

The Georgian Times

NO 1 NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA THE GEORGIAN TIMES MEDIA HOLDING

No 31 (1522) Wednesday, November 27, 2013 Weekly Newspaper, International Edition - Published by "The Georgian TIMES" Media Holding Since 1993 www.geotimes.ge



Cohabitation is Over.. What is Next?

The noisy and notorious 'Cohabitation' process has ended. The ruling Georgian Dream is now in sole charge, as both a President and a Prime Minister nominated by that coalition are in post and performing their duties.



On p. 2-12

Russia Reinforces Anti-NATO Military Rhetoric and Activity

On p. 4

The Former President's Farewell Gift: Georgian Citizenship

On p. 6

Economic Growth: Expectation and Reality

On p. 11

Legal Protection Against the Georgian Mentality

On p. 11

The Georgian Times Media Holding Celebrates 20th Anniversary!



From November 27, 1993 until today we have "Done what we know". During these 20 years presidents and governments have changed, and so have our editors in chief, journalists and correspondents. But our main principle has remained unchanged: we have documented all the ongoing processes in Georgia, so that we can gain the love and trust of the reader.

On p. 3

NEWSLETTER



Georgia

Country of life



Ukraine and Armenia Have Retreated From Brussels – Who Will Be Next???

Recent events in Ukraine, where disturbances have broken out over signing a Free Trade Agreement with and becoming an Associate Member of the EU, have demonstrated that EU enlargement is still considered by the Kremlin to be the key challenge to its national interests. Two nations, Armenia and, at least for the time being, Ukraine, have had to bow to Russia's third party influence.

On p. 3

Cohabitation is Over... What is Next?

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

The noisy and notorious 'Cohabitation' process has ended. The ruling Georgian Dream is now in sole charge, as both a President and a Prime Minister nominated by that coalition are in post and performing their duties.

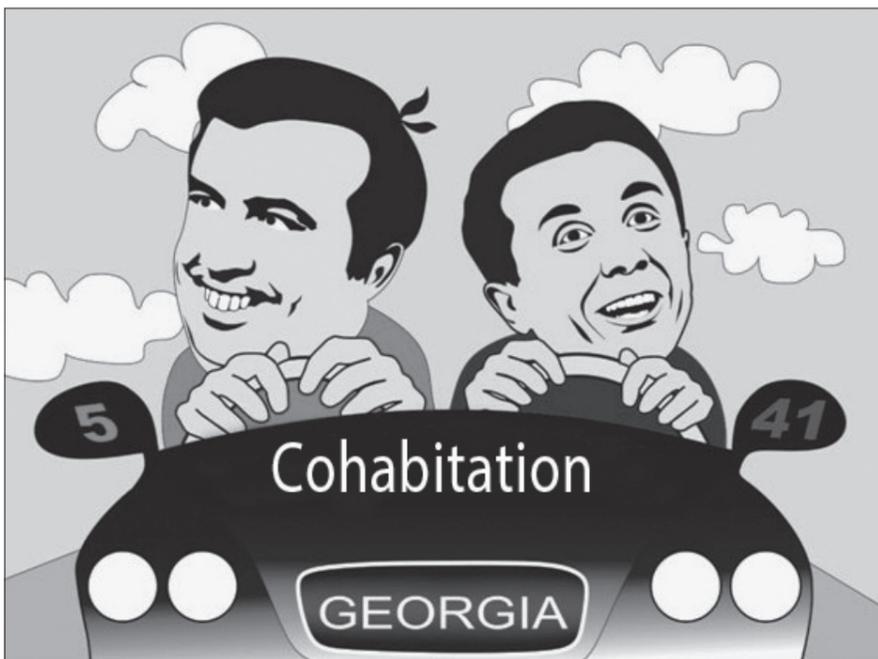
Former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, who won the parliamentary elections in 2012 and sent Mikheil Saakashvili's party into opposition has now kept the promise he made at that time and left politics – or as he puts it, he has gone into the civil sector. Member of his team say that Ivanishvili has performed a political miracle, but his opponents claim that he is now going to dictate policy from behind the scenes, without being publicly accountable.

On November 20th the Georgian Parliament, at an extraordinary session, approved a new government programme and declared its confidence in the government led by new Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili. 93 MPs supported the motion of confidence and 19 opposed it. The MPs of former President Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement boycotted the vote. Thus 31-year old Irakli Gharibashvili, who had been Interior Minister since October 25, 2012, became the effective head of the Government. On November 21 newly elected President Giorgi Margvelashvili signed a decree officially appointing Gharibashvili as Prime Minister.

The Cabinet is almost unchanged, the majority of Bidzina Ivanishvili's ministers having been retained. The new Interior Minister is former Tbilisi police Chief Alexander Chikaidze.

There are 150 seats in the Georgian parliament, 85 of which are occupied by members of the Georgian Dream coalition. The United National Movement has 52 seats, with the remaining 13 MPs being from various minor parties. When the future PM presented his new programme to the UNM opposition on November 19 a sharp confrontation took place. His opponents, more experienced in politics, did their best to put the future prime minister in an awkward position by asking strictly professional questions and managed to provoke him. The future PM was already quite nervous, and his tension sometimes transformed into aggression towards his well-prepared opponents. Gharibashvili pointed his finger at the UNM members and blamed them for the mistakes of the previous government.

Gharibashvili started his speech to parliament on the following day by expressing gratitude to Bidzina Ivanishvili, who, in his words, "played a crucial role in the political life of Georgia, achieved a peaceful change of power through democratic elections and implemented fundamental changes in the country". Gharibashvili, who has a



longstanding close relationship with Ivanishvili, said that will always take the outgoing PM's advice.

During the presentation Irakli Gharibashvili often tried to avoid answering direct questions but at the same time made accusations against the National Movement and the former administration. For example, when asked how he was going to solve the problems

rage at the low level of the economy, I think that we do not have a catastrophic situation. According to the International Monetary Fund, in recent months there has been an improvement in the economy. Our team is efficient, and can handle these problems easily."

Gharibashvili said that one of the causes of the declining economy was the tenseness of the

they should not be taken seriously.

Gharibashvili said that the main achievement of the 2012 parliamentary elections was the return of freedom to Georgia, as citizens are now free to express their opinions and the so-called National Democracy movement, which was just a facade of democracy, was based on a lie and the National Movement was a

ment which has presided over one of the most unsuccessful periods in the country's history, you are the government, which has admitted a budget deficit of hundreds of millions and practically halted economic growth; accordingly, there is no doubt that you will not be able to enlist the support of the minority," he added.

Not much time was devoted to discussing foreign policy. Asked about relations with Russia, Gharibashvili said: "We have not changed our foreign policy. You know very well that any provocation by Russia – be it moving the borders or some-

UNM MP Petre Tsiskarishvili asked Gharibashvili about the "pressure and blackmail" put on Ukraine by Russia prior to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership summit. He said that next week Georgia will be initialling an Association Agreement with the EU, and can expect that Russia will increase its pressure on Georgia to abandon its European aspirations. Gharibashvili responded, "Our foreign policy is the choice of our people ... We believe that this is the only right way, and Georgia's future lies in the pursuit of the EU and NATO. Of course, this may not happen today or tomorrow, but we have to



thing else – will meet with an immediate and severe response. Almost all members of

move towards that goal consistently and gradually ... We should promote the strengthening of democratic institutions in Georgia and prove to the civilized world that we really deserve to become a member country of the European Union and NATO.

"I really do not see any risks. You have given the examples of Ukraine and Moldova, but they are much more dependent on Russia than we are ... I am forced to remind you that it would have been better if you had been more critical of your own team at the time they were selling many of our strategic assets to Russian companies. So, from the point of view of foreign policy there is no change, and we have clearly stated we that will firmly continue to pursue the path to the EU and NATO".

Commentators gave the PM's speech to parliament different assessments. "If the National Movement had had the same opponents they themselves have now become, and if these MPs had asked questions about painful subjects with the same interest and aggression, the UNM would have been more successful and could still have been in power today," said Kakhi Kakhishvili. He added, "Despite his political inexperience Irakli Gharibashvili will be a good Prime Minister. He has a lot of positive qualities: he sticks to his principles, has a clear vision, is communicative and noble. I have had the opportunity of working with him for a short time and he left the right impression on me. He has one shortcoming – he is very young – but despite that, I think he will cope with the job".

Continued on p. 12



of slow economic growth and tax revenue shortfalls as Prime Minister, Gharibashvili said that the government has a "concrete plan", but refrained from giving further details. "None of our promises will be left unfulfilled. We have already done more than we initially promised the population," was all he said. However he then added, "We are correcting the mistakes made by you – the previous government, when you really ruined the economy; you tried to develop the economy through temporary stimulants." He then added, "As for your concern and out-

political cohabitation which had existed. He urged United National Movement MPs not to try and scare investors by presenting Georgia's situation in a negative light.

When asked which country he thought of as a suitable model for economic development in Georgia, Gharibashvili said: "We can take examples from many countries, but we are not going to undertake Singaporisation." He also said that questions about the details of specific laws were "not serious," saying that if such questions were merely designed to test this level of knowledge

neo-fascist body. He said that the people were afraid of Mikheil Saakashvili due to things like the horrors which were taking place in the prisons, the raping of people with brooms and truncheons. When asked to name his main failure as Minister of the Interior, Gharibashvili said that "there was no failure."

In their turn, the UNM MPs criticized Gharibashvili for taking an aggressive tone towards them. At the end of the hearing Giorgi Gabashvili said that adopted such a tone was "totally irresponsible."

"For us, you are the govern-

the government, including the Prime minister, have delivered very strict and severe reactions to these".

The only point on which the National Movement and Gharibashvili agreed was that it had been a "mistake" to release persons convicted of spying for Russia from prison. Gharibashvili stated that he had not agreed with putting people convicted of espionage on the list of "political prisoners" released as part of the January 2013. "I was against it, and I openly protested against it. Now I can confirm this," said Gharibashvili.

The Georgian TIMES

1 English-Language Newspaper in Georgia

First published in 1993.

The Founder and the President Malkhaz Gulashvili. Tel: (+995) 577 461 046

The Georgian Times Media Holding.

12, Kikodze str, Tbilisi, Georgia. Tel: (+995 32) 2934405,

E-mail: office@geotimes.ge; http://www.geotimes.ge

Publisher:

Nana Gagua

Tel: (+995) 555 293 003

E-mail:

gul@geotimes.ge

Executive Editor:

Emma Bairamova

Tel: (+995) 593 999 262

E-mail:

editorinchief@geotimes.ge

Deputy Editor:

Dali Bzhalava

Tel: (+995) 593 337 334

E-mail:

editor@geotimes.ge

Director:

Kakha Maskharashvili

Tel: (+995) 551 501 313

E-mail:

director@geotimes.ge

Marketing Director:

Irma Kvachantiradze

Tel: (+995) 593 314 105

E-mail:

marketing@geotimes.ge

Contributions to The Georgian TIMES are welcome. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item, ect. please contact; Tel/fax: (+995 32) 2934405

The Georgian Times Media Holding Celebrates 20th Anniversary!

From November 27, 1993 until today we have “Done what we know”. During these 20 years presidents and governments have changed, and so have our editors in chief, journalists and correspondents. But our main principle has remained unchanged: we have documented all the ongoing processes in Georgia, so that we can gain the love and trust of the reader.

It has not been easy to walk the hard path of journalism, to tell the real truth. Despite the love of our readers we have also had to cope with the obduracy of the enemy which has pursued us over the last nine years. We have fallen several times, but always managed to rise again!

We have seen everything over the last 20 years: recognition, success, an army of grateful readers, exclusives, hard-hitting articles, investigations and disclosures... and we have also seen financial police in the editorial offices of the newspaper, police searches, court cases, advocates, prosecutors and finally the arrest of our president and his juvenile son on the basis of false National Movement allegations. Our family of journalists went beyond being even a family and served the country like ordinary soldiers. So did their colleagues and “companions on arms” everywhere – editors, journalists, correspondents, photographers, the whole journalistic collective.



Today everything is the same as it has always been, despite everything. The Georgian Times Media Holding, which over the years has printed a lot of journals and magazines, now once again publishes the English language newspaper The Georgian Times alongside the quadrilingual website www.geotimes.ge and runs the GT press club. But we have everything ahead of us still! We got back on our feet recently, for the umpteenth time, and most importantly we are still defending the interests of the country and are still ordinary soldiers defending their country!

The heads of The Georgian Times Media Holding, Malkhaz Gulashvili and Nana Gagua, express their deep gratitude to all our staff, regardless of their status, with whom we have worked from 1993 till today, and promise that our slogan will remain unchanged - “We Do What We Know”!

Ukraine and Armenia Have Retreated From Brussels – Who Will Be Next????

By Dr. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

Recent events in Ukraine, where disturbances have broken out over signing a Free Trade Agreement with and becoming an Associate Member of the EU, have demonstrated that EU enlargement is still considered by the Kremlin to be the key challenge to its national interests. Two nations, Armenia and, at least for the time being, Ukraine, have had to bow to Russia's third party influence.

At the last moment, the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) rejected the package of law changes which the EU stated were a prerequisite for Associate Membership. By doing so, they prevented Ukraine receiving the rest of the membership basket.

These law changes were linked to the three main political requirements Ukraine must have in place before entering the European Union. These are:

- Reforming election procedures and regulations and improving the election environment. The EU wants to see MPs elected at regional level under a more transparent voting system;

- Reshuffling the court system to bring it into line with international standards;

- Giving prisoners the option of being sent abroad for rehabilitation, a stipulation connected with the imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko, which the EU feels is politically motivated.

The ruling Party of the Regions, led by President of Viktor

Yanukovich, has refused to accept these changes, even though this goes against its own government's decision on 18 September 2013 to "prepare for the acceptance of Ukraine as an Associate Member of the EU", and has deferred the signing of any other agreement between Ukraine and the EU, particularly that involving nuclear energy, offered as part of the Associate Membership package. Officially the Ukrainian government's position is that it must take into account its membership of the CIS and further promote economic cooperation with Russia. However this is the same Ukraine which has been economically blackmailed by Russia more than once, having an economic blockade and even an embargo on Ukrainian cargo being imposed upon it, and Russia has also suspended restructuring Ukraine's energy debt. This is claimed to be almost \$2 billion (\$800 million for consuming Russian gas and \$1.2 billion for consuming Russian oil products).

Just 10 days before the Vilnius EU Summit a CIS Summit was held in Saint Petersburg, at which the Ukrainian delegation, led by Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov, met Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who is believed to have had a very tough talk with his Ukrainian counterpart. A similar high-level meeting was recently held in Sochi between Presidents Yanukovich and Putin, at which the Ukrainian side was offered a package of special economic arrangements like low price energy, a privileged trading regime, etc.



It seems that very soon both Ukraine and Armenia will be proposed as members of the Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union, the Russian-led alternative blocs to the EU. In its turn, the Ukrainian government has proposed setting up a trilateral Russia-Ukraine-EU ad hoc working group, or commission, to resolve the troublesome and delicate problems which have arisen between the three parties. This is a strange proposal, as it is both unrealistic and contains hidden indications that the Kremlin has been pressuring the Ukraine to step back from EU integration.

The fierce geopolitical clash between the EU and Russia over the Eurasian "Heartland" and

"Rimland" on the Eurasian borders is now becoming very evident. Azerbaijan, theoretically another EU aspirant, is not yet ready to comply with the Associate Membership criteria and Moldova is in midst of the battle. Only Georgia amongst the original post-Soviet aspirant states is still drifting towards EU integration. Moldova's candidacy for Associate Membership is being promoted by the EU itself, which has offered free entry for Moldovan wines and agricultural products. Furthermore, 50% of the trade turnover of the separatist Moldovan region of Transnistria is accounted for by trade with EU members, even though the region is allied with Russia. However, the Commu-

nist Party of Moldova, a relatively "mild" pro-Russian political movement, is leading in the opinion polls prior to next year's parliamentary elections. Certainly, like Ukraine, Moldova will be blackmailed by Russia. It will suspend the supply of energy at acceptable low prices and the high migration levels from Moldova, which more than 500,000 people leave each year, is another very strong argument for reversing the country's position on EU integration.

The EU's own attitude towards the post-Soviet nations' aspirations to integrate with it is also now very unclear. A recent negotiation between the Ukrainian government and the IMF leadership resulted in the latter

refusing to provide a loan to cover Ukraine's debts to Russia. However the EU, which once promoted the accession or at least association of former Soviet states, expressed a reluctance to provide any kind of financial backing to help Ukraine meet the "Russian challenge".

This same problem could in fact arise in Georgia, as the country is still dependent on imported energy; about 75% of Georgia's energy comes from Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation due to low levels of domestic resources, and this makes Georgia's "European integration" aspirations vulnerable to pressure from its energy suppliers. Moreover, political pressure will be applied over the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose political and economic integration into the CIS and Customs Union membership are being promoted by Russia, which regards them as independent states. A new state structure has recently been proposed in Abkhazia, in which it would be divided into three administrative entities, Abkhazia proper, the Mingrelia Autonomous Republic and the Svanetian Autonomous Region. This threatened dismemberment of Georgian territory by its de facto rulers is another attempt to influence the Georgian side to halt moves towards EU integration, and such pressures will only be reinforced in the months and years to come.

Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia, Associate Professor, IB Euro-Caucasus University; Director, Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Studies

Russia Reinforces Anti-NATO Military Rhetoric and Activity

By Dr. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that his country is going, in the near future, to establish a joint air defence system with Armenia and Kazakhstan. Putin is said to believe that such cooperation increases the defence potential of Russia and its allies, contributing to peace and stability in the Eurasian region. "We will expand mutual cooperation with our partners and allies, focusing first of all on the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Commonwealth of Independent States," he was quoted as saying. In addition to that, the Russian president stressed that the Russian-Belarus international strategic exercises "West-2013" had been held successfully this year and that efforts to create regional army groupings, with the participation of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, were being made.

Moscow and Minsk signed an agreement on the joint protection of the Russia-Belarus airspace and the creation of an integrated regional air defence network in February 2009. Current Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said this April that a number of Su-27SM3 fighter jets were to be put on alert at the Lida airbase in Belarus. Russia will also deliver four battalions of S-300 surface-to-air missiles to Belarus next year, in addition to the Tor-M2 air defence batteries previously deployed there.

Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on the creation of a joint regional air defence system in January 2013, and this has been submitted to the Russian State Duma for ratification. Once approved, the agreement will create a basis for ensuring the airspace security of the two countries' mutual border. Once it is implemented the two sides will also exchange secret information on air defence issues. The agreement includes the supply of ten S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems from Russia to Kazakhstan pro bono. A similar agreement with Armenia is also planned, but in this case such a system could only have the status of a unified system due to the

lack of a common border between Armenia and Russia.

The proposed common Russia-Armenia-Kazakhstan air defence network will reportedly comprise five Air Force units, 10 air defence units, five technical service and support units and one electronic warfare unit. It will be part of the integrated air defence network of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia has also announced plans to set up a regional air defence network with members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, a regional security bloc which also includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

All this suggests that the Russian side is actually going to set up a new, modern collective defence system at regional and global levels. This will strengthen the concept of a Eurasian geopolitical identity and promote the new Eurasian Community. The components of the system will be three key geopolitical institutions:

- The Collective Security Treaty Organisation – the military alliance of Eurasian nations which has created the so-called "Forward Defence" strategy. The agreement on the creation of a unified CSTO defence system was sealed back in 1995, and will

bring together Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine;

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – the collective security organisation consisting of the Eurasian nations plus China. This body is designed to combat the common threats of terrorism and cyber-terrorism;

- The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – the old Eurasian integration modality endorsed by the Russian Federation which united post-Soviet nations during the transition period, prior to the development of the common Eurasian space. Georgia left the CIS due to the Russia-Georgia 2008 war but is being pressed by The Kremlin to return.

The common Air Defense System is primarily designed to deter a possible threat perceived by Russia to reside in the Euro-Atlantic community's analogical Collective Air Defence Shield. This derives from the Missile Defence Feasibility Study launched after the 2002 Prague NATO Summit. In April 2007, NATO's European allies called for a NATO missile defence system, which would complement the American national missile defence system, to protect Europe from missile attacks.



NATO's decision-making North Atlantic Council then held consultations on missile defence, the first meeting concerning this topic at such a senior level. During its 2012 Chicago Summit NATO leaders declared that this NATO missile defence system had reached interim capability, which means that its basic command and control capability had been tested and installed at the NATO Allied Air Command Headquarters in Ramstein, Germany, while NATO Allies were still providing sensors and interceptors to connect to the system. It also meant that US ships with anti-missile interceptors in the Mediterranean Sea, and a Turkey-based radar system, had been put under NATO command at the German base.

In addition to this there is the American National Missile Defense system, intended to shield the entire country against incoming missiles such as intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBMs). On 17 September 2009 President Obama announced that the planned deployment of long-range missile defence interceptors and equip-

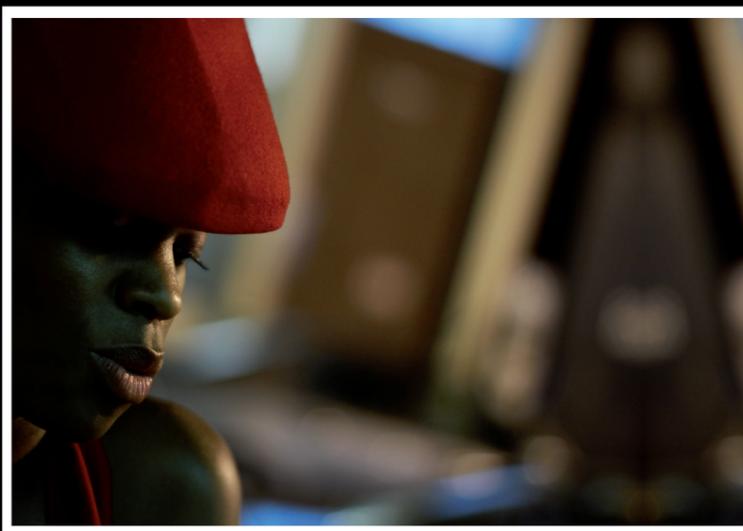
ment in Poland and the Czech Republic was not to go forward, and that a defence against short- and medium-range missiles using AEGIS warships would be deployed instead of long-range distance missiles. Nevertheless, the significant American National Missile Defense system is an effective counterpart to the NATO system and seen as equally a threat by Russia.

A new wave of Eurasian and Euro-Atlantic defence confrontation has already started. This cleavage was the real and not formal pretext for Ukraine and Armenia's recent refusal to pursue EU Associate Membership status. The military confrontation between CSTO and NATO over the deployment of each other's anti-missile defence systems carries the real risk of provoking further clashes between the EU and possible post-Soviet bloc members, which would be in effect a clash between Russia and the EU.

Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia, Associate Professor, IB Euro-Caucasus University; Director, Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Studies



Beka & Logic Project
Chillin' in Batumi



Rustaveli Theatre
December 10th 08:00 PM

Tickets available at Rustaveli Theatre Box Office



The concert is presented by Silknet



The Residence Dispute - For the People or the President?



By TATIA KAKIASHVILI, GT

The fate of the beautiful presidential palace on Avlabari is still unclear. The new government is still to decide who will use the luxurious palace.

President Margvelashvili has made his feelings clear. "At the Georgian Dream political council I proposed putting a University in this building", he says. He adds that has already discussed this with the Minister of Education, and that it has been decided that the Georgian-American University, which will begin operating in Tbilisi next year, will be based there. "This is a very interesting project, which will enable students to receive a highly professional education," said Margvelashvili.

The new is not going to live or work in the palace himself. He

has a strong opinion on the matter: he says that not he but the Georgian people should use the residence built with the people's money. Before being elected Margvelashvili stated that he would make do with a modest apartment on the tenth floor of the State Chancellery, which until now has been Bidzina Ivanishvili's meeting room, rather than the \$200 million plus palace built by his predecessor Mikheil Saakashvili. However this will be a temporary residence - a nineteenth century building in Atoneli Street in central Tbilisi, which a few years ago housed the U.S. Embassy, is being refurbished for use as a presidential residence. The repairs are due to be completed by May 2014.

Tina Khidasheli - like the vast majority of Members of Parlia-

ment - agrees that the palace was built with money stolen from the people and must be returned to them. In addition to housing the new university some of Tbilisi's museums could be moved into its halls. But in early November, during a meeting with students in Kvareli, outgoing president Saakashvili said that it would be unsuitable for this purpose.

"This is the President's house! It is not Misha's palace. As much as anyone says they are taking the building off me and returning it to the people, I want them to tell me: How can they do it?! Georgia did not have a palace for many centuries because the conqueror did not want it! This palace is a symbol of our statehood. I actually lived in a modest apartment, and have returned to the same, but the palace must remain. Browse well and you will see that it is no

place for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The building would be quite useless as a university too. This can only be the presidential palace, nothing else, because it is so constructed and it has not been adjusted to suit Misha".

Andro Barnovi from the National Movement also commented on the proposed change of use: "The [former] government built roads, schools and hospitals and maintained energy supplies. What they (the Georgian Dream) are doing is ridiculous and sad. How should we respond to this nonsense? This building was built for the administration of President and should function as such. Its location, architecture and interior arrangement are entirely designed so that the President's office can do its work without hindrance. This is a manifestation of the totally unacceptable

attitude by the new government to all the good work the previous government did," he said.

Construction of the Presidential Palace, initiated by Saakashvili, took place between 2004 and 2009. It was designed by Georgian architect George Batiashvili, who supervised the work until 2007, until the Italian architect and designer Michele De Lucchi, who later built the "Peace Bridge" in Tbilisi, took over. The majestic building is in the classical style, topped by a large dome, and decorated with Greco-Roman and Italian Renaissance features.

Saakashvili's residence could not be photographed by anyone, as all the approaches to it were guarded by the police and special forces and anyone attempting to take a camera in was confronted by the president's guards. They could only shoot it from afar, and even

then only after looking around to see that the coast was clear. However, for some foreign media figures, mostly Western ones, exceptions were made.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has reported that 6,319 historic landmarks are under threat as they have no official status. Whether the Avlabari palace is regarded as one of them is debatable. The debate revolves around what the actual function of the building is determined to be - could it only ever have been a presidential palace or could it, even in its original design, have been put to another public use? But as there is no suggestion that the palace will be demolished, it is very likely that it can be converted to public use, as a university or other such institution, with violating any local or international laws.

The Former President's Farewell Gift: Georgian Citizenship

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

Former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili has retired, but his initiative to simplify the process of granting Georgian citizenship to foreigners is still being discussed. Most criticize it, others pass over it in silence. Meanwhile, the new government is talking about introducing its own amendments to the law "On Citizenship" and stiffening the Georgian visa regime, while dreaming of the removal of visas to enter European Union countries.



The "distribution" of Georgian citizenships by the ex-leader of the country began when a few thousand Turkish citizens "of Georgian descent" were given Georgian passports simply for "preserving their love of their historical motherland".

On November 5 he went further, announcing that he was ready to give Georgian citizenship to those whose requests for citizenship had been turned down by Justice Ministry for "no obvious reason". He released this statement on his official Facebook page, saying that many people had lost their Georgian citizenship "due to obtaining the citizenship of other countries".

"In addition, foreign businessmen who have been working in Georgia for a long time, as well as businessmen who now intend to invest in the country, want to obtain Georgian citizenship. That is why we have decided to grant these people Georgian citizenship through a simplified procedure,

so that our country can be as integrated with the outside world as possible," the statement reads.

The next day long queues of applicants appeared at the presidential palace in Avlabari. People came from early morning and waited their turn for long hours. Their reasons for applying were different: they ranged from a mere wish to move to Georgia to uniting with their families.

Avtandil Gobozov, a Russian citizen in his mid-fifties, decided to come to live in Georgia as he had heard that it is a better country than his own. "I have relatives here, and I'd also like to stay here and bring my mother to live with me," he told GT.

Peter Mousa, 33, is an Egyptian who has been married to a Georgian citizen since July 2013. Based on his marriage he applied for the residency, but was rejected by the State Services Development Agency of the Justice Ministry. He then asked for a one-year multiple entry visa, but was

refused again. "I appealed against both decisions but still got no result. I hope the presidential initiative will let me stay in Georgia with my newly created family," he said.

For a week, from 6 to 12 November, citizens of different countries came to the president's administration with documents in their hands and hopes in their hearts. The number of aspirants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia, Egypt and other African and Asian countries increased daily, especially as the list of documents needed for the application was not long: a statement translated into Georgian and a certified passport copy.

The Georgian Young Lawyers Association regards Saakashvili's notion as an anti-state step. It has expressed doubt that all the people granted it until now have deserved citizenship for their "meritorious service" and added that the President never did such a thing before he was under threat

of losing his absolute power. Most Georgians also seem to think that this idea is a means of promoting him and giving him space to make a comeback. This view in fact gained so much currency that the head of the President's administration, Andro Barnov rushed to explain that Saakashvili was not granting citizenship to everyone - he had strict criteria, and examined each case separately before making a decision.

The impressive queues at the palace scared the Georgian government as well. On November 11 Minister of Foreign Affairs Maya Panjikidze threatened to make amendments to the law "On Citizenship" after President Margvelashvili's inauguration. The other members of the Georgian Dream coalition expressed their misgivings about this "mass distribution of Georgian citizenship", saying it would bring catastrophe.

A few hours later Andro Barnov announced that November

12 would be the last day for accepting documents. He explained this decision by citing the large number of applicants. He said they had not expected so many people to apply, so had decided to terminate the process as there was little time left to work on all the requests.

The initial figures were released a couple of days later: over 400 out of around 4,000 applicants had been given passports. Later this was corrected to 372. The President's Administration did not give any further explanation. This again caused long lines at the Avlabari palace, as people wanted to know whether they were among the "lucky 400". The administration directed them all to the Public Service Hall (PSH). Many foreigners rushed there.

Samvel Grigoryan, 37, born in Georgia, lost his Georgian passport when he took an Armenian one a few years ago. He told us that he had received a phone call from the presidential palace in-

forming him that he had been granted citizenship and needed to pay 20 GEL at the PSH to proceed.

A young man of around 21, who refused to give his name, said that he was from Azerbaijan. He showed us his residency card, saying that he has the right to live in Georgia legally but wants to get citizenship. "I am almost sure I will get it," he told GT before checking the results, though his good spirits dropped when the operator couldn't find his surname in the list sent to Public Service Hall by the administration.

One of the PSH staff told us that they had had two lists, sent at different times. "They are working on the lists and sending them to us gradually. We might get another part of it by the end of this week. So, whoever can't find himself in the list can call again at the end of November," she explained, adding that Georgian citizenship was mainly being granted to Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Turkish, American and Greek nationals with Georgian roots.

After the inauguration of President Margvelashvili on November 17 the government decided to tighten the visa regime with Asian and African countries. The visa-free policy with 118 countries will be revised and the number of days the visa is granted for, which must be requested in the application, will not exceed 30 instead of the previous 360. Only those who have obtained a Georgian visa previously will be able to apply for a multiple-entry visa, which will be valid for 90 days.

The immigration policy of the former government has been criticised for many reasons: whilst promoting tourism, it was also said to have created "an increasing number of social migrants from Asian and African countries" and made the country "a transit point for international human and drug trafficking".

* The names of the applicants have been changed on their request.



Georgia Attends International Tourism Fair in London

The Georgian National Tourism Administration has participated in the annual international tourism exhibition in London, World Travel Market (WTM) 2013. The Department of Tourism and Resorts of Adjara, the National Agency for Protected Areas, five tourism companies - Caucasus Travel, Visit Georgia, Georgia Travel, Explore Georgia and Geo Play Travel and the Holiday Inn hotel chain joined the National Tourism Administration on the Georgian stand.

New and existing promotional materials were presented, the information about Georgia being divided thematically – Culture, Wine and Culinary, Winter, Adventures and Summer. This manner of presentation helped visitors make a choice.

Giorgi Sigua, head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, said that participating in events of this kind contributes to the promotion of Georgia and will thus increase the number of people interested in the country.

“Increasing awareness of Georgia as a tourist destination in the international market is one of the most important tasks of the Georgian National Tourism Administration. Our participation in such exhibitions will help the private sector and directly contribute to fulfilling the country’s tourism potential and promoting its attractions, which will

attract more tourist flow from different countries”, he said.

WTM is the largest exhibition Georgia has been involved in since 2004. World Travel Market 2014 will take place on 3-6 November 2014.

“Every year we participate in 12-14 international and two local tourism exhibitions. One of the most important tourism fairs is the World Travel Market, which is always held in London, UK. This attracts visitors, tourism boards and businesses from around the world. Georgia has participated in it for several years, and the interest in our stand increases each year”, said Tamar Chikvaдзе, Deputy Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration.

The WTM 2013 Events Programme included speeches from influential figures in and around the travel industry who offered insights and invaluable up-to-date knowledge. This year saw an impressive 5% increase in participation in WTM, with the event opening its doors to more than 50,000 delegates over the four days. All visitor segments experienced growth, according to unaudited figures, with the WTM Buyers’ Club seeing a phenomenal 8% increase in attendance numbers. This increase in senior buyers will see the event facilitate more than £2 billion in industry deals. Other segments with increased visitor indicators included trade visitors (5%), international media (4%) and exhibitor



George Sigua, Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration

personnel (2%).

This year the first day of WTM, 4 November, was an exhibitor invitation-only day, which enabled exhibitors to hold discussions and negotiations with the buyers they wanted to do business with. The day proved a resounding success, with the invitation-only attendance up 12% on last year’s event, reaching almost 9,000 (precisely 8,916). The first morning’s Speed Networking session was phenomenally well attended, and saw a record number of both exhibitors (760) and WTM Buyers’ Club members (211) discussing business deals before the exhibition floor opened. 5 November saw 18,292 visitors attend WTM, a massive 7% increase on the second day of last year’s event. Tuesday is the busiest day of WTM, as it is the first day the event is open to the whole industry after the invitation-only Monday. 6 November saw a 5% increase in visitors, to 14,324, compared with the same day of WTM 2012. The final day was on a par with 2012, attracting 1% more visitors than in 2011. On the Thursday a second Speed Networking event took place, for the second year running, to facilitate post-exhibition deals. This attracted 370 exhibitors and almost 90 members of the WTM Buyers’ Club.

It should also be noted that the WTM Buyers’ Club (formerly the Meridian Club) has a global membership of more than 14,000 members, consistently attracts top-quality buyers and has a reputation for generating genuine

business leads. It involves senior international and regional buyers and decision makers. WTM nevertheless continues to focus on improving the quality of WTM Buyers’ Club, and all potential members undergo a thorough assessment process.

WTM 2012 generated £1,860 million of travel industry contracts, according to independent research conducted by Fusion Communications. It is owned by the world’s leading events organizer, Reed Exhibitions (RE), which organises a portfolio of other travel industry events, including the Arabian Travel Market and International Luxury Travel Market. In 2012, RE held more than 460 events in 36 countries, which brought together more than seven million people from around the world and generated billions of dollars in business.

The Senior Director of the World Travel Market, RE’s Simon Press, said: “I am absolutely delighted with the delegate attendance at WTM 2013. These figures demonstrate the power and importance of WTM to the industry and the role it plays in facilitating business for the sector. This resounding success can also be credited to the increased focus WTM has put on travel technology and luxury, with the Travel Tech Show and A Taste of ILTM debuting this year”. He added that WTM 2013’s business generation figure looks set to top £2 billion, making this year’s event the most successful of the 34 WTMs. The attendance figures will be audited by Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) in the New Year.



World Tourism Organisation Secretary-General Praises Tourism Development in Georgia

A summit of tourism ministers has been held in London, as part of the World Tourism Market (WTM), under the aegis of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration Giorgi Sigua delivered a speech at this summit. He presented Georgia's tourism development trends and sector reform programme to the international community. He also mentioned the role and significance of social media in popularizing the New Silk Road concept.

Sigua said that cooperation with UNWTO is of the utmost significance for Georgia, as participation in such summits is the best platform for spreading information. "I would emphasize that in the main annual publication of world tourism, the UNWTO Tourism Highlights, Georgia is listed as one of the fastest-growing tourism countries. This recognition is important, as this publication is a trustworthy and authoritative source of information for the international tourist industry", he said.

Secretary General of UNWTO Taleb

D. Rifai opened the ministerial summit. Based in Madrid, he has held this position since 1 January 2010. He was unanimously elected at the 18th session of UNWTO General Assembly (October 2009), following the recommendation of the UNWTO Executive Council made in May 2009.

Prior to this appointment, Rifai had held several ministerial portfolios in the Government of Jordan, as Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Minister of Information and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation. During his term as Jordan's Minister of Tourism Taleb Rifai served as Chairman of the UNWTO. During his meeting with Giorgi Sigua at the summit he mentioned that the World Tourism Barometer had declared the increase of travellers Georgia had witnessed to be the highest in Europe.

In 2013, at the 20th General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation held in Zambia and Zimbabwe, Georgia was elected to a second term as Vice-Chair of the Regional Commission for Europe. Georgia has been a member of this organisation's Statistics and Satellite Accounts Committee since 2011.



Giorgi Sigua hosted Arabian investor in Mestia

The Head of National Tourism Administration of Georgia Giorgi Sigua hosted the investor from Saudi Arabia in Mestia.

The visit was planned by participation of the investment group „Aamal Group” of Saudi Arabia and the member of the international trade chamber Yassin Al Suroor.

Giorgi Sigua presented the existing tourist potential and Infrastructure in Svaneti to the visitor. Yassin Al Suroor, in his turn, will popularize the product with the largest tourist companies and reporters of Arabia.

The fact should be noted that there will be held a press-tour in Georgia by Yassin Al Suroor's promotion in December, and the charter flights will be appointed.

This is his second visit in Georgia. He looked around Achara and Kazbegi in the framework of the visit.

In the framework of the visit Giorgi Sigua met the governor of Mestia and the local population involved in industry. He examined the current issues and visited the tourism international center with them.



Visa Regime to Become Stricter in Georgia

The Government of Georgia has announced that visa entry regulations are to become stricter, but the Georgian National Tourism Administration says this will not reduce the number of tourists entering the country.

Under the bill recently presented to parliament entry visas will be valid for 30 days instead of 360 and must be obtained at diplomatic representations and consulates of Georgia rather than the airport. The Ministry of Justice is also being stripped of the right to prolong the validity of visas for foreigners, although the Ministry of Internal Affairs can renew them at border crossing points. Citizens of 118 states will be affected by these new regulations.

Specific immigration visas will be added to the visa categories, and business visas will be replaced by special visas. There will now be short-term and long-term visas. Short-term visas will be issued based on the number of the days the applicant indicates they will stay in Georgia, up

to 30 days. Multiple-entry visas will be issued to aliens who took and used at least one Georgian visa last year and can show grounds for applying for a multiple-entry one. Long-term visas will be issued with the right of multiple entrance for 90 days and will be a precondition for receiving diplomatic accreditation or residence permission.

Khatuna Burkadze, manager of the GYLA (Georgian Young Lawyers Association) project "Promoting Well Managed Migration Between the EU and Georgia", has told The Georgian Times that the bill will make it possible for people to get long-term visas for a maximum of 5 years. Naturally, the regulations become stricter when the alien has been granted the right to stay in Georgia.

However, she added that the bill does not list the countries whose citizens will not be required to obtain a visa. It stipulates instead that these countries should be defined by Government resolution. "Currently there is visa free movement in place with certain countries, but not all.

Visa policy is much more liberal now, and this bill reflects this, as it adds definition to the policy," said Burkadze.

The authors of the bill insist that it is primarily motivated by state security interests. However its opponents believe that the precise definition of visa terms will limit free movement, although such regulations are commonplace in various countries.

Marina Metreveli, an economic analyst, believes that tourism, as a field of economics, is very vulnerable to threats and any political instability negatively influences both economics and tourism. "When the door is opened to citizens of all countries not all the people who enter are tourists, as they have different business to attend to; there is always a threat of trafficking, drug-related activity and terrorism being imported. In order to counter such threats, we have to differentiate the countries from which visitors are more acceptable," she said, adding that visa arrangements should be more liberal with the countries from

which a significant income is derived from tourism. For the others, Georgia should develop a particular strategy.

Giorgi Sigua, head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, is not expecting any reduction in the number of tourists visiting Georgia, as the bill is merely a revision of visa and immigration policy. "I think this initiative will not affect tourism. Georgia should not be the reception and border crossing point for everybody, by no means," he declared.

At the present time citizens of 117 states can enter Georgia without needing a visa and stay for 360 days, and those who require a visa can obtain one at the border in a simplified way. The new regulations, if passed, will come into effect in March, 2014. From that point the application fee for obtaining visas for 90 and 360 days, both single and multiple-entry, will be 50 USD, the fee for a one year multiple-entry visa will be 200 USD, a 10 year multiple-entry visa will cost 400 USD and a 15 year one 600 USD.

Opening of Winter Season in Mestia and Bakuriani

The Georgian National Tourism Administration is planning the opening ceremony of the winter season in Mestia and Bakuriani. The goal of this is to promote Mestia as skiing resort and to support internal tourism development.

Sporting events such as skiing competitions are planned within the framework of the project. The first will be an alpine skiing competition involving 50 professionals of various age groups. They will compete on trails prepared three hours in advance. A special jury, sited in Hatsavali, will evaluate the participants and declare a winner.

The second event will be for amateurs. 30 will compete, selected in advance from applicants to the Facebook page of the Georgian National Tourism Administration. This will help promote the Facebook page as well.

At the closing ceremony the amateur winners will receive certificates and awards from the administration. On the terrace of the Zuruldi restaurant in Hatsavali a band will play, and hot drinks will be served. About 40 skiers will give a show and the day will conclude with fireworks.

A similar season opening event will also be held in Bakuriani in order to promote it as a children and families winter resort. It will be held at the Bakuriani Square, which will be decorated. A wooden fence and arch will be installed at the entrance to the square. In a dedicated space barmen will produce apples dipped in glintwein, cocoa and caramel as a treat for the event guests.

The event will start at 14:00 and finish at 20:00. During the day, various competitions will be held in parallel, such as group target shooting and a rope climbing competition. Another competition, for groups, will be the "Most beautiful Snowman." Participants will try to produce the best snowman from materials supplied by the event organisers. A jury will evaluate the snowmen according to defined criteria and identify a winner. The winners of each competition will be awarded gift sets prepared by the Georgian National Tourism Administration.

At the end of the event a Christmas tree will be publicly decorated against a backdrop of music and another firework display will round off proceedings. The participants will be given rackets.





Georgia

Country of life

www.Georgia.Travel * www.gnta.ge

Gudauri
Mestia
Bakuriani



Economic Growth: Expectation and Reality

By ANASTASIA DGEBUADZE, GT

If we believe Minister of Finance Nodar Khaduri the economic growth indicators for next year will be close to the highest they have ever been. Khaduri stated at a meeting with representatives of the International Monetary Fund that the Georgian economy will grow by a further 5 per cent before the end of 2014.

Since 2003, the highest indicator of economic growth was seen in 2007, when it was 12.3 per cent. It is now 6 per cent. If growth increases 5 per cent more before the end of next year it will reach 11 per cent and we will be as "happy" as before. The most rapid acceleration of growth was between 2009 and 2010, when the indicator went from -3.8 per cent to 6.3 per cent.

An improvement in growth indicators does not actually say much about the nation's well-being and it does not impact on sustainable development. Economic growth does not automatically mean that the proceeds are being distributed amongst population equally. It is usually related to technolog-

ical changes, capital stock and improvements in the quality and level of literacy. But it can increase confidence in the country and generate investment and bankable goodwill.

The Government of Georgia plans to develop future fiscal and macro-economic parameters jointly with the International Monetary Fund. IMF members will meet representatives of the executive and legislative branches of the government. After achieving agreement on some parameters, the government will present a draft budget to parliament. Head of the International Monetary Fund mission Mark Griffith stated: "we have discussed with Mr. Nodar Khaduri about the country's new economic policy and economic growing trends. We hope that the programme will be implemented successfully in future."

Griffith stated that the Georgian economy will grow a further 2-2.5 per cent before the end of 2013. Official data appears to be different, stating that economic growth has reduced 0.1 per cent over the previous year, but that nevertheless progress will be accom-

plished within the final 1.5 months of 2013. As the Minister of Finances says, seasonal factors amongst others give him confidence that growth will return before the end of 2013.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development says approximately the same: that the Georgian economy will grow 2 per cent before the year ends. This is a downward revision from its May forecast of 3 per cent, but this is explained by lower levels of public and private investment and some post-Parliamentary and pre-Presidential election related factors which have caused policy uncertainty. However, economic growth is expected to speed up in 2014, with GDP rising by 4 per cent, provided both the political uncertainty subsides and the improvement of Russian-Georgian commercial relations continues.

These assumptions seem ridiculous to ex-UNM Minister of Economics Kakha Bendukidze. "I don't know what this prognosis of the International Monetary Fund is based on. If it comes true, this won't be to the credit of the current government. It will be proof that

the reforms of 2004-2008 are still working and the government has not been able to destroy the potential of the Georgian economy", he says.

In general, indicators of economic growth reflect positions in the Index of Economic Freedom. Studies demonstrate that there is an important relationship between economic freedom and positive social and economic values such as per capita income, human development, democracy, the elimination of poverty and environmental protection. Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labour and property. In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume and invest in any way they please, with this freedom both protected by the state and unconstrained by the state.

According to The Heritage Foundation, the richest countries have the highest indices of economic freedom. The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institution founded in 1973 in USA. According to its statistics, Georgia's current index of economic



freedom is 72.6, and it has increased by 13.6 points over the last ten years. This is the best indicator Georgia has ever had. The highest belongs to Hong Kong (89.3), which is followed by those of Singapore (88) and Australia (82.6). Bottom of the list is North Korea, with an indicator of 1.5, below Cuba and Zimbabwe (28.5 and 28.6 respectively).

There is an obvious difference between socialist and capitalist countries in such lists, and North Korea is an extremely socialist country while the advanced countries are more or less capitalist. This is logical, since in capitalist countries trade and industry are not controlled by the government but by individual citizens. As discussed above, economic freedom leads to national prosperity. If the citizens can provide

a product or service, they can make money. We can therefore conclude that if a country is capitalist in orientation and has a free market economic growth is more likely to come!

"Socialism needs to pull down wealth; liberalism seeks to rise up poverty. Socialism would destroy private interests, Liberalism would preserve [them] ... by reconciling them with public right. Socialism would kill enterprise; Liberalism would rescue enterprise from the trammels of privilege and preference. Socialism assails the preeminence of the individual; Liberalism seeks ... to build up a minimum standard for the mass. Socialism exalts the rule; Liberalism exalts the man. Socialism attacks capitalism; Liberalism attacks monopoly." - Winston Churchill.

SOCIETY

Legal Protection Against the Georgian Mentality

By TATIA KAKIASHVILI, GT

People smile when someone mentions animal rights in Georgia. Let's protect humans first, the argument goes, then think about animals. There have been quite a few cases of animals being tortured or killed which have been covered by the media and shocked people, but there has not been an appropriate reaction to these.

In one such case a young Georgian cut his neighbour's pet's head off, took a photo of it with its head cut off and posted this on Facebook. He did not plead insanity, but the public and animal protectors do not believe that this person will receive a severe punishment for such an act, because animal rights are not considered important in this country.

It was on 11 November in Argveta in Zestafoni that twenty-year old Tamaz Khuskivadze killed a two-year old male Caucasian Shepherd Dog, Beebe, with a double-barreled shotgun, cut the dog's head off and photographed images of his torso. These were published on Facebook on November 18. Khuskivadze had threatened to kill the animal before. Tortur-

ing and killing the dog just because it barked is clearly outrageous and inappropriate behaviour, but this didn't stop him.

According to the Chairman of the Georgian Society for the Protection of Animals, the perpetrator must be punished under Article of 259 of the Criminal Code, which states the following:

Cruel treatment, which may cause an animal's death or mutilation, will be punished by a fine or correctional labour for a term of up to one year. If such actions are committed by groups or in the presence of minors, a sentence of two years will be imposed.

The dog's owner - Leila Kiknavelidze - has asked the Popular Front, an animal protection body, to raise a motion with parliamentarians. As she told the media:

"No one was afraid of Beebe, the dog. He absolutely never did anyone any harm. When our neighbour Tamaz Khuskivadze was drunk, the dog only barked at him and once or twice chased him. But the dog never bit anyone! Once this boy threw rocks at my dog in front of my children. When I rebuked him, he replied, keep your dog in the house. One day, when Beebe was out and that



boy was again drunk, he shot and killed him, then cut his head off with an axe. I was in Tbilisi and didn't witness this incident. To tell the truth, calling the police because of the dog, even in these circumstances, is unacceptable for the local residents. I have heard that Tamazi is at home and very sorry about all the reaction he has received from people. He thought he had proved to everyone that he is a cool guy by treating a dog so mercilessly."

Despite the legal sanctions in place, the Popular Front reports that such cases are quite frequent. However, no one can confirm them with photos or video evidence.

"Copies of EU laws are screenshot by the Animal Committee. We can take a lot of copies of these and adjust them for application in our country. It's important that the state supports this. Legislation alone cannot achieve anything. It is unfortunate

that we have to go to the state to ask it to control citizens until they can control their own brains. Some citizens cannot think in depth about important issues, for instance, the fact that you cannot oppress a helpless creature just because it isn't human," says the Popular Front.

An investigation has now been launched into the dog-torturing case under Article 259 of the Criminal Code. If a criminal offence has been committed the

person responsible should be held accountable. Nothing further is being said about the case at present, by either the Popular Front or the Prosecutor's Office, due to this investigation.

It is clear from the way the victim speaks, however, that the Georgian mentality has not changed: Mrs. Kiknavelidze is not going to lose her neighbour. Opinion polls suggest that the majority of Georgians feel that if a person severely tortures an animal and then kills it they are at worst gross and immoral. Therefore, they should undertake community service, not be imprisoned.

Several NGOs, amongst them animal rights groups, protested in front of the Prosecutor's Office on 19 November. Their main demand was that law enforcement be regulated, so that citizens do not disregard the law.

"Civil society must speak out and condemn this brutality. Such inhumane treatment of animals is harmful and dangerous to the country's image, as well as public safety" says a statement signed by Vakhtang Mamaladze, Chairman of the animal protection organisation, Tamar Akubardia from the Animal Rights Advocacy Centre and the injured party.

Cohabitation is Over... What is Next?

Continued from p. 2

Mamuka Areshidze believes that the Prime Minister should understand all the issues related to government. He believes Gharibashvili did the right thing in involving the entire cabinet in the debate, asking them for answers to specific questions, but in future the head of government must be competent in all matters.

United National Movement members maintained that Gharibashvili may not have a future as Prime Minister and accused him of incompetence. They maintain that Ivanishvili will still influence the conduct of politics in the country. Giorgi Vashadze, the former Deputy Minister of Justice, said that he did not see any plans for improving the economy and providing jobs in the government's programme. "I did not see a political leader or manager. I saw only incompetence and evasion of questions," said Vashadze. He maintained that it is a big problem that Ivanishvili is still standing behind the new government but avoiding taking any political responsibility by refusing to be an official member of it himself.

Another member of the UNM, Director General of Rustavi 2 TV Nika Gvaramia, wrote on his Facebook page that very hard years await the Georgian Dream.

"the National Movement conducted a masterclass in parliament. It is obvious that the Georgian Dream will have to work with the most qualified and effective opposition in Georgian history. Very hard years are ahead for the GD," Gvaramia wrote.

On November 21 former Prime Minister Ivanishvili decided to respond to accusations that he will be dictating to the government from behind the scenes by publishing an open letter entitled "Post Scriptum". In this message to the people of Georgia the former PM said that he was not leaving politics because he is running away from responsibility or afraid of something.

"The biggest nonsense ascribed to me is that I am supposedly afraid, and want to run away from responsibility. I could perhaps be afraid of losing my position, but as I am voluntarily renouncing it what kind of fear are they talking about?" wrote Ivanishvili.

The former Prime Minister emphasized that he was not afraid to even risk his life to save the motherland. "I put everything on the scales - my life, my family, the safety of my children, and decided to save the motherland," said Ivanishvili. He called upon his people to free themselves from stereotypes and believe that a person



can be guided by good intentions alone.

The resignation of the former Prime Minister has aroused more comment than the appointment of the new one. Kakha Gogolashvili claims that such a rich man giving political advice creates an awkward situation. Bidzina Ivanishvili could become a George Soros for Georgia, but he needs to conduct an unbiased policy and take an unbiased attitude towards the civil sector to do this. However Vaja Beridze believes Ivanishvili will

keep his promise and really leave the new government to work independently. "The dictatorship of a person with no position from behind the scenes has nothing in common with democracy. Till now Ivanishvili has been an absolute leader, who had gained the absolute trust of the population, and there was no lack of democracy in this, but from now on he will lose this right to rule. However I believe he will do as he said and let the government run the country," Beridze said.

On November 24 Ivanishvili did indeed announce his retirement from politics, as he had repeatedly promised. During a congress of the Georgian Dream, he summarised the results of his tenure and gave instructions to his successor Irakli Gharibashvili. He assured his audience that the era of Saakashvili was over and that the 'Nationals' would never have the opportunity to return to power as he had done everything to ensure this. He said he had created a coalition which should never relax its efforts as

it is obliged to prove to the people every day that it deserves to govern the country. Ivanishvili said that the country now stood on three pillars: the young but talented Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, an outstanding politician of the modern era, David Usupashvili as parliament speaker and Giorgi Margvelashvili, who, Ivanishvili stated, will be the president of all the people, not just a small group who are close to the centre of power. He said that the main thing is that his successors should not feel dizzy with power - they must remember that their status does not give them advantages over other members of the ruling coalition.

Ivanishvili's farewell ceremony was surprisingly modest, lasting only half an hour, though several hundred party members gathered from the various regions of Georgia to attend it. The event was devoid of pomposity and was conducted according to a pre-written script.

Irakli Gharibashvili is now the most powerful man in Georgia, according to the Constitution, as powers have been taken away from the President and given to the Prime Minister, who unlike his predecessors will be the Head of Government. His office is on the 12th floor of the State Chancellery. President Margvelashvili's office is on the tenth floor of the same building.

PUBLICITY



SUNDAY BRUNCH

Gather around with your friends and family on Sundays for brunch at Tbilisi Marriott where we will cater to every family member! Sunday Brunch at Parnas captures the essence of Marriott's glamorous culinary tradition where Chef Pedro Gonzalez offers a variety of delights on the buffet with comfort cuisine combined with modern flavor. Everyone will find Sunday Brunch exciting with unlimited complimentary wines from Telavi Wine Cellar, mimosas for the ladies and kids' game room equipped with Xbox KINECT for your little one to enjoy!

Every Sunday, 12-3 PM
 Buffet - 47 GEL+VAT
 Buffet, unlimited white and red wine - 59 GEL+ VAT
 Children under 9 free of charge. Ages 9 to 13 - 25 Gel +VAT
 Special discounts for the parties 10 and more
 10% discount for our returning guests

Tbilisi Marriott Hotel
 13, Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi 8,
 0108 Georgia (Caucasus Region)
 Telephone: +995 32 277 92 00
 Fax: +995 32 277 92 10
 tbilisi.marriott@marriott.com
 TbilisiMarriott.com



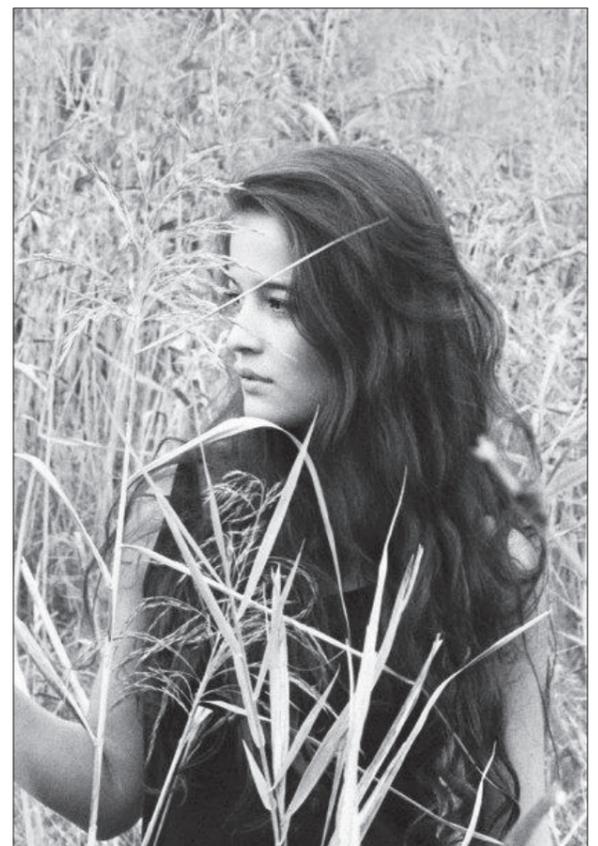
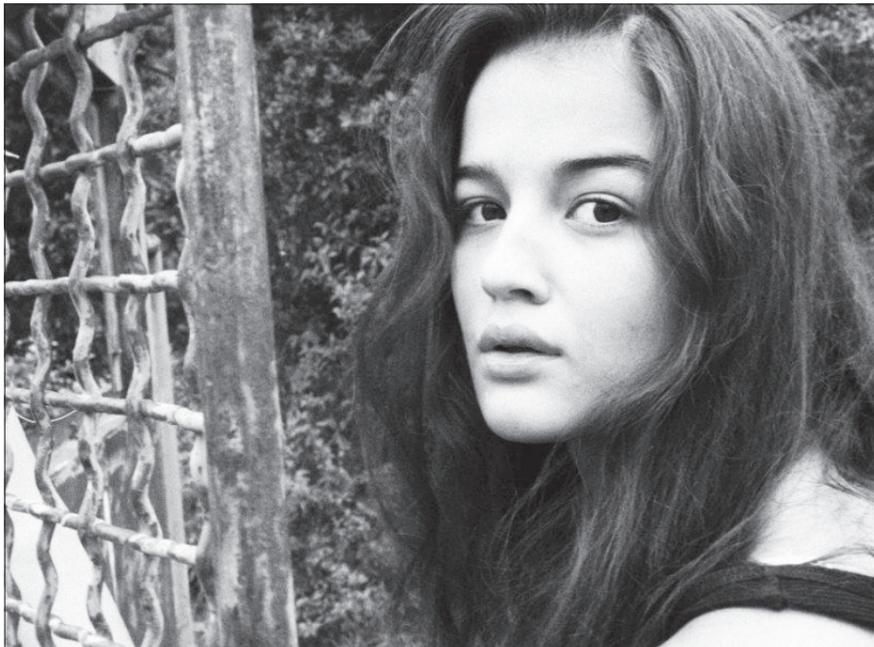
Blooming Mariam Bokeria on the Dark Nineties & Bright Future

By TAKOAGARASHVILI, GT

Writing this article is a tough call. Considering who the Georgian Times' readers are, this topic is the most difficult one to write about. It's hard for me to write about the darkest years in Georgia for people who neither witnessed nor lived through them. The nineties were dark, hungry, cold, dangerous and scary in Georgia. Yet life went on. There was no generation this era didn't touch to the core. It was rough for the entire nation. The older generation saw their long peacefully lived and built lives breaking down, adults were scared for their children who they had to raise in chaos and teenagers had to form and shape their personality in a constant riot, overcome the perspective of a hopeless future and pave a way through it. Georgians of any age who lived through those years are damaged in a deep and thorough way. Time may have passed, dark times may have gone, but the damage is still there, somewhere in the background yet deep and stable.

'In Bloom' had me jumping right back to those times. I was one those teenage kids. My schoolmates were boys with guns, my friends got kidnapped and married at a bizarrely early age, we were a survivor generation. I must say it has a beautifully written script, by Nana Ekvimishvili; precisely picked words, dialogues and more importantly attitudes. This film is the distinctly painted picture of the Georgian nineties: raw, harsh, dark and sad. It is a brilliant piece by directors Nana Ekvimishvili and Simon Gross, with exquisite cinematography by Oleg Mutu.

Everything in this movie screams the authentic spirit of the time: the institution of friendship, relationships, school and parenthood; most importantly, the cautiously picked colours make this spirit touch you from within and inject the damage of the nineties right into your essence. "The introverted Eka (LikaBabluani) lives in a book-filled apartment with her dismissive boy-crazy elder sister and her preoccupied single parent mother; precocious Natia (Mariam Bokeria) lives in the chaotic atmosphere of a cramped apartment with her extended working-class family dominated by her alcoholic father. But like most schoolgirls, Eka and Natia are far more concerned with life outside – classroom gossip, music, exercising their budding



sexual power over the local boys" (Palace Films).

The film has travelled the world. It has been a winner at some of the A list festivals: the AFI Fest, the ART Film Festival, the Berlin International Film Festival, the Hong Kong International Film Festival, the Montreal Festival of New Cinema, the Paris Cinema, the Prix Europa, the Sarajevo Film Festival, Wiesbaden go East and others. The film is also the Georgian entry for Best Foreign Language Film at the 86th Academy Awards.

I have managed to get hold of Mariam Bokeria, its star, and interview her. I must say that meeting her was quite surprising, as I didn't think you could find teenage girls like her nowadays: polite and humble, tactful and appropriate, cheerful and alive, zesty and absolutely beautiful. She is a sweet and talented little sunshine child, full of dreams yet determination.

When did you get into the entertainment industry?

I started singing when I was 4. I participated in different

shows and concerts. Later on I was in the music video by the Georgian boy band "Kuchis Bichebi", and then came the film by Nika Machaidze, "The Game" and finally "In Bloom".

How tough was the casting?

It was tough. The competition was huge. Almost the entire school was there, but I won. I did my best and I got the part. I was extremely happy.

Tell me about the shooting.

It was hard and long. It took a lot of time and energy to make the movie. We had the longest shooting days.

The time 'In Bloom' is set in was long before you were born. How did it make you feel to embody the story of a girl living in the darkest years?

I have heard a lot about those times. Yet doing this part somehow turned these stories into my everyday reality and drifted me closer to them. I could feel all the heaviness people went through. This film made me a part of it, now I understand much more clearly all the impact of the scary nineties.

How big is the difference between the institutions of friendship now and then?

It is very different indeed now. Today people are very accessible through several portals. It is not difficult for us to reach out to each other, moreover reaching out has turned into a habit rather than a gesture towards somebody. But I think I like the way it was then - when there was no cyberspace or cell phones. That made human relationships deeper and more valuable. It seems people appreciated attention more because it required quite a lot of effort.

How about boys and girls? How different are the love gestures now?

I can't say much about this, I'm not very experienced, but I do have a friend who keeps a knife at home which was given to her by her boyfriend for the same purpose as in the movie. He wants her to be protected.

Is she using it as protection?

No, of course not! She keeps it as a souvenir, that's all.

The entertainment industry is very harsh. Did you come across 'frienemies' on the set?

Luckily, no. Lika and I are friends; we have spent so much time together. It was great having her around all day long on the set and while travelling the festivals with the film.

Usually Georgian parents are not thrilled to give their kids to the entertainment industry. Was this so in your case?

My mother has always been very supportive about it. She has always embraced my passion. My dad has no problem with it either, since he knows this is temporary.

Why is this temporary,

what's your future goal?

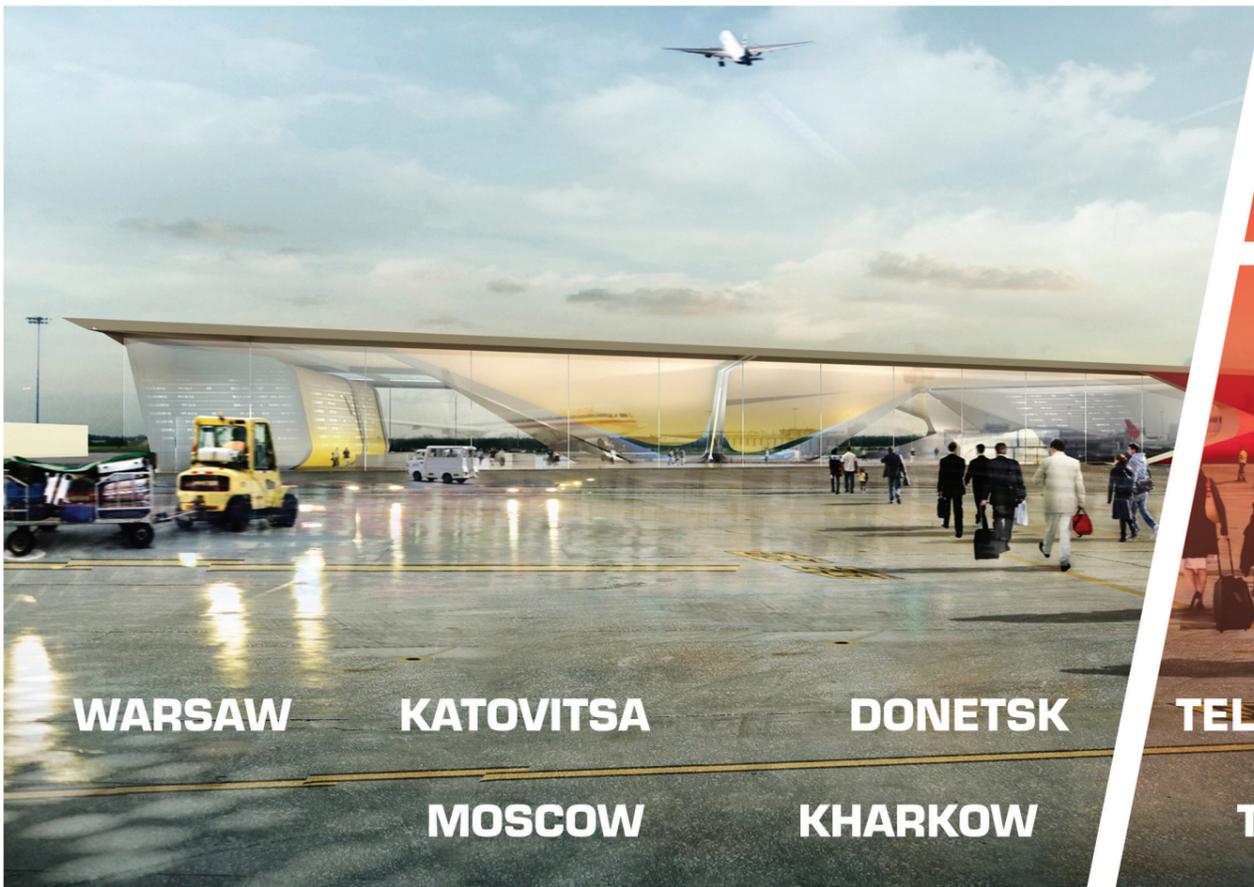
I am going to major in Business Management.

Can't you combine your passion with full time business?

Hopefully I will be able to. If I receive interesting offers I will be more than willing to go after them while my main occupation is business.

I wish Mariam all the best with her goals and dreams. Considering the unsteadiness of human nature she may change as time goes by, but one thing I know is that this little, talented, smart, glowing, bright, teenage 'mermaid' contains enough drive and determination to achieve whatever she wants.

DAVID THE BUILDER KUTAISI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



DAVID THE BUILDER KUTAISI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
Tel: (+995) 0431 237000
(+995) 0431 239003



From 15 €

WARSAW

KATOVITSA

DONETSK

TELAVIV

MINSK

MOSCOW

KHARKOW

TBILISI



Become a VIP at the Airport? Then ask for "Primeclass" CIP Service

"primeclass" CIP Service offers a complete package of meet and assist services at the airport. "primeclass" CIP Service agents will gladly assist passengers during all flight procedures for both departure and arrival. Passengers are accompanied through the fast tracks, dedicated security check points and business check-in and hosted in "primeclass" Lounge while their luggage are carried by a porter.

Tbilisi Tel: 322 310 330 Fax: 322 310 331 E-mail: primeclass.georgia@tav.aero
Batumi Tel: 422 235 111 Fax: 422 235 112 E-mail: primeclass.batumi@tav.aero
TAV Georgia Operation Services LLC | www.primeclass.com.ge



David Gvinianidze: Melody Of The Heart

By DANARA KURMANOVA, KAZAKHSTAN

“If the heart sings, there is no need for words” – David Gvinianidze finishes every concert of his “Three Baritones” world tour with these words from “Smile”, by Muslim Magomaev. In principle, we could end this article with this phrase too. Because during Gvinianidze’s performances the hearts of the audience sing – it is just impossible to describe the atmosphere in the hall any differently!

TIMELESS MASTERPIECE

David Gvinianidze has dedicated performances in the USA, the UK, Italy, Germany, the Baltic States, Israel, Cyprus, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to the memory of outstanding artiste Muslim Magomaev. Even name of the tour was taken from the singer’s autobiography “My Love is Melody”. You can find fans of Magomaev in every corner of the world, so it is small wonder that there are no empty seats at Gvinianidze’s concerts.

“But there is always one very interesting detail about the performances in honour of Muslim,” says Anna Panisheva, a cultural observer and journalist. “At the beginning the public is skeptical and wary, because performing Magomaev songs is a hard task, as people will compare what they hear with the original.

“But for David Gvinianidze and his colleagues Sergey Plyusnin and Yuri Zaltsman this tour is a tribute to the memory of great singer. Therefore, each of them performs the repertoire of Magomaev in his own way, how he feels and perceives the songs. All the soloists of the Bolshoi Theatre, and Zaltsman particularly, sing Russian folk songs very well, and Plyusnin, also from the Bolshoi, is a master of impersonation. At every concert he wins over the audience by performing Di Laila as Magomaev himself did. To enhance the effect he dims the lights, and this impels people to think: the King of Baritones is back! It is his amazing simi-

larity with the artiste which helped Plyusnin win 1st place at the International Muslim Magomaev Contest last year.

“Then, after all this, the organiser of the tour himself, David Gvinianidze, appears,” Anna Panisheva tells us. “This is the principal adornment of the concert, because he presents the creations of Magomaev from an absolutely different angle. This is a distinctive feature of Gvinianidze – his terrific ability to

field, after the 3rd episode he signed a contract with several international channels to produce more and at the same time won the Golden Ring international music contest.

It must have seemed that this was the time to reap. But when his programme had become the most popular show in Georgia he suddenly abandoned his career as a TV host, went to Russia and joined the Bolshoi Theatre. In record time, he became a soloist in several American and English theatres

He performs Magomaev in his own individual way, but his approach does not spoil it. Conversely, it even beautifies it. Most classical singers adopt a traditional style, but Gvinianidze is not afraid of wearing bright costumes or joking with the audience. He not only dances during the pop songs but maintains contact with the audience whilst performing classic arias.

“I understand that not all people can understand opera,” he explains, “and that is why I

displays itself, through temperament or the purely Georgian adamant hopefulness. For example, whilst performing “Oh, this Wedding!” he began to do a dance with elements of the lezginka which was as appropriate, cheerful and, most importantly, sincere as everything Georgian is. Doubtless this is one of the reasons why Russian audiences respond to him so warmly.” Regardless of political conflicts, the personal factor is the most important of all. Only art is able to reconcile us and to show us that, firstly, we are all human.

“I think this is the wrong approach to culture”, Gvinianidze explains. “Art must serve the people, but in the reality only well-heeled people can attend such events. So my team and I counter this because our work is for everybody. My fund regularly organises tours at which we sing free of charge, for orphans or disabled children. People are similar everywhere, their financial status does not influ-

ence their perception of art. Our tour includes 90 cities in Russia and Europe, and we sing operatic compositions interspersed with pop music so that people do not think that we are demanding that they love opera immediately.” He laughs. “As the saying goes, love cannot be forced, right?”

INSTEAD OF P.S., OR ALL OR NOTHING

Gvinianidze does not plan to dwell on his achievements.

“When I decided to go to Moscow my friend told me: “You should conquer all your doubts, otherwise they will eat you up.” He smiles, “Fortunately Moscow did not eat me up – I took a risk and changed my life successfully. Now this is my credo: everyone must try and progress and strive for goals. Mistakes and failures only steel us. I understood that, and this knowledge helped me a lot. This is why our fund has existed for 10 years and has made its name. The world knows us, as we give about 80 concert programmes. The most popular ones are duels between singers, and shows like How Opera Stars Joke, A Big Date with Opera, etcetera. Today, in anticipation of the New Year, the producers have asked us to put on our Christmas Cocktail, or Drunk Concert.

Furthermore, this coming summer Gvinianidze, with the help of the Adjara government, will host the Batumi International Opera Festival.

“I have dreamt of doing something like this in Georgia,” he says. “I am very glad that singers from the Metropolitan Opera, France and the USA believe in this project and will come to support it. I hope that it will become a new tradition in Batumi, because Georgia is full of talents, and the world should know about them.”



discover and convey new aspects of art”.

EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

However, Gvinianidze has never been “like everybody else”. Firstly, David disobeyed his parents, who had dreamt about a “serious profession” for their son, and went to the Paniashvili Tbilisi Music Academy. Then, while other students were merely studying, he made his own programme for Georgian TV about opera singers and composers. In defiance of the stereotype that beginners without experience of TV work cannot achieve success in this

at once and obtained the status of Honourable Guest at La Scala Milan. At this time Gvinianidze also created the Talents of the World fund which supports musicians from all over the world. For this activity he has been awarded the UN medal for Contribution to the Arts and was entered in the Worldwide Encyclopedia of People of the Millennium. When this happened, the critics suddenly forgot that they had once said that opera is now out of fashion, and Gvinianidze’s project will die very soon.

So it is no wonder that as an exception to the rules David has a unique manner of singing.

want to arouse their interest in different ways. I lay myself bare, try to artistically express the plot of a song, and talk about the history of opera, the life of Muslim Magomaev and his work with Arno Babadjan-yan.

ART FOR EVERYBODY

This is the main purpose of Gvinianidze’s world tour – to make people like good music. Herein lies the explanation of the strange, at first sight, pricing. While in provincial Kazakhstan tickets cost less than 30 dollars, in Italy you have to pay 3,000 dollars to see these concerts. In the most fa-





SOCAR Batumi named among
100 most popular buildings
of the world for 2013



(* 0001

WWW.SOCAR.GE