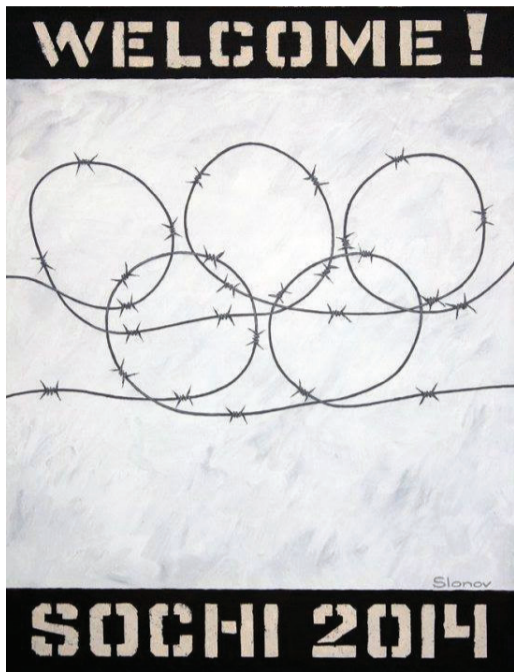


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Will Georgia Participate in the Sochi Olympics?

An online petition calling on Georgia not to participate in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, has been launched by the NGOs Transparency International - Georgia and Fair Elections. It has been signed by more than 10,000 citizens.

The petition is addressed to Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, National Olympic Committee President Leri Khabelov and Minister of Sport Levan Kipiani, and its organisers say that the government will have to take into account the opinion of the majority of citizens.

The petition states that Georgia's participation in the Olympics is not appropriate because Russia has systematically broken the Russia-Georgia war ceasefire agreement of August 12, 2008 by continuing to move the occupation line forward.

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Will Georgia Participate in the Sochi Olympics?

By LELA TSINTSADZE, GT

An online petition calling on Georgia not to participate in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, has been launched by the NGOs Transparency

activities,” says the petition. The organisers add that the Russian government is trying to make the locals flee their villages and that Georgia has been further humiliated by the Russian president’s decision to allow a so-called “hero of the 2008

which the government knows better than the public what is happening but cannot reveal everything. I respect this petition’s supporters, as they would like to show the world how much pressure the Georgian government is being put under by Russia and civil society. I understand and sympathise with them, but think that refusing to participate in the Olympics is inadmissible”, stated Zakareishvili.

Irakli Sesiashvili, Head of the Security Committee, stated that the government will take a decision about participation based on public and national interest.

“The government should analyse the situation, listen to the public and look at the issue from both sides. It is our responsibility. We will study, listen and take the decision which will reflect public demand”, he said.

Analyst Mamuka Areshidze said that Georgian athletes will not refuse to participate in the Games unless they are politicised and suggested that, as the selection of Ivan Nichaev to carry the Olympic Flame is part of the issue, Georgia should find the pilot who damaged Nichaev’s plane during the war and make him part of the Georgian Olympic delegation.

“This will serve as an answer. The Russian side cannot gain anything from appointing this man. Georgia also wins nothing by finding the pilot, but it will also not lose. Why does Russia need to do something different? As it is, it has appointed a failure to carry the Olympic Torch. The only thing this man did during the war was bring his damaged aircraft back to the airfield”, Areshidze told The Georgian Times, adding that there is no need to politicise this issue, and that despite everything he thinks Georgia will ultimately participate in the Sochi Olympics.

Andro Barnovi, Head of the President’s Administration, has not confirmed allegations by former Culture Minister Nika Rurua that Mikheil Saakashvili, the President of Georgia, supported Georgia’s participation in the Sochi Olympics after the 2008 war.

“I have taken an interest in this matter, talked to the president and our team members and nobody has confirmed this. I do not know what information Nika Rurua has. Our consent to participate was given before the war,

war”, pilot Ivan Nichaev, to carry the Olympic Flame. “Taking all these factors into consideration, we reckon that renouncing participation in the Olympics is the appropriate response to Russia’s refusal to meet its obligations and international standards. We appeal to the government to thus express our protest against these actions, which damage Georgian sovereignty”, they say, adding that Georgia’s refusal to participate will send a message to the international community that Georgia will never accept its occupation.

The Georgian National Olympic Committee and the Government of Georgia hope that Russia will act in an appropriate way so that Georgia will not have to review its decision to participate. Paata Zakareishvili, State Minister for Reintegration, has said that Georgia refusing to participate in the Olympics because someone is carrying a torch is inadmissible.

“This petition must not influence the government’s decision. There are some issues on



International - Georgia and Fair Elections. It has been signed by more than 10,000 citizens.

The petition is addressed to Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, National Olympic Committee President Leri Khabelov and Minister of Sport Levan Kipiani, and its organisers say that the government will have to take into account the opinion of the majority of citizens.

The petition states that Georgia’s participation in the Olympics is not appropriate because Russia has systematically broken the Russia-Georgia war ceasefire agreement of August 12, 2008 by continuing to move the occupation line forward.

“We would like to appeal to the government and Olympic Committee to change their decision to participate in the Sochi Olympics. During the last few months, most of the population along the de facto border have been prevented from accessing agricultural land and water as a result of the occupation force’s



in 2006. If the context changes after such a decision, our position may also change. So I do not understand where Rurua’s information comes from”, Barnovi noted.

However Rurua is insisting that Saakashvili did personally decide that Georgia should take part. “The Olympic Committee took the decision and the government decided not to get involved. I am not a foreign affairs specialist, and the decision of diplomats proved crucial. The president agreed to Georgia’s participation, specifically saying that we should go. He said it was not pleasant but necessary. To

my mind he was wrong then and the PM is wrong now, as he takes the same position,” said Rurua, who nevertheless added that the world will react negatively to a Georgian boycott.

The statements of government officials imply that Georgia’s participation in the Olympic Games depends on the actions of Russia. However Russia does not regard a Georgian boycott of the Olympics as a tragedy. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a Russian State Duma deputy, believes that Georgia would be making a mistake if it refused to participate, as sport is not an aspect of foreign policy.

“No one can impose a decision on us. If anyone boycotts a sports event only that country and its athletes will lose. Sport is not a part of foreign policy, just as trade, science and art are nothing to do with politics. Thus a boycott is a sign of weakness”, said Zhirinovskiy.

It seems that neither the Georgian public nor the Russian governments are going to change their positions. Georgia’s participation in the Sochi Olympics will therefore depend on where the Government of Georgia perceives the national interest to lie when faced with these two immovable forces.

NEWS See daily news on www.geotimes.ge

HILLARY CLINTON – GEORGIA FACES A VERY CHALLENGING DILEMMA

Hillary Clinton – Georgia faces a very challenging dilemma I think you’ve got a very challenging dilemma facing Georgia, the former U.S. secretary of State Hillary Clinton said at Chatham house, where Sulxan Khabadze, the member of the Institute asked her question.

Hillary Clinton underscored the progress Georgia has made, in the last, now nearly 20 years. “I think you’ve got a very challenging dilemma facing Georgia and you have summarized it well because the progress that Georgia has made, in the last, now nearly 20 years, is quite remarkable and many of the people who contributed to that progress are currently out of office and you have a new government that understandably wants to continue the progress and figure out the best way to do that”, Clinton said.

To Khabadze’s question, what should the government of Georgia do to tackle the obstacle that is on the way in building democracy, Clinton said that “there is so much riding on how you navigate through these next months in terms of your stability, in terms of whether or not you can as you say protect the rule of law, without undermining a lot of the progress that has been made. That takes a lot of very careful thought that has to be depersonalized. You have to think not of the people who you believe may have broken laws, but think about the positions that are currently being held by the new government and whether pursuing prior office holders is going to consolidate democracy or rip the country into a lot of pieces and what I would ask you to do is to try to avoid personalizing it and instead to try to analyze what would be in the best interests of Georgia in five, ten, fifteen years. Because for every person, you say, who wants you to do something, there is a person who thinks it would be very unfortunate if you did, and you have to sort that out. There is truth in reconsolidation commission models, there are other kinds of inquiries, that could make things public, so that it would serve the purpose of transparency but not create the kind of instability and may be even conflict that could undermine the democratic project in Georgia”, Clinton said.

“Our government is under huge, nearly irresistible pressure from the West, not to arrest the previous officials or be blamed for the politically motivated persecutions, at the same time, the government is under pressure from the public to face the justice for the sake of democracy and rule of law, those responsible to be brought to justice. Madam Clinton, your views are greatly appreciated and respected in Georgia, I would be really grateful if you could tell us your views how we should tackle these obstacles that are clearly on our way in building healthier democracy in Georgia”, Khabadze addressed Hillary Clinton.

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The Parliament of Georgia according to the new edition of the Constitution

Under the new edition of the Constitution the powers of parliament have grown. Parliament is still the supreme representative body which comprises the legislature and defines the main directions of domestic and foreign policy.

The first amendment to Chapter 3 of the Constitution (Article 51¹, Points a - d) concerns the dissolution of parliament, which is not allowed except under circumstances set out in the Constitution. In particular, dissolving parliament within six months of a presidential election, and within the last six months of the period of validity of the powers of the President of Georgia still isn't allowed, but an exception to this rule is cases in which parliament can't agree on the composition of a government, and the procedure for this is specifically defined.

According to new edition of the Constitution, the number of Members of Parliament needed to approve the creation of an investigative or other temporary commission has been reduced. This reduction is important, as it increases the role of the parliamentary minority. Now 1/5 rather than 1/4 of the total number of MPs can approve the creation of such commissions (Article 56, Point 2).

The Constitution of 1995 stated that a Member of Parliament was entitled to address a question to anybody accountable to parliament, such as local government bodies and city administrations, and the heads of the executive bodies of all administrative levels and of public institutions and receive an answer from them. This norm has changed a little, as mayors have been withdrawn from this list because they are part of local government structures and can't be held accountable before parliament (Article 59, Point 1).

In Article 59, Point 3 of the new edition of the Constitution parliament retains the ability to raise before the Prime Minister a question concerning the official responsibility of a certain member of the government, provided a majority of the total membership requests it, but the Prime Minister is no longer obliged to explain to Parliament why a minister has left office.

The list of people with the right to convene extraordinary parliamentary sessions and meetings has also changed. In particular, the President no longer has the right to call extraordinary sessions or meet-

ings on his own initiative, but the government now has (Article 61, Point 2).

The new edition of the Constitution of Georgia modifies the law on impeachment. After the resignation of the president is called for under the impeachment procedure, the constitutional court will draw a conclusion on the matter rather than the Supreme Court, which did this under the old version. The constitutional court will confirm or otherwise that the actions of the president were criminal, or a constitution violation, and parliament will then vote directly on the resignation of the president under the impeachment procedure. The new edition removes what in our opinion was an absolutely excessive intermediate procedure, in which parliament voted on whether or not to submit the dismissal of an impeached person to a vote.

To the 65th Article of the 3rd Chapter of the Constitution a new 11th Point has been added which obliges the Government of Georgia to obtain Parliamentary approval for the ratification, denunciation or cancellation of an international treaty or arrangement, although in cases in which the said treaty: a) grants Georgia membership of an international organisation or intergovernmental union; b) is military in character; c) concerns territorial integrity or national borders; d) is connected with loans or granting credits to the state; e) demands a change of in national legislation, a commitment to implement the necessary laws and acts which are valid in law is all that is required. The Prime Minister must also countersign any contract signed by the President.

According to new edition of the Constitution, the President has no right to introduce legislative initiatives of their own. Parliament can only consider bills presented by the government (Article 67, Points 1-2).

The number of votes necessary to override a presidential veto has also changed. If parliament doesn't accept the president's veto of its legislation, another vote is held on the initial edition of the draft law. The draft law will be passed again if it is supported by more than half of the total number of Members of Parliament. An organic law will be passed if it is supported by more than half of all Members of Parliament. A constitutional law will be passed if it is supported by at least three quarters of all Members of Parliament. The first two changes are related to in-

creasing the role of Parliament and limiting the involvement of the President in the legislative process, but the number of votes necessary to override the veto of a draft constitutional law has actually increased, as according to the Constitutional Law of 27 December 2011, the proportion of votes required to pass a constitutional law has likewise increased (Constitution, Article 68).

The 80th Article of the Constitution refers to the procedure for forming the government. It is noteworthy that the law adopted has established in the constitution the formation of the government by the so-called "Parliamentary Way". Granting confidence in the composition of the government is now uniquely the responsibility of Parliament, and the participation of the President has become merely formal.

Introducing such a mechanism to the process of forming a government is, in the opinion of the Venice Commission, a "step forward", however, the Commission made a number of remarks concerning the full procedure for the formation of the government by a newly elected Parliament and the timeframes for expressing a vote of confidence in the composition of the government, when the authority of a government is terminated. The Venice Commission found it unacceptable that there is an opportunity to vote on the same composition of government twice, and withdrawal this will reduce the time it takes to form a government and make the process more transparent.

The core of the constitutional innovations can be presented in the following way:

- The authority of the government is considered removed immediately after the granting of authority to the newly elected Parliament (not after the election of a new President, as in the old edition);

- The election subject which has the greatest presence in the newly elected Parliament will provide a candidate for Prime Minister, who will be formally nominated for the position by the President;

- If the powers of the government were terminated for any other reason than a new Parliament being elected the President, nominates for Prime Minister the candidate proposed by the parliamentary majority, or if there is none, by the faction with the largest number of members;

- If the Parliament does not approve the government after two attempts, the President will propose for approval a



candidature proposed by 2/5 of the deputies, and only then dissolve Parliament. If no motion of confidence in the government is given even after this third attempt, the President will call extraordinary elections.

The Parliament of Georgia has the right to declare no confidence in the government. In the new edition of the Constitution the institution of the constructive vote of no confidence is introduced (Article 81). This is explained in more detail below.

The "Law on changing and amending the Constitution of Georgia", adopted by the Parliament of Georgia of 15 October 2010, gave the Prime Minister the power to make the discussion of a bill in Parliament a vote of confidence in the government. If Parliament expressed confidence in the government in this vote, the bill under discussion was considered adopted. This change lim-

ited the monitoring functions of Parliament. If Parliament had found a bill unacceptable but was thereby obliged to declare no confidence in the government, the President could have dissolved Parliament, so Parliament, in most cases, had to accept government-initiated draft laws, which were turned into votes of confidence. In 2013 Parliament of Georgia reverted to the previous norm, which states that the President presents the composition of the government and the state programme to Parliament and obtains its confidence only when one third of the membership of the government, (but not less than 5 members), has changed.

From all this we can conclude that according to the new wording of the Constitution, which will enter into force from the moment the President elected in October 2013 takes his oath of office, both the formal and real roles of the Parliament

will increase significantly. The provisions of the new edition of the Constitution, which release Parliament from any pressure from the President concerning organisational and legislative matters, give us the basis to assert this. No less important is the fact that the main source of the birth and continued existence of the government is now Parliament, and the constructive vote of no confidence must lead to a new understanding and common standards developing.

Chairman of the Regional Centre for the Research and Promotion of Constitutionalism

Avtandil Demetrashvili

Executive Director of the Regional Centre for the Research and Promotion of Constitutionalism

Vakhtang Zhvania

NEWS See daily news on www.geotimes.ge

MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI : I NEVER LIKED THE SOCHI OLYMPIAD, BUT OPEN STATEMENT ABOUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SPITTING INTO RUSSIA'S FACE

I never liked the Sochi Olympiad, but open statement about it would have been spitting into Russia's face - Mikheil Saakashvili I never liked the Sochi Olympiad, but open statement about it would have been spitting into Russia's face, President Mikheil Saakashvili told journalists. According to him, Ivan Nicheaev's selection as one of the torchbearers of the Olympiad was not accidental and called it political demarche.

Mikheil Saakashvili noted Nechaev was actively bombing Georgia in 2008, though the Georgian side damaged his plane so that he could hardly land the plane on the Russian-controlled territory.

'He was declared as a hero for killing many people. Apart from Nechaev, there is sadist Genady Onyshenko, which disapproved Georgian wine a few days ago and he will torture us again and again', the President said.

According to him, if he calls on Georgian sportsmen not to take part in the Olympic Games, it will be a step against the sportsmen, because the decision should be made by the Olympic Committee. To the journalist's question why the decision on participation in the Sochi Olympiad was made under his government, Mikheil Saakashvili said open criticism of the Olympiad might have become additional pretext for war from the Russian side.

'Today we are facing occupation and erection of wire fences, and unity should be priority for us. How can we demand a united position from the international community if we don't have united position inside the country', the President noted.



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Interactive Television

Georgia to Host Presidential TV Debates

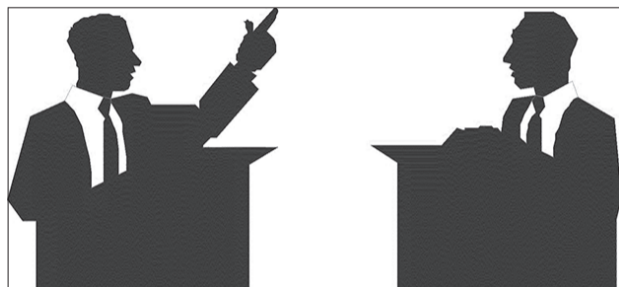
By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

On October 17-18, ten days before the presidential elections, the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) will host live presidential debates. Seven candidates will participate, and each will be given equal time to present their programmes. The candidates will be: Giorgi Margvelashvili ("Kartuli Ocneba" – Georgian Dream), David Bakradze (United National Movement), Koba Davitashvili (Independent), Sergo Javakhadze (Movement for Fair Georgia), Giorgi Targamadze (Christian Democrats), Zurab Kharatishvili (Independent, the former head of the Central Election Commission) and Teimuraz Mzhavia (People's Party). It is not yet clear whether Nino Burjanadze of Democratic Movement - United Georgia will participate. Viewers can send their questions to the presidential candidates by emailing info@gpb.ge (the website of the Public Broadcaster).

Since the sixties of the last century TV debates have been one of the best ways to assess presidential candidates in Western countries. They were established in the USA, where TV de-



rather than debate with stronger opponents. Therefore presidential debates do not have great significance in Georgia, and conse-



quently they cannot be harmed by performing badly at them.

Politicians and analysts also distrust the structure of the TV debates. For example, in biased TV programmes the station's "own" politician will be given the questions beforehand, but for the rest they will be bolts from the blue. The previously prepared

One can see with the naked eye that election coverage is now based on the canons of show business coverage. The ups and downs

of political struggles are presented in the format of a sporting performance. For the mass audience, there is no difference between political debates and, for example, motor races, horse races or boxing matches.

GT has asked various commentators their opinion on TV debates.

Zurab Bigvava, Political Scientist and Psychologist, says:

"First of all, the quality of the debate depends on which form it is held in. I think TV stations, TV programmes and presenters must be professional when conducting such debates, and the formulation of a TV debate culture will mostly depend on this. It would be good if such debates were conducted here on the same level as in the West. Now the First Channel has announced such a debate let's see what will happen. It will help the reputation of a candidate if he has answers to all the questions, but he must also appear professional in front of the cameras and show off his oratory skills. I think the campaign staff of each candidate will decide whether it would be good for their candidate to participate in sharp debates, but in general TV de-

30 announced a tender for designing the set for these debates, worth 53,500 lari. The winner of this was due to be announced on October 4, but according to the Competition and State Procurement Agency, The Public Broadcaster has not announced a winner as yet, though it is known that the tendering companies include Tbilisi-95 and Patio Art, and that Patio Art has participated in 27 tenders announced by GPB at different times and won 18 of them.

GPB will conduct the presidential debates with the support of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). In accordance with current legislation, the presidential debates on GPB will only involve qualified electoral subjects, i.e. candidates. According to Point 8 of Article 51 of the Election Code, a broadcaster can recognise as a

the so-called charisma and oratorical skills of the candidate are of great importance. They are intellectual duels in which self-confidence, wit, the gift of the gab and powers of persuasion are more important than manifestos. Sometimes a candidate can embarrass an opponent with their sense of humour or a well-placed one-liner. In fact very few voters actually read boring manifestos, as they vote not for "papers" but for people. Sociological surveys have consistently shown that people very often support a particular party on the basis of personal sympathy for its leaders rather than any programme it presents, and therefore making a good personal impression, via the TV screen, is crucial.

TV debates are the best means of demonstrating the personal traits of the various candidates. They concentrate the audience's attention on the candidates' images rather than political problems. This meets the needs of the mass audience and serves the interests of political groups alike. However one of the problems of TV debates is choosing the audience. It is very important to avoid instances of extremely "enthusiastic" voters wreaking havoc with live broadcasts. Similarly, when speaking of TV debates, and political debates in general, Georgian voters cannot help but recall Shalva Natelashvili, a politician who will never refuse any sort of TV communication. If having a sense of humour was the main attribute of a politician Natelashvili would win every debate and election, but the



bates between Republican and Democratic presidential candidates attract 65-70 million viewers. They have now become an unavoidable political ritual for American voters, who cannot imagine a candidate refusing to participate in them, although there have been examples of this, notably in 1980 when President Jimmy Carter refused to take part in the first TV debate and went on to lose the election. By means of these debates a candidate connects with voters one-on-one, and is given the chance to demonstrate his grasp of the key issues in the country he wishes to lead.

TV debates enable the electorate to compare and contrast different candidates. But they are not yet as popular in Georgia as in the USA. As a rule, these opportunities for political one-upmanship are only interesting to witty politicians with "the gift of the gab", who have presentation and oratorical skills and a slight sense of humour. Many politicians and presidential candidates prefer to give personal speeches

'impromptu' always comes over best, and will make "their" candidate look more competent, better versed in the urgent problems of the country and like someone engaged in real work for the benefit of the people. The questions are likewise presented as "opinions of ordinary people from the street," whereas in fact they may have been pre-written and specially selected to display the strengths of the chosen candidate. In some programmes the favoured candidate is asked to present his programme last, so that the voters will retain an impression of it for longer, as it will not then be contradicted by those who have already spoken.

The TV debates held in Georgia hitherto have been quite unsuccessful, because the time limit of 3-5 minutes per presentation per candidate deprived them of the opportunity to speak out. They would have to read "pre-learned texts", and end up finishing well within the time limit, waiting with an awkward smile for time to be called.

Kakha Gogolashvili, Political Scientist, Head of the Centre of European Studies, says:

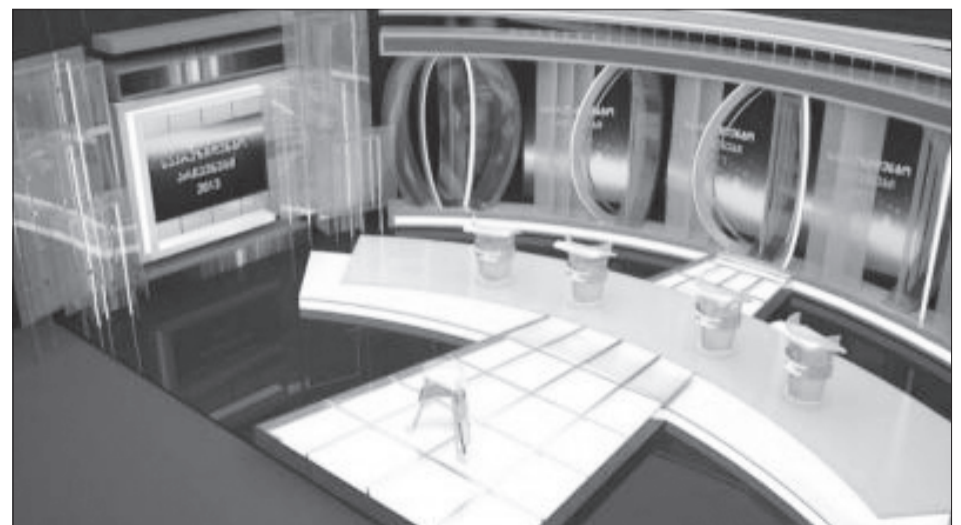
"Of course television is very important and can influence people. The refusal of candidates to participate is a form of self-insurance, a quest to maintain their reputations. We have a lack of political culture in this respect, as there is a possibility that the debates will not go the way a candidate wants and they can find themselves in an awkward situation which harms their image. Of course, TV debates are very good practice, but much depends on the structure of the programme, how well prepared the presenter is, whether there are proper questions and so on. We can understand why a candidate would refuse to take part in TV debates, because they fear that their carefully nurtured image will be dented and people will see them differently, and the hosts of unsuccessful TV debates can also blame the candidates for their failure, and harm the candidates' reputations that way".

bates are quite a positive phenomenon".

TV debates are now becoming

increasingly interesting for the Georgian public and could also improve the still developing political culture of Georgia. Georgian Public Broadcaster is enthusiastically preparing for the Presidential Debates on 17-18 October, and on September

qualified electoral subject the representative of any political party which, based on 5 polls



conducted throughout Georgia, has the support of 4% of the voters. Political Parties must therefore submit relevant documentation certifying this, in accordance with this article.

Television debates are also shows, in which visual effects,

1.24% of the votes his party gained at parliamentary elections of 2012 show that excessive clowning, and theatricalisation of political discussion, have the opposite effect to that intended.

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Will Khudonhesi Power Station Destroy People's Homes?

By LELA TSINTSADZE, GT

The relationship between the inhabitants of Khaishi, in Mestia municipality, and the government is considerably strained. The construction of the 720 megawatt Khudoni hydroelectric power station in the village has provoked widespread anger.

The locals are categorically opposing the construction, declaring that it will damage the environment and all the territory around it will be flooded to create a reservoir to service the power station. Most importantly, under the plans drawn up they will be evicted from their homes to provide the land to build this reservoir on. However Trans Electrica Georgia, the company implementing the project, intends to proceed.

The station is designed to reduce energy importation from neighbouring countries by producing 500 million kilowatt hours of energy a year. According to Trans Electrica Georgia, 700 million kilowatt hours of energy were imported in 2012 and 300 million in the first 8 months of 2013. The company therefore claims that Khudonhesi will ensure Georgia's energy security and help the country overcome the unforeseen technical problems which occur, such as cessation of supplies and accidents.

Some NGOs and energy specialists however are categorically opposed to the construction

of the plant. They frequent hold protests and discussions. The next protest action will take place at the State Chancellery on October 19.

Ecologist Lasha Chkhartishvili declares that the construction of such enormous power stations should be prohibited by legislation. "Such buildings cause climate change and destroy churches, graveyards and cultural heritage. This one will provoke climate change throughout Svaneti. People's health is being endangered," he stated, adding that the construction is against the national interests and private financial interests may lie behind it.

Head of Caucasian House Naira Gelashvili says that the power station will badly influence the environment, and is admissible in theory but only if Khaishi and the surrounding area are not flooded. "I have studied the plans of this station. I know it will influence the environment badly. The government has planned many such constructions, which will result in huge areas being flooded," she stated.

However the project team's own assessment is that climate change is not expected in the region after the reservoir is created. "The reservoir will lightly cool the climate of the raw path along it (1-5 km) during the warm season and heat it lightly during the cold season. Wind speeds may increase 2-3 times above the reservoir. There may be as much as 38mm of additional moisture in the atmosphere if the water brume turns

into moisture, a 3% increase. Changes in the population's health are not expected" say the Khudoni power station project team.

Mestia resident Tamar Pirtskhelani considers the construction wrong, but despite the threat of eviction she says she is not going to leave Svaneti. She says that the Soviet government had once wanted to build this facility, then the former government, but the local population objected. Now the new government has restored the project.

"We will not accept being evicted to make way for a power station. If evicted we will return. We will not agree to compensation. The people will not go even if they give us billions. This is the case, and nothing will change," she told us.

The state and the World Bank are promising adequate compensation for any damage or removal, maintaining that each settler's interest will be taken into consideration in the process of settlement. However, a study conducted in 2012 stated that approximately 200 families will have to be evicted from Khaishi, Gagma Khaishi, Lukhi, Kveda Tsvirmindi, Lajra, Tobar and Lalkhorali to make way for the power station. The Church of Saint George in Khaishi, the graveyard and various communal infrastructures will also be affected.

Trans Electrica Georgia says that the same study made it clear that the population want to receive compensation in cash and move to places selected by them-



selves. Compensation will be issued for all land, buildings and trees affected on the basis of their restorative value, in accordance with international standards. The locals maintain that they did not agree to any compensation. 2,500 persons have sworn in front of an icon that they will continue to oppose the construction and never leave their villages.

If the local population refuse to leave the Government will have to find alternative ways to proceed. However Technical Director of Trans Electrica Georgia Paata Tsereteli says the company will take public and expert concern into account.

"These comments will be reflected in our environmental im-



NGO representatives and the local population are deaf to the pleas of the company. They reckon the only option is to stop the construction. Trans Electrica Georgia says that it will take each resident's concerns and interests into account in the project, but will not examine alternatives to it.

Several days ago Minister of Energy Kakha Kaladze declared that the construction will not be

stopped because of a few NGOs. He said the locals are defying the state and the latter will not stop doing things because some people have taken an oath.

"We should not accept this precedent. Some people may swear on icons, some on the Koran, but we will not accept this precedent," Kaladze declared.

The Ministry of Environment Protection has issued the company permission to construct the power station. After elaborating further documents Trans Electrica will begin preparatory work. The population removed from the site will be accommodated by Canadian company REPLAN and international accommodation expert Federico Giovannetti.

POLITICS

6 Weeks to Go East Meets West - European Union Summit Vilnius, Lithuania

By STEVEN G. TRAYLOR, GT

Not since the end of the Cold War has Europe stood on the brink of such a political transformation as it does today. With the old cliché of East meets West, it prepares for the European Union Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania this November 28th and 29th.

Some six weeks from now the 2009 Eastern Europe Partnership group, formed to foster the conditions to accelerate political integration between Europe and the former Soviet Union states, will meet the world's biggest trading block, the European Union. Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine make up this partnership.

This process has not been easy, as Russia has exerted political and economic pressure on those slated to attend, and concern has arisen between European leaders and the Kremlin over the undue influence Russia seeks to maintain in its backyard today.



In April 2005 President turned Prime Minister and now once again President Vladimir Putin told the Russian Duma, "first and foremost it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". Putin has been in power since 31 December, 1999, some nearly 14 years, and he has just turned 61.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the world has changed dramatically and so has Europe.

Shown the way by a former Soviet satellite state, Lithuania, the six countries have expressed various degrees of interest in joining Western Europe, and some half a billion Europeans who have seen two world wars in the last hundred years, but relative peace in the past 70.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner of 2012, The European Union, will hold its third Eastern Partnership Summit amid pressure from Russia for these countries to consider an alternative to westward expansion and join what is called the Customs Union, a Russian creation incorporating Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, which acts as a counterbalance to European economic and political influence.

Six weeks away from the summit, Georgia is listening attentively to the experience of Lithuania, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union. Last week, a delegation from Vilnius was in Tbilisi, and meetings were conducted between delegations led by Loreta Grauziniene, newly elected President of the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) and David Usupashvili, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia.

Grauziniene said that Georgia has done "substantial work in the course of EU integration", therefore it has high expectations of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius come Novem-

ber. In her address to the international parliamentary conference, she said, "I personally have never doubted Georgia's decision to follow the European course. I have also never doubted that on the way to democracy parliaments in all free countries take the central role in ensuring the will of the people, the decisions of voters and the constitutionality of the state are respected".

The Rose Revolution government led by President Mikheil Saakashvili displayed the EU flag throughout the country for years, and during the verbal exchange with Russia over "who started what and when" in 2008, the international media portrayed Saakashvili draped between the flag of Georgia and that of the European Union as a sign that "this is where we belong".

Georgia continues to 'Get Ready'

Last week Alex Petriashvili, State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro Atlantic Integration, opened the 46th work-

ing session of the Governmental Commission on Georgia's EU integration process, which he co-chairs, here in Tbilisi.

This is nothing more than an ongoing set of meetings designed to discuss the integration process, through which Georgia is making its case for acceptance known. The session focused on the issues related to the creation of working groups on the translation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and the implementation of the Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU integration.

In September, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule said that the European Commission is ready to "do its 'utmost' and the 'almost impossible' in order to sign the Association Agreement with Georgia "as soon as possible" once treaties are initialled at the Vilnius Summit this November.

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New Kremlin Geopolitics: the Creation of the Eurasian Union in 2025

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

The idea of Georgia joining the Eurasian Economic Union is being discussed with increasing frequency, and within some NGOs and amongst the general public some concrete support for this idea has been expressed. According to an opinion poll conducted as part of the annual "Integration Barometer of the Eurasian Bank of Development" project by the Centre for Integration Studies of the Eurasian Bank of Development, about 59% of the population of Georgia supports the country's integration into the Eurasian Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Space. This means that support for this idea has doubled since the 2012 poll.

The assumption made by the Centre in its question may be dubious, but the indications are that joining the Eurasian Union is a more popular option than integration with the Euro-Atlantic bloc. This idea has been discussed at the high-

est levels, and Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili has commented on it publicly.

It is quite ridiculous that Euro-Atlantic integration and NATO membership have become second-level foreign policy priorities for the key Presidential candidates. Unlike in previous election campaigns, NATO integration is not being presented as the one bright star lighting the political path of Georgia. The drive to achieve NATO membership has diminished considerably, and the contrary policy of Eurasian integration is emerging as most viable option at public opinion level. However, in spite of this the institutionalisation of NATO integration requirements is going ahead. Georgia will be contributing to NATO's Rapid Deployment Force from 2015 and also become a part of the East European Defence Initiative forum, possibly contributing a brigade.

In this respect, rumours that the current Georgian government will not pursue the country's NATO aspirations are groundless and far from reality.

Georgia is still seeking to join the Alliance as a full member, and is contributing much to enhancing Euro-Atlantic security structures, either by participating in the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan or promoting democratic values and liberties in its own country. The NATO issue is still a hot one, despite the efforts being made by persons abroad, and some inside the country, to undermine the public support for this.

The Russian pressure on Moldova and Ukraine, which has even gone as far as imposing trade wars on them, and the forcing of Armenia to join the Eurasian Economic and Custom Union indicate how grieved The Kremlin is over the possibility that it might lose control of the post-Soviet territories. Taking into account President Putin's unpredictability, this presents dangers for Georgia. It seems that the dark shadow of the 1920-1921 "Sovietisation" is falling on Georgia again under the guise of the Eurasian Economic Commonwealth.

The idea of a Eurasian economic union became reality in December 2010, when at the Summit of the Eurasian Eco-

nomonic Commonwealth the participating parties agreed to create a new geopolitical coalition, a Eurasian Union, which would act as a counterweight to the European Union. In October 2011 an agreement was signed on the creation of a CIS Free Trade Zone, which would include Ukraine, the most problematic nation from The Kremlin's point of view, as it sees Ukraine as the biggest obstacle to its fulfilling its strategic goals. During that summit Vladimir Putin declared that the plan to set up the broader Eurasian Union was now being implemented. This entity would have three key pillars: *passport control relaxation, visa-free movement and a common currency.*

Putin has appointed ex-Foreign Economic Relations Minister Dr. Sergey Glaziev as his Political Advisor on Reintegration Affairs, and this clearly indicates that The Kremlin is intending to push ahead with its reintegration of the ex-Soviet space for as long as Vladimir Putin and his team are in power. According to credible sources, The Kremlin is pursuing a secret operational strategy for re-uniting the Eurasian space



by 2025. In classical geopolitics this would be referred to as its **Heartland** space. This reintegration, it is said, will be achieved in four stages. These are:

First Stage: the formation of a geopolitical "nucleus" between 2009 and 2012 – the key members of this "nucleus" will be Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, with the probable semi-inclusion of Armenia;

Second Stage: the first wave of enlargement, between 2013 and 2015 – in this period the geopolitical entity will be enlarged through the incorporation of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia as a full member, the economic and financial resources of the Union being increased;

Third Stage: the second wave of enlargement, between 2015 and 2020 – this envisages incorporating Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In this period a new reintegration model will be pursued, involving the development of common policies (mainly foreign policy), a common currency and common passport pro-

vision;

Fourth Stage: the complete reunion of Eurasia, between 2020 and 2025 – the plan envisages setting up a supranational collegial structure to be the authority within the Union and control macroeconomic regulation. By 2025 the Union would have a common currency and central bank and sub-projects such as those of the EU. It is also predicted that by 2025 the Eurasian Union's GDP will be \$5.7 trillion, which would make it the fourth largest economy in the world after China, expected to be the leader by that date, the USA and India. Russia's is currently sixth, after those of the USA, China, India, Japan and Germany.

This is the only scenario The Kremlin considers desirable. Georgia has a pivotal function in these plans. The Georgian public should be very careful that we do not end up going "Back to the USSR".

Associate Professor, IB Euro-Caucasian University

The GT Azri Strategic Studies Centre

The Georgian Defence System: To Be or Not To Be !!!!!

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

The Georgian proverb claims: "an oath is real but its purpose is strange", and this is a good description of the current national defence system. After nine years of abnormal political pressure on the Armed Forces of Georgia, in which the Clausewitzian maxim 'Government-Army-Society' was trampled on, the new government's approach to the Army and its problems should have been more reasonable.

Nominating the experienced politician Irakli Alasania as Defence Minister was a solid indication that the new government would introduce proper reforms and modernise the Armed Forces to at least NATO capability standards. All the ground was prepared to accomplish this mission, in a short period of time, but a year has now passed. What has been the concrete result of these reforms? On the basis of the very recent information on mass food poisoning amongst Armed Forces personnel, for at least the second time in the recent past, the complete non-transparency of human resource

management and the accidents which have occurred, we can conclude – in one word, nothing!

Certainly it is premature to state this so categorically, however the accidents have demonstrated that the latent erosion which began under previous minister Bachana Akhalaia and his predecessor David Kezerashvili is unfortunately still present, although not perhaps as grave in scale as it was then. It is now not known what the substantial reform of the national defence system, and the reshuffling of its structure, doctrinal principles, capabilities, personnel management and logistics, formally announced by the current leadership is actually intended to accomplish. All that can be observed is that the Ministry of Defense has been transformed into a new "Order of Knight's Templars", a clandestine organisation.

The outbreak of food poisoning in the Army indicates that normal defence preparation measures at national level are not being followed. The readiness level of the combat units is predominantly high, but there are serious problems in civilian personnel selection and



operational planning and with regard to the restoration of justice for those servicemen who were purged during Saakashvili's authoritarian regime and forced to leave the Armed Forces. There were more than 8,000 of these, all of whom are suffering social strife and seek elementary redress. These problems are being addressed with little enthusiasm, or completely ignored, by the current leadership of the Ministry of Defense.

It is a great pity that ex-Mukhrovani 'mutiny' military professionals are still considered by the senior officials of the MoD and General Staff to be "criminals" or non-military, although the Parliament of Georgia has granted them the status of political prisoners. It

is a great pity that many professionals who have been nurtured and trained at high-level Western military institutions and are true and skillful professionals are working outside their professions and socially unprovided for. This happens despite the fact that very serious and troublesome concerns, challenges and risks are undermining the national security of the state called Georgia. The Jihad videotape incident, the Caucasus Islamic Emirate's statement on joining the Global Jihad, the semi-investigation of the Lopota incident, the simulated clashes between Orthodox Christians and local Moslems in the Georgian villages of Chola and Gamarjveba, the assassination of leader of the Abkhazian Jamaat Jury Gitsba in



Gagra, etc. underscore the supreme seriousness of the probability of an incursion of Islamist militants into Georgian territory. Another serious challenge derives from the civil strife and military conflict in Syria. It is little known in Georgia that over 3 Islamist militants of Georgian origin are fighting side by side with other Islamists in the military formations opposed to the Assad regime. One of the key leaders of the Islamic Opposition Coalition, the warlord and Commander in Chief of the North Front Abu Omar Al-Shishani, is Georgian in origin and another prominent warlord, Abu Al-Banat, is from Dagestan in the North Caucasus. There are even Georgian Moslem combatants in Afghanistan, fighting on the side of the

Taliban.

All the above-mentioned indicates that the threat of a Syrian conflict spillover to the South and North Caucasus is very real, and if the Assad regime is toppled and the rebels come to power thousands and thousands of ex-combatants with an Islamist orientation, with upgraded skills in combat operational planning, could enter the area and began to preach jihad among the population. This is another reason why it is supremely important to modernise and develop the Georgian Armed Forces to render them able to cope with the challenges the country faces. Associate Professor, IB Euro-Caucasian University The GT Azri Strategic Studies Centre

SOCAR'S MULTI-FUNCTIONAL BUILDING OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR



AMAZING SOCAR-MCDONALDS ON THE BLACK SEA COAST IN BATUMI

Georgian fruit exporters welcome return of Russian market

By EKA GAZDELIANI, GT

Georgian agricultural products are returning to the Russian market, following the readmittance of Borjomi mineral water, wine and other alcoholic drinks.

Head of the Food National Agency of Georgia Zurab Chekurishvili and supervisor of the Russian Veterinarian and Sanitary Control Service Sergei Dankvert have signed an agreement which states that from October 14 there will be no limitation on Georgia exporting agricultural products to Russia, provided they are subject to sanitary control.

Citrus fruit, cob nuts, grapes, apples, pears and quinces will be exported to Russia from Monday October 14. A great harvest of citrus fruit is expected this year, and the Ministry of Agriculture has already begun to prepare for it. Packaging enterprises are making ready and the government plans to open new facilities which make plastic boxes. The Ministry says that approximately 30 tangerine packinghouses will be working in Ajara and the citrus harvest will be more than 110,000 tonnes.

The Georgian Farmers Association is enthusiastic about these measures but says that logistics need to be improved. Head of the Association Nino Zambakhidze says that farmers are ready to export but it has not yet been worked out how they can do it.

"I do not think we will have something like the Vegetables Export Company, which helped farmers with logistics. This organisation does not function any more. We know the state and the farmers are ready, we simply do not know how it will be done. Georgian fruit used to be sent to Russia on bypass roads. Now we have a direct road, but improving relationships is another matter," stated Nino Zambakhidze.

Zambakhidze is calling for the establishment of cooperatives. "Farmers cannot export their products individually as they do not produce enough fruit individually. We have no such farmers. If anyone exports individually they will obtain most of their fruit from others. That's why we are holding discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture on this question," she said.

Georgian fruit is currently exported to Ukraine and Kazakhstan, but Zambakhidze thinks



it will have to reestablish itself in Russia. "It is very hard to plan something in advance, when the first year may be complicated, as Georgian products will have to settle themselves afresh on the market, and the logistics issues will have to be resolved first. But everything will be fine in the future," she stated.

New Georgian Products is one company preparing to export to the Russian market. Its director Lado Vashalomidze has told The Georgian Times that it is waiting for an agreement from Russia.

"We have the strongest connections in Russia. Now we are waiting for their agreements, and everything will depend on the prices and conditions they offer. Based on these, we will decide the type and quantity of products to export," he told us.

New Georgian Products already exports to Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Moldova. It has now received orders for 300 tonnes of persimmons and 1,000 tonnes of tangerines. "We will inevitably export to Russia. We would like to be the first, the company most up to standard. The advantage of our products is that they

are marked, and correspond to all the relevant standards," said Vashalomidze, adding that low price and good quality distinguish Georgian products in Ukraine. He hopes the Russian market will prove successful for the company.

Minister of Agriculture Shalva Pipia has declared that the state will play a significant role in developing citrus exports.

"As soon as we had formed the new government we started working on opening up the Russian market. We took concrete steps and concluded agreements. As a result of orderly work, wine

and alcoholic drinks, mineral water and low-risk agricultural products will return to Russia step by step from this year onwards," he said.

Russia banned the import of Georgian wine, mineral water and agricultural products in 2006 due to the tense Georgian-Russian relations. The official reason for this prohibition was "low quality." At the beginning of 2013, after the government had changed in Georgia, negotiations on reversing this policy began again. At the end of May Borjomi mineral water and alcoholic drinks reentered Russia.

6 Weeks to Go East Meets West - European Union Summit Vilnius, Lithuania

Continued from p. 8

"If we are able to initial those important Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia at the Vilnius Summit, the (European) Commission has made it very clear that they will do their utmost in way of legal translation of those documents to be signed before the end of the term of the duty of this Commission", Fule was quoted as saying in an interview with RFE/RL's Armenian service.

No question, Georgia will be ready to initial the AA documents come November 28th and 29th. Georgia's Prime Minister Ivashvili said that Tbilisi aims to sign the Association Agreement in spring 2014 following its initialing in Vilnius.

The Eastern Partnership - Now

The first Eastern Partnership Summit was held in the Czech Republic in May 2009 and the second in September 2011. Now it is Lithuanian's turn. As the world has changed, so have some of the member states present in Prague some four years ago.

Belarus

Belarus was one of the signatories of the Eastern European Partnership in Prague but was represented by its Deputy Foreign Minister. The other signers were all Presidents of their countries.

Since then Belarus has shown little interest in becoming a fully fledged member of the EU and no interest in the spirit of the

accord, which calls for good governance, democracy, the promotion of reforms and/or encouraging people to people contact. Belarus' visa policies remain locked in old Soviet thinking.

Belarus is tied to Russia, its main trading partner. This common language country accounts for more than 50% of its imports and some 30% of its exports, according to EU estimates. Its economy is dominated by the state sector, which generates nearly 75% of GDP.

Alexander Lukashenko has been in power since 1994, making him the longest serving leader in Europe. Political parties are marginalized, and do not play a major role in the legislative process.

This authoritarian state is not likely to adopt the spirit of EU integration any time soon. Come November, Lukashenko will not be in Vilnius, unless he's looking for Matryoshka dolls for his number one supporter outside Belarus - Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

Azerbaijan

Last Wednesday saw the election of Ilham Aliyev to a third presidential term, he having replaced his father some ten years earlier. Observers have different opinions about the results of the election and its transparency.

One official observer was the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which said: "The 9 October election was undermined by limitations on freedoms of expression, assembly and association that did not guarantee a level playing field

for candidates. Continued allegations of candidate and voter intimidation and a restrictive media environment marred the campaign", <http://www.osce.org/odi-hr/elections/106901>

Europe is highly dependent on energy supplies from Russia, receiving some 25% of its needs from that source currently. It is seeking alternative sources from reliable partners as a Plan B to existing agreements. Thus Azerbaijan plays a significant role in the energy policy decisions of the EU, and is a key player in the geopolitics of the region. But what comes first, good governance or reliable energy supplies from this oil and gas rich central European nation?

The EU and Azerbaijan are currently negotiating an Association Agreement to succeed the PCA agreement of 1999. Look to Azerbaijan to be in Vilnius to flex its muscles with the decision makers over pending negotiations regarding gas supplies to Europe as well as discuss EU/Azerbaijan integration.

Moldova

Little landlocked Moldova, with a population of 3,600,000 and no exportable natural gas or oil reserves, is also scheduled to be in Vilnius. It may seem too insignificant for EU admission, like Croatia, but Russia seems to think it should be under its continuing sphere of influence, despite having no common border with mother Russia.

Recently Moldova suffered the same fate as Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Lithuania for

expounding a pro-Western attitude. Trade with Russia was suspended over exports deemed "a health hazard" by Russia, in this case wine. "The wine ban is a necessary step which we have undertaken reluctantly, but it is the only possible way of resolving the present situation," Russia's public health chief Gennady Onishchenko was quoted as saying by Interfax. A high-ranking Moldovan official, who asked not to be named, has stated that "Russia has a history of imposing bans to exercise political pressure on Moldova's sovereign choices".

Negotiations on the Association Agreement between the EU and Moldova were launched in early 2010, and were technically completed in June. Some countries take as long as 10 years to progress from intent to initial acceptance. Moldova too will be in Vilnius in late November, pen in hand, ready to initial the final Association Agreement documents leading to eventual EU membership.

Armenia

During the 1st week of September President of Armenia Serzh Sarkisian was in Moscow, all smiles with Vladimir Putin, each telling the other 'we will be one'. That ONE represents the Armenian President's decision to opt for the Russian Customs Union instead of the European Union. This decision came as a surprise to most political observers, as no hint of Sarkisian's intentions had reached Yerevan or European capitals.

Like the others who will be in Vilnius, Armenia has a long history within the former Soviet Union, and with Russia since it declared its independence in 1990. Armenia also has no land connection to Russia or the EU (unless Georgia, Turkey or Azerbaijan join)

Over the last month and a half much ink has been put to press over the Armenian decision to sign up with Russia. Sarkisian has listened to all the comments and come away with a simple 'this is what we are going to do'.

From the perspective of Russia, winning Armenia over, or getting it to surrender, is of little concern. Armenia represents as far west as Russia will probably succeed in garnering candidates for the non-consumer goods trading group of the Customs Union, and trade between Russian and Armenia will continue to grow. Harmonisation with Belarus and Kazakhstan will gain Armenia more economic turnover, but not on the scale which could have been expected had it committed to the West.

Armenia too will be in Vilnius, and at this point in time, President Sarkisian thinks he can have it both ways, commitment to the Customs Union one day and agreements with the European Union the next. It won't happen, Mr. President. Your country's future now lies with Russia.

Ukraine

Legend has it that Christianity was first brought to both Russia and Ukraine by Saint Andrew the Apostle. Russia and Ukraine

share many customs and traditions. Ukraine's state language is Ukrainian, but one in three citizens is a native Russian speaker.

Vladimir Putin, accompanied by Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church, was in Kiev earlier this year using the historical conversion of Kievan Rus to Christianity, an event which formed modern Russia and Ukraine, as an argument for the two nations to grow closer.

Over the summer Russia has used other means to try and convince Ukraine to turn a blind eye to the West and remain a bedfellow of Russia. The political pressure and economic offers coming from Moscow for this nation of 46,000,000 people have left President Victor Yanukovich at a crossroads prior to Vilnius.

Signals suggest that Ukraine wants to be part of modern day Europe. The EU has applied political pressure as well, and instructed Ukraine not to use selective judicial punishment as a tool of political suppression if it is interested in EU integration.

A month and a half from Vilnius, Ukraine is preparing itself for the true test of its future. The decision made by Kyiv will affect the lives of today's and tomorrow's unborn citizens and the future economic wellbeing of a country now suffering stagnation, and perhaps provide a leadership role for the 6th most populous European member state, ahead of Spain, in the future.

Ukraine will initial the Association Agreement in Vilnius, and plot a course towards Europe.

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Nikos Douglas Wood –Bringing His Gift to Our Gift

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT

The International Festival of Arts in Honour of Michael Tumanishvili –Gift –is on! Tbilisi has already begun welcoming shining stars of the “art galaxy” from all over the world. Yes, I just wrote “art galaxy”. No one can measure art, even though we can measure the perception of it. I don’t think we can consider the world of art less vast than the endless galaxy of bright, shining stars that brighten up our simple lives.

They say “earth” without “art” is just “eh”. I couldn’t agree more. If there was no art, life would be work, war, disease, food shopping, in other words life would be ‘just a bunch of Tuesdays’. This small word embodies a concept so deep that it not only makes the world a better place but is the essence of the world itself. Art is a simple activity for some and a lifestyle for others, but most importantly it’s a language that acknowledges no boundaries, religion nor ethnic origin, and it’s immortal. It’s out there; all we have to do is open our hearts, minds and lives to it, let it in and simply appreciate it. It’s the language which holds all peoples of the world together, brings the parts of the universe together; it’s what makes living on this “damaged” planet worthwhile.

While Gift is on artists from all over the world share their art with a Georgian audience. Théâtre Des Bouffes Du Nord and Peter Brook’s theatre company opened Gift Festival 2013 with the play *Le Costume* in the Shota Rustaveli State Theatre on October 13. During next two weeks Georgians will also enjoy Irina Brook’s “Dream Theatre”, Dmitry Krymov’s “Laboratory”, the Compagnie des Quindams Street Theatre, Stas Namin’s Music and Drama Theatre and the rock band Flowers, the Karagöz Turkish Shadow Theatre, the Panevėžys Theatre in honour of Justas Miltinis, Guy Masterson’s Mono and beautiful Georgian plays such as *The Dress*, *Amour* and others.

Another event will be the premiere of a short film, “Seagull Boy”, by Nikos Douglas Wood. He is the outstanding British director’s - Hilary Wood’s

grandson. When I learned Nikos was coming to the festival to show this film I got all pumped up. I know Hilary’s art well, and it filled me with expectation of Nikos’ production. He was in fact the very first guest to arrive here. Brits seem cold and stuck up to me, but I must admit that Nikos destroyed that stereotype. It must be his outstanding roots, the amazing Hilary Wood blood, that has turned this Englishman into a humble, polite and friendly guy. So it was a pleasure sitting next to him in the Tumanishvili Theatre foyer and interviewing him for The Georgian Times.

Let’s start with your professional background. How did you start making movies?

Well I always thought that I wanted to be an actor, that’s why I went to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. The course only took me a year.

Did you fulfill your acting dream?

After graduation acting didn’t feel dangerous enough for me, it somehow felt too safe. Having Hilary Wood as my grandmother, and having a directing and acting background in my family, I wanted to do something different.

Like what?

I had always been fascinated by photography. It had always sparked my interest as a child. So I decided to apply to the Metropolitan Film School and do a BA. It’s a two year course. I took the Practical Film Making Course. I had the best time of my life finding the profession that I really wanted to be in. It was wonderful. I am a lucky person to have found what I love and be doing it as a job at the same time.

Tell me about your shorts. What are they about?

The one here was my graduation film, it’s called “Seagull Boy”. It has Hilary Wood and Mel Raido in it. It’s based on a real event which happened to me and Hilary. We were sitting somewhere having a drink and a young man came up to us screaming like a seagull. We felt that he was joining in our celebration, since it was a happy moment for us, but we were wrong. He disappeared, but we found out later that he lived opposite us. He was autistic,

he would never speak, he would only cry. He did all the things you will see in the film.

It was wonderful and important to me to have Hilary in the film as my own grandmother. Having Mel and Hilary play opposite each other was like a magic.

What fascinates you as a director?

The way we communicate with each other. No matter where we are, we all end up living very busy lives. I’m trying to make sure that in all these close connective relationships we speak and listen to each other properly. I want my films to be about people connecting and communicating with each other in the different worlds they are in. I think this makes the most interesting stories.

Do you feel completely fulfilled by the film?

It has taken me about two years to make. It is in its final form now. Like I said, it was my graduation film, and I rewrote and remade it many times. Looking at the first version, with all these magical moments which were not connected with each other, and looking at it now, it is just a wonder to see. We changed it until we got it to the point it was meant to be. Only after that did I want to show it to everyone and see what they say. And here I am premiering it!

It’s very hard to find the money to make either short or feature films here in Georgia. How is it in Britain?

Film making is very expensive in London too. People don’t invest in you unless your name is already out there, especially when it comes to feature films. You have to have a track record. You have to work hard to establish yourself, and then the funds come.

What’s your track record?

I made a couple of other short films at university. What was common to all these films was that I was able to use some brilliant young actors, all trained by my grandmother Hilary Wood. Very few new film directors are able to call on actors from the National Theatre or those like Mel Raido who already have an international film career.

How far are you from making a feature film?



I can’t be sure. I do have plans. I’m going to do quite a bit of shooting, a TV series as well. So we shall see.

This is your first Gift. What are your expectations?

This is my first big international festival. I am happy to be here, it’s an absolute pleasure to take part in Gift after a 4 year break.

How does Georgian art look to Hilary’s eyes?

The impression I got from Hilary’s words throughout all these years is that Georgians

will work and work until they get it done. You have amazing classical actors. This country is full of talented artists. It was always wonderful to hear about them and about the authentic martial energy that makes Georgian art so amazing and exquisite.

Are you planning to bring Georgian art into your films?

Absolutely! I do have an idea for a film I would shoot here. Roughly speaking, I would like to be given the freedom to do it within the next 5

to 10 years.

You must be aware of this year’s programme. What do you think about Gift 2013?

All these great performances from abroad, as well as the Georgian productions, are just amazing. It sounds like a Christmas cake that has come early for me and artistically I can’t wait to have it. It is such a rush being able to celebrate this art parade with these amazing people here in Georgia, which has been in my blood since I was a child.

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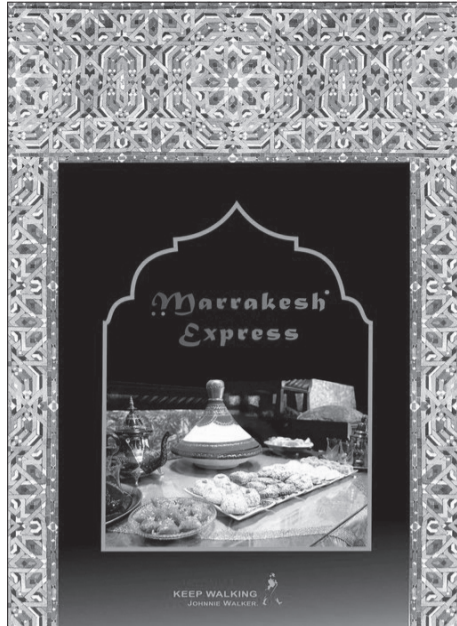
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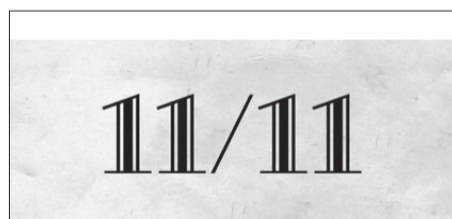
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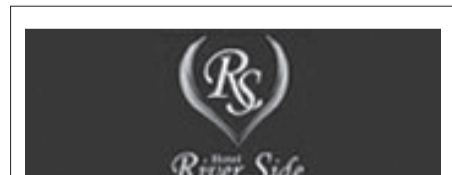
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