

## Politics

**Ballet, politicians, and national consciousness: Should art be free from the political agenda?**



FULL STORY ON Page 2

**Israeli Ambassador concerned by the Anti-Semitic sermon of several Georgian priests**

FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

**B**illionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder and the head of the ruling Georgian Dream party has released an open letter yesterday, announcing his departure from politics. Ivanishvili states in his letter that the ruling party is staffed with individuals who can replace his “hard work, authority, and skills in a worthy manner.”

According to Ivanishvili, the results of the 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia were unprecedented in the history of the country as the ruling party was able to obtain the mandate to rule from the people for a third term. He noted that this victory is the clearest, most distinct, and indisputable recognition of party members’ joint efforts. The letter reads that the electoral success of the GD party was logical and expected. “The ruling team truly is the best option that has no alternative in terms of features and characteristics among all political actors that exist today,” reads the letter.

Ivanishvili announced his decision about leaving the post of party chairman, as well as the party itself. He believes that his mission has been accomplished and therefore, has decided to retire from politics and fully distance himself from the reins of power. According to Ivanishvili, he is leaving politics proud, victorious, and grateful to the people. He is confident that the Georgian people will appreciate his decision, which, according to him, is dictated by the same interests that led him to enter politics.

The letter reads that the purpose of his entry into politics in 2011 was to fulfill two main goals – ensuring the unhindered

## GD party founder Bidzina Ivanishvili leaves politics



**“I have decided to finally retire from politics and fully distance myself from the reins of power. I am leaving the post of Party Chairman, as well as the party itself, and am returning to my pre-2011, private lifestyle,” reads Ivanishvili’s open letter.**

movement of the country along the Euro-Atlantic course chosen by the Georgian people and putting an end to Mikheil Saakashvili’s ‘violent, inhumane, and undemocratic’ regime in a lawful manner, through election. According to Ivanishvili, the opposition at that time did not have the resource to change the government without his direct participa-

tion in the process. The billionaire believes that both of his tasks have been accomplished.

Ivanishvili’s letter is critical towards Mikheil Saakashvili and the previous government. The letter stresses that during Georgian Dream’s rule, a previously severe situation especially in terms of freedom of media and independence of

business has significantly improved.

The letter reads that the current team of Georgian Dream party “is a unity that, with its patriotism, dedication, intellect, solidarity with its fellow citizens, and professionalism, is in every way on a par with the governments of European states.”

“I leave politics with the hope that even that part of today’s opposition which, through a lack of political will, inexperience, or spinelessness, ended up within the zone of influence of the evil and its main architect, will become convinced of the futility of an inappropriate attitude toward the interests of the homeland due to political selfishness and one man’s unbridled desire to seize power,” commented Ivanishvili about the opposition parties who refuse to take up their mandates in parliament. “I am certain that these parties are aware of the hopelessness of their current position and that they will overcome this influence, that is, they will fight for their future, which, in turn, will be a prospect for Georgian democracy,” he added.

Yesterday, the GD party held a political council meeting at the party office. Kakha Kaladze, Secretary-General of the ruling party stated after the meeting that the convention of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia party would be held on January 16. The convention, which will be attended by up to 400 delegates from all over the country, will elect a new Chairman of the party. At the decision of the political council, Irakli Kobakhidze will be nominated for the post of Party Chairman.



**The new chairman of the Georgian Dream party will be chosen on Saturday, January 16, at the party’s convention. Current executive secretary of the party, Irakli Kobakhidze has been nominated for the post of the chairman of the ruling party.**



# Ballet, politicians, and national consciousness: Should art be free from the political agenda?

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

When the prima ballerina of Georgia and the Artistic Director of the Georgian National Ballet, Nina Ananiashvili announced that she would be taking up the offer to head the Novosibirsk Theatre of Opera and Ballet (while retaining the leadership over the State Ballet of Georgia), it came as a shock to everyone. It did not take long until the criticism started to rise against the renowned dancer, with even an ex-President Saakashvili commenting on the situation that was unwrapping at the time when he was interviewed. However, on top of the expected wave of public disapproval, a historical, and, indeed, rhetorical question has been raised – should art be separated from politics, and does it, truly, have no borders?

Prima ballerina or a political figure by proxy?

Nina Ananiashvili was born in 1963, in Tbilisi, where she was enrolled in one of the city's ballet schools. She then proceeded to study at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, and upon graduation, Ananiashvili joined the Bolshoi Theatre troupe. Shortly after, Ananiashvili's talent became known in almost every part of the world – her "Swan Lakes" and "Sleeping Beauties" and dreamy "Juliette" would leave the audience applauding for a good 30 minutes after the performance had ended.

In 1988, Ananiashvili married then-Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Grigol Vashadze, and gave birth to the daughter Elena in 2006. The achievements of this dancer are countless and speak for themselves – one of the first Soviet dancers to perform as a guest soloist with the New York City Ballet, principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre, and the principal dancer of the Houston Ballet.

Upon her return to Georgia in 2004, Ananiashvili took up a lead over the State Ballet of Georgia and has successfully staged more than 60 full-time ballet productions, saw a renewal of the state funding, partnered with



Nina Ananiashvili, Courtesy State Ballet of Georgia

various renowned choreographers who worked with the Georgian ballet troupe and took the SBG to tour across the US on numerous occasions. In the long list of Ananiashvili's regalia, you will find Georgia's top cultural award – The Oracle of Art, as well as the People's Artist of Georgia award, and the People's Artist of Russia award.

From first sight, it might seem like a success story of a talented artist – something that we, traditionally, prefer to take out of the context of the political disputes or the country's national agenda. But art and politics are more intertwined than one might think, especially in the post-Soviet hemisphere.

Until recently, the husband

and impresario of Ananiashvili, Grigol Vashadze, has enjoyed close political ties with an ex-President and the founder of the United National Movement – Mikhail Saakashvili. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Culture, Monument Protection, and Sport, and later – the chairman of the UNM, Vashadze has long been one of the closest associates of Saakashvili. Moreover, Ananiashvili herself became the godmother to the ex-President's son, Nikoloz. One might argue that this alone would be a reason enough to not take up an offer of joining a theatre in Russia if nothing else then to simply avoid jeopardizing the political career of one's spouse. The on-

going situation is even more uncertain, since in December last year Vashadze has announced his decision to leave the chairmanship of the UNM party, and although Mrs. Ananiashvili stated that her decision had nothing to do with the prior decision of her husband, such a decision is quite ambiguous at the very least.

Political and personal ties aside, there is one more, a much more significant factor that cannot be overlooked in this context. With the occupation of Georgian territories, and in the aftermath of the 2008 war, to which Vashadze himself referred to as a decision that Moscow will never be able to wash away from, one may see Ananiashvili's ac-

tions as not particularly patriotic, at the very least. It seems like Ananiashvili herself was anticipating the criticism on the patriotic grounds to break out, as she stated in an interview with the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that her decision was concerned with the "creative work only". She went on to reassure the audience that she remains to be a "big supporter" of her country and that she does not think that her actions could be used as a tool by the "Russian propaganda" to undermine Georgia.

Should one's art mirror one's national identity?

Many artists would probably agree that whether they like it or not, at some point, or throughout their lives, they maintain a certain degree of influence by the country of their origin. Such influence can be both positive or negative (although the former is much more common than the latter), and one's art can be either inspired by or even mirror the realities of one's Homeland. It is, therefore, easy to link such notion to the artists' responsibility, as a public figure, social influencer, or the messenger of the creative art to uphold the principles and the overwhelming moods of the country where they come from – especially if the artist proclaims affection and a deeply rooted patriotism towards this country.

On the other hand, one can say that art exists outside of the borders and above politics. In the end, the only people that the artist is truly answering to is their respective audience, and such audience, regardless of who they are and where they are coming from, should be feeling and processing the creative processes that are offered to them in unison. As of right now, Novosibirsk theatre has temporarily suspended the contract with Ananiashvili on the grounds of her premature announcement about heading the theatre to the media, which the theatre has found disrespectful toward the troupe that Ananiashvili was not yet introduced to. As the situation is frozen, one question remains quite hot – does art unite or divide? And either way, does it even matter?

## Weather

Tuesday, January 12

Day Showers

High: 10°C

Night Showers

Low: 4°C

Wednesday, January 13

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 13°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 6°C

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## Israeli Ambassador concerned by the Anti-Semitic sermon of several Georgian priests

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

His Excellency Ran Gidor, Acting ambassador of Israel to Georgia has recently taken to Facebook to express his concerns about the anti-Semitic rhetoric that was spotted in the Christmas sermons of several Georgian priests. He began by saying that in his New Year congratulations to the country, he expressed his sincerest hope that the friendship between Georgia and Israel communities will be strong as ever in 2021, and there will be no place for anti-Semitism, racism, and bigotry in the Georgian. "Unfortunately, I was wrong" – wrote the Ambassador.

He went on to say that on January the 4, a Deacon of the Kutaisi Trinity Cathedral, Ilia Karkadze, voiced the "anti-Semitic conspiracy theories" that were "reminiscent of some of the worst blood-labels and anti-Jewish hate propaganda of 1930s Europe". According to the Israeli



H.E. Ran Gidor

Ambassador, this was not the only occurrence, as two weeks prior to the incident with the Deacon Ilia Karkadze, Metropolitan of the Kutaisi-Gaenati Diocese and the member of the Holy Synod, Ioane Gamrekeli "had delivered his own highly controversial and problematic sermon, parts of which could have been interpreted as anti-Semitic".

The Ambassador said that after spending several years in Georgia, he is confident that the majority of people here do not share such alarming views, and, to the contrary, have peacefully coexisted with the Jewish community for more than 2 millennia, and the Jewish community was subjected to a much lesser and a rarer anti-Semitism, than the communities elsewhere in the world.

His Excellency Ran Gidor has also reminded that in reciprocity to the kindness of Georgian people, Israel has invested in the Georgian economy by training more than 1,500 Georgian citizens in Israeli medicine, educa-

tion, agriculture, and high-tech, as well as organized numerous humanitarian projects and assisted in Georgian fight against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. On top of that, Georgia has been one of the primary destinations for Israeli tourists, as a record, 200 000 of them visited Georgia in 2019 making it "the biggest group of any country which is not an immediate neighbour to Georgia".

With the upcoming International Day of Commemoration of the Holocaust on January 27<sup>th</sup>, and as a "son of a 91-year-old Holocaust survivor", the Ambassador has called upon the Georgian government and Patriarch Ilia II to publicly condemn the hateful sermons and anti-Semitic speeches. The Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani responded on his Tweeter page by saying that not even the slightest expression of anti-Semitism may find its place in the "hearts and minds of Georgians".

## Government extends coronavirus-related restrictions until February 1<sup>st</sup>



Restriction on the movement of municipal transport as well as the operation of shopping malls remain in force.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava announced yesterday that the targeted restrictions and regulations in the country will remain in force until February 1. The minister noted that the two-three weeks left before the end of the month will be used for active communication and meetings with representatives of the business sector to ensure the safe opening of both transport and business in February.

According to her, even though the statistics of daily cases show

that the restrictions imposed by the government have been effective in stabilizing the situation, the rate of infection is still high. Thus the Inter-Agency Coordination Council has decided to extend targeted restrictions, which include suspension of municipal transport in big cities and closure of shopping malls. Restriction on movement from 21:00 till 05:00 throughout the country still remains in force. Besides the mentioned restrictions, in big cities of Georgia including Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Gori, Poti, Zugdidi, and Telavi, as well as the ski resorts Open and closed markets are not

allowed to operate, (only agrarian markets continue to function), Private and public kindergartens are closed, schools, vocational schools, and higher education institutions (except medical education programs) are fully switched to online mode.

According to the Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia, Georgia only considers purchasing vaccines authorized by stringent regulatory authorities. The vaccine should be qualified by the World Health Organization and should have an international acknowledgment.

At this stage, Georgia is working on purchasing Pfizer, Moderna, or AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccines. According to Gabunia, obtaining Chinese vaccines is not on the agenda as they have not been authorized by stringent regulatory authorities yet.

Yesterday, Georgia reported 551 new infection cases, 880 recoveries, and 23 deaths. Since the first outbreak of COVID-19 in the country, there have been a total of 239,780 confirmed cases, 226,215 recoveries, and 2,796 fatalities.



At this stage, Georgia is considering purchasing Pfizer, Moderna, or AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccines.