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!

First 100 Days for the Minister of Justice

Making the Switch to Organic Farming

What does the Future Hold for Foreign English Language Teachers?

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

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 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.”

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.”

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.
**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 a new government’s sweeping amnesty for political prisoners, he is willing to tell all!

Before your trial was even held, Saakashvili declared 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 basis of the so-called Mukhrani tank mutiny on May 5, 2009. Mikhail Saakashvili wished to somehow use this event to discredit the opposition, which was holding protests 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 arrest all of my personal achievements, 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 tricks they employed.

The idea was for Saakashvili to keep you 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 Tbilisi and Moscow. In covering these things, this information was classified as secret, which violated the 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 Ministry time. 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 48-hour list that included opposition leaders and even beloved members of their own 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 knees would be smashed, resulting in long drawn out agony. Do you know anyone who was tortured in that room?

About one year after I was imprisoned, Sergei 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 Oldani 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 warning to experience to my own ordeal, all in an effort to break 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 television 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 develoment of Georgia. Georgia can finally 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 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 shortened 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, whereas 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 regimes and all that was wrong with the program for Georgia and its enforcers. While Vakhtang and thousands of others are now free, we also investigate the post-medical 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 many more ways than one.

Ian F. Carver
Editor-in-Chief
Malkhz Gushlivi: Soon there will be “real freedom” for all in Georgia, not just political rhetoric and business as usual.

By DALLI BIBLAVA

Media holding “Georgian Times” will again be on newstands 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 Malkhz Gushlivi 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.”

Malkhz Gushlivi, 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 Gushlivi 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 2008, 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 Mikhail 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 onto 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 requirements between the two countries.

My steps irritated Saakashvili and he called in his power ministries to stop operation 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 and there are warnings that they will deport you and your son asks you to help him be free, then what choice is there? When faced with this you have to drop everything and go and 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 and domestic 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 Tbilisi (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, 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 it? Crossing of the border from Dusheti? They said “no”, the main problem for them was the fact that I crossed the border of Russia from Tikhvini, 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’s government was not serious. Such a violation of law is only because was personally irritated with me 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 but 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, was this a very strange move?

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 know 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 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 have newspapers, online editions, magazines, books; we had an advertising agency.

The government was behind the attack that followed, and the act on 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 a systematic manner. We had the protection of the family, but the government stopped it.

As for media, I was in prison. I was 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 as we returned back together and I hope they would only locked up not to hurt 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 “Kavkaz”.

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

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

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

We had terrible situations. People were beaten and constantly questioned, 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 released 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 BHIALAVA

From constructing glass court houses to rebuilding the entire legal system, Tea Tsulukiani, summariz- es 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 Min- ister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani but she has managed to make important strides in fulfilling the tasks and responsibilities given to her by Prime Minis- ter 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 develop- ment in the country.

“During my first days, I faced a ministry, where my predecessor was preoccupied with things like planning con- struction projects in places like Batumi, Sighnaghi (generally the whole Kakheti) and Lazi- ku,” explains Tea Tsulukiani. According to the minister, there are still various architec- tural sketches and designs lying around one of her prede- cessor’s rooms on the minis- try’s 9th 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 Min- ister of Justice and mentioned how tourism development will no longer be part of this agen- cy. “The second responsibil- ity of my predecessor was over- seeing the punishment proc- edures of the public prosecu- tor. 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 Depart- ment, which was left “help- less” under the previous re- gime. She mentioned how the ministry’s Analytical Depart- ment had a disproportionate amount of personnel, compared to the Legal Drafting Depart- ment, and how the two depart- ments were on the back of the whole Kakheti). Tsulukiani also claims 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 generally lack sufficient power and flex- ibility to perform their work and therefore we want to im- plement this reform and put them in the positions where they belong,” Tea Tsulukiani explains.

Tsulukiani also claims that she presented a bill envision- ing policy changes for the pub- lic prosecutor. She explained how the previous system served her predecessor but she has managed to work with Adzhishvili and destroyed families, arrested businessmen and stole peo- ple’s properties. This is the only thing I couldn’t handle during my first 100 days,” Tsulukiani concludes.

After being officially trans- formed 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 it ultimately would have been executed or killed in captivity.

As a security analyst, why do you think Moscow decided not to depose Saakashvili dur- ing the war? Comrades in arms provided the world with a constant reminder of how Moscow’s war against Georgia was dangerous. The debate of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war demonstrated the vulnera- bility of Georgia’s strategic re- lationships, the Russian in- tervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia while Saakashvili had announced his plans? Of course I would like to thank President Saakashvili and the Georgian people who supported his co- alition.

What are your future plans? I plan on using Saakash- vili in local courts before bring- ing my case to the Internation- al Court of Justice. I hope to come fully rehabilitated, I plan to continue fighting for citizen’s rights, and further activities of promoting Geo- rgia’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 more than a week. This is the result of the first meeting of Georgian and Russian officials held in Moscow on February 11. According to Maxim Savchuk, head of the office of the Georgian Consulate in Moscow, respondents were not only Georgians but also experts approved 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 post-poned as Georgia did not submit the list of companies that specialists were to inspect. He accused Georgia of “not ful-filling the terms stipulated in the document designed to re-quire that companies provide docu-ments for the resumption of Georgian supplies to Russia”. According to Chief Sanitary Officer of Russia Gennady Onishchenko, wine and miner-al water will be registered once experts approve of the quality of Georgian products. “This means below 5, suggesting that though fewer had flushing toi-lets than Moldovans, Kazakhs and Azeri-ans, all have fewer cellphones per capita than Georgia, and Azeris are less likely to own a car, washing machines, refrigerators or flushable toilets. This is because of the fact that in Georgia the highest level of household ownership of durable goods is associated with the highest level of per-capita GDP, but among other countries this relationship is weaker,” Davitashvili said, assuring that this is based on deep market anal-ysis. According to Davitashvili, local wine-makers are aware of the steep competition they might face in the Russian mar-ket, as during the last few years Georgian wines were replaced with Russian and Latin American varieties. “The qual-ity of local wine has risen since 2006, so Georgian products should not need much promo- tion to find a niche in Russia, especially since we have always found their consumers in Europe, US, ex-Soviet states and China,” he told Georgian Times. Nevertheless Georgia decided to advertise its product at the annual ProdExpo Interna-tional Exhibition of Food, Bever-ages and Food Raw Materi-als that opened in Moscow on February 11. The cent was made of natural ingredients, according to Maxim Savchuk, head of the office of the Geor-gian Consulate in Moscow. Russia banned the export of Georgian wines and two popular brands of mineral water - Borjomi and Nabolagvi - in 2006. The official reason was low quality, though in Georgia it was considered as a politically motivated step de-signed to collapse the coun-try’s economy, at least to alter its pro-Western stance. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili had then thanked Russia for “a positive incen-tive” that made Georgian winemakers improve the quality of their product. However, soon after losing the biggest market for its wines, the parties started rising and eventually burst out into the “5-days war” in August 2008 that caused breaking off dip- lomatic relations. Parliamentar-y Elections of 2013 capped the president’s 9-year, one-man rule. The new Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili is pursuing a course of restorations with Russia but ma-jor changes remain and the pro cess is expected to be long and hard.

AN APPROPRIATELY PESSIMISTIC GEORGIA

BY FRANK KLOBUCAR

When asked about their eco-nomic standing, both Georgians and their own citizens, 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 wash-ing machines.

In a recent poll by Georgian Opinion Research Business International, respondents were asked from 8 post-soviet countries about their econom-ic 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 compar-isons with great level of signifi-cance. For instance, we can see if people’s self-assess-ments correlate with actual wealth or if people are just being pessim-istic.

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 4 countries included, Geor-gians placed themselves low-est with a mean of 4.2. Rus-sians 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 them-selves relative to their societ-ies, 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, if so you use this frame, how accurate are these self-assess-ments?

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

Belarus is the country that represents the poorest people and 10 - the wealthiest. Of the 4 countries included, Geor-gians placed themselves lowest with a mean of 4.2. Rus-sians 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.

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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. As a result, he still has the 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 simply for the benefit of their families’ own well-being.

Georgian farmers’ association “Ekana” 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. Ekana 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 Shabtashvili, one of Ekana 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 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 premium, in order to access truly organic products. Considering the product market is very cutthroat, interested consumers find it hard to buy the food they prefer and in adequate volumes.

Organic farming is not limited to one region of Georgia; the practice remains popular in Georgia’s Kakheti, Shida Kartli, Guria, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Imereti regions. The highlands are the most advantageous for growing ecologically pure products, while mountainous regions are ideal for producing experimental agricultural products 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 access to market 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 Shabtashvili, 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 Kanderalashvili 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, Kanderalashvili plans on obtaining a certificate for production of 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 also 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 production. After all, it takes about three years to shift from ordinary agriculture to truly organic farming.

What does the Future Hold for Foreign English Language Teachers?

BY KOBA SAMSONIZE

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 Programs.

In the early 2000’s, the Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze launched the TLG 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. Soon after, close to 500 skilled American volunteers were now applying for TLG Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) working primarily in small village schools in nine of Georgia’s 12 regions.

In 2010, Georgian President Micheil 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 launched Teach and Learn 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 become 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-speaking 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 for a larger pool of 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 Peace Corps, and how many new arrivals were hardwired to Georgia with inflated expectations in the hast 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 subtleties of Georgian life and more effectively apply their skills. They strive to develop strong connections with the communities in which they live in Georgian communities for over two years.

Continued on p. 11
Georgian foreign policy in a State of Flux

By VAKHTANG MAIAΣIA

Georgian society is now focused on adjusting its former foreign policy, and the motivation is clear. The wave of instability and fragmentation of the Georgian political landscape has emerged from the bipolarity of the Cold War, and the impact is being felt by small countries and their relations with larger neighbors. The country's political landscape has evolved, with a focus on domestic considerations as well. Throughout recent history, the geopolitical agenda for Georgia’s development has been dominated by its geopolitical centrality, and the international arena, fears about the rising power of neighboring Turkey, and the increasing institutionalization of the EU integration process into the region.

Consequently, inspiration has been drawn from 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 dominated by its geopolitical centrality, and the international arena, fears about the rising power of neighboring Turkey, and the increasing institutionalization of the EU integration process into the region.

The recent visit of high-level delegations from the Eastern Partnership member states and the second meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil society Forum in December indicate 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 Valley is one of the critical agenda items to address the internal political turbulence that is yet to be solved.

Much too much and productive work has been lost with NATO being used as a proven formula. Much too much and productive work has been lost with NATO being used as a proven formula. At the Ruskisi #17 prison colony, I can say that among almost 3000 inmates, only a few inmates, not more than 50, may have been self-inflicted personal experience. As a former political prisoner who spent two years in a foreign prison, I can say that among about 3000 inmates, only a few inmates, not more than 50, may have been self-inflicted personal experience. As a former political prisoner who spent two years in a foreign prison, I can say that among about 3000 inmates, only a few inmates, not more than 50, may have been self-inflicted personal experience.

That is the case in which increase and society questions of how to perceive the nation’s place at the international level are complex, and the essence had been provoking a substantial dialogue. As a former political prisoner who spent two years in a foreign prison, I can say that among about 3000 inmates, only a few inmates, not more than 50, may have been self-inflicted personal experience. As a former political prisoner who spent two years in a foreign prison, I can say that among about 3000 inmates, only a few inmates, not more than 50, may have been self-inflicted personal experience.

Instead of acquiescing to the loss of the respective EU country’s political superiority which Serbia and Georgia never hope to match, the two should adopt an entirely new outlook on their respective conflicts. One such outlook is to simplify the go of the breakaway republics, both physical and economic, which is in the interest of both countries. Instead of acquiescing to the loss of the respective EU country’s political superiority which Serbia and Georgia never hope to match, the two should adopt an entirely new outlook on their respective conflicts. One such outlook is to simplify the go of the breakaway republics, both physical and economic, which is in the interest of both countries.

By RICHARD BERGE

Kosovo’s unilateral independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008 had profound ramifications on Georgia’s own territorial disputes. For Feyzi Semerdji, Norwegian citizen Richard Berge offers a pragmatic yet hard to swallow solution to Belgrade and Thessaloniki. Concluding that Serbia and Northern Europe are coming to terms with successful secessionist movements within their borders.

As a northern European visiting the Balkans and the Caucasus, the author and analyst sees Serbia and Georgia have a lot in common: Orthodox, strong nationalist sentiment, and even stronger fruit brandy. They also share the experience of suffering a geopolitical crossroads, which all have experienced in the region. Serbia and Georgia have a lot in common: Orthodox, strong nationalist sentiment, and even stronger fruit brandy. They also share the experience of suffering a geopolitical crossroads, which all have experienced in the region.

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But, even more compli- cated, and the advantages and disadvantages of full-fledged NATO member are discussed more. Current geopolitical perspec- tives are again on the front burner. Although approximately 60% of Kosovo citizens support the port of Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgian soci- ety turns to the Euro-Atlantic path in hopes of creating a new security dimension in the frames of the “Eu- ropean Neighborhood Policy” and Eastern Partnership dialogue (i.e. one other than the US dominated NATO alliance). By doing so, the Georgian leader- ship intends to halt further enlargement of the communi- ty due to its already blunted membership. The EU is also considering its tailored and approach Turkey which intentionally prolongs the process of Turkish membership into the European Union. The recent visit of high-level delegations from the Eastern Partnership member states and the second meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil society Forum in December indicate 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 Valley is one of the critical agenda items to address the internal political turbulence that is yet to be solved.

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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.

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 Ganja.

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 example, 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.

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.
For Armenia, Promising Changes Amid Elections

By SRETAPOR

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 highly 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 unseated current Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian into power were accompanied by protests in the capital involving tens of thousands of supporters of the challenger, Levon Ter-Petrosyan. 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 Sarkisian and two of the country’s other top political figures, former presidents Ter-Petrosyan and Robert Kocharyan, both declined to run. Consequently, the prospect for instability or violence surrounding it is diminished. Sarkisian 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 regarding 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 railways, telecommunication 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 closer 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

ByRFER/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 Hairikian.

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 Sarkisian is expected to win.

Serzh Sargsyan

Armenia may Annul the Protocols with Turkey

By ARMRA/DIACAM

Yerevan will annul its agreements with Turkey if Ankara continues to drag its feet on the documents. 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 BE'LIA ZAKAZIDZE

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, Soso 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 was committed 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 the amnesty has solved the 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. Inmates 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 were released, 14 of them during one session," Subari said in a recent interview.

Nazi Lanchuashvili, 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 prison doctors 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 prison 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 several aspects of the law which need to be changed. For example, some penalties imposed on serving prisoners are inappropriate. This 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 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 marriage is 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 creation of the Independent Monitoring Group, created during Giorgi Tugushi’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 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.

Soso Subari, the first report to parliament is expected in March and should be eye-opening for both Georgia and the international community.

Malkhaz Gulashvili:

Still there will be “real freedom” for all in Georgia, not just political rhetoric and business as usual

Continued from p. 2
What has changed in your life after being in prison?
I became spiritually strong 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 faith, and of course telling the truth to the whole society. For telling 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 sanctioned. A lot of them still protest 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 basis 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 Georgian Edition?
It is still too early to talk about it in detail. Since 1993, I have been creating this newspaper. A minute is enough to destroy everything. This is the minute of Saakashvili, he stroked “Georgian Times”, recovered everything 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. 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 human rights is protected for all and the truth of all what 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 not 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 constitutions 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; Kaika 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 through the sky, 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 1,500 kilometres east of Moscow.

People working to head 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 Ministry 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.

E D U C A T I O N

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 [there].”

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 through out 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 the cultural 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 Samtskhe-Javakheti 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 to supply “human shields” to deter any potential repeat Russian military incursions into Georgian territory.

Peace Corps has its own 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 ‘collecting 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.
ICES Mission’s Assessment of the Election Campaign Generally Positive

By: ARMREADIO.GM

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 perform 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 OICES said.

The Mission welcomes the commitment of the Armenian government to invite the maximum number of international observers to assess the level of organization and conduct of the presidential elections. In spite of the physical attack 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 conclusions 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 Taxing Election

Italy’s Taxing Election

By: MARIO MARGIocco

A winter election is not Italy’s choice. Nor is the country’s top bureaucracy, delivering Italy’s 62nd government in the last 65 years.

Since November 2011, Italy has been led by a political coalition – a centrist bloc led by Mario Monti. His government, however, is that European foreign policy has not unravelled in the crisis. Indeed, there have been some signs of progress. The European Union managed to preserve the essential of its acquis diplomaticum. In fact, the Scorecard’s assessment of the 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 auspices 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 over 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 negotia-tions 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 main-tained, which will depend largely on whether the EU can overcome the economic crisis (which continues to worsen in several member countries), manage a tax revolt, and curb unemployment. In this sense, European leaders are right to focus on the financial crisis in the eurozone.

Any future gains in global influence, however, will require Europeans to overcome their internal division and improve their foreign-policy coordination. In particular, success will require turning the European External Action Service (EEAS) into an effective diplo-matic 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 many are beginning to regard the euro crisis as the “new normal”; in other words, they are plan-ning in which European foreign pow-er continues to erode. Europe’s lack of a collective defen-se strategy, together with declining investment in military capacity, is also a serious ob-stacle to its continuing global in-fluence as a security actor.

This makes it even more im-portant for the EU to play the Common Security and De-fense Policy with wider foreign-policy efforts. This is a daunting task, given the EU’s current structure. The spectre of a Brit-ish withdrawal from the EU will not make things any easier.

The “US pivot” to Asia fur-ther increases the pressure on Europe to deal with its own neighborhood. Although the EU’s foreign-policy toward Rus-sia has become more effective, tensions have, if anything, grown stronger 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 mem-ber state to go to war in a region not far from Europe’s shores. There is still the risk of being drawn into large-scale military interventions, which are far from the EU’s mandate. There is still to be dealing with the fall-out of Islamist rebel groups’ at-tempted takeover of Mali this time next year, while the long-term consequences of develop-ments in the Sahel are bound to be felt for years to come.

Despite the gravity of the external challenges, Europe’s lead-ing bureaucracy, with less than one-fifth of the population of the United States, has a smaller number of member states as many members of the US Congress, and they are among the world’s highest bureaucrati-cally paid and most privileged MPs.

Meanwhile, Italy’s top bu-rocrats are the highest paid in history, according to OECD data, with several elevated offi-cials drawing larger pensions than former US presidents re-ceive. The salaries of Italy’s militia chiefs of staff and chief of police are almost triple those of their American counterparts. But the开拓 for political reform do not inspire optim-ism. While Grillo’s supporter-ship may gain in popularity in protest of these gilded giveaways for a few months, a consistent assault on political leading genuine to reform seems doubtful.

One broadly, the outcome of Italy’s election will have far-reaching impact on a still-struggling eurozone, though the nature of that impact remains impossible to predict – and may hinge on the French government’s commitment to austerity policies and the support it can garner from its colleagues in the eurozone. The near future will present a growing list of challenges. There are already indications from key strategic partners that many are beginning to regard the euro crisis as the “new normal”.

Monday, February 18, 2013

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 institution-al questions than to geopolitical issues.

Europe’s image and soft power, however, continued to fade around the world (though such a trend is diffi-cult to quantify), while mem-ber states continue to cut de-fense and development bud-gets. The good news, however, is that European foreign policy has not unravelled in the crisis. Indeed, there have been some signs of progress. The European Union man-aged to preserve the essential of its acquis diplomaticum. In fact, the Scorecard’s assessment of the 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 auspices 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 over 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 negotia-tions 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 main-tained, which will depend largely on whether the EU can overcome the economic crisis (which continues to worsen in several member countries), manage a tax revolt, and curb unemployment. In this sense, European leaders are right to focus on the financial crisis in the eurozone.

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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.

Throughout traditional dancing and singing only, “Birth” illustrates Georgia’s history from the country’s founding to the present in a way that any foreigner will easily understand. Though it is hard to imagine the country’s founding to the 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 Masxarshvili and to Lela Iakobashvili, while the play itself was produced by George Sikharulidze. Musicians Chabua Amiranashvili and Shota Samushia, together with dress designer Ana Rebishvili, 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-German holidays in Georgia. I remember my first Valentine’s Day over 10 years ago. It was the February 14th. It was a dinner at the super fancy restaurant on Perekovsky 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 had no idea anyone 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-Days 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 wearing a heart shaped chocolate. He took it all too deeply 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 too. Pearls were not important, as she declared and stamped herself into a history as one hockey woman. I don’t even see why she bothered writing memories; she is a memory 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 interview in the nude and often went wearing nothing under the black mink that Joe Di Maggio (her ex-husband) had given her. I can hardly imagine her Valentine’s Day outfits to please her men. She may have been mistrusted as a child, un-deeply 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.
We Do What We Know!