nonstop at the weekends. Levan pushed me into being a DJ. He showed me around, showed me how to do software DJing - laptop DJing. It was fun.

**Where did you make your debut?**

At first Levan and I spun together at a little bar in east London. Luckily I met a guy from Belarus, who liked my spinning and booked me in a dream lineup. Names like Ion Ludwig and

by an American label, another by the London based label Sabotage and a third was bought by Nokia for an online advertisement.

**How did things go after you played with the dream lineup? Did you hit it off with the other DJs?**

They didn't go all that well actually. Their circle was a very discreet, closed, 'family' society. My day job was getting in the way of my success in nightlife. You have to hang out with party people forever. You can't explain the day job phenomenon to a guy who has been smoking some funky weed for more than 48 hours at a time.

**I've been trying to get to the successful part because I know you are a successful DJ. How did your success come about?**

It is a strange story. I was trying to go to Paris with my girlfriend. Her passport was valid for only another 5 months, so the visa officer wouldn't issue us a visa. He stood up for a minute and the officer at the next window asked me what the problem was. I explained, and he issued the visa but asked us to keep it a secret. Then all of a sudden he asked us, in a very low voice, if we ever went clubbing. At that moment I was sure I was being filmed for a show like 'Punk'd'. I didn't know what the best answer would be but I plumped for telling the truth and said yes. Then he asked me if I had been to Fabric (a big club in London). Again I chose the truth and told him I had been there recently. So he said, "Yeah, I think I saw you on the dance floor". He gave me his number and suggested that we go together next time.

**Did you call him?**

No, actually, somehow I didn't. But the next time I went to Paris I did and asked him to queue-jump me, and he did. As a result I saw Nicko at the embassy, and he looked sleepy, unshaven, with bags under his eyes. It turned out he had been DJing all weekend. This was like an epiphany—DJing?! That was it! Very soon I was invited back to France where Nicko holds very interesting events. I also visited Spain where his boyfriend Jesus is also in the industry. A German DJ, Marco Thorn was there, and he thought we were on the Berlin beat and invited us to spin in Berlin.

**What sort of beat was it?**

It was house music in general, versions of deep house, deep, tech house and techno.

**Did you stick with this beat?**

Absolutely!

**What was your thing?**

I liked using a live instrument or a vocal while recording a track.

**Did 'party animals' like what you did?**

They did. Most importantly they liked it for like, four years, as we kept going back and forth to Berlin. Marco was a club manager. Every month he had a Saturday event and Nicko and I would go and spin there. Later on we came up with the name 'Organic'. Nicko was and still is

an organic strawberry farmer. He's got his own farm in the mountains of Normandy.

**What was the best outcome of this?**

We founded the 'Organic' label, which is a vinyl label; we release both vinyl and digital versions of our material. I also write the info/critique for the releases. Other than that there are still events we do in Malaga, Normandy and Berlin. Mostly these are private events.

**What's the most success you can have as a DJ?**

To spin a really good set and get a bj at the same time. (laughing)

**Have you achieved this?**

I have come close. But really, both progress and success for a DJ is being booked a year ahead.

**In that case, what brought you back here?**

I got fed up with my day job. I quit. Therefore I couldn't earn a living. It's hard to find a new job. So I just quit, travelled and then came back here. I am not saying that this is the final stop; I am just trying it out. Berlin is the final destination I can seriously think about. I have accomplished my main mission. I have obtained British citizenship. I am not chained to the post-Soviet world anymore.

**What are your other priorities?**

To get a long term contract with a big label.

**What is stopping you from doing this?**

I haven't been invited to yet. I do produce stuff and I have sold all my music. But I haven't caught on with the people who provide long term contracts for musicians.

**What do you need to do right now to complete this mission?**

I need to work on efficiency and productivity. I need to be in a stable environment so I can write just as much music as I want.

**You have said that the sweat of the crowd is an authentic and powerful inspiration for writing music. Do you like the Georgian crowd?**

Well, clubbing is a culture. When I went to the Berlin club the first time I realized I wasn't moving in the right way. There is certain etiquette of expressing your emotions through moves, dance and manners. I figured I lacked the culture of clubbing, but you adapt pretty soon. Georgian clubbing culture still lacks that etiquette. The crowd has fun, appreciates the music, but has still not adopted the club behavior culture just yet.

**What's the Georgian DJing environment like now? Who here do you like?**

I enjoyed the event with Tussia Beridze and Nika Machaidze at the Mtkvarze club. When it comes to DJs I would say Cobera (jr.), Lasha Guruli, Kakadu, Bacho Chaladze and Tomma Chaladze, Bero and Irakli Shonia.

**If they were spinning on the same night, who would you go and listen to?**

Lasha Guruli and Cobera.



Mark Henning were involved. I wish I was booked in those kind of lineups now.

**What was happening to your band meanwhile?**

Afternoon Version had written an album of electronic music. I brought it with me and tried to sell it. A few singles from it did get released: one was bought

but then my girlfriend went to London and all of a sudden London became destination number one for me. I looked up the medical training options there and went for it. It was the year 2001.

**How did London treat you?**

At first the reality was quite harsh. Things were foggy and grey, like London's weather. I



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