Russia wants to simplify its visa regime with Georgia conditional on amendments to its Law on “Occupied Territories”. Nonetheless the political spectrum of Georgia is reacting to the news in different ways – the majority government perceives this possibility as a positive sign in relations between the two former Soviet countries, while the opposition talks about the negative ramifications and risks of such amendments.

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How to Protect yourself from HINI Flue

Four more people have died of the H1N1 virus this week in Georgia. According to the Public Health and Disease Control National Centre of Georgia there are 284 laboratory confirmed cases of both type A and B of the virus this winter that so far has claimed 22 lives this year.

Although the peak of the virus’s infection is over, new cases of the flu are expected until the end of March. The Georgian Times explains what the symptoms are and how people can understand if they are infected with HINI virus.

The five month tenure of current Georgian government has been enough to notice many political, economic, social and cultural changes, both large and small. I may not be qualified to speak about the political or the economic ramifications of change in government, but I do feel confident enough to talk about the social and cultural changes, specifically changes in the prevalence of mind-altering substances.

Sustainable and Market-Driven Georgian Agriculture, “Not Grant Driven”
Russia wants to simplify its visa regime with Georgia conditional on amendments to its Law on “Occupied Territories”. Nonetheless, the political spectrum of Georgia is reacting to the news in different ways—the majority government perceives this possibility as a goodwill signal in relations between the two former Soviet countries, while the opposition talks about the negative ramifications and risks of such amendments.

The visa regime between Georgia and Russia was estab- lished in 2000 as part of an at- tempt to curtail alleged terror- ists who were based in the Georgian Republic and crossing into the Russian Federation’s North Caucasus region, particularly the districts of Gudauri in the ex-Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and subsequent Russian recog- nition of independence of Geor- gia’s breakaway territories. Abkhazia and South Ossetia, led to a continuous crisis in diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, Georgia unilaterally abolished visas for Russian citizens in 2011, which was largely seen as a political move.

President Mikhail Saakash- vili had earlier said that Moscow welcomed businesspeople and tourists from Russia. Neverthe- less, this was a small goodwill gesture and was not reciprocated by Moscow. Alexander Lanka- shevich, a spokesman for Russia’s Foreign Ministry de- clared that Russia was ready to set a visa-free regime for Geor- gians; however, stipulating that Russian citizens who had vised Abkhazia and South Ossetia should not be allowed under the Georgian law. Georgia’s Law on Occupied Territories makes it a crime for Anyone to enter Geor- gia’s breakaway territories without permission. The law was strengthened after the country’s 2012 par- liamentary elections denounced this law. A few days after de- feating Saakashvili’s National Movement Party, a representa- tive of Georgian Dream coa- lition and present-day State Minister of Health of Georgian Fe- ta Zakareishvili declared that the law will not be annulled but some amendments facilitating access to the breakaway territories will be adopted. The sub- ject has recently regained pub- lic attention after being raised in Parliament.

One of the first statements made by the new Georgian govern- ment was that it would restore full telecommunication links to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thus devaluing the law. The new regime claims that many Russian citizens travel to Abkhazia for their holidays without first transiting through Georgia. The first official talks between the two countries took place in Sochi last March, 2013 brought more than just additional revenues, but a positive sign in relations between the two countries. However, diplomatic relations between the two countries led to a complete severing of ties. Russia does not lay against Georgia, even if it does not wishes for our in- terest of Georgia’s borders and repeat of face the current relations with Russia, it happened as long as Russian tanks remain in Georgia.

At the moment four children, one of type A and two of type B viruses in Georgia this season. The number of cases has de- creased over last few weeks,” Ivane Chixadze, Deputy Direc- tor of Iashvili clinic told The Georgian Times, adding that “patients with H1N1 are treated with Tamiflu flu and there is enough of this medicine in re- serve at the hospital.”

H1N1also known as swine flu is a new disease, which was first spread in 2009. It has the same symptoms as the average flu and is spread through con- tact with an infected person. A person with H1N1 virus has a fever, coughs very often and has cold-like symptoms. The prob- lem is that he/she feels the same as if infected with the average flu, Imandadze told GT.

As Chixadze further ex- plains, it is very important to receive medical care in the ear- ly stages of the disease and fol- low the doctor’s advice in or- der to avoid any complications. “If you have a high body tem- perature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher that lasts more than three days, you must go to a doctor,” advises Chixadze. “The virus is especially dan- gerous for children, elderly peo- ple and pregnant woman,” he adds.

According to the Public Health and Disease Control National Centre most people who died this year were aged 30 to 64; four children were under 5 years old and one from 5 to 14 years; one death was recorded in the 15 to 29 age group.

The number lethal cases of H1N1 is less this winter com- pared with last year,” Imandadze explains. Doctors hold that vaccina- tion is the most effective way to be protected from the flu. It can be administered at any time, but the most recommended pe- riod is at the beginning of the flu season. The vaccination costs approximately 30 GEL, depending on the clinic.

It “begins working after two weeks and remains effective for six months. However, being vaccinated does not mean that one is 100 percent protected from being infected with H1N1,” Chixadze explains. There are many strains of flu that are constantly mutating, making it difficult for those who develop vaccines to keep up with their evolution.

To prevent infection doctors advise people to wash their hands and clean latrines surfaces very often; to avoid any kind of contact with an infected person even after recovering from the illness, at least for a few days. Such precautions will greatly minimize the chance of infection. It is advisable to avoid public transport when possible, and to stay away from con- tacted large crowds of people, as the virus can be spread by breathing the air of others.

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**How to Protect yourself from H1N1 Flu**

**By Lika Moshashvili**

Four more people have died of the H1N1 virus this week in Georgia. According to the Public Health and Disease Control National Centre of Georgia there are 284 laboratory con- firmed cases of both type A and B of the virus this week—that is far higher than the number of 72 cases that were claim 22 lives this year. Although the peak of the virus’s infection is over, new cases of the flu are expected until the end of March. The Georgian Times explains what the symptoms are and how people can understand if they are infected with H1N1 virus.

There are three types of in- fluenza viruses: A, B and C. Human influenza A and B vi- ruses cause seasonal epidemics almost every winter. Influenza type C infections cause a milder respiratory illness and are not thought to cause epidemics. As the Georgian Public Health and Disease Control National Center informs there are 255 cases of type A and 22 type B vi- ruses in Georgia this season.

“At the moment four children infected with these virus- es are undergoing medical treat- ment at Tbilisi’s Iashvili clinic. The number of cases has de- creased over last few weeks,” Ivane Chixadze, Deputy Direc- tor of Iashvili clinic told The Georgian Times, adding that “patients with H1N1 are treated with Tamiflu flu and there is enough of this medicine in re- serve at the hospital.”

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On March 11, 2013 at 12:15 pm in Tbilisi SOCAR officially opened its fourth natural gas station in Georgia. The new station is located on the left bank of the Mtkvari River on Ksani Street near the Dighomi Bridge, and is now among 103 SOCAR fuel stations operating in the country.

The station is equipped by Argentinean company Galileo, which offers the latest generation of gas compressor equipment, which provides quick and safe gas compression.

Car owners are able to use special service blocks which can regulate tire pressure, salon cleaning, water filling and other services. All in all, 20 people are employed at the new station.

Inaugurating SOCAR’s new station was President of Azerbaijan State Oil Company Mr. Rovgan Abdullayev along with other official guests.
**Favorable Business Climate or Something Fishy in FDI Figures?**

By: LISA TONAKANYAN

In search for greater profits and a more predictable environment, investors from various countries are flocking to Georgia. However, not all their well-laid plans and high expectations are living up to the billing. There are also questions about their motivations in the first place, and whether they are strategic or simply opportunist investors.

Liberal and free market oriented economic policy, reduced tax rates, simplified licensing and taxation procedures have made Georgia one of the most attractive countries among former Soviet Union states for investors, at least according to various government sponsored sites and PR provided by the Chamber of Commerce. There have existed a number of impression reforms all aimed, at least in theory, at opening up the economy and providing a level-playing field for locals and outside investors alike. Much has been written in the Georgian and international press about how the country is making Georgia one of the most liberal and free market oriented economies in the world and how the investment climate has improved.

A NNOUNCEMENT

Al Faris state company, an affiliate of the Ministry of Industry and Minerals announces tender number 3/FAR/2013 for supplying (ELECTRICAL GENERATOR 1000 KVA) within the investment budget for the year 2013 to complete the rehabilitation of Al Faris. Those interested in participating in the above-mentioned tender should refer to the commercial department in our company located in Khan-Dhari near the petrol station to receive a copy of the general conditions and specifications against an amount of (50000) dinar non refundable and whoever awards the tender will undertake the last announcement fees. Any offer submitted after the tender closing date will not be considered.

Conditions:
1. Submissions should be enclosed in three envelopes: (technical, commercial and documents).
2. These envelopes should be closed, sealed and the name and number of the tender should be written on each one.
3. The company or bureau registry certificate issued and renewed from the Ministry of Trade.

- The contractor’s classification card issued and renewed from the Ministry of Planning and Development Coordinating Commission.
- Quittance of tax from one of the branches of income tax directorate for the current year for the participated Iraqi company or bureau and Arabian or Foreign company, which has an officially registered branch in Iraq.

- A conference will be held on Tuesday (06.03.3013) in the head office of the company to answer any questions about the tender.
- You can contact us on our company e-mail for clarification AL.Faris2004@yahoo.com

You can find the general conditions and specifications of the tender on the website of the Ministry of Industry and Minerals: www.industry.gov.iq or our company site www.farsig.com

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Georgia, Defense Budget Priorities, Risks and Tin Horn Dictators

By SABA GVEIDZE

Georgia’s current defense management policy is insufficiently developed and still in a state of flux, which was evidenced by last year’s Parliamentary elections. In the few months prior to the legislative vote, it is clear that much money has been wasted, especially in the sphere of arms purchase, despite the overall defense budget.

Even in the best of times, the government came to power without a clear strategy and was not adequately armed with short term political agenda items, were shaping this policy; nation-building was not the guiding principle. It is now clear that many of the issues of the Ministry of Defense were exaggerated to set the stage for elections, driven, especially in the run-up to the 2008 Georgia-Russia war.

Georgia and international media outlets have documented cases of legal and illegal military procurement, as the case of the spectacular theft of carpet while Georgia, David Dalrave, has also charged with corruption related to weapons sales made in association with members of the Georgian government.

On a micro level, a recent audit of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) revealed many instances of corruption, notably the purchase of three 5,000 bullet-proof vests costing a total of 2,800,000 USD from Ukraine. It was determined that the purpose of the funds was to cover the cost and totality available for military use.

Another such case was that of the multi-launch systems which rained down tube missiles and bombs during the official opening ceremony of the capital city.

Furthermore, the purchase of ten luxury cars, costing the state 1,357,313 GEL, was not justified. Often it is difficult to even understand what items were purchased by the MoD, or whether it was even for military purposes, as much of what is bought is expensive and not even for the use of high-level MoD officials.

President Mikheil Saakashvili’s government and the MoD apparently spent more than 8.4 billion lari (approximately three billion euros) on defense, especially in the period 2008-2009, one of the highest proportions in the world. However, it is ever becoming more apparent that much of this amount was not even spent on useful items but either embezzled or squandered. Even Transparancy International, (TI), the international anti-corruption agency, confirmed in a May 2012 report entitled “Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index” that Georgia remains vulnerable to real challenges which can readily put its national security goals and missions at risk.

This report also confirmed that a high level of elite corruption has long pervaded defense spending. An atmosphere of secrecy still dominates the military sector but it is debatable if this was imposed for security reasons or is driven more by need to conceal misappropriations and incompetence.

The formal oversight powers of the legislature have not been applied to the defense sector to any substantial degree, and this may have contributed to a breach whereby military assets are available for military use.

In his report, the Commissioner for Human Rights will take up the post

Thomas hammerberg’s report demonstrated the very much Government’s support for the democratic development and improvement of human rights protection in Georgia. The appointment, which will last for four months, at least initially, can only be greeted with enthusiasm from those who have been critical of past international and special relations between Georgia and the EU.

Hammarberg will be tasked with observing further reforms made to Georgia’s legal system and providing recommendations to the Georgian government. The overall mission of the former Commissioner is to lead Georgia down the path towards expedited integration into the European community. It is evident that much work still needs to be done in terms of constitutional reforms, not least those concerning the rule of law, human rights and bringing the national law in compliance with the Common Law.

As a special adviser, Hammerberg will engage in regular consultations with Georgian ministers, members of parliament, opposition leaders and civil society representatives. He has already met with Maia Paşăcă, Minister of Foreign Affairs and David Ususshvili, Parliamentary Chair.

The success of these consultations will largely depend on the readiness and willingness of the above-mentioned actors to work together and find common ground on the issues that determine successful EU integration.

Hammarberg would be prepared for Georgia’s constructive criticism in illegal arms dealing, illegal arms traffic and trade, and it would be crucial that Georgian society actively engage in discussions so that the recommendations Hammarberg’s sets forth can be actively realized.

European integration does not only imply a legal framework whereby national laws are better organized in accordance with the Common Law. Integration represents an ambitious undertaking that comes with and a huge responsibility on the part of its members. The process is very demanding and the active involvement of every citizen to the process of EU civil society is required in this process.

Hammarberg is not new to Georgia. In 2011 he visited the country as a member of a delegation, specifically the country’s criminal justice policy and the independence of the judiciary branch, the basic human right which entitles every citizen to have an equal access to justice and the right to a fair and fair trial.

In his report, the Commissioner described the Georgian reform process as a development and modernizing criminal justice policy as a “double-edged sword” with an “ambitious” process (Strasbourg, 30 June 2011, Commission(2011) 22). Moreover, the report positively evaluated the willingness of the Georgian authorities to fight against corruption, calling organiza-
Getting High in Tbilisi

By GIORGI GEZHIALISHVILI in an altered state!

The five month tenure of the current Georgian government has been enough to notice many political, economic, social and cultural changes, both large and small. I may not be qualified to speak about the political or the economic ramifications of change in government, but I do feel confident enough to talk about the social and cultural changes, specifically in the prevalence of mind-altering substances.

I was often surprised at the great variety of Georgians who had drugs while in Georgia for a few years and experimented with recreational vectors, small towns and the capital Tbilisi. On one end of the spectrum was the opinion that all drugs are bad, i.e., heroin and marijuana are equally destructive, to the individual and society; and on the other, the opinion that, when regulated properly, some currently outlawed substances have a place in our society on equal footing with such substances as alcohol and tobacco.

Many Georgians remember the Shevardenia era as a time when acquiring marijuana was as simple as walking into a field and harvesting it, whereas the most marijuana a person might happen to come across this days is a matchbox half full and already mixed with some errant tobacco from a cigarette.

There has been, however, in the past couple of months a new entrant into the realm of intoxication in Tbilisi. Commonly referred to in Tbilisi as bio or chemia, and known abroad as Spice or K2, these substances are synthetic analogs of marijuana. Legal in most countries until the end of the past decade, they remain legal in many still it is debatable whether or not this is legal in Georgia, in fact or by the letter of the law. Most of these synthetic cannabinoid alternatives consist of inert herbal plant dry matter that has been sprayed with a chemical compound, which attempts to mimic the effect of THC, the primary consciousness-enhancing compound in marijuana.

The material is then packaged and marketed as herbal smoking material or incense. These materials can be inhaled and smoked in the same manner as traditional tobacco, whereas the actual effect varies based on dosage, purity and user tolerance, it can range from almost an unperceivable high to something more akin to consuming psychedelic mushrooms and going berserk.

Due to its international quasi-legal status, these drugs can be purchased legally in many countries as well as over the Internet; they have become a common alternative to smoking marijuana in countries with harsh drug laws. Further, because of the chemistry involved, it is very easy for the producers to adapt to new drug laws. When one compound is identified and made illegal, the producers simply alter the chemistry slightly, creating a new substance, which must now undergo the same illegalization process which effectually keeps the producers one step ahead of the authorities.

In short, this means that in Georgia, and Tbilisi in partic- ular, more and more young people are being introduced to these substances and enjoying them. All the while many still do not have access to a regular supply of marijuana, likely due to the fact that marijuana harvest season usually takes place in August or September, and the previous administration was still in power and was responsible for administering harsh penalties for any perceived drug use or attempt at cultivation.

But with the new government, and the associated am-

Rabati Castle Reconstruction tainted by shady Auctions and Side Deals

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE

As part of an on-going investigation, the Georgian Prosecutor’s Office held a press conference on February 28 to discuss massive misappropriation of state funds during government- led reconstruction works of the extensive 13th century Rabati Castle in the Akhaltsikhe region of southern Georgia, not far from the Turkish border. Much more is involved here than just the humble corruption that still plagues Georgian institutions and society as a whole.

Khatuna Patchadze, head of the public relations department of the Prosecutor’s Office stated that between 2011 and 2012, property in Akhaltsikhe region was auctioned off at ten times and in some cases, upwards of one hundred times more than the actual market value for real estate. It is interesting that during the auctions that buyers often representative only one organization or an individual who after being the sole high bidder simply gave back the property to the state free-of-charge. All the motivations for such altruism is unclear but apparently, based on the statements of the prosecutor’s office, what transpired in the background “pressure” amounts to state-sponsored arm twisting against private businesses.

Consequently, late last year, the Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation in Samtse-Javakheti region into the alleged misappropriation of funds from the state budget by officials of the Akhaltsikhe municipality and instances of blackmail, etc. Such cases fall under crimes detailed in Article 182 in the Georgian criminal code. Official documents detailing with the privatization of real estate in Akhaltsikhe region from the municipality board was obtained by investigators during the process. Although facts are still sketchy, and being an on-going investigation, there appears to be ample evidence to raise serious questions about the legalization of the real estate in this Georgian region and the role of the former ruling government and its supporters, including members of the National Party, in the process.

It is interesting to note, based on information obtained from the Prosecutor’s Office how the buyers were under arrest or serving prison sentences at the time of the auctions in some cases. For instance, one audit determined that a 20,000 square-meter former cattle farm in the village of Anqor with an original going price tag of 14,400 GEL was increased by the municipality to a starting price of 63,000 GEL and sold off. Georgian Invest, represented by Mindia Kamadadze, and all the while the company’s CEO, Juansher Mashia, was serving a prison sentence in the 8th Penitentiary Colony. Georgian Invest ultimately purchased that plot for 4,949,500 GEL as the sole bidder.

In these two cases of alleged corruption, the sold property was returned to the state. A bribery case in the village of Tskhaltbila was assessed at 13,000 GEL during an inventory. Here only one buyer, Jemal Gvarliani, participated in the auction, buying the club for 100,000 GEL and then relinquished rights to it for the benefit of the government. In the village of Khelvaci, a building, this one worth a mere 5,000 GEL was purchased for 500,000 GEL. There was also a case in the village of Chomi, the representative of which, Giorgi Mepharishvili, again the sole individual showing up for the auction. Such a tendency sets a pattern in line with other cases. Again, Irakli Khashidze, the director, Levani Simonishvili was sitting in prison at that time and the state regained ownership of the property based on his generosity, soon after the auction.

The on-going investigation has also revealed that some purchasers did not even register their new ownership rights at the Civil Registry Agency. Ltd. Kondaisadze and company purchased a library-club in the village of Gulba for 200,000 GEL which had a market value of only 13,000 GEL. Vazdani Kostashvili, a representative of the company, failed to apply for an owner- ship certificate. Meanwhile, the library and medical insti- tution in the village of Khori was appraised for 4,000 GEL and sold off at the auction for 200,000 GEL. Similarly, the buyer, Davit Andranikashvili, neither applied for a certificate nor register the property at the Civil Registry. On February 22, 2013, the Prosecutor’s Office called purchasers Davit Andranikashvili, Mindia Kamadadze and Giorgi Mepharishvili as witnesses. The Prosecutor’s Office declared that the investigation is on-going and appropriate legal measures will be taken in the near future.

The pattern does not come as a big surprise to many, especially those who understand that such deals have been endemic in recent years. With over 26 million GEL spent on the Rabati Castle reconstruction works at the time, the motivations are clear and are part of a larger policy that appears to have been directed from the top levels of government.
Azerbaijani Opposition Blogger Says ‘Democratic Revolution’ Is Approaching

By RFE/RL’s Azerbaijani Service

Azerbaijani blogger Emin Milli is a rising star in his country’s rapidly growing opposition movement. He is widely known as the “demon blogger” for his role in a now-famous video lampooning President Ilham Aliyev’s government — a video many believe was the real reason he was recently jailed for 16 months.

Milli is currently in Prague as a jury member for the One World human rights film festival. He told RFE/RL correspondent Clare Bigg about his hopes for democratic change in Azerbaijan, the lessons he learned in prison, and how the international community could be undermining efforts to unseat Aliyev.

RFE/RL: You served 16 months in prison on charges of terrorism and abuse of power. Such accusations are not new. In your opinion, what is driving people to take to the streets so actively this year?

Milli: Aliyev has always presented himself as a guarantor of stability in Azerbaijan. Now, he is becoming a guarantor of increasing instability. His father kept some space open for the opposition — there were always five or six members of the opposition in parliament and he would meet opposition newspaper editors. He pretended there was a dialogue. Things are very different now. There has not been a single opposition member in parliament since 2010, new laws have been adopted to fine people for participating in peaceful but unsanctioned rallies, the financing of nongovernmental organizations has been made almost impossible.

People became so tired and so frustrated. You cannot trust courts, you cannot trust the law, and everything has become more expensive. You know that people in government are stealing hundreds of billions of dollars. Another now the issue is the situation in the army. Every year, about 100 soldiers die in the Azerbaijani Army, but only about 15 of those die on the conflict line with Armenian armed forces. The others die because of corruption and mismanagement in the army. People don’t have jobs in the regions. That’s why people started taking to the streets.

RFE/RL: How big a role have social networking sites like Facebook played in drumming up support for the protests?

Milli: A new-media revolution is taking place in Azerbaijan. Out of 9 million people in Azerbaijan, more than 1 million are now on Facebook. Research showed that 7 percent had daily access to the Internet two years ago. This year, the same research — done by U.S. professor Katy Pearce — shows this figure has gone up to 11 percent.

A university rector in Azerbaijan [Elshad Abdullayev] has been taping his conversations with different people in government for years. His brother worked for the National Security Ministry before going missing. So he started bribing government officials so they would give him his brother back. He failed. Now he lives in France and is posting all these secret conversations on YouTube. The biggest scandal he put online was the fact that he gave $1 million to the head of the presidential administration. Aliyev’s right-hand man, in return for a parliamentary seat.

RFE/RL: You served 16 months in prison on charges of hoarding that were widely believed to be politically motivated. This time in prison has obviously not crushed your resolve. How are you campaigning against the government?

Milli: Many things are changing in Azerbaijan, and the pace of change is so fast that I cannot even keep track. What has changed in Azerbaijan is that the old and the new opposition are uniting with a single candidate. Even more importantly, they will sign a document outlining their whole strategy, how they share their resources, what their common goals are, who will assume which responsibility in bringing a democratic revolution to Azerbaijan, and how the country will be run once the single candidate comes to power. This has never happened in Azerbaijan. It’s a change in narrative.

RFE/RL: You have accused the international community on a number of occasions for not doing enough to combat abuse and corruption in Azerbaijan. What concrete steps can foreign governments take to help improve the country’s rights record?

Milli: “International community” is too broad a term. I’m talking about the U.S. and British governments. So far, these governments have supported the Aliyev regime because Aliyev provided oil and gas and invested a lot in these countries. The international community’s civil-society institutions have not only underfunded democratic civil society in Azerbaijan, they have also funded so-called “gongos,” pro-Aliyev nongovernmental organizations. USAID, for instance, recently gave $1.5 million to an NGO whose head also chairs the Azerbaijani parliament’s legal committee, which initiated the law to fine people participating in peaceful protests.

Everything Azerbaijan’s democratic movement is doing now and all the changes that will happen this year will take place not thanks to Western support, but despite Western support to Aliyev’s regime. All we want from the international community at this stage is for the international media to pay more attention to what is happening in Azerbaijan and for the U.S. and British governments to realize that they are threatening their own military and economic interests in Azerbaijan by supporting Aliyev.

Black Sabbath Guitarist Writes Music For Armenia’s Eurovision Entry

By RFE/RL’s Armenian Service

Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi has written the music for Armenia’s entry in the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest.

Iommi said his ballad “Lonely Planet” is due to be performed by the Dorians in the Eurovision semifinals on May 16 in Malmo, Sweden.

The Dorians have written the lyrics in English, and Iommi, a founding member of the legendary heavy metal group Black Sabbath, said the music came from a “demo idea” he was working on.

The song was voted by Armenians to be the country’s Eurovision contender. Iommi is known in Armenia for his work raising funds after the 1988 Spitak earthquake killed tens of thousands of people.

Last year’s Eurovision contest, held in Azerbaijan, was won by Swedish act Loreen, giving Sweden the right to host this year’s edition.
NEWPORT BEACH – After instant and seemingly coordinated reactions from Europe and the United States, the proposal for a European Union-US free-trade area has been generating little media attention. There are three reasons for this, and all three highlight broader constraints on good national economic policymaking and productive cross-border coordination.

In his “State of the Union” address in January, US President Barack Obama proposed a “comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership” with Europe based on trade that is “fair and free.” His administration regards this as part of a comprehensive approach to generating “good-paying American jobs.”

The bold proposal received an immediate and enthusiastic reception in Europe. “Taking to the streets within hours,” European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy called the proposal “ground-breaking.”

Arguing that it could increase Europe’s annual economic growth rate by half a percentage point, they declared that formal negotiations would start quickly.

At first, there was quite a bit of general interest and understandable. So the agreement involves the world’s two largest economic areas, with national, regional, and global implications. Yet, despite the realization that an agreement could fundamentally alter the nature of global trade and production networks, it only took a few weeks for interest to drop off.

One reason is rooted in initial conditions that limit direct gains from increased trade while widening the scope for tension and conflict. Free-trade agreements that promise the greatest benefits are those that link economies characterized by high tariffs, low levels of trade, and little overlap in consumption and production patterns. This is not the case for the US and the EU. Average tariff levels are only 3%. The US economy already accounts for almost 20% of US imports, and the US tariff for EU imports. And, given similar per capita income levels and cultural orientations, overtures in production and consumption are considerable.

Having said this, there would be immediate upside potential, owing to better resource allocation, more harmonized investment regimes, stronger standards, and the elimination of outdated non-tariff and regulatory barriers. Aerospace, auto manufacturing, biotechnology, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals are among the sectors that stand to benefit. There is also the potential for reining inefficient American food and agricultural practices, in particular.

The second reason for wanting attention to the proposed partnership speaks to a broader issue: A seemingly endless stream of short-term political dramas has made it extremely difficult for both Europe and the US to focus for long on any secular and structural initiative.

In Europe, broad-based discussion was undermined by the ongoing conflict over the euro’s future and the Italian election – this is the latest sign of how frustrated citizens in a growing number of countries are rejecting conventional political parties and the political status quo. With that, it becomes more difficult to pursue longer-term policy objectives, which merely add further uncertainty about the precise path of European economic and financial integration.

In the US, the disruption took the form of yet another fiscal mini-drama. With a dysfunctional Congress again fighting Washington, US policymakers in the country is now on the receiving end of a budgetary sequester – this would have far more harmful effects than the automatic headwind to economic growth, job creation, and progress on reducing income and wealth inequalities.

Put the two together and you get a barrier to EU-US trade negotiations – one that renders the agreement not only unrealistic but also structurally “unrealistic” the two-year time-horizon that has been set for completing the deal.

The third reason concerns the poor state of global policy dialogue, notwithstanding all the happy talk about global challenges and shared responsibilities.

Last month’s G-20 meeting ended up as another example of the partial success of the international system, it is evident. Such an agreement has the potential to encourage better medium-term alignments to reduce trade barriers, set proper standards, enhance mutual- benefit cooperation. It would facilitate coordination on stronger global rules and principles, including those pertaining to intellectual-property rights and trade in services. And it would force multilateral organizations to reform if they wish to retain even the limited relevance that they have now. The proposal for free transatlantic trade is potentially transformative. It comes at a time when the West is increasingly being dragged down by short-term disruptions and continued policy inertia. Yet the implemen- tation prospects are far from promising. The proposal has the capacity to act as a catal- yst for adapting policy approaches to current realities, but it is subject to the dulling forces of twentieth-century mindsets and institutions that are too slow to adapt to twenty-first- century challenges and opportunities.

Winning the Transatlantic Trade Challenge

By ANNA PALACIO

ANA PALACIO, a former Spanish foreign minister and former Senior Vice President of the World Bank, is a member of the Spanish Council of State.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Monday, March 11, 2013

Maximum levels of competitive pressure can be achieved by the European Union and the United States meeting periodically in a high-level meeting that brings together a small number of essential political leaders. Besides the obvious negotiators – EU trade commissioner Karel de Gucht, Commission President José Manuel Barroso, and the new US Trade Representative – this group should include European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, and the author of the Transatlantic Trade’s Transformative Potential.

The economic benefits of a transformative agreement “an enticing oppor- tunity to shift its narrative from a crisis to a crisis management to a genuine recipe for growth.”

The US is “subject to the dulling forces of twentieth-century mindsets and institutions that are too slow to adapt to twenty-first-century challenges and opportunities.”

What is needed is a focused approach to generating momentum for talks that has dissipated, the argument has renewed hope that a transformative agreement between Europe and the United States, the proposal for a “comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership” could be reached.

A transformative agreement “the final report of the High Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth, released ahead of Obama’s announcement, recommended that the ‘EU’ and the United States meet periodically

In the US, the proposal for freer transatlantic trade conflict in its potential to transform global trade, production networks, and multilateral organizations to the benefit of all. At the post-gener- al level, it would act to rational- ize the current system of four poorly functioning blocs centered in Canada, Europe, the US, and, to a lesser extent, and eventually (and perhaps quite quick- ly) to two better-functioning blocs that would have little choice but to work well togeth- er: one dominated by China, and the other by the EU/US.

Such a global structure has the potential to encourage bet- ter medium-term alignments to reduce trade barriers, set proper standards, enhance mutual- benefit cooperation. It would facilitate coordination on stronger global rules and principles, including those pertaining to intellectual-property rights and trade in services. And it would force multilateral organizations to reform if they wish to retain even the limited relevance that they have now.

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**Conflict as a Construct**

**By KENDRA PARADIS**

Group dynamics are crucial to perform well in a team whether considering interaction between colleagues, supervisors, or classmates. This process is known as “storming and norming”, the middle two stages of group development. First, naturally, a group is formed. During this stage, all the members get to know each other and work together to produce desired goals. The leader of the group is usually quite directive in this stage as the group is not yet assumed clear roles.

Next, the members vote. Each member votes whether the ideas considered while the team explores the task and the best way to complete it. The task of a group has not been thoroughly defined yet, nor has the overall goal been set. The group is usually quite directive in this stage as the group is not yet assumed clear roles.

**This process is known as “storming and norming”, the middle two stages of group development.**

Each group can then move through these stages of development, which will ultimately determine the quality of the work produced and the well being of the collective and individuals within.

**By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY**

Many political focus and various development projects have not been of much benefit for Georgian agriculture because of not being able to see for the forest to the trees. In short, free trade, in the absence of a level-playing field in business and legislative environments, sets the conditions to where a country’s commodity group is no longer able to effectively compete in terms of production costs and meeting international quality and food safety benchmarks. Such barriers to trade can also impact domestic market share as well as similar products can be exported at lower prices. It is marketing and consistent high-quality that contributes to the most to a country’s economic growth and export trade potential.

The only way this can realistically be accomplished is by abolishing top-down policies and procedures that restrict the agricultural sector’s ability to find niche markets, and by adopting rigorous marketing and quality campaigns to stay competitive within those niches – starting first with the domestic market and then looking to exports.

**The Georgian Times**

**Sustainable and Market-Driven Georgian Agriculture, “Not Grant Driven”**

**Monday, March 11, 2013**

**A-G TALK**

**By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY**

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Two exciting new options for ethnic food in Tbilisi have recently opened, and both specialize in Lebanese cuisine. While the dishes they offer are relatively similar, they are distinct when it comes to presentation and price.

The first and more high-end option is Crispy Lebanon. Located prominently in a newly renovated building on the corner of Aghmashenebeli Ave and Tamar Mepe, Crispy is situated across two floors with the bottom one acting as a show-room, operation, and the second floor a more traditional dining room. At first sight you think you are in the wrong place if you were planning on a nice sit down meal, as the ground floor is very spacious and seemingly thrown together at a moment’s notice; however, the upstairs portion exudes the opposite vibe.

Crispy is aiming to occupy a specific market niche for dining in Tbilisi: a haven for expatriates from the Levant and Middle East who want a taste of home, and the familiar dishes from Lebanese cuisine that accompany it, while giving Westies who want to add another mid-to-high-end dining option to their rotation. Portion sizes are good and the service is friendly and attentive, and all of the familiar options like hummus, baba ghanoush, falafel and pitas are available. The falafel is slightly firmer and darker around the outside than I prefer but still quite good, and the hummus is deliciously smooth and creamy. They also offer a wide selection of continental food for the less adventurous eaters.

The main criticism that diners at Crispy Lebanese might have after eating there would be the price. The food is quite expensive, especially when compared to the other Lebanese option in Tbilisi.

By KOBA SAMSONIDZE

The ever expanding fast-food industry in Georgia will do the same beating the profitability of traditional Lebanese pita for some added texture; and a salad of rocket bathed in lemon juice and mixed with onions and sumac.

The falafel, when compared to Crispy’s version has a softer interior and flakier outer shell that I find more enjoyable to eat. While Cedar’s hummus is a little thin, I find Crispy’s the baba ghanoush is equally delicious at both restaurants, and while the food is fresh and the price could be a deal breaker for many outside the expat community.

Cedar of Lebanon is located at 171 David Aghmashenebeli Ave and Cedar of Lebanon is located on Gribopedov str.

By GIORGI KHUKHUNASHVILI

Fast-food is appealing to customers for two simple reasons: it is cheap and fast. The flip side is that fast-food menus are unhealthy. They contain excessive amounts of salt and trans-saturated fats – all of which contribute heavily to heart disease and an abnormal metabolism.

In a 2010 report by the United States Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), up to 36% of adults and 17% of children in the US are obese, with the rate for adults expected to reach 60% by 2030 in 13 US states. However, even more alarming is that childhood obesity has more than doubled over the past 20 years. According to the CDC, the percentage of obese children aged 6–11 years in the US increased from 6% in 1980 to nearly 18% in 2010. If the numbers continue to grow, more children and adolescents would be vulnerable to cardiovascular diseases, type II diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis.

In Georgia, obesity has not reached critical levels, at least yet. According to the survey conducted by Caucasus Research Resources Center in 2008, obesity was ranked around 1% in terms of most recent health issues. However, this gives a false sense of comfort, as according to the same survey around 20% suffer from cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. These are health problems that are caused by apparel much healthier than the fast-food alternatives, it is often the fast-food industry prices that appeal to Georgian customers. Nevertheless, a regular menu, an omelet cuckoo clock, as well as a clock with a potato flag and iconography of the pre-enslavement symbol of all things Lebanese, the cedar tree. If Crispy is expensive, Cedar is an out right steal. It is almost not even necessary to look at prices for individual dishes as most are between three and five lari. This is great because you can really explore the diversity of the cuisine by ordering a variety of different options. Excellent starters at Cedar include fatoush, a simple peasants’ salad of diced tomatoes, onions and feta cheese with lemon and mint, which gains its uniqueness with the addition of flakes of traditional Lebanese pita for some added texture; and a salad of rocket bathed in lemon juice and mixed with onions and sumac.

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Thbilisi residents help to establish fast-food industry in unconventional ways – price and health put added, trendiness is what really matters.

On February 14, 2013 the first Burger King restaurant opened in Georgia’s Tbilisi’s Mall, causing quite a buzz, especially among teenagers. Fast-food restaurants are spreading rapidly in Georgia. The economic rhythm of the 21st century dictates us to move faster, think faster and, eventually, eat faster.

Around the world, the popularity of McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy’s and other fast-food chains is evident by their immense sales and in-your-face advertising. The most famous, McDonalds, has managed to open 32,000 restaurants in 100 countries since its founding in 1940 and even served as the sole food outlet at the London Olympics. Over 60 million people around the globe eat at McDonald’s every day – proving just how dominant the fast-food industry is.

Surprisingly, McDonalds was the first fast-food franchise to enter the Georgian market. Opening on the capital’s Rustaveli Avenue in 1999, the restaurant served upwards of 7,000 customers per day of business. Over the last 14 years, Thbilisi is now home to other franchises like Burger King and Texas Chicken.

Wendy’s is soon to open in capital’s former central post office building. The list is certain to grow faster, think faster and, eventually, eat faster.

The first and more high-end option is Crispy Lebanon. Located prominently in a new-ly renovated building on the corner of Aghmashenebeli Ave and Tamar Mepe, Crispy is situated across two floors with the bottom one acting as a show-room, operation, and the second floor a more traditional dining room. At first sight you think you are in the wrong place if you were planning on a nice sit down meal, as the ground floor is very spacious and seemingly thrown together at a moment’s notice; however, the upstairs portion exudes the opposite vibe.

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The main criticism that diners at Crispy Lebanese might have after eating there would be the price. The food is quite expensive, especially when compared to the other Lebanese option in Thbilisi.

Lunch for two could easily run upwards of 20 GEL a head, and while the food is fresh and filling, the price could be a deal breaker for many outside the expat community.

Cedar of Lebanon on the other hand is a completely different establishment. Situated on a tiny side street off Rustaveli, it is so small that you could easily walk past it without even noticing, and it is doubtful if the tiny café could be called a restaurant. The food is quite cheap, especially when compared to the other Lebanese option in Thbilisi.

Again, the main difference when comparing these two restaurants is in the kind of place you want to eat. The menus contain almost identical options for Lebanese food, with Crispy offering a variety of continental options as well. While Cedar is little more than a one-man operation, offering a no-frills eating experience complete with a refrigerator you can grab drinks from at your leisure. Crispy is full service restaurant. Where Cedar is mostly likely known about via word of mouth among the Lebanese and Middle Eastern community in Thbilisi, Cedar has marketing and expatiate connections. Both are delicious and equally authentic, and they don’t seem likely to step on each other’s demographic toes. The only choice between the two is what kind of surroundings and dining experience you are in the mood for. Myself, I frequent Cedar when Romanians are in Tbilisi, but that is because I am a starving food critic.

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By GIORGI KHUKHUNASHVILI

The fast-food trend is a strange twist. It is no secret that Georgians take eating seriously, including overeating. There are no less local brands which serve a mix of traditional cuisine and conventional fast-food products. The most prolific among them is Lula, which runs six branches throughout Thbilisi. Perhaps the most popular item is Ori Lula Menu which includes Kababs, fried potatoes, and a cold drink. Interestingly, these are the staples that every Georgian restaurant offers to its customers but at a lower price. But Ori Lula’s kababs presented in its own Ori Lula wrapping sways consumers towards the more trendy food outlet.

Fast-food in Thbilisi is neither fast, nor cheap but apparently remains very popular for some unknown reason. The only explanation for Georgians’ preference for fast-food is that it is trendy. It seems that walking around Thbilisi with the McCafe branded Coke cup is an instant stamp of approval. Fortunately, the US and Europe are slowly catching up to the corner with the growing popularity of organic food and going green. Perhaps Georgia will do the same be-cause it also reaches the same level of obesity as so often found in more developed countries.
The Georgian Times trilingual online portal offers the latest Georgian news and analysis in English, Georgian and Russian languages.

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Rocko’s Thick, Deep, Emotional, Bright, True, Special Colors

BY TAKO AGARASHVILI

There are lots of colors... Lots of colors on big canvases... Lots of colors with thick layers... Lots of colors to express a lot... Colors on faces, on bodies, on the backgrounds... It’s a fact; this guy knows exactly what to do with colors. He knows what he wants to say with his painting and he says it massively, deeply, colorfully and yet at the same time delicately just right.

Rocko Iremashvili was educated in Tbilisi. He went to Nickoladze Art School for two years, then entered M. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and majored in painting. He thinks he made a right choice school wise. It was back in the day when the State Academy of Arts was full of people trying to find themselves in alcohol and drugs rather than drawing. It gave him pretty intense and busy school years. After winning the German exchange contest DAAD, he left for the Stuttgart State Academy of Art—and mastered there. As is very common for Georgians, love of the motherland brought him back to Georgia. Rocko has had 14 exhibitions in total (both in Europe and Georgia). His works used to be sold out in a blink of an eye, until they weren’t. One day sales just stopped. Motivation is feeding his inspiration at the moment, yet the best days are yet to come.

Do you regret coming back home?

Actually no. After coming here I had a chance working with different media. Considering the expenses, I wouldn’t get a chance to do all that in Germany. I don’t think that an artist has to limit himself to one direction. One should try all different things and find himself not just in one, but mix it if he can. I drew, paint, sculpt and this all requires quite some spending. It would have been impossible for me to work on all that in Europe. So, so, I don’t regret coming back here, yet I don’t want to be here anymore.

How did coming back home show on your art?

Different media? Yet your baby is painting?

This specific exhibition “Parallel Mode” was all painting. I do work and prefer to work with sculpture, video and other media.

Do you agree with this?

I used to agree with that. But after seeing quite a few examples of people progressing with a lot of practice I think it’s overrated. I have witnessed people becoming great painters when I thought they were not so talented. But results were pretty astonishing. I think people can learn everything. I believe that despite age or lack of practice, if a human being has to and wants to express something he shall find a way. There are many genius writers, and artists who found their talents in quite an age, yet became huge.

What is it that you painted on those canvases for this exhibition?

It’s solely my attitude towards events happening at the moment they were painted. Those canvases were made at different times. That’s why I called it “Parallel Mode”. At the same time I was working on something else. While doing so, I just found messages to express from within and painted those canvases. Some show protest, some show sadness and fear toward how kids are growing up with wrong toys and in the wrong environment. Like I said, it’s the impact of events surrounding me.

Do painters have one favorite work?

I have but different ones at different times; one or two works at a time. It changes with what sells. It makes an artist extremely unhappy, but some choose to go that way, simply because they have families and they must be making money. It’s extremely hard.

So you vote for “art for art” VS “art for money”?

Absolutely. I have a contract with the gallery in Germany they pay me despite my paintings being sold or not. It was my condition, if you like what I create then display me and I won’t be working on demand.

What does Georgian audience buy?

Georgians are searching for art that makes them smile; it’s more of a wall paper for them. They don’t want to be looking at all the time at the painting on the wall that is aggressive or sad. There are not too many mansions in this city to buy big canvases. Other than that, Georgians mostly purchase the brands. Name sells well. After coming from Germany my exhibition sold out immediately.
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