



# GIORGI KADAGIDZE PROPOSES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MINISTRIES

SALOME KHVEDELIDZE

On February 16, the former President of the Georgian National Bank, Giorgi Kadagidze, made a statement on the optimization of 19 ministries on Rustavi 2 TV show *Choice*. According to him, the process of reducing the number of ministries would contribute to the reduction of bureaucracy and at the same time would allow Georgian taxpayers save hundreds of millions of dollars.

Kadagidze named the ministries that can possibly be abolished or reattached to other ministries. In particular, after the prosecutor's office was separated from the Ministry of Justice, Kadagidze is in favor of abolishing the Ministry of Corrections and Probation and subordinating the probation and penitentiary systems to the Ministry of Justice, as is the case in many European countries. He also stressed the need to abolish the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and subordinate the Department of Youth Affairs to the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Defense. Kadagidze called the Ministry of Culture the Soviet remnant and therefore does not see the need to obtain it. Finally, he also noted the necessity to merge the Ministry of European Integration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into a single department.

Kadagidze's statement met with mixed reactions at the plenary session of the Parliament. Some deputies said that optimization of ministries was voiced several times in the past few months, although no specific decision or plans were adopted. According-

ly, they did not rule out the possibility of the optimization process taking place in future.

A large proportion of Parliamentarians and a certain number of ministers, including Kakhi Kaladze, Gigla Agulashvili and Kakha Kakhishvili, support the new initiative, however different opinions were voiced as well. The Minister of Refugees and Resettlement, Sozar Subari, labeled Kadagidze's speech as an, "interference in the work of the government and a desire to get involved in politics." According to Health Minister, David Sergeenko, the cancellation of certain ministries is not related to the large amounts of savings.

As to the question of which of the existing ministries and state agencies might be the subject of unification-optimization, the majority of interviewed members of the Parliament refrained to comment. Until then, the members of Parliamentary minority called on the Prime Minister to start the discussion and choose the meeting date.

According to the Bank President, Georgia can take an example from successful Western countries. For the weight and size of the country like Georgia, 19 Ministries is a luxury and obtaining them costs a lot. He focused on the Netherlands and Switzerland, and brought up the example of the Swiss government's model, which consists of 8 ministries, with up to ten different departments in each ministry. Departments such as Social Insurance, Education and Research, Culture and a few others, are united under the umbrella of the Federal Department of Home

Affairs (the Ministry of Home Affairs), while the Federal Department of Economic Affairs (the Ministry of Economy) consists of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, and the Federal Office of Agriculture, Professional Education and Technology.

In European countries, considering that the majority of them have larger populations than Georgia, the number of ministries is proportionately lower. In Sweden there are 12 ministries, in Finland there are 11, France has 15, and Germany has 14. The Baltic countries, of which success after independence has been exemplary for Georgia, have 11-14 functioning ministries; 11 in Latvia, 14 in Lithuania and 11 in Estonia. Just as in European countries, there were 14 functioning ministries in Georgia, however when the United National Movement came to power, new ministries were added to the already existing ones: the Ministry of European Integration, the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, and the Ministry of Corrections.

The difficulty of the optimization process is predominantly related to reaching an agreement, and in particular, which ministries should be selected and what the criteria are. For instance, the management of the energy sector today is largely decentralized and the Minister has the representative role.

We can also speak about merg-

ing the Economy and Finance Ministries, and there is also a possibility of uniting the Ministry of Energy with the two aforementioned ministries. Experts have divided opinions regarding such matters. Part of the population was unhappy with Kadagidze's version as to what to do with the Ministry of Culture, with Kadagidze saying that the Ministry should be abolished. A lot of European countries have a Ministry of Culture, including France, Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, the Baltic States and others. The Culture Minister, Mikhail Giorgadze stated that existence of the Ministry should not be questioned.

In addition, there is an issue with the number of employed people in the public sector, especially in ministries. Functions of the state must be delegated to public organizations. Problems in different sectors, such as agriculture, cannot be the responsibility of the state only. For instance, in 2009 in Latvia (as well as in other Baltic countries) the Public-private partnership (PPP) program was created, and was successful in the implementation of the programs. Similar programs exist in Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and many others.

According to data of 2015, the number of employees in 141 public institutions, by no means a full list, was 72'726. About 27'000 people are employed in the government administration and ministries, 33'000 in public legal entities and sub-agencies, and 5000 in local and independ-

ent public legal entities and commissions. Almost 38% of public sector employees work in government administration and ministries. So a significant part of the population works in such institutions, while the private sector is weak. Of course, the question of abolishing and merging the ministries triggered mixed reactions among the population and especially those who work for the ministries.

The optimization process means the shift of a lot of people from the public sector to private which may place a heavy burden on them in the beginning.

Ministers and the members of the Parliament have not made any statements concerning these issues. Some noted that the optimization process requires a lot of time and good plan.

The size of the Ministers' Office in Georgia often depends on coming elections. During that time, the government decides to abstain from the release even the least necessary employees, and the optimization process means a lot of changes. Based on the experience of European countries, Georgia needs to optimize the ministries, which will not only become the resource to reduce bureaucracy, but will also reduce irrational spending of the budget and make the private sector more active.

However, along with that, the focus must not rather be on reducing the number ministries to certain number – the model of Switzerland with 8 ministries is not the starting point – but on how optimization can proceed less painfully and how ministries can work correctly.



# QUO VADIS, BRITAIN? GREAT BRITAIN TO PREPARE FOR REFERENDUM

GURAM PTSKIALADZE

The United Kingdom and the European Union have been holding meetings regarding the issue of the country's concerns regard the Union. Meanwhile, Great Britain are about to hold a referendum as to whether it stays in the organization or leaves. The poll will take place on June 23, 2016.

Where the EU faces some puzzling problems, above which is the migrants crisis, Great Britain is historically striving for isolation and questioned the EU as a unity of a strong Europe.

Holding a referendum was a core issue in 2012 too, however David Cameron abjured the needfulness of it. While abnegating a referendum, he revealed that the time of a referendum would come, if it was righteously necessary. The PM announced in January 2013 that if the Conservatives won the elections in 2015, they would ponder holding a referendum. As they won the elections, they stated that a poll would be in place until the end of 2017, as promised.

The most skeptical party toward the EU wanting Great Britain to leave it is the United Kingdom independence party founded in 1990's. The UKIP took third place in Britain in European Parliament in 2004, second in 2009 and first in 2014. Their leaders are waging a campaign for 'Brexit' (Britain + Exit).

While having the elections in the last year, both the Liberal Democratic Party and the Labor Party refused to agree on holding a referendum unless the appropriate plan of leaving EU is

made. The Scottish National Party does not want Great Britain to leave the European Union either.

Soon after entering the European Commonwealth, Downing Street held a referendum on the subject of being a part of the organization in 1975, but the British people said yes and GB stayed. Nevertheless, the amount of people who were mistrustful of the EU has increased.

Common opinions are split up. According to a last poll, 34% of respondents want Britain to leave the EU, while only 36% believe that the UK should stay, and the remaining citizens are hesitating on a decision.

Brexit supporters think that Britain is being held back by the EU, which they say imposes too many rules on businesses and charges billions of pounds per year in membership fees for little in return. They also want Britain to take back full control of its borders and reduce the number of people coming here to work. One of the main principles of EU membership is free movement, meaning that a traveler doesn't need to get a visa to go and live in another EU country. They also object to the idea of an ever closer union and believe that the ultimate goal to create a "United States of Europe."

David Cameron wants Britain to stay in the EU, and now he has some power back from it. The Labor Party, SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Lib Dems are also in favor of staying in. As mentioned above, according to polls, the public seems pretty evenly split on the issue. Brexit opposers

believe Britain gets a big boost from EU membership; it makes selling things to other EU countries easier and, they argue, the flow of immigrants, most of whom are young and keen to work, fuels economic growth and helps pay for public services. They also believe Britain's status in the world would be damaged by leaving and that they are more secure as part of the bloc.

Even though David Cameron is stubborn, stating that Britain should stay in EU, he takes into consideration that some changes should be made if UK and EU want to live together. That is what the sides have been discussing for several days. Cameron sent a draft to Donald Tusk concerning Britain's demands. Now what Great Britain's government wanted and agreed upon is known.

Downing Street agreed to a package of changes to the UK's membership of the EU after two days of intensive talks with other member states' leaders in Brussels in February. The agreement, which will take effect immediately if the UK votes to remain in the EU, includes the following: child benefit payments to migrant workers for children living overseas to be recalculated to reflect the cost of living in their home countries; migrant welfare payments whereby the UK can decide to limit EU migrant benefits for their first four years in the UK.

Migrant welfare payments - The UK can decide to limit in-work benefits for EU migrants during their first four years in the



UK. This so-called "emergency brake" can be applied in the event of "exceptional" levels of migration, but must be released within seven years - without exception. Euro zone - Britain can keep the pound while being in Europe, and its business trade with the bloc, without fear of discrimination. Any British money spent on bailing out euro zone nations will be reimbursed. Protection for the City of London - Safeguards for Britain's large financial services industry to prevent euro zone regulations being imposed on it

Sovereignty - There is an explicit commitment that the UK will not be part of an "ever clos-

er union" with other EU member states. This will be incorporated in an EU treaty change. "Red card" for national parliaments - It will be easier for governments to band together to block unwanted legislation. If 55% of national EU parliaments object to a piece of EU legislation it may be rethought.

Competitiveness - The settlement calls on all EU institutions and member states to "make all efforts to fully implement and strengthen the internal market" and to take "concrete steps towards better regulation", including by cutting red tape. Some limits on free movement - Denying automatic free movement rights to nationals of a country outside the EU who marry an EU national, as part of measures to tackle "sham" marriages. There are also new powers to exclude people believed to be a security risk - even if they have no previous convictions. The result of the talks will affect how British people think of EU and what decision they will make on the referendum of June 23. It goes without saying that if EU does not allow Great Britain to implement changes, it will be highly possible that Brexit will come true. Supposing that GB quits EU, it will damage EU unquestionably and threaten even its existence by being an impetus for other countries to do the same. Now it is up to British people whether Great Britain remains in EU and whether EU copes with it.



# MONTENEGRO'S ACCESSION TALKS AND PARALLELS TO GEORGIA

GIORGI CHAPIDZE

NATO continues its path of enlargement in a harsh and volatile political climate. Montenegro is the latest country invited to begin accession talks to join the Alliance as of December 2015. While this step illustrates that NATO does not retreat in the presence of Russian interest in the Balkans, the Alliance fails to secure even Membership Action Plans (MAPs) for Georgia and Ukraine. NATO is hesitant to intervene in Russia's near abroad region or backyard to pacify the Kremlin, but aims at integrating western Balkan countries where Russian strategic interests are rather humble.

Montenegro and Georgia are located in dissimilar geopolitical landscape but Russia still has interest in Montenegro. Pro-Russian parties that were trying to derail the country from the unification process, remain the major challenge for Montenegro's NATO aspirations as they organize protest rallies against Podgorica's chosen political strategy. Russian-backed protesters have tried to destabilize Montenegro and discourage NATO from proceeding with the integration course. Moscow express its position through Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that Montenegro's integration in the Alliance would be considered a provocation to change existing international order within the region.

The Russian federation also pointed out that if Montenegro joins NATO this will cause another blow in European security and will have an effect on Russia-NATO relations. Moreover, Russian Chairman of the Federation Council's Committee of Defense and Security, Viktor Ozerov, declared shortly after NATO initiated accession talks that Russia will suspend programs launched between the countries. "Montenegro should be aware that, in connection with its accession to NATO, many of the programs that they had implemented with Russia, including military-technical cooperation, will be impossible." As well as this, Russian officials stated that Russian investment has been quite significant in later years and would leave the country. Russian officials also declared that Montenegro's accession is a conspiracy of pro-American western elites, suggesting that if the referendum is held, the government would not be able to secure enough support for NATO accession.

Russia also tried to influence Montenegro's accession, but failed as the Kremlin did not have enough leverage over political processes in the country. Russia pursues a similar strategy in Georgia by using soft power components to change Georgian political orientation towards their northern neighbour. Russian interests in the South Cauca-



sus region are the main factor in NATO-Georgian relations, while it was merely a single component in Montenegro's case.

Montenegro has shown very fast-paced progress in its relations with NATO. After the country regained independence in 2006, Montenegro started undertaking structural and institutional reforms to come closer to the Alliance. Five months after declaring their independence, NATO invited Montenegro to join the PFP (Partnership for Peace) initiative. This event marked the first historic milestone for the country's NATO bid. Within this framework, Montenegro started to advance for its defence system and army by joint military trainings with other NATO member countries. The main focus was on peacekeeping and crisis-management operations. As for Georgia, NATO invited Tbilisi to join PFP program in 1994. The Alliance also helped Georgia to

strengthen Western aspirations but frozen conflicts and Russia's interests are the main stumbling blocks for accession talks.

In 2007 Montenegro contributed military equipment to the Afghan National Army to support NATO's effort and expressed its willingness to cooperate with the alliance. In 2008, NATO issued a Partnership Action Plan with Montenegro, and in 2009 NATO foreign ministers invited Montenegro to join MAP. After Montenegro joined MAP, its government increased involvement in NATO military programs. After 2010, Montenegro decided to contribute its troops to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Georgia was also a major non-member contributor of troops in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan that was always seen as a positive step for Georgia to come closer to the Alliance. Nevertheless, despite this hard effort Georgia, did not get

the MAP.

Montenegro has managed to overcome the negative anti-NATO concerns and Russian propaganda that is a serious threat for Georgia's aspiration as well. Montenegro has a sizeable Serbian population which opposes NATO membership due to the fact that NATO bombed Serbia during Kosovo war in 1999. As well as this, some Montenegrins would like to proceed with a non-aligned movement strategy that means that the country should not enter in any political or military organization. Georgia also faces the same challenges given that a considerable number of Georgians are not enthusiastic about joining the Alliance, possibly due to post-Soviet sentiments. Russian soft power tries to back pro-Russian organizations in Georgia, striving to derail Georgia's Western route, while Russia invoked mass protests in Podgorica to destabilize the situation. As can be seen, Russia uses almost the same strategy to prevent Montenegro's membership in the Alliance as it does in Georgia. They try to make changes to the countries' Western aspirations by financing and backing local organizations that try to convince citizens that integration into NATO is not in each country's national interests. Russia have imposed sanctions on Georgia and it uses the same tactic to dissuade Montenegro from the NATO bid. Both Georgia and Montenegro have populations who don't favor entry into NATO. In the case of Montenegro, a number of ethnic Serbians are not willing to join the organization while Russia targets the Russian-speaking minority groups in Georgia. Despite these similarities, there is a geopolitical context that makes NATO prudent to advance accession dialogue with Georgia that would affect Georgia's aspirations until Russia or NATO change foreign policy objectives.



# UKRAINE AND TURKEY TO RESUME FREE TRADE ZONE NEGOTIATIONS

EKA PKHOVELISHVILI

Turkey and Ukraine are ready to expand economic cooperation with each other, including an agreement concerning the Free Trade Zone. Prime Minister of Ukraine, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and his Turkish counterpart, Ahmet Davutoglu, gave instructions to their ministers to start technical consultations on the resumption of the negotiation process for the establishment of the Free Trade Zone, which was suspended in 2013.

At a joint press conference following the meeting in Kiev, the Turkish Prime Minister announced his government's readiness to sign the Free Trade Zone Agreement within the framework of economic cooperation.

"Negotiations on a Free Trade Area between Ukraine and Turkey were suspended in 2013. Together, we gave instructions to our ministers to start the negotiation process for the establishment of a Free Trade Zone that will continue in March," said Yatsenyuk.

In addition, the parties are planning to increase good turnover with US\$10 billion in 2018. Moreover, Ukrainian Prime Minister also suggested that Turkey should continue to invest in the Ukrainian infrastructure and energy issues.

"The necessity of signing the agreement concerning the Free Trade Zone between Ukraine and Turkey is the first priority in the list of the issues on the development of bilateral trade and economic relations," said the president of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK), Ömer Cihad Vardan.

"At the moment, Turkish investors are already feeling the negative impact of the absence of a Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and Turkey, and if the process is delayed for two or three years, then the consequences will be irreparable," said the head of the board, TUSIB (Turkey and Ukraine Industrialists and Businessmen Association) Rasim Bekmezdcı.

The DEIK organization was established in 1986 to promote the resolution of business problems, developing and supporting the strengthening of relations between the representatives of business, and being responsible for foreign economic relations of the private sector of Turkey. In the 30 years of its existence, DEIK has created 130 business councils.

In Turkey, as in Ukraine, there are problems regarding their relationships with Russia, and in the end, products intended for



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Russia will be exported to other countries. 90% of exports from Turkey are industrial goods and 50% of the goods exported from Turkey go to the EU.

The Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine will increase the Turkey's role in the region. The new official foreign policy of Ankara, which was isolated from its neighbors during the Cold War and was only Western oriented, has undergone significant changes. The country, with its growing economy, very convenient strategic location, and with ties to the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Middle East, is an important regional power.

Russia's relation with its neighboring countries is a key factor, which can significantly change the regional security system. With the confronted relations

with Russia, signing the Free Trade Zone agreement between Ukraine and Turkey might slow down the influence of Russia in the region. The signs of this were revealed at the meeting, when Arseniy Yatsenyuk noted that this is the first winter without Russian gas, which Ukraine successfully survived. In turn, Davutoglu said that Turkey does not recognize the annexation of Crimea and promised to support Ukraine as a strategic partner.

Within the regional security system, the signs of innovation during the recent months are coming from Turkey. It seems that the establishment of a Free Trade Zone with Ukraine is likely not based on the well-planned scheme of obtaining more power in the region, but is generally the part of the ongoing processes in Turkish

society and political elite, which aims at strengthening relations with Ukraine on the road of the Western integration. It is expected that the Turkey-Ukraine enhanced partnership will maintain Pro-Western course and will contribute to the balancing of Russia's power in the region.



# ICC: CHANGES PROPOSED BY GOVERNMENT REGARDING FREEZING OF BANK ACCOUNTS NOT SERIOUS

ICC Georgia had endorsed Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili during its 11th Consultative Board meeting; Prime Minister Kvirikashvili had presented to ICC Board Members the headlines of his upcoming block of reforms to encourage private sector development. ICC Georgia had expressed its confidence that Prime Minister Kvirikashvili was committed about tackling in the shortest terms the major hurdles that are damaging the investment climate in the country and mainly the relation between the Revenue Service and the business community. ICC Georgia is expressing today its deep concern regarding the proposed draft amending the Tax

Code, according to which the freezing of bank accounts without court Order for recognized taxes shall stay in force and the Revenue Service still reserves the right to freeze bank accounts for recognized and also unrecognized/disputable taxes if there is a risk of non-payment of such taxes and only after 48 hours the RS will have to apply to the Court and request confirmation of already frozen accounts.

ICC Georgia believes that this initiative is not serious at all and does not address the practice of arbitrary freezing taxpayers bank accounts and still represents a very serious impediment to business and investment in the country. Tax Administration

and the behaviour of the Revenue Service are for ICC members and by far the number one drawback to their businesses and unquestionably the number one issue to be addressed to improve the investment climate.

“Over the past twenty years, Georgia has gained a terrible reputation as a place to do business mainly because of the Revenue Service; as long as the bank accounts of businesses are frozen, as long as the Revenue Service over-penalize them and drag them into years of dispute and litigation the investment climate in Georgia will remain unappealing to both Georgian businesses and foreign investors alike. We still don't feel a real political will to



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improve the business climate, we are extremely disappointed with the draft law regarding freezing of bank accounts, we haven't seen anything in the draft law that solves the issue of freezing of assets or limiting the audit period or sanctioning inspectors who over-penalize taxpayers; if those issues are not addressed immediately, the investment climate will remain unattractive and we will find it very difficult to encourage any foreign investor to set foot in Georgia” said ICC-

Georgia Chairman, Fady Asly.

ICC Georgia is the largest and most vocal global Business Association in the country; it includes over 350 corporate and youth members and 28 business associations. The International Chamber of Commerce is the largest business organization in the world that includes over 6.5 million businesses and chambers of commerce. ICC consults regularly at the global level with the G8, G20, the World Bank, WTO, WCO and the UN.



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## MENU

### Monday

Soup of The Day  
Green Seasonal Salad  
Chicken Schnitzel  
Creamy Raspberry Cake



### Tuesday

Soup of The Day  
Mexican Salad  
Pizza Margarita  
Lemon Cheesecake

### Wednesday

Soup of The Day  
Greek Salad  
Tiflis Burger  
Pogitorole



### Thursday

Soup of The Day  
Green Salad  
Pasta Carbonara  
Cherry and Chocolate Cheesecake

### Friday

Soup of The Day  
Tomato & Cucumber Salad  
Pork Shashlik  
Vanilla Icecream



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# CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS: LEGAL PROBLEM OR A POPULIST ACTION?

IRAKLI PAVLENISHVILI

In the first paragraph of the 36 articles comprising the Georgian constitution, it states that marriage is based on equality of rights and free will of spouses. Before the 2012 presidential election, the Christian-Democratic Movement prepared a draft of a new constitutional amendment, which provisioned for a change to Article 36 of the Constitution, as follows: "The state recognizes marriage between men and women, which is based on equality of rights and free will of spouses." The CDP began collecting signatures to support this initiative, which also became the basis for a discussion on homophobia. In 2014, former Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, initiated the amendment so that, "the family is the union of man and woman." He was apparently referring to marriage, as the term 'family' did not exist in the Constitution. He also said that the initiative of strengthening the definition of family in the constitution was reviewed and approved by a council of the coalition known as Georgian Dream.

On January 27, 2016, chairman at Civil Monitoring Association,

Giorgi Tatishvili addressed the Constitutional Court to recognize the civil codes article, which determines marriage as union of only man and woman, as unconstitutional. On February 7, the Georgian Orthodox Church addressed the Interior Minister with a request for the protection of Giorgi Tatishvili. The church said that Tatishvili was representing the LGBT community, and because the majority of the population holds a negative attitude toward this law there is a danger that this situation will be cited as an instigation of force, and Tatishvili's life will be endangered. The Interior Ministry did not report on whether they have provided protection for Mr. Tatishvili in accordance with the Patriarchate's request.

On February 8, the LGBT organizations in Georgia distanced themselves from Mr. Tatishvili's initiative on marriage equality, saying that Mr. Tatishvili had no prior or current discussions with the LGBT community. They also said that he acts, not on behalf of LGBT people, but for his own interests. In their view, the definition of the marriage initiative is provocative and is aimed, not

to protect LGBT rights, but instead cause them harm. On February 9, MP Gia Volsky said that the parliamentary majority had prepared a draft law, according to which the definition of family will be the same in the Constitution as it is in the civil code.

Until 1990, homosexuality was recognized as a disease, but since the World Health Organization removed it from the list of diseases, a global movement of acceptance began, culminating with the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption by homosexual parents in 21 countries. This growing trend has now reached Georgia. Marriage equality is not debated by international law, and many European states have different approaches to the legality of same-sex marriage and same-sex relations. 27 European states, many of whom are part of the European Union, recognize various forms of relationships between people of the same sex. The remaining EU countries, predominantly the post-Soviet countries, have opted for constitutional restriction of marriage equality. Some international organizations consider these restrictions to be the intro-

duction of homophobia with the help of democratic instruments.

The United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Rights committee addressed states to legally recognize same-sex relationships. According to the report from the UN Human Rights High Commissioner's Office, not officially recognizing these relationships and not enforcing principles of acceptance contributes to the marginalization of LGBT couples through improper and unequal treatment by individuals, health service providers and insurance companies. The court's approach is shared by the United Nations and considers not recognizing same-sex couples' life partnerships to be a violation of the European Convention's Articles 8 (Respect For Private And Family Life) and 14 (Prohibition Of Discrimination).

As read in the court's decision, same sex couples must be legally recognized and protected. The court is critical to those states where there is no legally-equipped same-sex partnership. This approach was clearly demonstrated in cases such as the Oliari versus Italy case, and the Valliantos versus Greece case,

indicating that the Georgian state should do its best to meet the legal standards set by the European court. For the overwhelming majority of the population, same-sex marriage is not considered to be acceptable. In a 2012 NDI survey, 89% of respondents supported the idea of a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. European Commissioner, Stefan Fule, declared in 2014 that the EU does not demand legalization of same-sex marriage, and that the West does not want to impose foreign values on Georgian people.

The issue of marriage is not a priority for the LGBT community and their defenders. The constitutional amendment does not serve the democratic values in the country and is the subject of political speculation. It is likely that the raising of similar issues by the government is caused by its willingness to hide bigger problems on election year, and to gain political points by setting populist issues. Such manipulation of the issues of course leads to a discriminatory practice and continuous and systematic marginalization of the LGBT community.



# CHARRED SALARIES, MINERS' STRIKE, AND EMPTY COLLIERY

TEIMURAZ SHA

1450 coal miners, workers of Dzidziguri and Mindeli collieries in Tkibuli municipality, conducted a protest strike lasting more than a week. They demanded increased salaries and better working conditions. Representatives of Saknakhshiri GIG, the company responsible for the miners, met them only on the 6th day, although their amended promises were not clear enough.

In spite the fact that a coal miner is one of the hardest and most dangerous occupations, and needs regular monitoring of work conditions, the labor rights of Georgian coal miners are not protected by any institutions, nor are the conditions and salaries satisfactory. All mentioned problems of collieries are expressed in a large group of regular accidents, including deaths, and honoraria in amounts of \$120-200 per month.

Neither the government nor the offices of the Ombudsman take care of the labor rights of coal miners. Of course, there are many lawsuits, charters and codes which are able to protect the rights of lead companies to

improve the working conditions, but the Georgian government has a selective approach to them. For example, in 2005 the Parliament of Georgia ratified several articles of the European Social Charter, including Article 3, "The right to safe and healthy working conditions," but the parliament ignored an obligation to the International Labour Organization. Up to this day Georgia has not yet ratified the Safety and Health in Coal Mines Convention (No. 176) of the ILO. Recently, on January 18, the Government of Georgia, in particular the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs, accepted an ordinance to launch a national program focusing on Inspection and Evaluation of Work Conditions. In the frame of this program, a working group will work out and accept the norms of work conditions, which will be followed by the inspection and evaluation processes.

The main demand of Tkibuli coal miners are increased salaries from \$200 up to \$280, and improved working conditions, such as including warm smocks, and dry areas. The company

Saknakhshiri GIG, which owns the colliers, kept silent for few days, but on the 5th day published an official position on the web resource.

It stated, "The company provides salaries on time, and also protects all conditions rewritten in job contracts. Coal miners are provided with a full pack of medical insurance, and the company regularly improves the working conditions. Despite the fact that there is no reason for such a protest strike, the management of the company negotiated with the protestors."

The Saknakhshiri GIG company was founded in April 2006, and it is wholly owned by GIG holding with the operations focused on coal mining activities, including coal extraction and enrichment. A sole owner of economically important coal mining assets, Saknakhshiri is a premier coal mining company in Georgia and the only provider of locally mined coal.

Dzidziguri and Mendeli mines, where current operations are taking place, represent the key production assets, located with-

in Tkibuli municipality. The company owns a coal reserve amounted to 331 million tons. For 2014, the Sales Revenue is about 34.2 million GEL, while EBITDA is 8.2 million GEL.

On February 17, the Direct General of Saknakhshiri GIG met with representatives of the protestors. The director proposed that the coal miners are to finish the strike, and start back at work, while the company will think about salary increases and improvements of conditions. The coal miners have not been satisfied with the meeting, and they expect specific actions by Saknakhshiri GIG.

The MP from Tkibuli municipality, Eliso Chapidze, commented on the problems of the coal miners. According to Chapidze, the social privileges of coal miner were limited, and part of the employees' salaries decreased. Chapidze called upon her colleagues to get involved in the miners' problems and solution processes.

"I would like to use the high tribunal to call upon the leader of my team, Bidzina Vanishvili and

ask him why the Tkibuli population is being punished? I want to plea to the Government of Georgia, and to my team members. They may not say that I haven't mentioned this current issue before. I call upon the authors of lawsuits – Irakli Tripolsky, Giorgi Zhorzholiani, Gia Volski- and other members of my team, to not go to the Tkibuli coal miners alone. We cannot avoid the responsibility we have," she said.

The protest strike is still continuing in Tkibuli. Unfortunately, the problems of coal miners are not publicized to international or local human rights organizations, the government, or even the media, while at the same time, the miners are not able to achieve their aims alone, face-to-face with Saknakhshiri GIG. The protestors need help solving their problems according to the law.

Due to these issues, the population of Tkibuli, which is already quite poor, will face new economical problems, because the majority of the population works in those particular collieries.

## UN PRESENTS REPORT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN GEORGIA

Every year, 5000 women are killed by family members. Every third woman in the world will have experienced different types of violence in their lifetimes. Most often, the violator is a male partner. Every year, more women in the world die as a consequence of violence than from cancer, car accidents and military actions combined.

In the USA, three women die every day, 38'028'000 women experience physical violence in their lifetime and since 2003, 18'000 women have been killed by their husband or partner during an argument. 95% of victims of violence are women. Any type of violence against women remains an unsolved problem, even in so-called developed countries. In the opinion of former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, violence against women is a global problem in any type of society or culture. Women, despite race, ethnic origin, social origin and natal place, can become victims of violence.

Nowadays this subject is dis-

cussed actively and many organisations in the world research and attempt to resolve this issue. The 25th of November is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Unfortunately in Georgia, violence against women isn't seen as a huge problem, because many facts and acts of violence are wrongly justified with incorrect and misinformed stereotypes about gender equality.

According to research, in Georgia every 11th woman and approximately 3% of pregnant women are victims of physical violence. The behavior of 35% of women is controlled by their partners, and 14% of women are recognised as victims of emotional violence at least once in their lifetime. In the case of domestic violence, the perpetrator is usually a male partner, and the victim a woman. There are 4 types of violence: physical, emotion, sexual, economical. According to the Estonian researchers, in Georgia, physical violence is the most common. According to the research, 50% of doctors con-

firm that in Georgian families, physical and psychological violence is a serious problem. The research shows that the theme of sexual violence is tabooed in Georgia and victims rarely talk about these events. The victims of physical violence are often married women, approximately 30 years of age. The most common victims of sexual violence are 13 to 18 year old girls. 9% of gynecologists admit that they have experienced cases where pregnant women gave the birth to children with disabilities because of physical violation.

United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women, Dubravka Simonovic, visited Georgia, and on the 19th of February at the end of a five-day conference, she talked about the problem, its causes and its consequences. She said that during the past few years Georgia has made several significant improvements to its legislative framework on violence against women, with a particular focus on domestic violence. The government demonstrated its willingness to improve

women's situations in general and to address domestic violence in particular. Nevertheless, despite a list of laws, policies and institutional measures adopted to combat violence against women, there is no specific legislation on gender-based violence, and a lack of a comprehensive national mechanism to coordinate, effectively implement and monitor gender equality policies.

The implementation of these laws is challenged by societal attitudes. Entrenched patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes means that gender-based violence is often tolerated, and domestic violence is considered a private matter and not a public concern in most parts of the country. Ms. Simonovic paid attention to the importance of promoting prevention and continuing the campaigns raising awareness of women and girls' rights within the population. She encouraged the government to continue training police officers around the country, as well as social workers, doctors and teachers who who also play key roles

in detecting and reporting and reporting cases of violence. To her mind, there is an urgent need for more shelters throughout the country, in particular in rural areas, as the majority of shelters are only located in urban areas.

She also talked about early and forced marriage. In rural areas, the vast majority of girls are married before the age of 18, and some as early 16. These girls, as a general rule, drop out of formal education, so they often lack the economic independence needed to leave their abusers. There are other harmful problems, albeit to a lesser extent, including virginity testing and sex selective abortions. She supports the adoption of the law on mandatory quotas of women in parliament, specifying a minimum participation of 30% of women and hopes to see more women elected as members of the parliament.

"Every woman and girl has the right to live a life free from violence," Ms. Simonovic said in conclusion. She will introduce a final account and recommendations in June 2016.



# THE CHAOTIC AFTERMATH OF BANKRUPTED MAESTRO TV

TAMAR UMPRIANI

TV channel, Maestro. Has gained the interest of the community once again following an internal reorganization of the channel and a confrontation between the owners, resulting in the dismissal of channel director, Baia Gadabadze. After being forced to leave her job due to a decision made in the partners' meeting, she filed a complaint in the Tbilisi City Court, which was then rejected. According to her, the decision was sent into the Court of Appeal and she assumes that the government is involved in the case of the Maestro channel.

"Complaints like mine are discussed for two or more months as usual, but my request was decided in exactly 24 hours. I had reasonable doubts before but now I am sure the government has an interest in this case and is acting illegally," said Gadabadze.

As of the 1st of February 2016, Maestro's shares had been reorganized between its owners. According to the agreement filed in the business register, Giorgi Gachechiladze bought 15% of shares from both Giorgi Ebralidze and Levan Chikvaidze. The cost of the sold property is confidential and settled by the agreement. Due to this reorganization, Gachechiladze has become the dominant owner thanks to his ownership of 55% of the shares. Mamuka Glonti, one of the founders of channel, owns

15%, While Maka Asatiani owns 25% and Ekaterine Akobia has 5%.

After attaining the controlling stake, Gachechiladze made an announcement in which he said he plans to change the channel staff and management to reaffirm the name of one of the most powerful and popular channels in the country. The dismissal of Baia Gadabadze was required to appoint his brother, Levan Gachechiladze, as the new channel director.

Gadabadze says the bankrupted Maestro was sold for several million dollars, which can't be explained by the commercial point of view, affirming that it could be attractive for only one reason: the Maestro brand is to be used for political interests.

Irakli Rukhadze, an unofficial owner of TV channel Imedi, was involved in the case when Gachechiladze mentioned that Rukhadze gave him financial support for buying the shares of Maestro. According to the case, it isn't the first time Rukhadze has shown an interest in Maestro.

In May of 2015, Rukhadze contacted Irakli Gogelia, businessman and husband of Maka Asatiani, who proposed to sell him the channel for \$7 million. "On 29 May, 2015 Rukhadze contacted Gogelia for the first time and recommended that he buys Maestro," said Gadabadze. "He was interested, not in the

channel, but in its licenses and channel frequencies. He was ready to pay \$7.5 million for the channel's connections and contents."Maka Asatiani's Lawyer says they won't let anyone create a new branch of Imedi from Maestro.

The dream deal for Rukhadze failed, but he kept proposing his recommendations about buying the channel throughout last year. Ms. Asatiani applied to the court to announce the channel's bankruptcy. She said of her decision, "I, as one of the owners of Maestro, promise that I will try my best to keep the channel working without problems. We promise the society and channel staff that we will protect the channel's rights legally in court. We will keep working and won't allow anything to prevent the channel's functioning or its editorial independence and development."

After the appeal in the court about bankruptcy, Gachechiladze, who owned 25% of shares at that moment, requested that the other partners be available for financial support of the channel's operation. He said some investors would invest \$10 million for it, but they had to keep their identity private. The other owners of the channel reacted negatively to his suggestion and rejected collaboration with secret investors.

Another founder, Mamuka Glonti, said, "I am not going to exchange one of my life's most



important achievements, Maestro to material profits. If anyone, the country or a person who has more influence than tries to take my property illegally from me, I will do anything to get it back. They must know that winning once with money or power doesn't mean the end. Violence won't ever win the war."

Gachechiladze's lawyer assumes that the partners intentionally started the process of bankrupting the channel to leave Gachechiladze out of the game. "Instead of just talking we are working to sustain Maestro. On the 3rd of September in 2015 I first suggested to Irakli Goelia that I should own his shares so I had the chance to take care of the channel. I gave him the guarantee of financial stability," he said. "On the 25th of October I filed a case in the court to take back the official name of Maestro. I managed the ownership of the control of majority shares for only one reason: to change inefficient management and appoint the right person to the director's position who will work for the channel's survival."

Asatiani's lawyer presumes that the shares were not bought by Gachechiladze but by Imedi's, owner Irakli Rukhadze. If

this gets confirmed it means the competition rule of Georgia was violated and needs to be investigated. The channel was sold to an economic agent who already owns a different media channel. Section 11 of the Competition Law states that, it is a crime if one person tries to own two different media channels and then tries to be dominant of the other. The lawyer asked the court to investigate and acknowledge the fact, and, if this is confirmed, to cancel the agreement between Gachechiladze and the ex-partners about buying channel shares.

Competition also made an announcement about the case and said that they haven't received any paper about Maestro until now, even though it's not in their jurisdiction to get involved in this kind of case.

Media experts believe that if Rukhadze ownership of Maestro is confirmed, they will be able to make a case surrounding the use companies for personal interests, political reasons, or to make a channel dominant. Any of these issues in the industry can disrupt the country's democratic development, and society's right to obtain information from diverse viewpoints will be restricted.



# MARIAM JASHI: WE CREATE STORIES WITH THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE

GURANDA DZAMELASHVILI **EXCLUSIVE**

The Charity Fund “Solidarity” was founded by the former Prime-Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili in 2014. Recently, the Solidarity Fund has published 10th Periodic report. According to the report more than 5.7 million Lari has been collected by the fund since its establishment. As a result, the fund has covered all the treatment costs for 215 beneficiaries and among them 106 cases abroad. “Observer” spoke with the Solidarity Fund executive director, Mary Jashi about fund’s activities and its future plans.

**You have been an executive director of the Solidarity Fund since its establishment .What was the pre-condition for foundation?**

As you know, in 2013 had increased funding for health and launched an universal health care program, which provided the basic health package for all citizens. But still there were remained particularly expensive medical interventions, which is not funded by the state and municipal programs. In addition, the country was very in difficult social condition. According to United Nations Children’s Fund and the UN Development Program studies, 70% of population was considered the socio-economically disadvantaged. There was no common platform, which would ensure the mobilization of resources and other expensive medical or social needs for beneficiaries. To create this common platform was established the solidarity fund”.

**What are the main criteria for choosing the beneficiaries whose treatment will be covered by the fund?**

At present, we are funding the beneficiaries under the age of 22 with oncological disease. Extension of the Solidarity Fund programs are directly related to the public participation. If monthly donations are under 400 thousand GEL and we won’t be able to do more to mobilize financial resources, then we won’t be able to finance the beneficiaries with other disease. If self-employed or employed citizens of Georgia, which are nearly one and a half million people donate every month even symbolic amount of money this will give us an opportunity to help the disabled patients and children with rare diseases.

**How many beneficiaries have died so far and who’s paying to**

**transfer a body of the deceased back to Georgia?**

Unfortunately, oncological diseases are very difficult to cure. In 2015, not a single child or youngster has died due to financial problems. We can say that 80% of beneficiaries who are funded by the Solidarity Fund continues their treatment and dozens of patients have been fully recovered. Totally we had 35 cases when beneficiaries with cancer had died and only one case when a child had passed away abroad. To transferring the ceased body to Georgia, we can say that the Solidarity Fund was involved in the coordination, however, I would also like to point out Dimitri Tsintsadze Foundation, which had provided all the financial support.

**What is the main source of funding for the Solidarity Fund?**

The administrative expenses of the Fund is allocated from the government. As for revenues, it is more than 55 000 civil servants and 23 of the private company’s regular monthly donations. These small contributions are around 3-4 Lari for each individuals and as a result we manage to gather 270 thousand Lari for each month. In addition, one-time donations and charity events are held, which also adds a certain amount of money to the lump sum.

**What share of the funding come from ordinary citizens, who enter on the website of the Fund, register there and transfer money?**

Donations from some individuals isn’t high. Perhaps it’s less that 5% of monthly donations. The majority of donations (75%) are collected from public sector employees, while about 20% of money comes from the private sector and from charity events. A Turkish businessman and philanthropist Galip Ozturk helps the fund since its inception, he had donated half million dollars for the fund. This is a unique example of the individual donations.

**How often do you have the cases when citizens or companies from abroad are helping the fund?**

We have a German friend Heinz Gengenbach who collected 20 thousand euros throughout the whole Germany for the project which will launch from the 1st March and will help 80 children with cancer to send materials for diagnose to German laboratory for free. The project also partly



cover radiation therapy. Mr. Heinz has been a friend of Georgia for 20 years. When he had learned about the existence of the solidarity fund he expressed a desire to cooperate with us.

**Overall, which foreign clinics do you cooperate with?**

Last year, with the help of the Ministry of foreign affairs and diplomatic corps we had sent a request for co-operation programs in 25 countries. As a result, in 11 cases out of 25 we got reply from the clinic. In co-operation with the clinics we can not only treat the children at a reduced price, but also carry out joint programs in order to render the services to beneficiaries residing in Georgia. The main purpose of the Solidarity Fund is not only in oncology, our goal is to improve the service in Georgia. We want to see the child with cancer two years later, who no longer requires to go abroad for treatment. Today, the country’s health sector do not have such opportunity. With the support of 23 private companies and 55 thousand civil servants, we won’t leave any child without financial assistance. At present, in collaboration with leading university clinics in the United States, the cancer institute Harvard University, Yale University, as well as Saint Judy hospitals network, the leading European clinics, Israel, Japanese clinics e.c.t

**What is the “ideabox” ?**

The “ideabox” is a space for people to suggest us their ideas how to expand our programs and how to make our fund more known for the society. Mainly we get some ideas from the students youth organizations. We also had received a letter from Georgian Diaspora. We will start meeting with representatives of Diasporas this year and they will

be able to actively participate in our charity events.

**The Supervisory Board was carrying out their activities with the leadership of the former Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. Are there expected any particular changes as the Prime Minister has replaced?**

The Solidarity Fund is a historical project in Georgia which was initiated by the former Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. As for the continuing activities of the Fund, the chairman of the Board of Supervisors became a new Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili who’s is a great supporter of the fund and with his support we are planning programs for the further continuation of the Fund’s activities in order to expand. However, to expand the Solidarity Fund activities the public participation is still necessary. In the future we will focus more on the international cooperation programs.

**Recently the Solidarity Fund has published the tenth periodic report. What is the most important about this report?**

According to the 10th periodic report more than 5.6 million dollars was mobilized by the fund which makes it possible to fund treatment costs for 215 children and youth including 106 abroad. We had saved dozens of families from bankruptcy. We have numerous cases when we funded children with more than 150 thousand dollars. For example, I can bring the 4-year-old Nikusha’s case, whose bone marrow transplantation had costed 167 000 dollars.

More recently, we proved 15-year-old George’s treatment which will cost 58 thousand dollars . These are the stories that we are creating with tens

of thousands of people and participation of each individuals, even if it’s symbolic, is vital.

**The Solidarity Fund will launch a new program for children living in poverty from 2016 can you tell us more about this program?**

I should mention once more that extension of the fund is directly related to our community involvement. If we have about 1.5 million citizen with average salary and if they donate at least one lari in a month then we will be able to collect around one million and a half lari what will give us an opportunity to help oncological patients above the age of 22, disabled beneficiaries and children with rare disease. For instance, transplantation of a heart isn’t financed from the governmental programs, the Solidarity Fund is the platform what can help these people if the society will support us as well. We are going to launch a special program for children living in poverty at the end of this year and in the beginning of 2017. Families living in poor conditions will have an opportunity to upload information about their situation on our social website and we will individually connect them to those people who can donate one hundred or two hundred lari for them monthly. This is the project which is also implemented in many other countries throughout the world.

**What are the Solidarity fund’s plans for 2016 ?**

During 2016, the Foundation will focus on three main priorities; expansion of the international project of the Solidarity Fund, mobilize society more (increase a number of public employees who donates for the fund) and strengthen the pediatric services.

# POST-SOVIET BOYS FROM 90S ARE BACK IN TBILISI?

NINI JAPARIDZE

I live on Tsereteli Avenue. When walking around in daylight, everything feels like home. The beginning of the street is noisy, full of merchants, sellers and buyers. The end of the street, Gamopena, is comparably calm and conservative. This is the best place to hold different events. Public figures, ambassadors and Georgian celebrities often visit but I doubt that many really know what goes on here in the evenings, especially late at night.

Are the frozen faced guys from the 90's back in Tbilisi? This is the question that has been torturing me for a pretty long time. Why is my street full of guys who are hiding their bearded faces in the black tippets? It is so easy to recognize them. They seem so woozy, they almost never say hello, and act like if they are trying to hide something, but what? It was 10 AM when my friend and I met a young man on Tsereteli Avenue. He was bleeding. His knees were skinned and galled, and his clothes were dirty and torn as well. We thought he was drunk, but when we came closer, we found out that he was

neither drunk nor in a fight. He acted as if he were under the influence of drugs. He was not able to control his behavior. He was swinging his arms and losing his balance. Suddenly the young man started to choke but he didn't have any aerosol.

We were afraid and immediately decided to call the doctor. When the young man heard we were calling he became very angry and ran away. He didn't have enough force to escape, so he fell down within 10 meters. His knees started to bleed again. He didn't like that we were with him, and neither did we, but we left him only when he was able to walk independently, breath and speak. That happened in just two hours, so we spent this time with him.

The strangest thing ever was that after being so uncontrollable, he became a very taciturn person, one capable of speaking and thinking quite clearly. The only signs of his previous condition were his ripped jeans and bleeding knees. I, as a journalist, encouraged him to speak up and tell his story.

Tengo was a student at the medical university and had been consuming forbidden medications for more than a year. Well, forbidden for us and for those who can think appropriately. For Tengo, these drugs were not forbidden at all. According to him, he was able to get them without any obstacles. He said that they didn't require any receipts and were not recognized as drugs by the ministry of health and labor of Georgia.

"Several years ago I was suffering from Asthma and my doctor told me that I needed Atrovent. This medicine was zoning me out. I liked it, but it required a prescription. Since I was not in need of this medicine anymore and couldn't obtain it through prescriptions, I found out other medicines which were sold without prescriptions. They were Grimodin, Lirik, Gabapentin and Baklosan and I often zonk out when I dink all of them at the same time. It's very important not to lose control over yourself. If you lose control, it means you've got problems,"- said Tengo.

When he was asked if he realized the possible outcomes, he said he was but was not able to control himself, as he depended on the aforementioned medicines very much, which was interesting considering that these medicines are not forbidden and can be legally purchased.

"I feel like a lazy man. If I have a chance I do this, I will, even if I know that this is not very good for my health. When I'm drinking too much I'm not able to work, or think properly. Sometimes I even have hallucinations but I can't really stop. Recently I was smoking bio drags, but now they are included in the list of prescription drugs and you can't get them easily. The only way out for me is that if the drugs I am drinking will be restricted as well," said Tengo. According to him, the leading drug stores don't sell the medicaments without prescriptions, but those which are small, located on Tamar Mepe Avenue, are selling them without any documents. "In the big drug stores, the psychoactive drugs can't be obtained without appropriate prescriptions and

documents. Many things have changed after "Bio smoking." The only way to get them is to go to small drug stores, on Tamar Mepe Avenue. There, you can even get Grimodin," Tengo said.

We decided to conduct a little investigation. We visited the leading drug stores located on Tsereteli Avenue, PSP, GPS, Aversi and Pharmadepo, we discovered that Grimodin is the most expensive drug. The price for 60 pills is 58 Gels and the price for 120 pills is 118 Gels. In the leading drug stores we were not able to get the medicines without prescriptions.

Unfortunately, we were not able to find enough evidence to support what Tengo was saying, as no one sold the medicaments we were asking for. Interestingly though, it doesn't change anything. If Tengo, a young student, was able to obtain the drugs without prescription, it means that just about every person is able to do this. We hope that this issue will be regulated soon and the young people won't have any chances to buy medications which might harm their health.



# GEORGIAN MUSICIAN IS IN TOP FIVE AT YAMAHA COMPETITION

NINI MACHAVARIANI **EXCLUSIVE**

Yamaha held its annual contest for trumpet performers on February 14 in Dubai, UAE. Any student, under 24 years old who studied at the Conservatory could take part. 39 applied for the competition, with 16 applicants from 7 countries including Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan were selected in the second round.

Valerian Saatashvili represented Georgia at this competition. He successfully completed the final stage of the road where he took part in the top five best musicians. Saatashvili performed "The Carnival of Venice," by Arban, Jean-Baptiste.

"In cooperation with the Conservatory, we selected the best student, who was named one of the winners. This is a great success for Saatashvili and a motivation for future trumpeters," a spokesman at Yamaha Georgia said. "We would like to thank him for his high professionalism, for his hard work to his goal, and we wish him a lot of success."

Yamaha Georgia fully funded the costs of participants, including the booking of a five star hotel, and first class tickets.

"I was enormously pleased with the fact that for the first time, I had the opportunity to represent my country at a large-scale com-

petition. It was a big responsibility, and I want to thank Yamaha's representation in Georgia for this opportunity, for their trust and support," Saatashvili said.

Speaking to the Observer, the musician noted that all five winners were awarded with a cash prize of \$5000. Winners also discussed their future plans with Yamaha representatives.

"I had hoped for a victory, and was pretty sure that I would win. I said to myself that there was no other way except to play well," he said. According to the musician, winning this competition will have a positive impact on his professional development. Each competition is very important for the artist's creative life as no one knows what will be next. This opens the door to many opportunities.

"The most important part of the competition is not a victory; it is a great experience and with such small details comes professionalism. This is a path that all the performers have to take," said Saatashvili.

Vako Saatashvili enrolled at the Tbilisi State Conservatory in June 2012. Since August 2015, he has moved to Norway with the Erasmus exchange program to study at the Oslo Conservatory, the Norge Academy of Music.

"While living in Oslo, I real-

ized that we should respect those students who study in Georgia through an exchange program, because there will surely come a time when the majority of us will experience living in a foreign country. It is hard to start a new life in another country and I have developed personally and professionally," he commented.

All musicians need to constantly work on themselves from a professional and personal point of view, as Saatashvili said. He also had to work on improving certain details of his performances and his Norwegian professors are helping him. He is involved in many different exciting projects.

"Unlike Georgian professors, Norwegians are slightly more informed, they are much higher in number and the Norge Academy of Music has a relatively large culture and history."

After bachelor studies, Saatashvili plans to apply for his masters and to gain degree abroad. He is willing to start a solo career, but he might also become a part of an orchestra. A dream place for him to hold a concert is the Oslo Concert Hall and he dreams of becoming a member of the Oslo Orchestra. He is very eager to share his knowledge and experience with talented, enthusiastic and determined children.



"I would advise young musicians to be goal oriented and to work hard, because it is always followed by the result. Prefer-

ably they should be motivated to work on themselves and always know what they want from life," said the musician.



# MAEGHT GALLERY OF PARIS HELD SCARVES EXHIBITION IN GEORGIA

Georgian National Museum Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery opened the exhibition of silk scarves from Maeght gallery, Paris that will be closed on February 23. The exhibition showcase up to 50 silk scarves from the “Maeght” collection which were created based on the sketches of the prominent artists, one of them is a Georgian artist, Gela Tsuladze.

“The idea of the scarves’ exhibition came years ago, when I met with Gallery Maeght representatives, I have known them for 30 years. I did my first solo exhibition in Paris; in 1982 one of my paintings was sold from the series of abstract painting, which was bought by a young girl. When I delivered a picture to her home, I learned that he was the grandson of the Maeghts family.

Our encounter took place so long ago and now we are friends. From the fact that they already own 11 thousand samples, I was offered to exhibit one leaf from this big tree in Georgia,” said the artist, Gela Tsuladze.

Gela Tsuladze works in the style of 1980s French “free figuration” sequence. In addition to paintings he has created sculptures. For example, the statue of WHERE in Batumi was performed by him in 2013. He is a

co-author of another sculpture in Tbilisi, bicycle.

According to the artist, the scarves exhibition was decided because their transportation was more simple and convenient. Exhibition of scarves was first held more than 50 years ago by Georges Braque and Marc Chagall, many other paintings were sold on the second and third exhibitions. This is a limited edition, which now lies only in families and is no longer for sale.

Maeght plans future exhibitions in lithography and many other paintings. Tsuladze noted that the most important for artist is to love his job. The main thing is to put much color and fun.

“Artist should not wait for a muse. Painting is the process that leads to the muse - the process never happens the other way around,” says creator.

First exhibition of Maeght silk scarves was held in 1984 in Lyon, the second in 1990 in Tokyo, the third - in 2015 in Batumi “Contemporary Art Center”, and the fourth in 2016 in Tbilisi, Dimitri Shevardnadze national gallery is in progress.

The story of Maeght family starts before the war period. Grandfather Maeght was kidnapped and her wife was selling vegetables in the market. The

situation was very difficult, after certain period it became difficult to sell vegetables. Grandfather returned at home and opened the shop with his wife, which was selling radios. However, it failed and started to bankrupt. That was when an unknown artist passed through the empty shop, saw the free space and offered the exhibition of paintings to the owners. Since then the gallery held several exhibitions, currently it owns 11 000 art pieces and third generation continues their work.

The Marguerite and Aimé Maeght Foundation is a private foundation aiming to present and promote modern and contemporary art in all its forms. The Maeght Foundation owns one of the largest collections of paintings, sculptures and graphic works of the 20th century European artists including Bonnard, Braque, Calder, Chagall, Chillida, Giacometti, Léger, Miró, Uzac and contemporary artists such as Adami, Calzolari, Caro, Del Re, Dietman, Kelly, Mitchell, Monory, Oh Sufan, Takis, Tàpies.

This exhibition will emphasize the importance of Georgia as one of the Silk Road countries. The exhibition aims to strengthen the cultural relations between Georgia and France and support integration of Georgia into the European art-space.



# WHY DO FOREIGN NATIONALS PURSUE THEIR STUDIES IN GEORGIA?

MARI TABATADZE

Young people from many different countries are gradually becoming more and more interested in the Georgian Education system. This process is due to the integration into the mainstream European programs, giving international students the chance to participate in various different exchange programs and to continue their studies in Georgia. The process is facilitated by the access to education in Georgia where foreign students can study without exams.

In accordance with the resolution of the Georgian Government, the Educational Support Program for Foreign Citizens is effective from January 1, 2016. This program is administered by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

Program beneficiaries are foreign nationals who are learning or will learn in higher education institutions in Georgia. The program includes the funding of undergraduate, graduate, certified physician and dentist education programs, as well as, PhD studies and Georgian Studies accredited education programs.

Statistically in Georgia, most of the students arrive from India, then Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia and Sri Lanka. Citizens of any counties have the right to receive a full education from the higher education institutions of Georgia. In addition, interested persons may obtain information from the official website of the Ministry of Education and Science.

In considering the issue, the first thing to note is that when we talk



about the citizens of other countries, it also includes the majority of immigrants, with the status of a citizen of another country. As for the students enrolling, this process generally happens through the national exams and is the same process for foreign students too, specifically ethnic Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians living in other countries now but who are returning to their own country as they do not have a language barrier. The second way is to pursue the studies without examinations. It is really very attractive at first glance. However, there are some limitations, which are regulated by the Bologna Process. After the studying for their certificates, a foreign student must have taken a prerequisite subjects in his or her own country. Without doing so, they cannot study in a

Georgian institution.

As explained above, in accordance with the clearly formulated rules and the terms defined, foreign students have the right to study at the Higher Educational Institutions Accredited in Georgia without passing Unified National Examinations. In order to take this opportunity, foreign applicants are eligible to submit an application to the legal entity of public law at the National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement of Georgia, along with all necessary documents. Having the chance to study in Georgia without passing any exams is really the best approach in order to attract foreign students to our country.

The next interesting issue is that medicine is constantly the most popular field for foreign students and it has turned into

a trend. Other in-demand study areas include foreign languages, business, history and law. In addition, some foreign students are also interested in Georgian Studies.

It is also worth mentioning that for foreign students, getting education is cheaper and more easily obtained in Georgia than in other EU countries. This is undoubtedly a major reason for the interest of foreign students. In addition, since the Lisbon Convention calls for the recognition of education in other countries, including Georgia, many foreign students have the opportunity to find work in their own countries.

More attention should be paid to regulated professions, including the law and medical sectors. While discussing these fields, foreign students have to pass additional exams in order to be able

to find jobs in their countries. However, it seems that as tuition fees are low and accessibility is high, foreign students mostly elect the above-mentioned fields and pursue their studies in Georgia.

In turn, the possibility of pursuing studies without exams, less financial resources, better access to education, and the availability of planned programs, the opportunities provided to Georgia mean that it has obligations to foreign students to supply foreign students with grants such as study expense reimbursements. On the other hand, it is a great way to encourage Georgian immigrants to return to their own countries, and to have close links with their homeland. The opportunity to study in Georgia also opens the country up to international promotion.



# EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW INITIATIVE

NATIA BITSADZE

On February 18, Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, and Minister of Education and Science, Tamar Sanikidze, discussed planned reforms in the education system. The new government initiative is to create a German education model; a dualist system, which implies the participation of the employer in the educational system, strengthening of production related practice, and detection of the highest in-demand professions, to ensure employment for the students.

According to government administration, the reform is an important process to ensure higher student employment rates. For the purpose of successful process execution, discussions with the German government have already been launched.

To be included in the labor market is a challenge for all students and alumni. As reported by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), there were 124'223 students and 22 000 graduates in 2015. Studies have shown that most of them are actively seeking a job in their profession, but without success.

In 2014, UNICEF conducted the National Youth Survey in Georgia, and found that the highest rate of unemployment in the population is amongst the young people, in particular, those between the ages of 20 and 24. Confirming UNICEF's survey, many young people are unemployed for between several months and several years after graduating, and found that it is made even more difficult without personal contacts in their areas of study.

A non-government organization, CRRC Georgia, conducted a survey in 2015 of a group of graduates. Of the 78 graduates included in the study, 67 are employed. Of those, 31.25% have found jobs using personal or family connections, while 17.5% had other contacts. Only 17.5% found work through employment websites. The organization reported that the graduates who do not have connections, have only an 18% chance of finding a job, which is very low.

24 year old Tamar is a graduate. Two years ago, she graduated from Javakishvili Tbilisi State University with a degree in English philology. Tamar said,

despite her studies, she has never worked in her profession. "I have passed only two months of a free training program in the House of Justice and they granted me a Certificate of Appreciation. I had always sent my data to a variety of companies or state institutions, but to no avail. Now I work in a bank, of course, in another profession," she said, mentioning that she hopes that she will be able to work in her own profession in the future.

"The most important thing is to find a job within your profession, not just to graduate from university," she added. "The graduates should not have to work with other job titles. Now I collect money to study in the magistracy itself. I think that the government should work with this in mind. Those students have more practical experience and a better chance to start work in their professions."

One of the reasons for youth unemployment in the country is nepotism. Georgia joined in the Open Government Partnership in 2011 and holds the obligation the adoption of transparent and impartial practices should be included in public service. The structure of this is a bit off. Consider: "The action plan of 2014 and 2015 eliminated some problems, such as not allowing the creation of time that could be spent gathering documents for nepotism. However, the society has said that nepotism still exists in government agencies.

In 2015, a non-governmental organization, Transparency International – Georgia, conducted a study to find out the public opinion of the nepotism and other forms of corruption.

This study clearly shows the mentality of society. Only 5% of respondents said that nepotism was a justifiable act, and that officials can appoint a person without competition if she or he is their relative, friend or member of the party. From this 5%, 1% believes that nepotism is completely justifiable, while 4% think that it is partially justified.

Nepotism should be perceived as a crime and a shame, and not the daily norm. It is important considering that neither the public nor the private sector have started working on this problem, or even discussed it. There are



only surface studies, after which people stop worrying about nepotism.

The government's argument is that there are plenty of jobs for young people in Georgia, but the employer's requirements are out of touch with graduate qualifications, however none of this research supports this statement. The main challenge for the young people is work competition, as the vacancies are incorrectly announced and implemented.

The Prime Minister said that, to fix the problem of the graduates' unemployment, educational changes are needed. Firstly, internal reforms need to be changed to provide everyone with equal opportunity to work, then competition for positions should be made as transparent as possible to show that each employee was fairly appointed to a position.

In 2012, about the law regarding public service was changed, and now states that any state agencies are required to publish an announcement about vacant positions. The government considers that this amendment simplifies the competition, and to demonstrate its participation in the reform procedure. However, the majority of the public does not trust the new job competition.

On February 15, the Freedom of Information Development Institute (IDFI), published the public's opinion on the topic. The majority of respondents discussed the idea that when a vacant position was filled by an existing temporary employee, the publishing of the job application and the job competition was only a formality. It is also important to determine the efficiency of the public service employment website. HR.gov.ge needs to create

a transparent competition process and give an equal chance to everyone, including students and graduates. According to the IDFI survey it cannot provide a fair, competitive and transparent environment for applicants.

To participate in the competition, it is advised that applicants have at least one-year experience, which does not include the majority of graduates. Accordingly, the site does not promote the employment of young people. Nothing has changed since the creation of the website; it even has the same format. For registration, applicants must enter information about their family members, their age, and their current employment which creates opportunity – or discrimination.

There are no state strategies or priorities, which reflected the employment problem of students and graduates. In European countries, professional training has become a part of the curriculum of universities, because graduates get the chance to work to gain higher experience and professional contacts. In Georgia, the internship experience is not officially recognised, therefore internships cannot help young people to gain employment.

The project, Summer Job in 2012 was the only attempt by the state to amend this, hiring students for just a month, although the youth involved enjoyed the program. After the elections, current government officials said that this project was only the former government's one-time pre-election rally, and Summer Job has not been repeated.

The Ministry of Education says that the Ministry does not have the function of monitoring employment; it is oriented only to give students education, but

the fact is that education is not enough to find a job.

The government plans to implement a new law regulating public services to solve the recruitment problem, starting on January 1, 2017. Head of the Civil Service Bureau, Catherine Kardava, said that the reform would follow major changes in the public sector.

"From 2017, the Civil Service Bureau will offer a certification program to society because the person will not be able to take a part in an employment competition without a certificate in the next year. This year we will have at least two certification exams," she said.

According to her, these changes will touch on the competition process, in order to make it more transparent.

"The so-called competition committee chairmen and political officials can no longer be on the commission. There will be a major assortment of public officials and experts who will observe the process independently," Kardava said.

It is not clear when and how government will adapt the German model of education, which includes internship in the learning process, considering that the reform of the Civil Service Bureau does not come into effect until the next year. Nepotism, lack of transparency in employment competition, the malfunction of a public service site, lack of internship programs and a lack of recognition of official experience are still unresolved issues faced by young people and graduates. Fortunately, there is a hope that the government's reforms will be productive and will give more opportunities to youth and allow them to start working with their professions.

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## NATIONAL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP RESUMES

VAKO KIPIANI

The second round of the national football championship started with interesting matches. In the first round, outsiders Zugdidi lost against Batumi Dinamo, 0 points to 1. The goal was scored by Serbian newcomer Marco Mikhailovich after 43 minutes of the game. With this victory Batumi moved from seventh place to fifth place.

The second round of the National Football Championship began with interesting matches. In the first, outsiders Zugdidi lost to Batumi Dinamo, 0 points to 1. The goal was scored by Serbian newcomer, Marco Mikhailovich after 43 minutes. With this victory, Batumi have moved from 7th to 5th on the championship ladder. The match ended in a draw between Kobuleti "Shukura" and "Samtredia". The teams exchanged goals in each and every point earned. In the 22th minute of the first half Grigol Dolidze from Kobuleti team brought

a score to the team. After five minutes of the second half Budu Zivzivadze equalized. The match ended in a draw 1: 1.

The match between Kobuleti Shukura and Samtredia ended in a draw, with the teams matching points and play. In the 22nd minute, Grigol Dolidze of Kobuleti opened the scoring. 5 minutes into the second half, Budu Zivzivadze equalized, with the match ending in a 1-all draw.

Zestafoni saw a true football thriller. Terjola Sapovnela hosted Tbilisi Dinamo and lost 1-2. The first half of the match ended 0-0. In the first "Sapovnela" was defending himself, ,, Dinamo '' did not put pressure on the fresher. In the second half the teams were trying hard, but without a goal. Score opened after 72 minutes with a free kick of Tengiz Chikviladze, turned out to be short-lived joy for Terjola team. Three minutes later, George Kvilitaia restored equilibrium and after the fifth minute of added time the referee appointed a penalty, the goalkeeper was successful. But the referee gave another chance to the Dinamo attacker, Alexander Iashvili. This time he was accurate and Dinamo earned three points for the game.

In the first half, Sapnovela defended well and Dinamo did not put a lot of pressure on the fresher. In the second half, both teams were working hard but couldn't score. The score opened after 72 minutes with a free kick for Tengiz Chikniladze, which turned out to be short-lived joy for the Terjola team. 3 minutes later, George Kvilitaia restored equilibrium, and following 5 minutes of added time the referee awarded a penalty kick. The goalkeeper was successful, but Dinamo were given another chance and striker, Alexander Iashvili scored again.

Other matches ended with the following results: "Saburtalo" - "Tskhinvali" 2: 2; "Kolkheti" of Poti and "Dila" of Gori ended 0: 1; "Merani" of Martvili - Kutaisi "Torpedo" 2: 1; Bolnisi ,, Sioni" -, Lanchkhuti '' Guria 1: 1; "Lokomotiv" Tbilisi - Sachkhere "Chikhura" 2: 2.

The other matches ended with the following results: Saburtalo



2- Tskhinvali 2; Kolkheti 0-Dila 1; Merani 2- Torpedo 1; Bolnisi 1- Lanchkhuti 1; Lokomotiv 2- Chikhura 2.

With 43 points, Dinamo tops the championship ladder, while the current champion, Gori Dila sits in second place with 38 points. Tskhinvali currently sits in third with 33 points.

## WEEKLY SPORT NEWS

### Football

The state finances 2016-2020 for a football development program are at \$265.7 million.

The program goals and objectives include:

- Football management standards
- Competitive, free-market football
- Football infrastructure
- The stimulation of private investment in clubs
- The support of education programs for football
- New football programs including women's football, junior championships, beach football, school championships and others.

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The Georgian Football Federation and the football club, Zestafoni signed a lease agreement. According to the agreement, the



Football Federation can use the Davit Abashidze stadium and one of the bases in Zestafoni. In the framework of this three-month contract, the city's main stadium will host National Football Championship matches and an international friendly match between the youth teams of Georgia and Ukraine on March 28.

### Wrestling

On February 18, Alexander Medved Cup wrestling ended in Mynsk, where Georgian men's team made a total of 5 medals - 2 gold and 3 bronze medals. Tournament champions became Zurab Yakobashvili (70) and Geno Petriashvili (125) and the third place with Khinchegashvili

(61). David Marsagishvili (86) and Elizbari Odikadze got out from the championship. On February 18, the Alexander Medved Cup wrestling ended in Minsk, where the Georgian men's team made a total of 5 medals- 2 gold and 5 bronze. Zurab Yakobashvili and Geno Petriashvili became tournament champions with 70 points and 125 points, respectively, and Khinchegashvili came in 3rd with 61 points. David Marsagishvili and Elizbari



Odikadze were out of the competition.

### Judo

On February 19, a bronze medal at the Grand Prix of Dusseldorf in Judo was won by Vazha Margvelashvili, who was given 120 ranking points. For those points, he defeated his Japanese rival in just 13 seconds.

### Basketball

Junior Borjghalosnebi will compete for the first time in Georgian Rugby history in the tournament, where the world's 12 strongest junior teams will be present. The world championship will be held in Manchester, England, from June 5 to 25.

Junior Borjghalosnebi went on a South American tour, where they will have two matches against both Argentina and Uruguay.