

# The Georgian Times

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## A Double Dealing Spy or Scapegoat?



Vakhtang Maisaia, former political prisoner, NATO expert, and alleged double agent reveals how far Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was willing to go to maintain power. Accused of espionage, Maisaia names the real foreign agents who operated in Georgia under Saakashvili's patronage. Now a free man as a result of the new government's sweeping amnesty for political prisoners, he is willing to tell all!

**On p. 2**

**First 100 Days for the Minister of Justice** *On p. 4*

**Making the Switch to Organic Farming** *On p. 6*

**What does the Future Hold for Foreign English Language Teachers?** *On p. 6*

**Real Prison Reform Late in Coming but Now on the Right Track!** *On p. 10*



## Pending Russian Sanitary Inspectors

Upwards of 35 Georgian wine companies are waiting for sanitary inspection that is expected to take place next week. This is the result of the first meeting of Georgian and Russian officials held in Moscow on February 4.

During the last six years Georgian wines have never been so close to returning to Russian store shelves. The prospect of a thaw in bilateral relations first appeared when Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream Coalition won a majority in Parliamen-

tary Elections on October 2, 2013. As part of his promise to restore relations and economic ties with the Russian Federation, Ivanishvili sent his officials to Moscow with the aim of lifting an embargo imposed in 2006. As a result of the meeting, specialists from Russia's consumer rights organization Rospotrebnadzor will head to Tbilisi in about a week "to inspect those Georgian enterprises that have provided documents for the resumption of Georgian supplies to Russia".

**On p. 5**

## Exclusive Interview with Malkhaz Gulashvili, Owner of Georgian Times Media Holding

Media holding "Georgian Times" will again be on newsstands and in the public eye. Soon we will be fully operational. The first step will be the online GT edition which will be published in three languages - English-language edition "Georgian Times", newspaper in Georgian will be subsequently published. Many have asked why the media holding company stopped working, and why Malkhaz Gulashvili had to leave Georgia with his son, and then finally returned back? - I, as the president of the media holding company will personally share the true story to the dedicated readers of the "Georgian Times."



**On p. 3**

## Ivanishvili Addresses Congress of his GDDG Party

PM Bidzina Ivanishvili reiterated on Saturday that he welcomes "reasonable" proposal from the UNM to enforce parts of new constitutional provisions now instead of late 2013.

**On p. 12**

# A Double Dealing Spy or Scapegoat?

By IAN F. CARVER

**Vakhtang Maisaia, former political prisoner, NATO expert, and alleged double agent reveals how far Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was willing to go to maintain power. Accused of espionage, Maisaia names the real foreign agents who operated in Georgia under Saakashvili's patronage. Now a free man as a result of the new government's sweeping amnesty for political prisoners, he is willing to tell all!**

*Before your trial was even held, Saakashvili declared that you had inflicted "huge damage" to Georgia by providing Russia with classified information on Georgian military positions during the Russo-Georgian war. So why were you arrested nine months later?*

I was arrested on the day of the so-called Mukhrani tank mutiny on May 5, 2009. Mikheil Saakashvili wished to somehow use this event to discredit the opposition, which was holding protest rallies at the time. He wanted to restore the delicate balance between his PR and real actions. The Mukhrani incident provided a good photo and propaganda opportunity; however, in order to get away with it, he needed a Russian culprit, some indication that enemies of Georgia were involved.

The second reason is that by that time, Saakashvili's special services had managed to covertly confiscate all of my personal achieves, which included material I was using for a book dealing directly with the Russo-Georgian war. It described the lead up to the war (from January 2008) to the immediate post war period (September/October 2008), covering all military aspects of both sides of the conflict, strengths and weaknesses, political objectives, strategies and the dirty tricks they employed.

*The GoG arrested you for spying for Russia, yet upon your release it was stated that you were officially charged with spying for NATO. Can you explain the official and unofficial sides of your case?*

I was accused of being a Russian spy simply for domestic consumption. However, in the actual court verdict I was charged with spying for NATO on the basis of my academic and professional contacts, and my

experience working in Bratislava, Slovakia. In covering themselves, this information was classified as secret, which violates the Georgian Constitution. If this verdict had been transparent, it would have contradicted the unofficial narrative, personally announced by Saakashvili, that I was a spy working for Moscow. Regardless, both versions are absolutely absurd and other motivations were behind my arrest.

*Describe the physical and psychological pressure you endured while in prison?*

First of all, upon being arrested, I was taken to the headquarters of the Georgian Security forces where Interior Min-

This was Saakashvili's attempt to reach out to Moscow and balance relations in case Georgia's budding relations with the West would be damaged. After confirming this information true, they demanded that I disclose my sources; I explained that the material was totally based on publically available information and my own research.

Next, I was forced to read a pre-prepared confession, threatening to arrest my mother and my wife on grounds that they collaborated with me in my acts of espionage. They gave me a 40-name list that included opposition leaders and even beloved members of their own

ing in long drawn out agony.

*Do you know anyone who was tortured in that room?*

About one year after I was imprisoned, Sergo Tetradze, a former colonel of Georgian Foreign Intelligence, was tortured to death in the same building. I suspect it happened in that same room. I now know that that they were using the same methods on him as they described and used on me.

On May 8, 2009 I was transferred to Tbilisi's notorious Gldani prison where until June 22, 2009 I was interrogated by two groups of men from the Counter Intelligence Department which used the same interrogation methods applied in Guantanamo Bay prison: sleep deprivation, freezing temperatures, denying me of any elementary hygienic means, and constant physiological pressures. I was told my family members would be tortured and even murdered and I was forced to witness other prisoners being beaten and tortured as a warming up exercise to my own ordeal, all in an effort to break



ister Vano Merabishvili, his deputy Amiran Meskheli (who is now on the run) and all the top brass were summoned. They had some of my research materials, which had been used by a 2008 International Crisis Group report and by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Security Committee. In these reports I described all the political connections with the ruling UNM party, the link between Merabishvili and Belarusian regime members, mostly with Lukashenko's National Security Advisor, Victor Shaman, and via him, connections with Moscow and other networks of patronage. I mentioned how Merabishvili officially visited Minsk three times and twice unofficially.

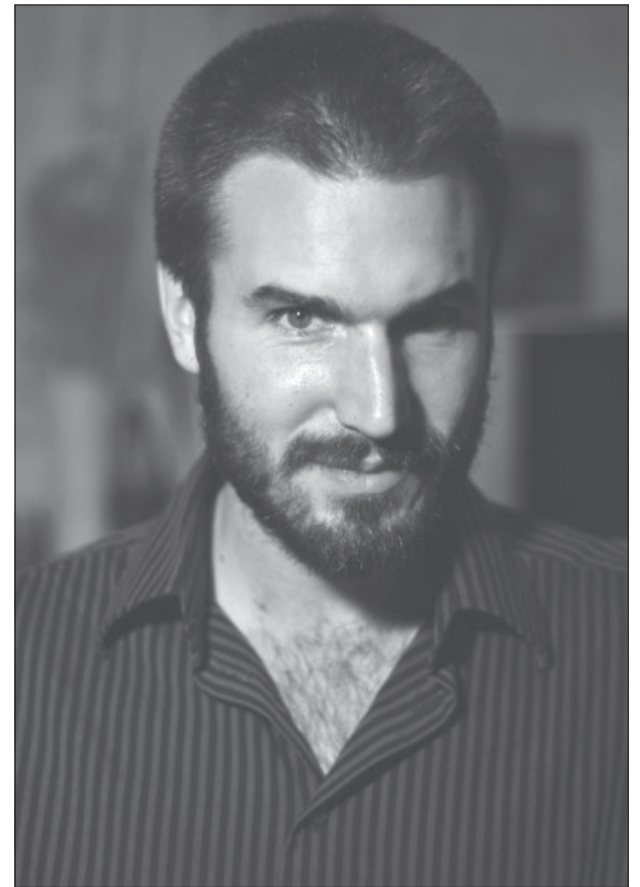
UNM party. They demanded that I identify all of those who I had connections with.

It appears that they wanted to continue the arrests and needed my confession to speed up the process. Due to my refusal to play along, I was subjected to numerous mock executions. They even masterminded an escape attempt scenario in which I managed to grab a gun from one of the officers but I was shot and killed immediately afterwards. In addition to beating me countless times, I was given a tour of a special torture chamber where they showed me various instruments of the trade. They explained a method in which I would be hung by my feet while my kidneys would be smashed, result-

ing me down physically and emotionally.

My torturers told me several times that they had permission to kill me and it was officially sanctioned from above. In fact, a special operation was planned for my liquidation. This was directly ordered by the Georgian president himself, as confirmed by Lado Bedukadze, a former high level official of the prison administration in a recent interview distributed widely by the media throughout Georgia. New facts have been revealed that continue to confirm the existence of an operation to shut me up forever.

*Continued on p. 4*



## The Georgian Times is Back!

*Here we are again, starting out a new period in the evolution and devolution of Georgia. Georgia can finally be run as a state for all its people - giving power back to its people. After a nearly two-year hiatus due to political threats, financial considerations, and waiting for the dust to clear, Georgia's first and best known English-language newspaper is up and running again.*

It is also a new chapter in the history of the Georgian Times, new faces, new approaches and the realization that there is more to a newspaper than just catchy headlines. One thing is certain - many now are realizing that the Georgian Times had been the voice that was crying out the truth when others were repeating the standard official line.

To make a long story short, much of the mainstream media has been discredited, think tanks and others that turned a blind eye to much that had transpired since 2003, as if such matters as human rights, the rule-of-law and democracy could be shortchanged for some greater agenda. No need to call out names but it is clear who took sides and who has been on the payroll. As the editor, I have nearly seven years of experience in Georgia and it is finally paying off in moral dividends. Now I am able to look others straight in the eye and ask what they did to try to prevent the war in 2008, what their positions were on the events of November 7, 2007 or May 26, 2011, etc.

The new Georgian Times aims to offer a balance of politics, analysis and social issues. Agricultural and educational issues will also be regular features. GT will not serve as forum to present Georgian-Russian relations in the all too typical cold war era, zero-sum game mentality. Nothing is gained by beating a dead horse. It is time to move forward. We want to assign that cohort of pundits and learned 4-hire foreign correspondents, diplomats to the dust bin of history.

Highlighted in this edition is an interview with one of the most pro-Western people I've ever met, Vakhtang Maisaia, a famous political prisoner whose story sums up the duplicity of previous regime and all what was wrong with the program for Georgia and its enforcers. While Vakhtang and thousands of others are now free, we also investigate the post-amnesty current situation in Georgian prisons and other issues that need closer scrutiny.

Georgia's press is now freer than any time since Shevardnadze's period, and it will be interesting to see how the country deals with its new found freedom. Georgia has been reborn in more ways than one.

*Ian F. Carver  
Editor-in-Chief*

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# Malkhaz Gulashvili: Soon there will be “real freedom” for all in Georgia, not just political rhetoric and business as usual!

By DALI BJHALAVA

Media holding “Georgian Times” will again be on newsstands and in the public eye. Soon we will be fully operational. The first step will be the online GT edition which will be published in three languages - English-language edition “Georgian Times”, newspaper in Georgian will be subsequently published. Many have asked why the media holding company stopped working, and why Malkhaz Gulashvili had to leave Georgia with his son, and then finally returned back? - I, as the president of the media holding company will personally share the true story to the dedicated readers of the “Georgian Times.”

Malkhaz Gulashvili, the founder of Media - Holding “Georgian Times”, and the president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies “Azri” claims: “President Saakashvili’s regime personally attacked him and his family. It is for this reason that the media holding stopped working. “My wife Nana Gagua is a publisher and editor. My whole family was paralyzed and lived in a constant state of fear. It is now clear to many that not only we were being politically repressed in Georgia but anyone who dared to speak the truth and try to fully exercise their rights as a Georgian citizen.

**In May 2010, you had to leave Georgia. Why?**

Firstly, “Zonder brigades” and representatives of Georgian Special Forces attacked my son in a way to get to me. My political views were the motivation for such an attack. That much I am certain. I was criticizing Mikheil Saakashvili and his regime through the newspaper and my comments were direct and to the point.

Another motivating reason was the meetings held in international forums, including the Eurasian media forum. As a journalist I met Dmitry Medvedev, Russian President, and many others. I would speak openly about the things which are still to this day not very popular with the leftovers of the government that is trying to hold on to the bitter end. For instance, among the topics covered were the issue of the



Russian market for Georgian products, air links with Russia and the abolition of visa regime between the two countries.

My steps irritated Saakashvili and he called in his power ministries so to plan operations against me and my family. My son was attacked by four members of a Special Forces unit. He was kidnapped and told that if your father doesn't stop we are going to destroy you.

That's why I had to take my son abroad. According to the Vienna Convention, a man whose family is in danger has to avoid it, and do what is necessary to get the family out of harm's way. It was a time when even thinking of Russia was considered as high treason. Why did you decide to go to Russia?

I had to make this step. When your son is threatened, the passport is expired, you are warned that they will destroy you and your son asks you to help him be safe, then what choice is there? When faced with this you have to drop everything and go how you can, especially when after your child had already been kidnapped and beaten. You will only think about leaving the country for a safer place. Of course, it would be better to leave the country legally, but, unfortunately, my son's passport has expired and there was no time to apply for a new one, and even to do so might

put him at additional risk.

Moreover, those persons who kidnapped my son represented the law enforcement agencies. Now the entire world actually knows how representatives of the law enforcement worked during that time. The same was happening outside the prisons. People were threatened and destroyed. It is a fact that the media holding “Georgian Times” stopped working because of threats from the side of police. My son was also oppressed; this fact was answered by international media and the US government.

We demanded the investigation, however, during seven months nothing happened. Moreover, throughout this period there was a constant threat, and when a person appears in such a situation, the instincts' drive him rather than totally think out and conscious decision. There was no choice but to leave Georgia as it was controlled by Saakashvili's regime. I went first to Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and then to the Russian Federation for protection.

When I was going to move to Slovakia, for my son's studies, the Foreign Ministry blocked his passport. However, all the necessary legal procedures were done and the appropriate amount of money was paid for passport. With these decisions they effectively locked us in Russia, as they wanted us to be there.

**You were charged for the illegal border crossing only, but you were not recognized and not considered a spy.**

They wouldn't dare it.



Even the case of crossing the border was not clear, which border was issued? Crossing the border of Tskhinvali from Dusheti? They said “no”, the main problem for them was the fact that I crossed the border of Russia from Tskhinvali, as South Ossetia is legally part of Georgia, and that is based on international law.

I had crossed the border of Russia not a Georgian one. The Russian Federation never held me responsible for this action; everyone knows that this charge by the Saakashvili government was not serious. Such a violation of law is only because was personally irritated with me as I have already explained.

**You came back to Georgia unexpectedly, just as like you left it. Were there any earlier**

**attempts for negotiating behind the scenes?**

No, no attempts have been made. Moreover, I tried to set my son free with my lawyer's help from criminal responsibilities because when we left the country, he was under age, such responsibility shouldn't be imposed on him.

Shalva Tadumadze was defending our illegal interests. Now he is the parliamentary secretary of Prime Minister. He was helping me with the case of my son but we received an answer from the Prosecution - and how both of us were guilty and we would be charged.

**Your son had no opportunity to study and he also had no passport; do you think that government did it out of revenge?**

Of course it did. Everything including the kidnapping of my son was totally out of revenge and to make an example of us as part of the campaign of fear upon the Georgian people.

**Considering all these facts you decided to return to Georgia, this was a very strange step.**

I was always thinking of getting back to Georgia, and as soon as I would take care of my son I was going to return myself.

**But you knew that they would send you directly to jail?**

Yes, I knew that I would become a prisoner. My friends also were prisoners because of the same reasons. I promised to go to the jail, if my friends and my son would be released. Of course nobody released my friends; they were already in the prison.

We came back to Georgia. I and my son were immediately arrested. However, he was released for 2,000 GEL bail.

I had to return to my country. First, it is difficult to live in a foreign country, especially when you know that you

are a stranger there. I mean Holdings with 400 employers. We had English-language newspapers, online editions, magazines, books; we had an advertising company as well.

The government was behind the attack that followed, and we lost all our media - the family, except for income received from other media.

We lost everything, all the sources of money that my family had. We were oppressed in all ways: morally, economically and financially.

My wife and another child of mine were in Tbilisi, we were in Moscow, it is impossible to travel in Russia without a visa, the visa issue that can be resolved only at the level of minister, is so complicated. In fact, we were in Russia, as in a big prison colony.

**After the charges were made against you, did you expect that they wouldn't arrest you?**

I did not expect any other offers. I knew that I would be arrested. I had hoped that my son would be released.

**So you made this decision because of your son right?**

Yes, that is true. My son could no longer live in other countries and in Baku he told me - I'm an adult, and if they arrest me it is ok. I couldn't send my son to prison so we returned back together and I hope they would only locked me up and not him.

As I expected I got arrested. Moreover, I was asked to confess that I crossed the border illegally and I was the one who started the quarrel in TV Company “Kavkasia”

**If you had recognized your guilt would they have released you?**

No, not me, but they did release my son.

**What was happening inside the prison? Did they pressure you?**

I saw terrible things, 35 people lived in one room, people were beaten and constantly pressured, and it was a very hard and sad thing to watch.

**If there were no governmental changes in October, do you think you would be in prison nowadays if you had did the same thing?**

Yes of course. My wife was refused when she wrote a statement about my release. Since Sozar Subari is the minister everything has changed and I was released.

Continued on p. 10

# First 100 Days for the Minister of Justice

By DALI BJHALAVA

**From constructing glass court houses to rebuilding the entire legal system, Tea Tsulukiani, summarizes the first 100 days since taking up her post as Georgia's Minister of Justice.**

The first 100 days were not easy for Georgia's new Minister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani but she has managed to make important strides in fulfilling the tasks and responsibilities given to her by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili. Her tasks was divided into two parts: 1) breaking down the entrenched system of fear that flourished under the previous government, and 2) launching reforms needed to bring about further progress and development in the country.

"During my first days, I faced a ministry, where my predecessor was preoccupied with things like planning construction projects in places like Batumi, Sighnaghi (generally the whole Kakheti) and Lazika," explains Tea Tsulukiani. According to the minister, there are still various architectural sketches and designs lying around one of her predecessor's rooms on the ministry's 9<sup>th</sup> floor. Tsulukiani plans to hand over the designs to a museum in the near future.

The minister also explained the reason behind abolishing the Strategic Development Agency, which was directly subordinated under the Minister of Justice and mentioned how tourism development will no longer be part of this agency. "The second responsibility of my predecessor was overseeing the punishment procedures of the public prosecutor. This was an area where I had to carry out some major reforms," Tsulukiani explains.

She said that the ministry's main aim now is to build up the Legal Drafting Department, which was left "helpless" under the previous regime. She mentioned how the ministry's Analytical Department had a disproportionate amount of powerful compared to the Legal Drafting Department, and how the two departments have been the main sources of legislative initiatives that have been realized over the last 3 months.

Tsulukiani said that she created the ministry's first-ever Department of Republic Relations. The main purpose of the new department is to make the ministry widely open to society, since it was one of the most secretive and tabooed places for citizens while Zurab Adeishvili was Justice Minister.

"For me, transparency always meant that citizens should not receive incompetent letters from those holding high



offices. I denounce such kind of treatment," says Tsulukiani, adding that she personally received a letter from the ministry when she was in the opposition asking her how much money the budget earns through plea bargains. "My response was that this information is available on the Ministry of Justice's official website. Obviously, it was a lie because such information was never made available [to the public]. I saved this letter as an example of how the ministry was operating on a daily basis."

Tsulukiani says that before she became minister, employees who held the same positions and did the same amount of work had different salaries and commissions but significant changes have been made. For her the stability of a public officer is very important, as it is a vital part of powerful and effective government and she aims to carry out fundamental changes in this field too.

"In Georgia, change in governmental has long gone hand-in-hand with replacing public officials; this has become something of a tradition. Public officials were forced to leave their positions against their will so that they would never be in a position to sue. There were approximately 155 employees in the Ministry of Justice, and [so far] only 2-3 persons were replaced. Such a practice will be difficult to sustain, but it is very important for me because the current Georgian government aims to create a stable state not dependent on change of governments," Tsulukiani says.

Since taking up her post, she has received 5,432 letters from the public. Tsulukiani has personally responded to one-third of these and she hopes to be able to respond to the rest soon. Tsulukiani also talked about the legislative department and says that the recently debated bill in parliament

will lead to important legislative changes. As a result of the bill, the staff of High Council has been depoliticized. Tsulukiani says that a large num-

ber of judges will keep their jobs but that the strategy of elections will undergo serious changes.

"We provide judges with

fair laws, but they are free to fit the laws as needed to the management of justice through disciplinary procedures. These days it is impossible because this field is under the control of one authority: the Chairman of the Supreme Court along with 3-4 so-called chairmen of the judges. Judges generally lack sufficient power and flexibility to perform their work and therefore we want to implement this reform and put them in the positions where they belong," Tea Tsulukiani explains.

Tsulukiani also claims that she presented a bill envisioning policy changes for the public prosecutor. She explained how the previous system served only her predecessor and that the Minister of Justice was able to take the place of prosecutor and easily interfere in criminal law. In response, Tsulukiani developed a bill with the supreme prosecutor, which will weaken the

power of the minister. Tea Tsulukiani claims that the minister of justice is a political figure, and not political oppressor. The Minister of Justice can arrest officials and sue them, including the president, chief of staff, MPs, and ministers. Tsulukiani believes that the minister should not hold such kind power. She said that such reforms will also enable the supreme prosecutor to act without any interference from the Minister of Justice.

"One hundred days in the Ministry of Justice was not enough to carry out fundamental changes. I can blame the prosecutors. During these days we (with the supreme prosecutor) had no chance to sue those prosecutors who worked with Adeishvili and destroyed families, arrested businessmen and stole people's properties. This is the only thing I couldn't handle within my first 100 days," Tsulukiani concludes.

## A Double Dealing Spy or Scapegoat?

Continued from p. 2

**Why did the Georgian leadership want you killed?**

It was personal on one level but another aim was to conceal the fact that I was actually convicted for spying for NATO, not Russia. If I had been killed, everyone would have believed I was a Russian spy and all my materials would have been destroyed. It was an opportunity for Saakashvili to cover-up the reality and to manipulate my case for political gain.

**You told your lawyer in 2009 that while in prison you were interrogated by a Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) operative. Is this so?**

Yes. On the night of June 22, 2009 one of my official interrogators, Lado Datashvili, introduced me to a new interrogator and he explained that he was a representative of the Russian FSB. He looked half Georgian, half Russian and spoke in Georgian with a Russian accent. He told me that he used to live in Sokhumi and it was clear to me that he was indeed from Abkhazia.

**Why would they reveal that he is working for the FSB and how could Russian intelligence be involved in your questioning?**

This is another reason why they intended to shut me up for good. Much is involved: I had worked within NATO structures and I was affiliated with the NATO Economic and Security Directorate and the

NATO Economic Committee. Russia had officially protested against this particular committee because we introduced a special action plan for energy security and cooperation. NATO later adopted this plan. This made me an enemy in the eyes of the Russians.

**What was this FSB investigator particularly interested in?**

Unofficially, I was also accused of being both a CIA and British Intelligence Services agent. This was based on meetings I had with the US deputy head of mission to Georgia and several other US and British diplomats. The Russian government had increased interest in the CIA during the high profile international spy scandals in the US at the time.

The FSB investigator wanted to know about my ties with NATO special services, my specific mission, about secret aspects of the Georgian-NATO relationship; he wanted me to name my sources that provided me with information about Russian involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; he asked me to explain Mayor of Moscow Yuri Lushkov's businesses interests in Abkhazia and those of other Russian tycoons. Not surprisingly, he knew all about my activities, for instance, how on March 30, 2008, I had given presentation at a closed-door Georgian Parliamentary session about Russian and Turkish economic interests and competition in Abkhazia, and about how I had also talked about Russian

special services involvement in the region; these were his main interests.

**To what extent do you think Russian special services have penetrated the Georgian security and intelligence apparatus?**

At the time of my arrest, the Director of Georgian Counter Intelligence was Giorgi Mazmushvili, a man who was lobbied and promoted by Valeri Khaburzhania, Georgian State Security Minister from 2002-2004. In Moscow, Khaburzhania recently confirmed during a live interview with Georgian journalists that as Minister of State Security he had close ties with the FSB leadership. During this period, Putin called Saakashvili directly and told him not to replace Khaburzhania. This is now a well-known fact. Mazmushvili, who interrogated me in his office, graduated from the Minsk KGB Institute during the Soviet period. Just recently, his mentor, Khaburzhania announced plans to return to Georgia and set up a pro-Russian political party.

**What do you think the previous regime actually intended to do with you, if not kill you?**

Saakashvili had announced that if his party was victorious in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections, he intended to strike a deal with Moscow to trade their spies sitting in Georgian prisons for Georgian citizens imprisoned in Russia on charges of espionage. This further demonstrates why the FSB interrogated me in Gldani prison.

After being officially transformed into a Russian spy and traded, Russian FSB would then have a free hand to do whatever it wanted with me. I have no doubt that I ultimately would have been executed or killed in captivity.

**As a security analyst, why do you think Moscow decided not to depose Saakashvili during the war?**

Keeping such a man in power provided the world with a constant reminder of how Saakashvili's foreign policy was dangerous. The debacle of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war also demonstrated the unreliability of Georgia's strategic relationships with NATO, breakdown in command and control, and how such adventures could jeopardize US national security. It was because of Saakashvili's actions in South Ossetia that Azerbaijan altered its foreign policy in the direction of Moscow. Moreover, under Saakashvili's leadership, Moscow solidified its geostrategic position in Abkhazia and South Ossetia while also acquiring additional economic infrastructure and assets in Georgia. There was clearly more to the six-point peace plan that ended the 2008 Russo-Georgia war. Much we will never know.

**Is there anyone who you would like to thank for release?**

Of course I would like to thank Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Georgian people who supported his coalition.

**What are your future plans?**

I am plan on suing Saakashvili in local courts before bringing my case to the International Criminal Court. After I become fully rehabilitated, I plan to continue my professional activities of promoting Georgia's European integration.

# Pending Russian Sanitary Inspectors

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Upwards of 35 Georgian wine companies are waiting for sanitary inspection that is expected to take place next week. This is the result of the first meeting of Georgian and Russian officials held in Moscow on February 4.

During the last six years Georgian wines have never been so close to returning to Russian store shelves. The prospect of a thaw in bilateral relations first appeared when Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream Coalition won a majority in Parliamentary Elections on October 2, 2013.

As part of his promise to restore relations and economic ties with the Russian Federation, Ivanishvili sent his officials to Moscow with the aim of lifting an embargo imposed in 2006. As a result of the meeting, specialists from Russia's consumer rights organization Rospotrebnadzor will head to Tbilisi in about a week "to inspect those Georgian enterprises that have provided documents for the resumption of Georgian supplies to Russia". According to Chief Sanitary Officer of Russia Gennady Onishchenko, wine and mineral water will be registered once experts approve of the quality of Georgian products. "This



will be followed by admission to the Russian market," he added.

At the same time Onishchenko mentioned that earlier this month a planned visit of Russian delegation was postponed as Georgia did not submit the list of companies that specialists were to inspect. He accused Georgia of "not fulfilling the terms stipulated in the document designed to resume the supply of Georgian product to Russia".

Later the Georgian Ministry of Agriculture informed that officials from both former Soviet countries agreed upon a mechanism for re-opening access for wines to the Russian market. At the moment Rospo-

trebnadzor has all the needed documentation and the representatives of Onishchenko's Office are about to finish the necessary paperwork, head of National Wine Agency of Georgia Levan Davitashvili said to *Georgian Times*.

"They might come to Tbilisi next week, though this information is not yet confirmed. However, it's already known that at the beginning they will inspect factories of 35 companies – Kindzmarauli, Khvanchkara, Teliani Valley, Telavi Wine Cellar are among them. In total we have a list of 84 companies that expressed their readiness to return to the Russian market and we continue to receive new applications

from Georgian wine-producing companies", Davitashvili stated.

He agreed with Gennady Onishchenko, saying that Georgian wines might face an uphill struggle after returning to Russia this spring. Davitashvili said that Georgian wine can gain 3 to 4 percent of Russia's market which is less than it used to control before the embargo.

However, eager to make up for lost sales, Georgian wine-makers might take a risk of exporting 30 millions bottles annually instead of declared 10 millions. Moreover, they are expected to win the place of premium class wines.

"This trade embargo signif-

icantly hurt Georgia's economy. Before 2006 we depended on Russia a lot – around 80 percent of the total export of wine, but gradually we overcame the crisis. We opened up to other foreign markets and today our wine is being sold in more than 40 countries. A bottle of well-known Georgian brands such as Kindzmarauli, Mukuzani or Khvanchkara in Russia will cost approximately just as much as in other European countries – 300 Rubles (USD 10). In this segment we'll have to compete with French and Italian beverages", Davitashvili said, assuring that this is based on deep market analysis.

According to Davitashvili, local wine-makers are aware of the steep competition they might face in the Russian market, as during the last few years Georgian wines were replaced with Abkhazian and Latin American varieties. "The quality of local wine has risen since 2006, so Georgian products should not need much promotion to find its niche in Russia, especially since our wines have easily found their consumers in Europe, US, ex-Soviet states and even China", he told *Georgian Times*.

Nevertheless Georgia decided to advertise its product at the annual ProExpo International Exhibition of Food, Bev-

erages and Food Raw Materials that opened in Moscow on February 11. On display were various lemonades, sauces, juices, wines and brandies – all made of natural ingredients, according to Maxim Savchuk, head of the office of the Georgian Union of Exporters.

Russia banned the export of Georgian wines and two popular brands of mineral water - Borjomi and Nabeglavi - in 2006. The official reason was low quality, though in Georgia it was considered as a politically motivated step designed to collapse the country's economy, or at least to alter its pro-Western stance. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili had then thanked Russia for "a positive incentive" that made Georgian wine-makers improve the quality of their product. However, soon after losing the biggest market the political tension between the parties started rising and eventually burst out into the "5-days war" in August 2008 that caused breaking off diplomatic relations. Parliamentary Elections of 2013 capped the president's 9-year, one-man rule. The new Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili is pursuing a course of restoring relations with Russia but major hurdles remain and the process is expected to be long and hard.

## An Appropriately Pessimistic Georgia

By FRANK KLOBUCAR

When asked about their economic standing relative to their own countrymen, Georgians generally feel that they are worse off than citizens of other countries. When we evaluate this based on ownership of durable goods and infrastructure availability, however, things don't look quite so bad. The only things that Georgians owned less frequently than the rest of the respondents were refrigerators and washing machines.

In a recent poll by Georgian Opinion Research Business International, respondents were asked from 8 post-soviet countries about their economic situation, personal health, and opinions on politics and society. We're lucky to have all these variables in the same poll, with so many respondents, because it allows us to make some interesting comparisons with great levels of significance. For instance, we can see if people's self-assessments are accurate, or if some people are just being pessimistic.

Each respondent was asked to place themselves on a 10-point scale of society, where 1 represents the poorest people and 10 - the wealthiest. Of the 8 countries included, Georgians placed themselves lowest with a mean of 4.2. Russians and Ukrainians also have means below 5, suggesting that people feel a little less wealthy than they are. Interestingly enough, Moldovans are the most economically positive at 5.6.

If people were perfectly accurate in assessing themselves relative to their societies, every country should have a mean of 5. We can make the assumption here, then, that respondents were not only judging their well-being relative to their own countrymen, but also to the general level of wealth they perceive other countries to have. This could account for these variations by country, rather than simply declaring that some people are more pessimistic than others. So, if you use this frame, how accurate are these self-assessments?

Society Ladder	
Armenia	5.4
Azerbaijan	5.5

Belarus	5.3
Georgia	4.2
Kazakhstan	5.5
Moldova	5.6
Russia	4.7
Ukraine	4.5

Georgians are indeed less likely to own many appliances, including the aforementioned fridges and washing machines. They are not the only ones that can claim a need, though: Moldovans, Kazakhs, and Ukrainians all have fewer cellphones per capita than Georgia, and Azeris are less likely to own a car, washing

toilet, you would probably think that Georgians must have the worst access to plumbing and flushable toilets. This is also untrue: 90% of the Georgians polled had tap water, though fewer had flushing toilets (62%). While these are no means western-level numbers, Georgians enjoy more frequent flushes than Moldovans, Kazakhs and Azeris.

So it seems that people aren't particularly good at self-assessments in a general sense; the most economically proud country is also the least equipped (and also has the

themselves higher on society's scale should be more likely to own a given good. It turns out this is true: there is a positive individual-level correlation between self-assessed wealth and ownership across the board, but it is not staggeringly strong. The two strongest correlations to self-assessment come from refrigerators (.21) and computers (.25). Televi-

numbers for Georgia alone, to see if they were more pessimistic than they should be. The numbers I was given are quite interesting; the correlations between self-assessed wealth and ownership of goods and infrastructure are actually significantly higher in Georgia. What this tells us is that Georgians are in fact much better at self-assessment of wealth than

Correlations	Total	GEO
Fridge	0.21	0.33
TV	0.08	0.15
Washing machine	N/A	0.07
Mobile phone	0.19	0.32
Computer	0.25	0.32
Flush toilet	0.10	0.27
Cold tap water	0.10	0.30

Do you own...	ARM	AZE	BLR	GEO	KAZ	MDA	RUS	ARM
Fridge	97	97	99	72	98	92	97	97
TV	100	99	99	97	99	97	97	96
Washing Machine	84	53	87	47	91	86	93	89
Mobile telephone	79	88	83	78	74	68	83	76
Computer	32	23	54	27	40	35	47	40
Car	29	20	46	27	42	28	42	33
Cold tap water	100	87	93	90	87	70	92	90
Flush toilet	100	59	77	62	47	37	80	76

machine, or computer. In fact, computer ownership is lowest throughout the Caucasus.

If you think back to your last trip to the regions, and the times you had to leave the supra to use a hole-in-the-ground

lowest per-capita GDP at \$3,200 USD). Let's climb a little further down the ecological ladder, though, and look at individuals.

If self-assessments are to be trusted, people who place

sion's correlation is weak, but mostly because penetration is virtually complete; there are more TVs than toilets in these countries, so the saying goes.

If you'll notice in the chart of correlations, I also ran the

their neighbors. It seems Georgians are the realistic ones, while Moldova has its head in the clouds.

All correlations in this column were perfectly significant (.000), with the exception of aggregate washing machine ownership. All margins of error are 2.5% at 95% confidence. Visit our website at gorb.com for other articles and archives.

Frank Klobucar is a research analyst at GORBI, Georgia's first opinion and market research firm

# Making the Switch to Organic Farming

By TINA GOGOLADZE

*"The business idea first came to my mind when my family doctor told me that not all fruits are healthy to feed my child."* Malkaz Jakheli is one of the 600 farmers who would rather produce and consume organic products than traditional ones. In 2006 he first tried his luck with an organic wine business. After three years of working and submitting documentation, he was awarded an international certificate that allowed him to export his "Jakheli Wines", which are now available in Germany, Italy, Sweden, Ukraine and Japan. Although the story of a successful natural product is an attractive option, especially for those who are interested in organic farming, not everyone can readily target their product for export. Volume and consistency are necessary and many back-to-nature producers would rather produce healthy fruits and vegetables, free from pesticides or Genetically Modified Organisms solely for the benefit of their families' own well being.

Georgian farmer's association "Elkana" has been developing organic agriculture since 1996. This non-governmental



organization consists of various small farmers' associations and it provides rural consulting services to farmers who are either just beginning or merely interested in organic farming. In addition to organic farming, some of the organization's key aims are to promote agricultural biodiversity, sustainability and continuity of supply. Elkana collaborates with farmers through a fee-based membership, which includes various services such as kitchen garden planning in the regions and developing land plots.

Elene Shatberashvili, one of Elkana members, considers that the main challenge is how to get organic products onto the Georgian

market when it is faced with misleading and false labeling. "Eco 100 percent is written on many Georgian products which leaves customers clueless as to what is hidden behind these words. As a result, the loyalty of consumers to any brand or outlet depends only on trust to one or another food processing company."

Georgia does not have a quality control mechanism, making it difficult for eco products and farmers to compete with bigger companies that supply the lion's share of the Georgian market. Market research demonstrates that there is a segment of consumers who are ready to pay more, even a pre-

mium, in order to access truly organic products. Considering the product market is very cut throat, interested consumers find it hard to buy the food they prefer and in adequate volumes.

Organic farming is not limited to only one region of Georgia; the practice remains popular in Georgia's Kakheti, Shida Kartli, Guria, Samchke-Javaketi and Kvemo Kartli regions. The highlands are the most advantageous for growing ecologically pure products, while mountainous regions are ideal for launching experimental agricultural farms because plants are less prone to diseases in such climates and such crops have not been grown before.

However, the development of organic agricultural products is hindered due to chaotic governmental policy and a lack of understanding of what constitutes an organic product in the first place. In such a country where small plot ownership and poor soil are serious problems, there are nevertheless perfect climate conditions for sustainable quality food production. A clearer view of opportunities of agricultural development is needed, and this needs to be done in terms of how crops and soils must be

managed. Georgia lacks both resolve and resources to compete with neighboring countries in terms of economies of scale. It takes more to produce for a larger market than production alone, harvesting, post-harvest and packaging are all essential components. The market is based on the shared needs of consumers and producers and they must take international experience into consideration. The example of Austria, where twenty percent of agricultural products are organic, serves as a model for Georgia.

The Georgian government is planning to establish rural extension and agricultural consulting centers in various regions. According to Shatberashvili, farmers need to have access to more information about organic farming. To gain knowledge about its advantages and disadvantages and make the right decisions based on proven results on producing and harvesting healthy crops.

Marika Kandorelashvili of Guria region switched to organic farming eight years ago. She produces apples, peaches, plums and wheat on her farm. Although she tries to harvest products free from pesticides she continues to struggle due to a lack of additives. Not yet

an exporter, Kandorelashvili plans on obtaining a certificate for producing certified organic foods soon.

The procedure of certifying organic products varies from country to country. Approximately 60 states have such laws and regulations. However, the process of verifying organic products is based on a unique system of certification that not only certifies how the crop was produced, but only investigates the cropping history of the land to determine if chemicals had been used before and for how long ago. It takes more than just claims to say that you are producing organic products.

In Georgia, the institution responsible for certification is "Caucascert". Operating under the legislation of "Green Caucasus" and adhering to European Union standards, any product with a "Caucascert" certificate is allowed to be exported to EU countries. The process of certification is based on annual inspections where the potential organic farmer needs to present documentation of all fertilizers and other inputs used during the production. All in all, it takes about three years to shift from ordinary agriculture to truly organic farming.

## EDUCATION

# What does the Future Hold for Foreign English Language Teachers?

By KOBA SAMSONIDZE

**It is not uncommon for a foreigner in Georgia to be mistaken as an English language teacher due to the massive influx of teachers under the previous government's TLG initiative. But the experience sharply differed with the existing Peace Corps Program, raising questions about the future of both programs.**

In the early 2000's Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze invited the United States Peace Corps, an organization with over 50 years of experience working in developing countries, to Georgia, and in 2001 the first group of 70 volunteers arrived in the country. Since then, close to 500 college-educated American volunteers have followed in their footsteps to live and work alongside their Georgian counterparts for 27 months exchanging cultural traditions and developing educational, business, and social or-



ganizational infrastructure across Georgia. With its main focus on education, there are currently close to 80 Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) working primarily in small village schools in nine of Georgia's 12 regions.

In 2010, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili requested Peace Corps to expand the program to 500 volunteers. But the request was declined primarily because Georgia already had a higher per capita PCV presence than any other former Eastern

bloc country.

Undeterred, the Saakashvili government lunched Teach and Learn with Georgia (TLG), an entirely new, domestic English language program designed to invite thousands of native English speakers to Georgia to

teach English in public schools alongside local language teachers. Unlike Peace Corps, which is only open to US citizens, the new Georgian program invited practically any native English speaker regardless of nationality. In many cases, the program introduced Georgians to their first Yank, Brit, Aussie, Kiwi, or Canuck.

Since its inception, TLG has been by far the most visible example of cross-cultural exchange for Georgian youth, and society as a whole, leaving scarcely a village without the experience of having an English speaker join their community for some period of time. By January 2013, over a thousand volunteers from 43 countries had participated.

From the Peace Corps' perspective, the establishment of a domestic English education program meant that Georgia could now meet its own needs of sourcing skilled and trained teachers. In the eyes of some, the Peace Corps' program was relegated to a secondary status by the Georgian Ministry of

Education and Sciences, which was naturally motivated to promote its own, President-endorsed initiatives. Moreover, many Georgian schools, which previously sought out PCVs, were now applying for TLG volunteers instead.

However, in practice, Peace Corps' actual goals were not being met, and much of this had to do with the overall lack of preparation and orientation for the teachers, and how many new arrivals were lured to Georgia with inflated expectations in the haste to launch the TLG program.

The difference is clear: PCVs undergo a rigorous six-month application process in which they are carefully screened. Once accepted they undergo three months of intensive language and cultural training to prepare them for the unique realities of Georgian life and more effectively apply their skills. They strive to speak and read Georgian, and they live in Georgian communities for over two years.

*Continued on p. 11*

# Georgian Foreign Policy in a State of Flux

By VAKHTANG MAISAIA

**Georgian society is now focused on adjusting its foreign policy orientation and the motivation is clear. The wave of instability and fragility on the Georgian political landscape has emerged from the bipolarity of governance.**

Consequently, inspiration has been infused into improving the situation, and not only in terms of international political perspectives but based on domestic considerations as well. Throughout recent history, the geopolitical agenda for Georgia's development has been twofold – European and Euro-Atlantic integration. This began in the period of Shevardnadze and was inherited by Ivanishvili's government, albeit with a less seamless transition from the Saakashvili's authoritarian rule. Georgia is experiencing a combination of identity crisis and crisis of imagination. Thus some of the most challenging and exposed intra-society questions of how to perceive the nation's place at the international level are coming to the fore, a subject which is being discussed on many levels, not just among the so called pundits and political elite.

Much ink has been spilled, not to mention layers of political rhetoric, over the option of becoming a NATO-member. Much time and productive work has been lost with NATO being used as a proverbial football in the political arena. The geopolitical challenges that existed before continue

unabated, even more complicated, and the advantages and disadvantages of full-fledged NATO member are discussed more. Current geopolitical challenges are again on the front burner. Although approximately 60% of population still supports the trend of Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgian society turns to the European policy-makers with hope of creating a new security dimension in the frames of the "European Neighborhood Policy" and Eastern Partnership dialogue (i.e. one other than the US dominated NATO alliance). By doing so, the EU leadership intends to halt further enlargement of the community due to its already bloated membership. The EU is also considering its tailored approach Turkey which intentionally prolongs the process of Turkish membership into the European Union.

The recent visit of high level delegations from Eastern Partnership member states and the second meeting of the Eastern Partnership in Tbilisi on February 12-13 have reflected the importance of the agenda of further enlargement of the EU prior to the Vilnius Summit to be held in November of 2013. From Georgia's perspective, the issue of expanded EU enlargement into the Caucasus is takes its place on the critical agenda to address internal political turbulences that are to the detriment of Georgia's national interests, i.e., restoring territorial integrity, maintaining sovereignty, reinforcing regional leadership, combating terrorism and drug smuggling,

protecting human rights and democracy, etc. However, for the time being, the processes underway in Georgia, viewed from the perspectives of *low politics* and *high politics* are very different and contradict Georgia's stated aspiration of becoming a fully fledged member of either the EU or NATO.

**Low politics perspectives – the category of global issues related to the economic, social, demographic and environmental aspects of relations between governments and people** – the global issue of EU enlargement partially realized via the mechanisms of the Eastern Partnership dialogue has significantly impacted the Georgian political landscape. Stefan Fule, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy mildly criticized Georgia's democratic perspectives, followed by sharper criticism from the European People Party coalition recently. It is interesting to note that such spokespersons were mum a few years earlier, based on personal observations, and in reality, such a stance had been provoking a new standoff inside various segments of the population. Unfortunate as it does appear, less than informed speculation as to the February 8 scuffle in front of Tbilisi's National Library Building deserves closer scrutiny. It may be a bit naïve and premature to contend that the opposition United National Movement and its allied NGOs, and various public supporters suddenly concocted a proposal for a constitutional amendment to fix the coun-

try's foreign policy orientation. The statement inspires many contradictions, especially among other parts of the population. It brings into question the democratic and institutional organizations of the country as a whole.

It must be underscored that pro-European and even pro-Russian sentiments are steadily being promoting in Georgian society. All this tends to counter-balance the "pro-American" orientation (as expressed through Georgia's NATO membership aspiration), which is hardly ever considered as outspoken topic, especially by Georgian policy-makers. The unpopular and authoritarian style of governance of Georgia's previous ruling party United National Movement led by the instable and unpredictable President Mikhail Saakashvili (he is at least partially considered responsible for starting the Russo-Georgian war due to his very low-profile decision-making trait and his incompetency to properly analyze foreign policy challenges and risks) has significantly damaged pro-American sentiments among the Georgian population. This is based on my personal experience. As a former political prisoner who spent two years at the Rustavi #17 prison colony, I can say that among almost 3000 inmates, only a few inmates, not more than 50 perhaps, including myself, were strong supporters of the Euro-Atlantic integration who also had pro-American leanings). Moreover, the "tilting curve" in the economic and social



spheres (high inflation, economic decline, high foreign debt, high trade deficit, etc.) promotes this trend away from aggressive pro-Americanism and is becoming a vital factor in shaping Georgia's foreign policy direction.

**High politics perspectives – those issues related to the military, security and political relations of states** – from the view-point of international politics, Georgia's aspiration to achieve an status-quo Associate membership status with the EU by the end of the year indicates an inspiration by the current Georgian government led by Bidzina Ivanishvili to at the very least promote the regional leadership agenda in the South Caucasus and to be more active at the global level, including by taking part in peacemaking operations abroad. The August 2008 war has seriously damaged Georgia's international reputation as a geopolitical gateway to the realization of global projects that are limited in the direction of East and

West, e.g., the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Silk Road strategy, etc. The shadow of a "failed-state" image inherited from the Saakashvili regime's legacy seriously undermines the nation's ability to fully achieve its national interests in the international arena. The pan-European foreign policy reinforcement is sought to be a "life buoy" for swimming in stormy "global geopolitical ocean".

By Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia – *ex-political prisoner, USIA Alumni, an international defense fellow and doctorate student at the U.S. Air Force Academy (1998), graduate from GIPA and George C. Marshall College of International and Security Studies, a Counselor at Georgian Mission at NATO HQ and a rapporteur to the NATO IS PASP Security and Defense Economics Directorate (2004-2008), visiting Professor at Bratislava State University and "Caucasus International University", director of the "Georgian Times" Strategic Studies Center "Azri".*

## Lessons to Serbia and Georgia from Northern Europe

By RICHARD BERGE

**Kosovo's unilateral independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008 had profound ramifications on Georgia's own territorial disputes. Five years later, Norwegian citizen Richard Berge offers a pragmatic yet hard to swallow solution to Belgrade and Tbilisi, as they struggle coming to terms with successful secessionist movements within their borders.**

As a northern European visiting the Balkans and the Caucasus, I have concluded that Serbia and Georgia have a lot in common: Orthodoxy, strong nationalist sentiment, and even stronger fruit brandy. They also share the experience of being on a geopolitical crossroads, which over the centuries have subjected them to devastating wars, rule by foreign empires, shifting alliances, ideologies and political orders. Surviving and prospering as small countries and nations on such a crossroads has in the past required extreme ad-



aptation, pragmatism and perseverance. This is still the case today.

Perhaps the biggest political conundrum that Belgrade and Tbilisi had to face during the final decade of the 20th century was the secession of territories which both had regarded as integral to their countries, and in part as the cradle of their civilizations. In both cases, the secessionists were supported by a powerful country or alliance of countries against which they were ultimately powerless to resist. The secession of Kosovo from Serbia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia were equally traumatic and equally tragic for both Georgia and Serbia.

The response to the loss was also similar in both countries:

Instead of acquiescing to the loss of their respective territories, Tbilisi and Belgrade enacted various measures to halt or slow the secession of the breakaway republics, and later to reintegrate them. However, it has increasingly become clear that these strategies have not worked: neither Serbia nor Georgia are closer to integrating their breakaway republics today than they were ten to twenty years ago.

On the contrary, deep running geopolitical divisions between East and West, as well as the increasing institutionalization of politics and society in the breakaway republics themselves, has arguably contributed to making their separation irreversible and total. Faced with the futility of confronting the pow-

erful backers of their breakaway republics, which enjoy vast military, economic and diplomatic superiority which Serbia and Georgian never hope to match, the two should adopt an entirely new outlook on their respective conflicts.

One such outlook is to simply let go of the breakaway republics entirely, both physically (which is in fact already the case), juridically as well as men-

tally. Even though this would be immensely difficult to accept psychologically for both Georgians and Serbs, it could have the benefit of opening up new, important avenues for progress and development for the two countries. A model for this outlook already exists in northern Europe.

After WWII in northern Europe, Finland lost large parts of its territory to the Soviet

Union. However, Finland quietly accepted the loss of territory, kept its sovereignty, and embarked on a path of domestic development in the shadow of the great powers. In the decades since WWII, and in particular since the end of the Cold War, Finland has managed to create a modern state with a democratic society, an advanced, high-tech economy, and with regional cooperation and European integration as some of the cornerstones of its foreign policy.

The experience of Finland presents Serbia and Georgia with a choice: clinging to the lofty nationalist dreams of bringing back lost territories, or considering following a less hot-blooded path that could lead towards greater domestic and regional peace, progress and prosperity. The choice is theirs.

*Richard Berge has a Masters degree in politics, security and integration from the University of London, where he focused on conflict studies, nationalism and security issues in the Caucasus and the Balkans. He has experience from diplomacy and civil society in the Caucasus and has traveled extensively in the region.*



# Azerbaijani Politician Arrested On Corruption Charge

By AP AND RFE/RL'S AZERBAIJANI SERVICE

**An Azerbaijani politician expelled from the ruling party after being implicated in a corruption scandal has been arrested.**

The Sabail District Court in Baku ordered Gular Ahmadova to be held in pretrial detention for up to two months.

The Prosecutor-General's Office announced late on February 13 that Ahmadova will be charged with abuse of public office in order to commit embezzlement.

In September, a video appeared online showing Ahmadova, a parliamentary deputy with the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, discussing the size of a bribe required to secure a seat in parliament.

The incident allegedly took place in 2005.

Although corruption is said to be rampant in Azerbaijan, the high-profile exposure of public figures is rare.

Ahmadova faces up to 12 years in prison if found guilty.



Photo - Gular Ahmadova

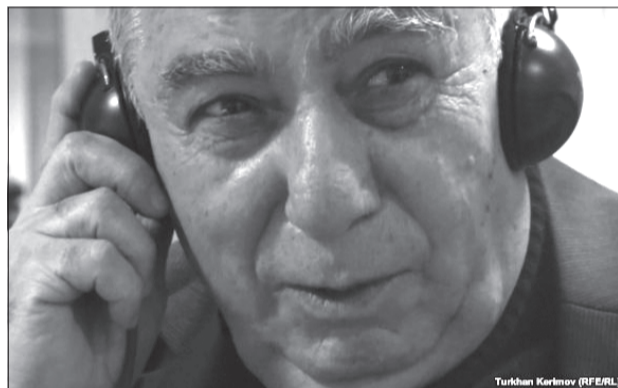


Photo - Azerbaijani writer Akram Aylisli

## Azerbaijani Writer's Books Burned Over His Controversial Novel

By AP AND RFE/RL'S AZERBAIJANI SERVICE

**Protesters in western Azerbaijan have burned books by a prominent novelist, calling him "a traitor of the Azerbaijani nation."**

The incident happened on February 10 in the city of Ganca.

Akram Aylisli was officially stripped of his "People's Writer" title and his presidentially-awarded pension last week.

These actions were taken against Aylisli because of his novel "Stone Dreams," which was printed in a popular Russian magazine last year.

The novel describes sensitive issues in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

It focuses on the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, the mostly Armenian-populated region that broke away from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s.

The Union of Azerbaijani Writers announced February 9 that Aylisli had been expelled from its ranks.

On the same day, hundreds protested in Aylisli's native village of Aylis, condemning the author and his book.

## 'Don't Be Obnoxious,' Azerbaijani President Warns Officials' Children

By KENAN ALIYEV, RFE/RL'S AZERBAIJANI SERVICE

**Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has sharply reprimanded government officials and members of their families for what he called their "obnoxious behavior."**

While he didn't mention it by name, Aliyev's remarks were taken as his first public reaction to recent protests in the town of Ismayilli, northwest of the capital, Baku.

The January unrest was triggered by a car accident involving the son of a cabinet minister.

Talking to journalists on the sidelines of a conference on regional development, Aliyev warned government officials to behave properly or face serious consequences:

"The children of high officials display obnoxious behavior. They are misbehaving and insulting people. Who gave them the right to do so? If I hear one more time about someone's bad behavior, that person will be arrested and his father will be dismissed."

Aliyev also called on central and local government officials to stop holding ostentatious celebrations and weddings and to live more modestly:

"Some of them look down on people and don't listen to them. They insult people. This all must end... Some officials organize big parties — flashy wedding parties and birthday celebrations. Is this acceptable for public officials?"

Using himself as an exam-

ple, Aliyev pointed to his 50th birthday celebrations in December 2011, which he said he spent in the Agcabadi region with internally displaced people from the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh:

"This is my nature and you should follow my example.... Stop with these expensive weddings, birthday parties, and expensive gifts. Enough is enough."



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev: "Enough is enough."

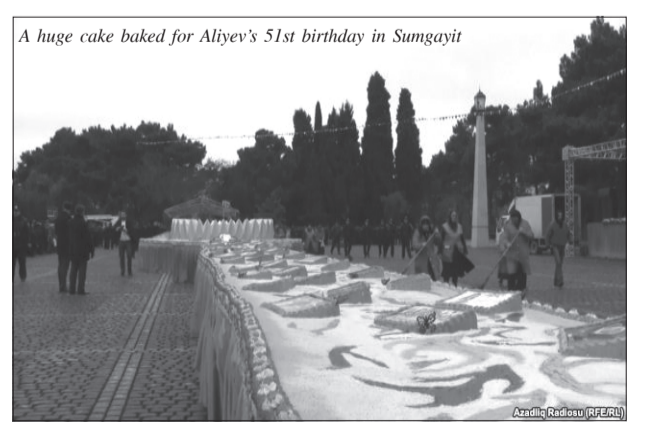


Ismayilli after the January protests

Those who do it know who I am talking about. It is about local and central executive officials."

(Of course, Aliyev, failed to mention the huge birthday cakes that have been baked for him on his birthdays.)

Dozens of protesters were arrested after the January 23 protests in Ismayilli when protesters set fire to cars and a hotel owned by the minister's son.



A huge cake baked for Aliyev's 51st birthday in Sumgayit

Azadliq Radiosu (RFE/RL)



# For Armenia, Promising Changes Amid Elections

By STRATFOR

Armenia's presidential election on Feb. 18 is unlikely to lead to any significant political changes within the country, but it comes amid a broader strategic shift in the South Caucasus. Due to an ongoing political thaw between Russia and Georgia, the Armenian economy could see a boost from increased regional economic integration, which may also reduce Yerevan's own political isolation.

Unlike in neighboring Azerbaijan and some other authoritarian states in the former Soviet Union, Armenian presidential elections typically have been heavily competitive. In both 1998 and 2003, presidential elections went to a second round because no candidate was able to obtain the requisite 50 percent of the vote to win in the first round. In the past, this competitiveness has occasionally led to violence and instability in the country. The 2008 elections that ushered current Armenian Presi-



dent Serzh Sargsyan into power were accompanied by protests in the capital involving tens of thousands of supporters of the challenger, Levon Ter-Petrosian. The demonstrations turned violent and ended only after security forces intervened, resulting in several deaths and hundreds of injuries.

Unlike previous elections, this one is not expected to be

competitive; no candidate is seriously challenging Sargsyan and two of the country's other top political figures, former presidents Ter-Petrosian and Robert Kocharian, both declined to run. Consequently, the prospect for instability or violence surrounding it is diminished. Sargsyan is projected to win comfortably, with most polls showing him taking 60 percent to 70 percent of

the vote.

In terms of foreign policy, the election is unlikely to lead to any significant shift regardless of who emerges victorious. All candidates broadly support Yerevan's close relationship with Russia. Moscow is the primary provider of Armenia's energy, foreign aid and investment, and Russia also owns many of the country's strategic assets such as rail-

ways, telecommunications infrastructure and natural gas pipelines. More important, Russia has 5,000 troops stationed in Armenia and serves as a security guarantor in the country's ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan over the breakaway territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia's geopolitical orientation is unlikely to change.

However, a significant shift

is under way beyond Armenia's borders. For the past decade, the country has served as Russia's main anchor in the Caucasus, while Georgia pursued close ties with the United States and NATO and Azerbaijan attempted to balance its allegiances between the West and Russia. But since the election of Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili in 2012, Tbilisi has been in the process of improving ties with Moscow. While countries such as Azerbaijan and Turkey are worried about this shift, Armenia strongly supports the move. Strengthened ties between Georgia and Russia have led to renewed interest in projects such as reviving the Georgia-Russia railway via Abkhazia, which would give Armenia a direct rail link to Russia and could boost the Armenian economy.

Though this project and others still face obstacles, they could reduce Armenia's isolation in the Caucasus. Yerevan has long been a stalwart ally of Moscow, and the emergence of a more pro-Russian tilt in the region could boost the country's political and economic prospects.

## Armenian Presidential Candidate Knew Assassination Suspects

By RFE/RL'S ARMENIAN SERVICE

An Armenian presidential candidate says two suspects arrested for the shooting of another candidate once worked for him as house painters.

Vardan Serdakian told journalists in Yerevan on February 12 that, because of his connection to the suspects, he fears being framed and charged with involvement in the assassination attempt against Paruyr Hayrikian.

Serdakian did not say when the two men worked in his house.

Hairikian, the leader of Armenia's Union of National Self-Determination Party, was wounded on January 31.

Surgeons successfully removed a bullet from his shoulder, and he is recovering.

Last week, police arrested two Armenian men in connection with the shooting, but it is still not clear how they were involved.

Seven candidates are running in the election on February 18, which incumbent Serzh Sargsyan is expected to win.



Presidential aspirant Vardan Serdakian says he knows Samvel Harutiunian (left) and Khachatur Pogosian, who have been arrested on suspicion of shooting rival candidate Paruyr Hayrikian.



Armenian presidential candidate Vardan Serdakian

## Serzh Sargsyan Armenia may Annul the Protocols with Turkey

By ARM RADIO.AM



Yerevan will annul its agreements with Turkey if Ankara continues to drag its feet on the documents' ratification, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan told the Voice of Russia on Saturday.

At the same time, he said he supports the Armenian-Turkish protocols signed in 2009 that stipulate establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The documents are yet to be ratified by the MPs of Armenia and Turkey.

# Real Prison Reform Late in Coming but Now on the Right Track!

By BELA ZAKAIDZE

**Time has passed, but the public is still focused on the prison abuse scandal which emerged days before the October Parliamentary Elections. The broadcast evidence of blatant torture and prison rape that was clearly officially sanctioned created a new public interest in the penal system and its management. Such interest still endures today.**

The newly-elected democratic government responded to the inhumane behavior of its predecessor by issuing an amnesty; approximately 4,500 inmates have been freed thus far. However, the new Minister of Corrections, Sozar Subari, faced a great dilemma when the prisoners announced that they would hold a massive protest and reject the new structural policy proposed to eradicate such abuses. Subari compromised to make some alterations to the new policy. Despite this, many of the prisoners are now telling all to the media and the public is taking notice.

The amnesty has solved the overcrowding problem, which has been widely discussed in recent years. However, Subari thinks that the main success to this point has been the eradication of torture and other forms of inhumane treatment.

"After I became Minister the treatment in prisons became humane. I assure you, the shameful torture of prisoners under the previous government will be forgotten once and for all", states Subari, who knows the subject well from his days as Georgia's Ombudsman. He stresses not only human rights but health issues since historically, many inmates contracted



TB while serving their sentences.

The Minister is now setting up a special commission to address such issues. "Over the last nine years only 11 seriously ill prisoners have been released. After two months of the new commission's work 27 prisoners had been released, 14 of them during one session," Subari said in a recent interview.

Nazi Janezashvili, a human rights activist who is a member of the prison monitoring team, claims that the healthcare system in prisons is still inadequate. "The number of prisoners has been significantly decreased; this fact is in itself very important. Obviously this will affect the conditions of those remaining. Certain steps have been taken in terms of healthcare, but so far we haven't seen any significant progress, since

this problem remains."

Subari further claims that he is working hard in this direction and gives concrete numbers. According to him, in October 733 prisoners were treated by the public health system, at a cost of 159,000 GEL. In November these figures were 1,140 prisoners, and 278,000 GEL. In December, 160,000 GEL was spent on the treatment of 740 prisoners. "Hopefully, the amount of money spent will slowly decrease; the number of prisoners has significantly reduced and the state of prisoner health will also improve. I cannot claim that the health of prisoners is now satisfactory, but we have made serious progress," said Subari.

There have also been efforts by various NGOs to improve the legal basis of protecting the health and welfare of the pris-

on population. These NGOs will submit recommendations to the legislative body, and the sooner the better: the last updates in the prison code were made in November 2011.

"There are a several aspects of the law which need to be changed. For example, some punishments imposed on serving prisoners are inappropriate. These may violate human rights because they are imposed on people with serious health problems; they require special products, for example natural juice, or milk products. Denial of special needs food is a form of punishment which should not exist. Restriction of communications also used as a form of punishment. There is a need to improve the regulation of prison visits. The problem of visits by those engaged in less traditional sexual relations must be resolved.

They have totally different needs than those whose marriages are officially registered and sanctioned. Consequently there are many issues that need to be settled," Subari adds

Monitoring prisons is very important to the public and the NGO sector. There has been some public demand for the continuation of the Independent Monitoring Group, created during Giorgi Tughushi's ministry. Journalists were also included in this. There is also call for the expansion of the National Preventive Mechanism, and another option is the creation of a Monitoring Board under the Ministry of Corrections. The National Preventive Mechanisms now being expanded in response to these concerns.

Ucha Nanuashvili, the current Ombudsman, explains that

the right to monitor the prisons has always rested with the National Preventive Mechanism, created in 2009, but the number of professional experts will now increase. "I think at that time [of the prison rape scandal] it was necessary to establish an independent monitoring board, which would share information with the public concerning improvements being made and bring to light any future crimes against inmates. It played a positive role, but it was a provisional council, its members were not responsible to the public; there were no common rules of behavior or working standards. Now it is high time for a new stage. The independent national preventive mechanism will have the power to systematically monitor prisons through scheduled and unscheduled visits," Nanuashvili explains.

However, journalists are not included in the prison monitoring group at this stage. Giorgi Tughushi, his predecessor takes a totally different position. "It is wrong to say that journalists cannot be the members of the monitoring group. It is essential that some representatives of media are members of this group. The mandate of this group was in fact defined several months before the new minister took post. We are now facing a situation in which the Public Defender's mechanism, the monitoring board, does not exist", said the former minister and Ombudsman.

What has changed in the Georgian prisons since the elections? More detailed information will be available after the Ombudsman gives his report. Ucha Nanuashvili's first report to parliament is expected in March and should be eye-opening for both Georgia and the international community.

## Malkhaz Gulashvili: Soon there will be "real freedom" for all in Georgia, not just political rhetoric and business as usual!

*Continued from p. 3*

**What has changed in your life after being in prison?**

I became spiritually stronger and once again the fact showed that fighting for the truth will always have results, despite the fact that it is hard to fight for the truth. All of my works were dedicated to my country, church and my faith, and of course telling the truth to the whole society. For tell-

ing the truth all of my family suffered – as we all work in media and nobody in government wanted to hear the truth at this time.

Unfortunately, international organizations did not speak about my case again, as the president and his government was very successful in dirty provocations and media spin. I don't know why but even in the West, Saakashvili's government methods are sanc-

tioned. A lot of them still protect him but the truth is starting to come out as to their motivations.

**Can the new government justify your high hopes for the future?**

I expect that there will be a real freedom and fate of people will not only depend on any politician's mood. Moreover, I hope there will be no more media censorship and education will be restored. Anybody

who doesn't like what media says won't be allowed to oppress people and destroy their lives. Saakashvili regime was doing it on daily bases and with a sense of impunity.

**You mentioned that you will start over publishing the paper, what are the plans for future; will there be only English edition?**

It is still too early to talk about it in detail. Since 1993, I have been creating this news-

paper. A minute is enough to destroy everything. This is the minute of Saakashvili, he destroyed "Georgian Times", recovering everything is hard work. We are now working day and night, doing all possible to restore everything, online editions already working. This interview is now published in the English edition. I hope the Georgian edition will come out soon. We are also going to add internet TV as well. As the rest

of the plans, we are keeping our cards close for now.

One thing I know for sure, we still keep on telling the truth for human rights and the welfare of our country. We will be actively involved in political life of Georgia and making sure that freedom is protected for all and the truth of what all has transpired under the criminal government of Saakashvili will be part of the historic record for all to read.

## Court Authorizes Police to Bring Tbilisi Mayor before Investigators for Questioning



By CIVIL GEORGIA, TBILISI

**Tbilisi City Court has authorized law enforcement agencies to apply coercive measures to bring Tbilisi mayor Gigi Ugulava to the police station for questioning as a witness in connection to scuffles that broke out outside the National Library on February 8.**

After earlier this week Ugulava was summoned by the police for questioning, the Tbilisi Mayor's Office said that Ugulava was willing to testify but would not arrive in the police station and instead was inviting investigators at his office. Police appealed court seeking permission to force Ugulava to appear before investigators. Ugulava said that he would comply with court's decision. Before the court's ruling was announced, Ugulava reiterated: "If court says that I have to arrive [at the police station] I have no problems."

"Gigi Ugulava has been summoned for questioning as a witness twice... He, however, has not appeared for questioning and has neither provided the investigation with a valid excuse for not appearing," the court said in a statement, adding that all the legal conditions were in place to authorize coercive measures to bring Ugulava to the police station for interrogation.

The court also said that Ugulava "should be brought" to the police station for questioning at 3pm local time on February 16.

After the court's decision was announced, Tbilisi mayor's office said that Ugulava would appear before investigators in the police station.

## Date Set for MP By-Elections

By CIVIL GEORGIA, TBILISI

**MP by-elections in three single-mandate majoritarian constituencies to fill vacant seats in the Parliament will be held on April 27, according to a decision passed by the Central Election Commission on Friday.**

By-elections will be held in Tbilisi's Nadzaladevi constituency, as well as in Samtredia and Bagdati constituencies in the Imereti region.

Three seats in the Parliament became vacant after majoritarian MPs from the Georgian Dream coalition were appointed in the executive government shortly after the October elections – Tea Tsulukiani, who was elected in Tbilisi's Nadzaladevi single-mandate constituency, became the Justice Minister; Kakha Kaladze, who won majoritarian race in Samtredia constituency became Energy Minister and Archil Kbilashvili, who was a majoritarian MP from Bagdati single-mandate constituency, was appointed as chief prosecutor.



The Central Election Commission set the date of by-elections based on amendment to the election code, passed by the Parliament in December, according to which MP by-elections can be held either in April or October, instead of only October as it was previously envisaged.

## Meteorite shower causes mass casualties in Russia

By EURONEWS

**A meteorite streaked across the sky and exploded over central Russia on Friday, raining fireballs over a vast area and causing a shock wave that smashed windows, damaged buildings and injured 1,200 people.**

A traffic camera captured the extremely rare moment when it passed over Chelyabinsk, a city some 1,500 kilometres east of Moscow.

People heading to work in the city heard what sounded like an explosion, saw a bright light and then felt the shock wave.

Car alarms went off, thousands of windows shattered and mobile phone networks were disrupted. The Interior Minis-



try said the meteorite explosion also unleashed a sonic boom.

No deaths were reported but some 1,200 people were injured, at least 200 of them children, and most from shards of

glass.

The fireball left fragments as far away as Cherbakul in Russia's Ural Mountains, hitting the area with the power of an atomic bomb.

The European Space Agency said its experts confirmed there was no connection with an asteroid the size of an Olympic swimming pool that passed Earth on Friday night.

## EDUCATION

# What does the Future Hold for Foreign English Language Teachers?

Continued from p. 6

This is compared to the two to three week long application process and one week orientation course for TLG volunteers. As one former participant explains, this left volunteers "completely unprepared", adding, "at least half of the people who I came here with knew nothing about Georgia and were terrified to be [here]."

While the traditionally hospitable Georgian people welcomed these visitors with open arms into their communities, stories about alcohol soaked evenings involving volunteer teachers in Batumi and Tbilisi quickly spread throughout the country, earning the

guest teachers' reputations as drunks; notorious blog posts about relationships between Western men and Georgian women and other mishaps gave many Georgians the impression that these English speaking guests were attempting to culturally subvert traditionally conservative Georgian society to one of western-style decadence. TLG began unraveling fast, and it damaged the good reputation that the Peace Corps had earned during close to a decade of dedication and hard work.

On the technical side of things, the Georgian teachers did not in all situations react warmly to the diverse cultures of the program's participants

or the attempts to alter the structure of instruction by volunteers with no prior knowledge of teaching, or of the societal norms of a Georgian school or classroom.

TLG may also have had political motivations when it comes to the placement of its participants. In regions like Samengrelo and Shida Kartli, which were on the front lines during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Peace Corps maintains a limited or non-existent presence. TLG on the other hand densely populated these regions with volunteers, leading some to see this as an attempt by the Saakashvili government to deploy "human shields" to deter any potential

repeat Russian military incursions into Georgian territory.

Peace Corps has its own culturally homogenizing faults, and ominous political motivations, as it often serves as a training ground for future diplomats who end up in the intelligence services, as seen in Libya and the killing of the US Ambassador last year. Many host nations are not deceived by its professed good intentions, and they see the PC as an instrument of US foreign policy, i.e., a promoter of imperialism and 'soft power'. This is especially true in the former Soviet Union. Notable examples include the program's abrupt end in Russia in 2002 after being accused of "collect-

ing information on the socio-political and economic situation in Russia" with a spate of similar fates in Uzbekistan in 2005, Kazakhstan in 2011 and Turkmenistan in 2012.

Although such threats to Peace Corp hardly exist in Georgia due to its strong Western orientation, the long-term future of both programs remains unclear. The 2013 class of new PCVs will be the smallest since returning to Georgia in 2009 after a one-year hiatus due to the 2008 war with Russia. Meanwhile, the Georgian government decided to downsize TLG's footprint to just 150 volunteers, placing them only in the regions.

There are lessons to be

learned from both programs, and despite its many flaws and close association with the previous regime, TLG cannot be considered a total disaster. Instead it proved a valuable first step in the creation of a successful domestic guest teacher program like those in South Korea or Japan. As Georgia's new government makes fresh tracks, it should not forget how TLG and Peace Corps have greatly impacted Georgians' views and relationships with the English language and the English-speaking world.

**Koba Samsonidze is the pseudonym of an American English teacher in Georgia.**

# Ivanishvili Addresses Congress of his GDDG Party

By CIVIL.GE

**PM Bidzina Ivanishvili reiterated on Saturday that he welcomes "reasonable" proposal from the UNM to enforce parts of new constitutional provisions now instead of late 2013.**

Speaking at a congress of his party, Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GDDG), in Tbilisi, Ivanishvili said that constitutional changes were needed to limit presidential powers under which the President has the right to sack the sitting government and appoint new one without Parliament's approval.

"Members of the parliamentary minority group also understand well the need for such changes. Because they understand it, they have offered us a reasonable proposal to put into effect right now several provisions of the constitution, which are to be enforced in October [2013]. I welcome any kind of reasonable proposal," he said, but also added that broader constitutional changes would still be required as it contains "many other shortcomings."

Responding to UNM's calls on including in the constitution a clause that would guarantee Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy course, Ivanishvili said that Georgia's "European aspiration" did not belong to any specific political group. He said



allegations about his government intending to turn away from the European path "is a lie" and added that it was "ludicrous" that UNM, which nine years ago amended a constitution by giving the President, as he put it, "dictatorial" powers, was now insisting on constitutional guarantees for pro-Western foreign policy course.

"European course is a choice of the Georgian people; membership in the European Union and NATO is required to achieve this historic goal and our government follows this path unconditionally," the Prime Minister said.

He also said that at the same time his government had already started mending ties with Russia.

"First step has already been made as Russian market will be opened for the Georgian prod-

ucts – that's rather important for our people," Ivanishvili said.

He also said: "Our country should turn into the place of agreements, not confrontations."

During the congress of GDDG, which is the leading party in the six-party Georgian Dream coalition, Ivanishvili was elected as its honorary chairman. GDDG has also elected a 21-member political council, the party's main decision-making body, which mostly includes lawmakers, among them: GD parliamentary majority leader Davit Saganelidze, as well as Eka Beselia; Manana Kobakhidze; Eliso Chapidze; Irakli Sesiashvili; Irakli Tripolski; Zakaria Kutsnashvili. Minister of Finance Nodar Khaduri and Minister of Energy Kakha Kaladze are also members of

GDDG's political council.

In lead up to this congress, GDDG held regional assemblies, setting up its local branches in the provinces and electing heads of these local branches. The process was coordinated by MP Davit Saganelidze, leader of the parliamentary majority. This process in some of the provinces, however, was marred by confrontations between Georgian Dream activists because of disagreements who should lead local branches. GDDG leadership claimed that confrontations were stirred by activists who were "infiltrated" into the party by the UNM with a purpose to thwart the process of forming regional branches of the party.

Referring to these confrontations, PM Ivanishvili said at the congress of GDGD in Tbilisi that those developments in

some of the provinces "have nothing to do with democracy"; he also said that no one would be able to gain power through violence.

In his speech at GDGD's congress, Ivanishvili condemned again violence that erupted outside the National Library on February 8. He also said: "I understand very well those anxious people, whose rights were infringed by Saakashvili and who gathered to express their protest... But what followed next is totally inadmissible. We should learn that unfairness should be responded with legal means and not with fistfight."

"We will not let revenge, but I promise that every wrongdoer will face justice," he said.

Ivanishvili also said that "the first step towards restoring justice" was passing by the Parliament law on amnesty. 7,392 inmates have been freed as of February 14 as a result of the amnesty, according to the ministry for penitentiary.

Before his speech at the GDGD's congress, Ivanishvili told journalists on February 16, that Georgian Dream had offered for several times to the UNM to start working jointly on a new amnesty bill that would apply to all the "non-violent" crimes allegedly committed by officials from the previous authorities, but UNM had not responded.

Ivanishvili also said that when he met President Saakashvili in the Georgian patriarchy in January, he had reminded

the President to work on an amnesty bill for former officials, because without such amnesty "many will have to face justice".

"Saakashvili responded that [Tbilisi mayor Gigi] Ugulava and [ex-PM and UNM secretary general Vano] Merabishvili are heroes and they would go into jail with great pleasure," Ivanishvili said and added that "it seems Saakashvili has not lost leadership within his team" and wanted many of UNM leaders to be arrested in order to then portray it as a political prosecution.

In his speech at his party's congress Ivanishvili said that his government "is working tirelessly round the clock" and result of this work would be felt by the people soon.

Ivanishvili also called for "respecting traditions", but also for "accepting novelties".

"These are two main principles, which determine Georgian culture's identity and vitality," he said. "We should take dignified approach not only while preserving our traditions, but also when accepting novelties. We have to remember that we should approach critically xenophobic and homophobic attitudes locked up in pseudo-traditionalism, as well as approach critically thoughtlessly replicating novelties or everything that is foreign. I believe that a person grown up on the Georgian traditions and culture will not differentiate people on the basis of their ethnicity and religion."

# ICES Mission's Assessment of the Election Campaign Generally Positive

By ARM RADIO.AM

**The Election Observation Mission of the International Expert Center for Electoral Systems (ICES) has given a generally positive review of the work conducted by the government bodies during the pre-election campaign.**

The mission highlights the high level of professionalism demonstrated by the Central Electoral Commission. In particular, the CEC has verified the voter registration lists in order to confirm the personal data of Armenian citizens having the right to vote. The voter registration lists were published well in advance of the elections in order to duly inform the public. The work of the CEC during the pre-election campaign was characterized by its transparency and accessibility to voters, the ICES said.

The Mission welcomes the commitment of the Armenian government to invite the maxi-



imum number of international observers to assess the level of organization and conduct of the presidential elections.

In spite of the physical at-

tack on one of the presidential candidates, the mission notes that the pre-election campaign between the candidates was relatively calm.

The Mission also notes that the coverage of the electoral campaign by the Armenian mass media was broad and diversified. According to observers, there

was relative equality in the total coverage of the election process, both in print and in electronic media.

The final evaluation and con-

clusions of the Mission on the democratic and transparent character of the presidential elections will be made only upon completion of the electoral process.

# Europe's Foreign-Policy Resilience

By VAIRA VIKE-FREIBERGA AND ANTONIO VITORINO

**For decades, people have bemoaned the waning of Europe's global political power. To add some precision to the debate, in 2010 we helped to write the European Council on Foreign Relations' first Foreign Policy Scorecard. Back then, we wrote – rather mildly – that Europe had been “distracted” by the euro crisis. By the end of 2012, the crisis could be considered less acute. Nevertheless, European leaders have continued to devote more time and effort to financial and institutional questions than to geopolitical issues.**

Europe's image and soft power have undoubtedly continued to fade around the world (thought such a trend is difficult to quantify), while member states continue to cut defense and development budgets. The good news, however, is that European foreign policy has not unraveled in the crisis. Indeed, it has even shown some signs of progress.

The European Union man-

aged to preserve the essence of its *acquis diplomatique*. In fact, the Scorecard's assessment of European foreign-policy performance in 2012 shows modest signs of stabilization and resilience. Although the EU had no high-profile successes comparable to the military intervention in Libya in 2011, it performed surprisingly well in its external relations – especially given the deep crisis with which it continued to struggle.

For starters, the coherence of Europe's policies toward Russia improved: the EU threatened to use the World Trade Organization's dispute-settlement mechanism when the Kremlin announced new protectionist measures in late 2012. It also launched an antitrust probe against Russian gas giant Gazprom, and criticized human-rights abuses during the crackdown on demonstrations that accompanied the March election that returned Vladimir Putin to the presidency.

There were also signs of modest improvement in Europe's relations with China, despite a lack of unity that continued to undermine its lever-



age. New EU missions to Niger, South Sudan, and the Horn of Africa under the aegis of the Common Security and Defense Policy were also launched – something that had not happened in the previous two years.

Of course, there were also areas in which Europeans performed less well. Above all, they could not break the frustrating diplomatic gridlock over Syria or stem the escalation in violence as the year went on. Europeans remained divided on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (though to a lesser degree than in previous years), and failed to have an impact on the United Nations vote in November to upgrade Palestine's status. They also struggled to pursue a united approach to Azerbaijan and Ukraine, and continued to seek a coherent approach to



Turkey as accession negotiations remained blocked.

Nonetheless, the EU's foreign-policy performance in 2012 was positive overall. It now remains to be seen whether this momentum can be maintained, which will depend largely on whether the EU can overcome the economic crisis (which continues to worsen in several member countries), restore growth, and curb unemployment. In this sense, European leaders are right to focus on solving the financial crisis in the eurozone.

Any future gains in global influence, however, will require Europeans to overcome their internal divisions and improve their foreign-policy coordination. In particular, success will require turning the European External Action Service (EEAS) into an effective dip-

lomatic corps that can convert the EU's huge resources into real power.

The near future will present a growing list of challenges. There are already indications from key strategic partners that they are beginning to regard the euro crisis as the “new normal”; in other words, they are planning for a future in which European power continues to erode. Europe's lack of a collective defense strategy, together with declining investment in military capacity, is also a serious obstacle to its continuing global influence as a security actor.

This makes it even more important for the EEAS to align the Common Security and Defense Policy with wider foreign-policy efforts. This is a daunting task, given the EU's current structure. The specter of a British withdrawal from the EU will not make things any easier.

The US “pivot” to Asia further increases the pressure on Europe to deal with its own neighborhood. Although the EU's foreign policy toward Russia has become more effective, tensions have, if anything, grown – and may continue to do so. Insecurity in Africa's Sahel region, already a growing

concern in 2012, has, in the first month of 2013, led one EU member state to go to war in a region not far from Europe's doorstep. Europeans are likely still to be dealing with the fallout of Islamist rebel groups' attempted takeover of Mali this time next year, while the long-term consequences of developments in the Sahel are bound to be felt for years to come.

Despite the gravity of the euro crisis, the EU foreign-policy machine (such as it is) continued to function in 2012, with moderately successful results. Just getting by, however, is unlikely to be enough to address the challenges that Europe is likely to face this year. The EU will need to do more – and do it better. We remain hopeful that it will be up to the task.

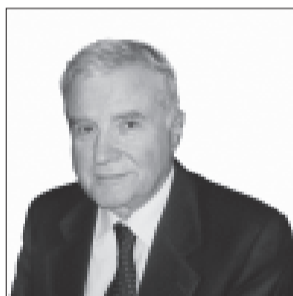
*Vaira Vike-Freiberga is a former president of Latvia. Antonio Vitorino is a former Portuguese EU Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs.*

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# Italy's Taxing Election

By MARIO MARGIOCCO

**A winter election is not to Italian tastes. But, on February 24-25, up to 50 million voters will go to the polls to elect a new parliament, delivering Italy's 62nd government in the last 65 years.**



Since November 2011, Italy has been led not by a politician, but by an academic economist and a former European Union commissioner, Mario Monti. His emergency technocratic government, supported by the left and right, was a masterpiece of outgoing President Giorgio Napolitano.

Napolitano's move was crucial, filling Italy's need to replace the inefficient and scandal-ridden Silvio Berlusconi, in whom fellow leaders and global markets had lost all confidence, with an internationally respected figure. Under Monti's leadership, reforms were finally initiated and markets were calmed.

To enhance the credibility of public finances, Monti's government substantially increased taxes, particularly on real estate, while preserving the already record-high income-tax rate. The tax plan highlighted that Italy, like Japan, is a coun-

try of public debt and private wealth. As the economist Marco Fortis points out, Italian family wealth is still, if not for long, second to none in Europe.

Beyond growing international credibility, two major changes to the Italian political landscape have shaped the election campaign. The first is Monti's surprise resignation in December, after losing the backing of Berlusconi's party. While he will not run as a candidate (he is already a senator for life), he formed a centrist coalition – affiliated with neither the left nor the right – to contest the election, and has declared his willingness to resume his leadership role if the coalition is victorious.

The second change is that, after almost two decades of striving for a workable political system dominated by the center-left and center-right parties, Italy is experiencing a remarkable dispersion of forces. The ballot will include dozens

of competing parties, most of which will not win parliamentary seats, owing to a 2005 electoral law requiring at least 4% of the national vote to enter the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) and 8% on a regional basis to enter the Senate.

According to public-opinion polls, the center-left Democratic Party, led by Pier Luigi Bersani, along with some more left-



leaning allies, has the support of roughly 33% of the electorate, down since late January, while backing for Berlusconi's center-right coalition has risen to 28%. Meanwhile, Monti's centrist grouping has only 16% support, while the populist Five Star Movement, founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009, has 17% backing – a figure that could go higher if those who previously stayed at home decide to cast a protest vote.

The real battle, therefore, is

between the Bersani and Berlusconi coalitions. Most observers believe that Bersani will carry the day, thanks to the much-criticized electoral law, which will give him control of the lower chamber if he wins a majority – regardless of how many people vote or how slim the margin. The law favored Berlusconi in 2008; it is likely to benefit Bersani now.

But, in order to govern, Bersani would need both chambers, and he is unlikely to muster 50.1% in the Senate. At the same time, with Monti's coalition failing to gain traction, reflecting the historically limited appeal of classic bourgeois parties in Italy, many observers are wondering what his role in the next government will be. For Bersani, creating a coalition with Monti may well be the key to gaining control of the upper house and, in turn,

of the government.

Amid these plans and predictions, a growing banking scandal has reminded Italians that, in politics, luck can sometimes make the difference. When Monte dei Paschi di Siena – Italy's third-largest bank – revealed that it faced losses of up to €720 million (\$970 million) from complex derivatives deals carried out in 2006-2009, support for Bersani's coalition slipped, owing to the PD's long-standing ties to the bank. Given that Italians tend to vote against, rather than for, issues, mistrust of the PD has translated into increased support for Berlusconi's coalition.

Another issue with the potential to undermine the PD's standing is the party's advocacy of a new wealth tax. Italians already shoulder heavy taxes: an individual taxpayer with annual income of €50,000 pays €15,000 in income tax; with two children, that total drops by only €1,000. By contrast, a French taxpayer with the same income pays only €9,000; with two children, the tax bill plummets to €3,000, and a €1.5 million fortune would mean an additional wealth tax of only €4,230.

In other words, with or without children, the French citizen's annual tax payment would be smaller than that of the Italian taxpayer with no additional wealth. In this context, a new wealth tax could be a dangerous proposition for the PD.

One feature of Italy's turbulent politics remains consistent: the control exercised by en-

trenched interests, and the dominance of a bloated and inefficient bureaucracy. With less than one-fifth of the population of the United States, Italy's parliament has twice as many members as the US Congress, and they are among the world's best-compensated and most privileged MPs.

Meanwhile, Italy's top bureaucrats are the highest paid in history, according to OECD data, with several retired officials drawing larger pensions than former US presidents receive. The salaries of Italy's military chiefs of staff and chief of police are almost triple those of their American counterparts.

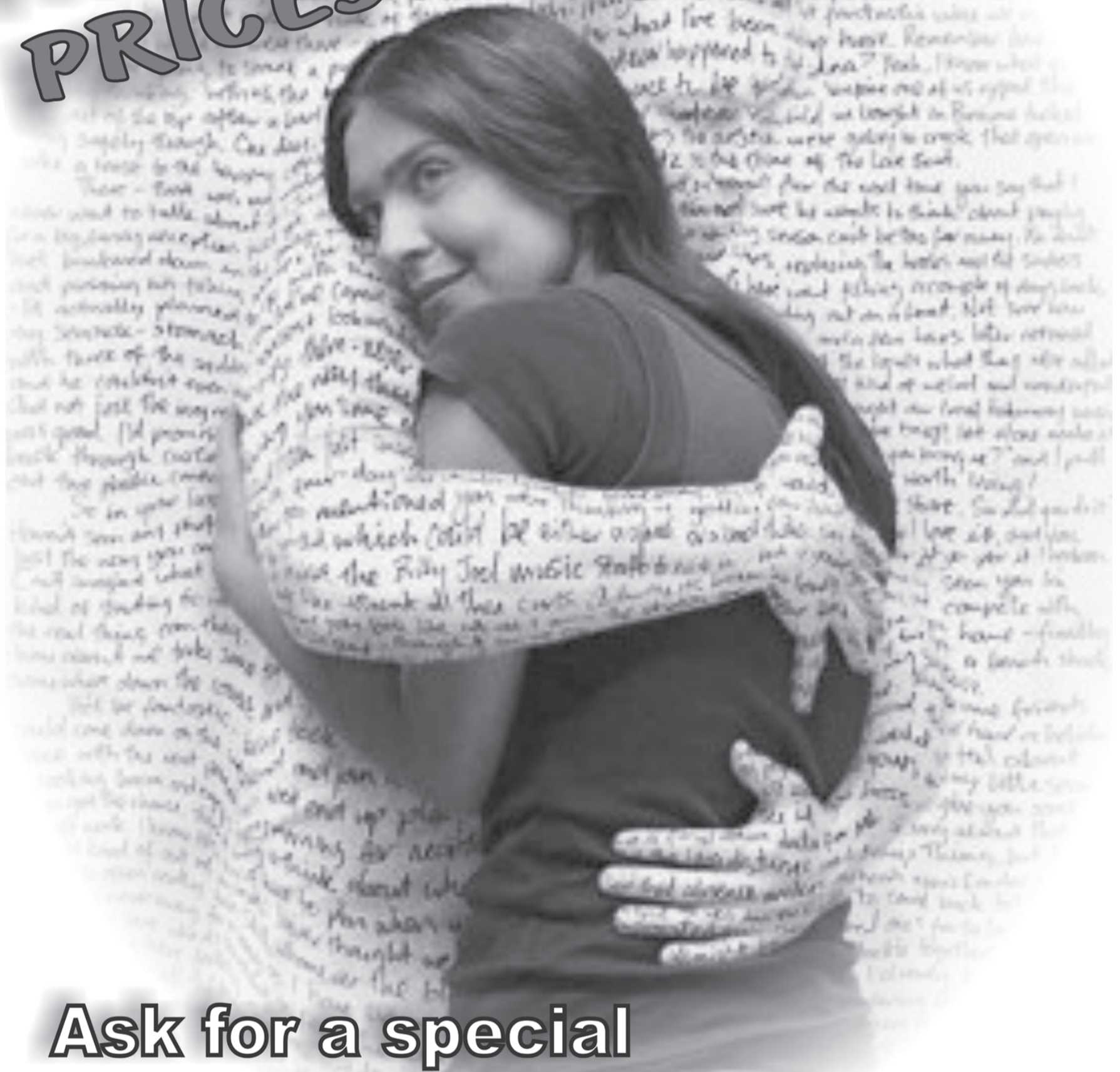
But prospects for political reform do not inspire optimism. While Grillo's supporters may ignite fireworks in protest of these gilded giveaways for a few months, a consistent assault leading to genuine reform seems doubtful.

More broadly, the outcome of Italy's election will undoubtedly have a far-reaching impact on a still-fragile eurozone, though the nature of that impact remains impossible to predict – unless Berlusconi returns to power, in which case the consequences will be all too clear.

*Mario Margiocco's most recent book is “Il disastro americano. Riuscirà Obama a cambiare Wall Street e Washington?” (The American Disaster: Will Obama Change Wall Street and Washington?)*

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# Tbilisi's Nabadi Folk Theater Prepares for New Season

By IRINA MACHURISHVILI

**For the past nine years, the Nabadi folk theater has been taking guests on a mystical ride back in time with its stylized musical performances of Georgian history. Located conveniently on Rustaveli Avenue, the theater is gearing up for its first performance of the year on March 1, 2013 after taking a two-month break.**

Known for its mainstay performance "Birth", Nabadi is primarily oriented towards foreign tourists arriving in Georgia. It is the first of its kind in Georgia and is increasingly becoming a popular venue for local guests as well.

Through traditional dancing and singing only, "Birth" illustrates Georgia's history from the country's founding to present in a way that any foreigner will easily understand. Though it is hard to imagine that a two-hour performance is enough time to accomplish this, as Nino Turabelidze, founder of the Nabadi explains, the aim is to offer a performance that describes Georgia's glorious yet turbulent past for those who may be new to Georgia.

Throughout Birth, spectators witness traditional songs and dances characterizing different times and events, ranging from the unification of Colchis and Iberia into the modern Georgian state to pivotal battles against foreign invaders. Spectators are even treated to Georgian wine and traditional sweets to make amplify their experience. What is unique about the theater itself is the audience's intimacy with the performers since the theater stage is positioned very close to the spectators.

According to Turabelidze, tourists have difficulty hiding their positive emotions while experiencing the performance, adding, "They often come to me and say that the show clears up a lot about Georgia's long history."

Birth's story was conceived by historian Simon Masxarashvili and to Lela Iakobashvili, while the play itself was produced by George Sikharulidze. Musicians Chabua Amiranashvili and Shota Samushiat together with dress designer Ana Bibileishvili bring the play to life.

Nabadi holds weekly performances in Tbilisi and often participates in international

cultural festivals. So far Birth was successfully performed five times in Germany, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

In 2008, Nabadi created the preference "War Minute", which was devoted to the Georgian-Russian war. "Our aim



was to bring the pain and suffering of the war to everyone so that society would prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again in Georgia. To our own surprise, the show was a bit too dramatic that after only four performances we decided



to cancel additional showings, Turabelidze says."

As Nabadi prepares to bring Birth back on March 1, 2013, the theater is also planning to give birth to a new play exclusively about the history and development of old Tbilisi.



# Money Talks But Heart Shaped Chocolate Sings

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

**We celebrate quite un-Georgian holidays in Georgia. I remember my first Valentine's Day over 10 years ago. It was the February 14<sup>th</sup>; it was a dinner at the super fancy restaurant on Perovskaya Street, I was paying and my valentine was my closest childhood girlfriend. We were proud to be different, making fun of the fact that we were spending the "corny" day together. Except I had no clue I would be spending quite a few V days with her in the future.**

I also remember Valentine's Day in London in the year 2002. I was new in the city and Norah Jones was new in show business who had just issued her debut album "Come Away with Me". I didn't know anybody there so I got dressed up,

went to Piccadilly Street to have the most delicious dessert (it was a strawberry cake) and even got myself a present – the debut album by Norah Jones "Come Away With Me". I had a blast telling this story to my friends in Tbilisi. They said it was that year's most different fun story. Again, I had no clue; I would be buying myself quite a few V-day presents in the future.

There were a few Valentine's Days in Los Angeles as well. I told my boyfriend (at the time) I didn't care about the day. He was happy to know, he was not expected to do something romantic, therefore "lame". On the other hand he gave me a teddy bear holding a heart shaped chocolate. He took me pleasantly different from all the desperate women expecting romance on that "corny" day.

Last year my fairly new unemployed (who neither owned nor needed a calendar)

boyfriend forgot that it was any kind of a special day. When I mentioned it a few days later, he said it was a blast to find a girlfriend pleasantly different from all the desperate women expecting romance on that "corny" day.

It's a blast to hear that I am different. Except, don't really see what benefit does it really grant me?!

Coco Chanel stated: "in order to be irreplaceable one must always be different". In my opinion, she also had to write a manual to that. She was a great breakthrough for an orphan, a fashion pioneer - stylish, sharp, noble woman. Considering that she was raised by nuns yet her zest and talent got her immortalized, she must have been a bit more specific about what she meant by being different. She wore pearls and was rebellious and stubborn in the era when women won the right to vote and were allowed to work outside their homes (as

men were taken to the war). She was different; nonetheless after a 9 year affair her lover married someone else.

Queen Margot was different. She was famous for her beauty and sense of style. She was also a gifted poet and writer, notable for her scandalous behavior and not being able to keep other's scandalous secrets. She could have chosen any life she wanted, yet being a beautiful stylish talented Queen didn't seem enough for her. She wore pearls too. Pearls were not important, as she declared and stamped herself into a history as one horny woman. I don't even see why she bothered writing memoirs; she is a memoir by her entire living. She was different. Her king brother kicked her out because of her reputation, her king husband hardly allowed her to enter his court. Making several unfortunate political attempts, she got imprisoned by her king brother for 18 years. "Temptations,

like misfortunes, are sent to test our moral strength," she said. Aside of being a Queen twice, she was famous for her "moral test failures". You must agree, she was a big success in being different and was kicked out from one royal court to another.

Foster child Marilyn Monroe on the other hand doesn't require an explanation saying that "well behaved women barely make history". She acted on it as much as possible. She did make history. She was the very first cover of Playboy magazine, took Kennedy brothers and Marlon Brando as lovers (among many others), and appeared nude when it wasn't required at all. She just preferred to go naked. She gave interviews in the nude and often went out wearing nothing under the black mink that Joe DiMaggio (her ex-husband) had given her. I can hardly imagine her Valentine's Day outfits to please her men. She may have

been mistreated as a child, underpaid as an actress, blamed by wives, envied by women, unappreciated as a person but she was different, she did make history of a kind and shared lots of love with lots of men and was found dead in her apartment.

I bet if you do manage to be different and manage to surround yourself with people who appreciate it, your lover won't marry someone else, your husband won't kick you out, you won't be found dead at your apartment, and won't have to buy yourself a depressing music CD on Valentine's Day. The day for heart shaped chocolate for some girls, pretending to care about heart shaped chocolate for some guys, and self-presenting heart shaped chocolate for the rest-singles. As it comes to me, nothing different this year - I had a hot date and saw a play "Amor" in Tumanishvili Film Actors' Theatre.

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