On March 21, the Georgian Parliament passed a constitutional amendment limiting presidential powers with the vast majority of votes. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili will no longer be able to sack the Georgian Parliament with one swift stroke now that the amendment was passed with 135 votes.

In another apparent miscarriage of justice in Georgia, Giorgi Keburia, a businessman whose products are used by the US military and the Georgian government, appears to have been falsely imprisoned by the previous government because, despite the high reputation of his cost-saving products, his political views were unacceptable.

Georgia’s ‘Gifted’ October 2013 in the Works
An interview with Art Director Katie Dolidze

Fall 2013 seems very promising for those who appreciate art. After years of silence the International Festival of Arts in Honor of Michael Tumanishvili – Gift – is back. Its art director Katie Dolidze is happy to grant Georgians with the festival again. She has been nourishing the event for over a decade. Even though the festival experienced a few years of fall out, it still is the ‘it’ art event of the year.

Thirty-seven New Cases in Georgian Measles Outbreak

Georgia categorizes its visitors

Caucasus Film Festival Breaks Down Barriers Within the Region

US Marines Train Georgian Soldiers in Agile Spirit-2013 Drills

Georgia: U.S. Marines Launch Month-Long Military Exercise to train Georgian Troops for further Deployments to Afghanistan and possibly Mali.
Lame Duck Georgian President Saakashvili Just Plucked

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

On March 21, the Georgian Parliament passed a constitutional amendment limiting the powers of the many presidential powers with the vast majority of votes. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili will not be able to sack the Georgian Parliament with one swing stroke now that the amendment was passed with 135 votes.

People have been wondering who was going to win the big show down in the Georgian Parliament on March 21, 2013. Well, it depends on who you ask and still there are those who think Saakashvili’s ability to land on his feet is a cat. No doubt Saakashvili will try to make a thing out of the fact that none of the United National Party’s (UNP) MPs voted for the Constitutional changes which, essentially, strip the President of his power and appoint a new government of his choosing – at least not in the test vote, anyway. Yet moments later, every last one of them sided with the majority Georgian Dream coalition in the real vote - the one which counted.

WHAT HAPPENED?

UNM house leader Davit Bakradze was clearly uncomfortable with the position in which he found himself and out that if Saakashvili were to pull the trigger that loaded gun he had in his back pocket, and sack the standing government, then he would play no part in the President’s new government.

Perhaps he was mindful that if such a thing were to happen the former opposition leader Alexander Tsvadzeoridze warned, the凭借lers would be cut out at the Presidential palaces with Saakashvili on the point and being forced out of office and made to sign his own resignation letter there and then. Some punters were even predicting that there could also be crowds and blood in the streets.

Yes folks, what comes around goes around, as such the dire popularity ratings for Saakashvili and his UNM fall prey - those who he said would fall on their swords to protect him – and they too have much to lose once all that has transpired in the last years finitively gets investigated. You see, Saakashvili’s standing in his own government in the Western media and in the European corridor of power. No longer willing about protecting him, or protecting those that have made their fortunes by being part of the network of patronage. No one else matters now, and the president is likely looking at saving his own hide than trying to have a smooth transition of power on the best of terms. He has dragooned down the good judgment of his name of his country in order to protect himself in the process. Manufacturing everything else he even doped 23 unwitting fools from the European People’s Party to put their names to a litany of lies which, he believed, would somehow force the Georgian government to cave to his every whim. He even titled his dammed to drag Andgela Merkel and Manuel Barroso into the ring to stand in front of him or fall on his back.

They were any day of the week, and who could blame them for wanting to keep their distance from this fading star. In his final act Saakashvili met with all of his UNM “mates” to tell them what to do about the impending debate of all the lies and power untold of his own government in the Western media and in the European corridor of power. No one else matters now, and the president is likely looking at saving his own hide than trying to have a smooth transition of power on the best of terms. He has dragooned down the good judgment of his name of his country in order to protect himself in the process. Manufacturing everything else he even doped 23 unwitting fools from the European People’s Party to put their names to a litany of lies which, he believed, would somehow force the Georgian government to cave to his every whim. He even titled his dammed to drag Andgela Merkel and Manuel Barroso into the ring to stand in front of him or fall on his back.

THE SCANDAL

MPC produces a special lubricant for the M4, a mod- ern American assault rifle which the Georgian military purchased from Bushmaster Firearms International in 2008. The weapon’s operating and maintenance specifications explicitly call for the use of the FP-10 lubricant, which is only manufactured by MPC. Nonetheless, Saakashvili was blocked at every turn, even after invest- ing heavily in branding between 2007 and 2010. He con- nects his rejection with what he describes as his “opposi- tional mood” and his frequent- ly vociferous public state- ments. As a result he began to have financial problems, prompting him to find a new partner with exclusive author- ity who could invest in the business. That man was Ni- koloz Osikhmashvili, who had close ties with Defense Min- ister Batu Akhaliya (this nice became Akhalia’s wife).

“My minimum requirement for the new partner was that he invest 20,000 USD,” Saakashvili said.

My new partner well under- stood that he could make a handsome profit without doing a single day’s work, so this was more than a fair sum. Never- theless, I agreed to the mere 13,000 USD that he offered,”

explains Saakashvili, adding that there was no juridical docu- mentation of the transfer of this money because both par- ties had known and trusted each other for years. Keburia even became the godfather of his child.

After six months of work- ing together Osikhmashvili suddenly demanded his mon- ey back in full, which was as a surprise to the fledgling busi- nessman. “I told him that he could take the money out if the company turned a profit, or if another partner replaced him. In addition to cash, we still had an inventory valued at 12,000 USD that he asked to re- deem part of his money from there in stock.”

CRIMINAL CHARGES

After Keburia refused to hand over this money, which he did not physically have, Osikhmashvili filed criminal charges, accusing him of fraud and the illegal extortion of 12,000 USD, despite having already received a portion of this amount. Osikhmashvili then went to the Georgian Parliament’s Office that no MPC company existed and had it not registered a representative office in Georgia. The Prosecu- tor’s Office contacted MPC’s U.S. office and it was informed that Saakashvili was attempting to persuade the com- pany that he had a close. Shortly afterwards Osikhmashvili sent letters to MPC’s U.S. office and to his partners in Eurasia, in which he accused Saakashvili of fraud and betray- ing him as a partner and stated that no company could do busi- ness with him. It was clear to the Georgian Parliament that will really shine page and start a new chapter in the modern development of democracy, admit past mistakes, hold those who committed se- rious crimes responsible, and look to the future with a clear purpose to build a modern country that will really shine out as a beacon of democracy.
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Georgia Categorizes its Visitors

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Georgia has changed the system of foreign visitors’ registration. All visitors will now be divided into three categories. However, the novelty causes some apprehension to callers – they fear the change will toughen issuing Georgian visas.

The innovation was introduced to the public in March 2013. According to the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, there will be A, B and C categories of visitors. As the MIA explains, the A category will be given to tourists; their stay in Georgia can last from 24 hours to one year. B category visitors is for transit purposes and allows being on the territory of Georgia for less than 24 hours after crossing the state border. Visitors traveling for any other purpose will be included in category C, which is made up of citizens of neighboring countries who live near the borders and frequently cross the Georgian border for a period of less than 24 hours for industrial, commercial or other reasons.

As it appears from the MIA statistic data in January-February 2013, more than 565,660 visitors came to Georgia. This figure has increased by 37.2 percent in comparison to the same period in 2012. The vast majority of visitors (231,500) are from Turkey. The number of Azeri citizens coming to Georgia averaged 128,300; there were 101,300 travelers from Armenia, 54,400 from Russia, 14,400 from the EU, and 6,200 from Ukraine and Iran each. Georgia has a visa-free regime with all the above-mentioned countries.

The MIA also informed that the number of tourists during the first two months of 2013 reached 206,418 (31.3 percent of the total visitors), transit – 70,299 (12.4 percent) and visits for other purpose reached 263,409 (51.1 percent).

However, it remains unclear just how the Ministry collects these figures since the purpose of the visit is not currently registered at borders crossings. Ladayash Merek, a tourist from Poland, crossed the Russian-Georgian border through the northern checkpoint at Lars. As he told the Georgian Times, “It was never questioned about the reason for my visit to Georgia.” The custom officer only asked whether I had ever been to Abkhazia or South Ossetia, he looked through my passport and returned it with out any further questions,” he said.

A citizen of Egypt Hany Kadry Saleeb came to Georgia in search of business opportunities in mid March, 2013. “At the Tbilisi International Airport I just filled in an application, wrote my name and passport number, paid the money and got my visa. They didn’t ask me anything, even the purpose of my visit,” he told the GT. He expressed hope that the new system of registration of foreign visitors will not influence on visa procedures. “The visa regime between Georgia and Egypt is simplified to the utmost at the moment – we get our visas upon arrival instead of applying for them in the Embassy of Georgia in Cairo. So if everything remains the way it is now, it will be great,” he stressed.

According to the airport’s customs officers, the procedures of visa issuing did not change. “Everything is the same here. Visitors who can get their visa upon arrival and do not face any sort of problems,” the representative of custom service told GT.

Caucasus Film Festival Breaks Down Barriers Within the Region

By TINATIN GOGLADIZE

The second Caucasian film festival, a four-day event was launched in Tbilisi’s Literature Museum on March 22. The museum’s small room, little screen and projector on the table was packed with foreigners and Georgians viewers. Although the festival itself is still quite new, the high level of public interest is the result of unique selection of films offered by the organizers of the screenings. Throughout their work, directors from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia gave different visions of their neighboring countries and how to break down artificial borders between them, one of the main aims of the festival.

“This festival wouldn’t have been held if there weren’t so many interesting directors in this fascinating region using their talent energy and youth to make new documentaries and fiction films which show the world around them as they see it,” said David Moran Ambassador of the United Kingdom in Georgia said at the opening of the event.

The idea of Caucasian Film Festival came to Cez Dellesar a French diplomat who was collaborating with the British Embassy in Georgia. Collecting interesting movies produced in the region seemed like a very promising idea to her. The event’s chief organizers Tina Lagidze and Nestan Nidzharadze selected the movies from the different countries in cooperation with the British and Dutch embassies in Georgia.

As Nidzharadze explained, unlike the first festival held in 2012, this year’s screenings included not only Caucasian directors’ works but European film makers whose movies were about the region: “We are proud to present Ineke Smith’s work “The Aviatrix of Kazbeg” and also a documentary by Patrick Cuat’s “Hurricane Kalatozov.”

Angel Semura, Deputy Ambassador of the Dutch Embassy in Georgia thinks that for small countries it is twice as hard to make someone notice them. “In order to be noticed we have to interact a lot with our neighbors to look for common features and common history. I truly believe that if we look for features that you have in common the traditions that are common will make relations easier between countries. Thus this festival is very important for the region.”

Throughout the screenings of the documentary and feature films, a mix of contemporary and retrospective art offered the opportunity to gain insights of the region’s history. “Flourishing Abkhazia” was the opening documentary of the festival. Shot in 1941, the film was kept in the national archives of Georgia. Although the film is a classic example of Soviet propaganda, it still gives viewers who have never been there the opportunity to see Abkhazia in the distant past and untouched by war.

The Georgian National Archive with the help of the EU delegation also restored and provided the film festival with “Chronicle of South Ossetia”, a documentary covering events from 1930-1950 and thus gave accesses to unique material that was previously unavailable for public viewing.

The interesting film choice, unique materials, representatives of different countries and growing public interest in the Caucasian Film Festival is certain to help the festival grow from a small one room with a projector to larger venue and a bigger audience.

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US Marines Train Georgian Soldiers in Agile Spirit-2013 Drills

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

Georgia: U.S. Marines Launch Month-Long Military Exercise to Train Georgian Troops for further deployments to Afghanistan and possibly Mali.

An Australian journalist and his American colleague visited the Georgian military base on March 21, 2013 where they observed U.S Marines, form its Black Sea Rotational Force contingent, training Georgian military personnel in counterinsurgency techniques, press release is being used for upcoming deployments to Afghanistan and possibly Mali.

The tour was part of a public affairs program to promote "Operation Agile Spirit 2013", an intensive month-long joint live-fire maneuvers training exercise at the Vaziani military base located near Tbilisi, Georgia. Despite being questioned about Afghanistan, Mariner's public affairs officer, 1st Lieutenant Hector Alejandra said the training is about "security deployment as a crisis deployment framework".

Lieutenant Alejandra also claimed the exercises are aimed at improving military capabilities between the United States and Georgia to deal with any humanitarian missions that may arise in the region.

Tim Byrnes, who is in Georgia to research some articles on the current Georgian political situation for Australian media, said the US Marines appeared to be well-experienced.

"Most US personnel I spoke with confirmed they had served and seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan," Byrnes said.

Mr. Byrnes, Australia's leading researcher on the Soviet Butch of Stalingrad, saw combat as a journalist during the 2008 Russian - Georgia War in South Ossetia for Australian media outlet Skynews and Sydney's Fairfax.

He has also been invited to present his experiences at the Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian University of New England (UNE). Byrnes said he saw to the effect that the mission was broken out between NATO and Georgian forces and are having a negative impact on the morale of these troops.

The US Marines are training the Georgian military on how to effectively deal with IEDs and it is thought this training will be useful should Georgian troops be deployed to other combat theatres around the world, especially the potential EU's military training operation in Mali on the African continent.

"Among the way we saw the military facilities, there would be checkpoints being set up, as the Georgian troops would be manning in Afghanistan and other potential NATO and EU combat operations."

The Vaziani training base is an old, former Soviet airbase, and would be a part of the frontline bases in case a war would have broken out between NATO and the former Warsaw pact members, including the Soviet Union.

Reinforced plane and bomb storage hangars and earth protected storage sites can still be seen there.

By SABA GAVADZE

The 2012 European Neighbourhood Policy Country Progress Report on Georgia was published by the European Commission on March 20, 2013 in Brussels (European Press Releases RAPID MEMO/13/ 246). At the same time, the European Commission presented the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton published the annual "Neighbourhood Package", consisting of a joint communication that assesses the European Neighbourhood Policy implementation 2012, a report on the "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity" with Southern Mediterranean, an Eastern Partnership progress report, 12 country reports including one on Georgia, and a statistical annex.

The report represents a general overview and analysis of EU – Georgia relations, as well as the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, which includes negotiations over the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The EU Association Agreement (AA) expresses the intention between the EU and a non-member states and international organisations (Articles 217-219, Treaty on Functioning of the EU). The Agreement creates a framework in many different areas of cooperation, such as political, economic, social, and cultural and security issues. Current- ly Georgia is pursuing active talks upon acquiring the Association Agreement. The Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, which was presented to Georgian authorities on February 25, 2013, was considered to be a major step towards the agreement. This was due to the "significant progress that Georgia had made during 2012" in its efforts to reinforce the democratic institutions and pursue peaceful political transition process.

The report evaluates the 2012 October Parliamentary elections as a positive step the Georgian country has taken in the development of the relations with the EU. Moreover, the Union appreciates the reforms carried out to strengthen the justice system as well as the reforms in public sector and regulatory approximation to the EU acquis. However, the Commission adds later in the report that the judicial system needs further reform in order to bring "criminal justice policies and practices in line with Council of Europe standards", to achieve fair trial norms; and ensure that police officers to take into account the recommendations of the Public Defender’s Office.

The Country Report mentions the active participation of Georgia in the Neighbourhood Policy and its attempts to negotiate with de facto government representatives of the country’s breakaway regions. The EU also expects Georgia to “maintain and improve constructive participation” in the discussions and seeking ways to enhance trade relations and take “pragmatic and constructive steps” to support investment across the administrative boundary line.

The first crucial action would be reviewing the Law on Occupied Territories. Concerning the legal system, the Commission suggests adopting more comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, which will eventually ensure that the rights of minorities (ethnic as well as religious) are well respected.

Moreover, the improvement of the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with the engagement of the EU is highly assessed in the report. However, the EU gives a conclusive list of actions Georgia needs to follow for better cooperation.

Firstly, the shortcomings which were identified by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in electoral law need to be improved before the 2013 Presidential election and 2014 local elections are held. The Union’s positive assessment of the 2012 Parliamentary elections is no reason to neglect the need to improve electoral law. However, the EU has expressed hopes that the 2013 Presidential elections will be no less successful.

Secondly, the Commission reminds Georgia that the Constitutional amendments should be carried out by the consultation of a domestic as well as international level by engaging the Venice Commission and taking into account the its recommendations.

Thirdly, the Report echoes the recent criminal prosecutions and advises to conduct them in a transparent and impartial manner, free of political motivation in order to prevent any selective justice. Moreover, the Commission expresses concerns about the use of torture and ill treatment in the penitentiary system and analyses the structural failures to be the reason of the above systemic issues.

The EU suggests ensuring more effective internal as well as external monitoring process of the penitentiary system in order to detect and prevent any kind of ill-treatment of power.

The report supports media pluralism and independence as well as freedom of speech and freedom of the press and shows cooperation with the EU. On the legal side of the issue, the Union expects Georgia to “implement the law on transparency of media ownership”.

During recent months, the EU has observed active changes in Georgian legislation, the development of the new power-sharing agreement and transform of power from one political party to another. The EU has always supported democratic changes in Georgia and had always advocated the enhanced cooperation with the country. The Union has mentioned multiple times that they cooperate with the authorities of Georgia and not with a single political party. It is very important for every citizen of the country to put pressure over the government institutions to carry out the responsibilities they have been awarded. The Country Report on Georgia holds more than just suggestions of the European community. The report reflects the way the EU perceives current political developments in the country and the Union’s attitude towards domestic affairs. The report is the assessment of as well as guide for Georgia— a compulsory guide towards the Association Agreement and further cooperation.
Thirty-seven New Cases in Georgian Measles Outbreak

By Lika Moshiashvili

Thirty-seven new cases of measles have been reported in Georgia in the last week, taking the toll to 250 (211 in Tbilisi) with 103 patients hospitalized, the National Centre of Disease Control and Public Health Center (NCDC) informs. Measles cases are likely to continue over the next 2-3 months, with hundreds of more cases expected, Health officials say “vaccination is the only solution to bring the outbreak under control.”

“Approximately 20 patients are presently being treated in our hospital. We declared quarantine a few weeks ago and it will probably last until the end of April,” stated Keti Chigvani, a doctor at the hospital for infectious diseases. “Since January, 133 measles cases have been registered in our hospital,” she told The Georgian Times.

As Khutna Zakhrashidze, head of the Transmitted Disease Department of NCDC comments there is an outbreak of the measles in the country. “There are more cases compared with previous years,” she noted.

In 2012, there were only 31 measles cases registered in Georgia, over the last few years the number of measles cases in general was no more than 30-40 each year.

“The cause of the spread of the disease is the failure of the measles immunization effort in 2008,” stated Paata Imnadze, head of NCDC.

Measles, also known as Rubella or morbilli, is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus - a viral infection caused by the rubella virus. The virus spreads very fast and easily and it is passed on through direct contact with an infected person.

“Typical symptoms of measles include fever, cough, conjunctivitis and a rash. Complications are quite common even among healthy people, and around 20% of reported measles cases experience one or more complication,” said Imnadze. “These can include ear infections, vomiting, diarrhea, pneumonia, meningoitis and serious eye disorders,” he added.

The initial symptoms of measles appear around 10 days after one is infected and they generally last for up to 14 days. The measles rash usually appears a few days afterwards and disappears after 4-5 days. The disease may also lead to serious complications, including blindness and even death.

“Unfortunately, it is most infectious before the rash is visible so people tend to spread the virus before they realize they have it,” Zakhrashidze explained. “It’s fairly easy to catch if you haven’t been vaccinated and come into contact with someone who has the infection, which is why epidemics often spread among schoolchildren,” she continued.

As the NCDC’s website reports, this year most of the cases affected people in age group of 20-29. Thirty measles cases were recorded among 1-4 year old children, 27 cases among 15 to 19 year-olds, and 17 cases among infants who are less than one year old.

According to Keti Chigvani there is no specific treatment for measles and it depends on the complexity of the disease “People who have measles should be in bed, rest, drink liquids and control their temperature. If a person has symptoms of measles he/she must immediately go to a doctor,” she advised.

As Chigvani explained, if a person is hospitalized with the virus he/she usually needs a transfusion and antibiotics.

“We have enough reserves of all the necessary medicines in the hospital,” she said in an interview with GT.

Due to the increased number of measles cases, free vaccination of people from 6 months to 30-years of age is under way in Georgia. Vaccination for 1-7 year-old children is mandatory.

“The most effective way of preventing measles is vaccination and mumps and vaccination. In these cases the body of a person has built up immunity to the virus,” Imnadze explains.

According to Zakhrashidze if all the planned activities will be conducted properly and the public will follow doctors’ recommendations, the number of measles cases will be reduced by autumn.

New People’s Movement Develops Recommendations for Government

By Tamara Tchokhonelidze

People’s movement Lazarus held its first public meeting at the Rustaveli Theater on March 19, where it members set forth its demands for the new government and make sure it lives up to all its promises in the post election period.

Headed by the poet and public figure, Revaz Amashukeli, Lazarus, was founded after the last year’s parliamentary elections by His Holiness and Beatitud Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II. Lazarus seeks to represent a political and non-commercial entity established by honored representatives of art, science and culture. The movement monitors and analyzes the current processes in the country and develops recommendations for the Georgian government and policy makers.

Amashukeli opened the meeting by stating that although the parliamentary elections changed who held power in Georgia, the country still faces many challenges. “There are still many problems that need to be solved in our country. That’s why we have gathered today in this hall in order to remind the politicians about those issues and give them our recommendations,” the head of the movement addressed the meetings attendees gathered in the hall of the Rustaveli Theater. Besides the members of the movement, other representatives of the civil society were among the speakers of the meeting.

Elbert Batiashvili, member of the movement, mentioned that the former government had sold off so many plots of lands to foreigners in the regions of Georgia. “Georgians are very hospitable and foreigners are always welcome to Georgia, but it is unfair how most of the plots of lands in the regions are given to Arabs, Indians, and Chinese etc. while ethnic Georgians, known for their agricultural activities from ancient times, are left without land,” Batiashvili stated.

Nana Kakabadze, chairperson of the non-governmental organization “Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights”, talked about the creation of a commission, which would conduct political and legal evaluations of the nine-year governance of the previous government. “This commission will be a political party, which will demand that the current government adequately reacts to the wrongdoings of the previous one and to keep its promises concerning the restoration of justice,” Kakabadze said.

Former political prisoner Vakhtang Maisaia, who holds a PhD in political sciences, talked about the activities of the previous government “fascism of the XXI century”. He talked about the dreadful conditions he had to endure while imprisoned. “I can say that the situation in the prisons under the management of the former government was like the one in Saarbrucken concentration camp during the Nazi Holocaust. Parliament should work out a memorandum which will include those wrongdoings and all the offenders should be punished accordingly,” Maisaia stated.

“Still many questions need to be given adequate answers like the illegal confiscation of property and cleansing of ethnic Georgians by the former government. All these issues must be investigated properly as the current power should justify people’s confidence,” Kakhia Khakhishvili, director of the Elections and Political Technologies Research Centre said.

Demographic problems were also reviewed during the meeting. Anzor Totadze, demographer and member of the movement, talked about the catastrophic demographic situation in Georgia.

“While in 1980-1989 the birth rate ran as much as 435,000 births, from 2000-2009, it decreased to a low of 53,000 births. In simple terms the birth rate was decreased by 8.3 times during these difficult years. The most alarming demographic situation is found in Georgia’s regions, where many young people leave their villages because of the economic hardships. They are searching for urban areas in seeking jobs. The mortality rate far exceeds the birth rate in many regions. According to the study by the United Nations, by 2050 Georgia’s population, which is currently estimated at a high of 4.5 million, will decrease by one million,” stated Totadze, who also discussed the recently established Demographic Regeneration Fund of Georgia, which is developing a special social and economic program in order to improve the demographic situation.

NB: The same social problem was confirmed last week by GT in an article that quotes Office of National Statistics in claiming that Georgia’s population stands at 4.5 million, but according to Avtandil Sulaberidze, Director of the Institute of Demography and Sociology at Ilia Chabchavadze State University, Georgia’s population dropped below 4 million for the first time in 2003 and currently stands at 3.77 million.

Aleksandre Tsitsinadze, deputy head of the movement, mentioned an array of problems in sphere of education, science, culture and religion. “More attention should be given to these spheres as loss of the spiritual values is irreparable. Studies in historiography and linguistics must be promoted,” he said.

“Literature publications should be restored,” Tsitsinadze said.
Debating the Impact of Prisoner Amnesty in Georgia

By EMMA BAIRAMOV

In the run-up to the 2012 Georgian parliamentary elections the incumbent government organized a series of delays to assist with their political opponents. One of its most effective plans was fuelling fear of a possible increase in crime if the United National Movement was defeated at the ballot box. Such fears prescient following a mass amnesty of prisoners in every instance and in the present government, but their release is not likely to have a significant impact on crime in Georgia.

It is no secret that one of the major achievements of the former government was decreasing the level of crime in the country, and existing fears were exacerbated when the new government promised a large-scale amnesty, which the release of more than 8,000 prisoners since January 2013. An additional 2,000 prisoners have been personally pardoned by the Georgian president during this period. 150 of these 10,000 released prisoners have since been released on parole for committing new crimes. According to the monthly report of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia of the period from April 70 of these were amongst the 2,000 prisoners that had been personally pardoned by President Mikheil Saakashvili.

RAMIFICATIONS OF PRISONER AMNESTY

Speaking in Baku, Damir McGuinness, in an article of Jan-
uary 30, 2013, entitled “Baku city’s crime fears as inmates freed from jail,” claimed that Thilisi's reputation of being nearly crime free was now in jeopardy as almost 5,000 inmates had been freed from jail. Since this article appeared much has happened. Thilisi's reputation has deteriorated due to the potential impact of the amnesty on the crime rate. The following is the impact of the amnesty on crime in Georgia.

According to the official crime statistics for the period between November 2012, and March 2013, in other words since the first amnesty, there has been an increase in crime. This increase in crime is a result of the amnesty, which has led to an increase in crime. Offences such as petty robbery are taking place on various streets and residents have claimed that such a level of crime has not existed for many years in Thilisi.

According to the official crime statistics, there have been 1.3 million crimes committed in Georgia in November 2012 compared to the previous November. These included 300,000 more crimes in January 2013. The crime rate declined in November, but it still increased. More crimes than January 2013's crime rate was also an increase of 45% in March 2013.

Statistics show that the number of prisoners in Georgia exceeded all norms for countries of a similar size. Moreover, many Georgian pris-

continue
No End In Sight To Armenia's Postelection Standoff

By Kenan Aliyev and Robert Coalson, RFE/RL

The government of Azerbaijan has continued to crackdown on opposition activists in recent weeks, an effort that activists say is aimed at consolidating Aliyev's control of the political landscape ahead of the October presidential election.

OSCE Secretary-General Lamberto Zannier discussed Baku's request to downgrade its OSCE office during a visit on March 14 that Baku views that OSCE has been undermining Azerbaijan's sovereignty.

Alongside this, the Azerbaijani government also passed a new media law in March

The Azerbaijani government said on March 15 that it will pass the money on to "mass media organizations and neighborhoods" (HHK), said the authorities might even consider that unrest went much deeper than young people.

The Azerbaijani government passed a new media law in March which is widely seen as an attempt to control the media and limit freedom of expression.

"Unfortunately, from different aspects, we see a lot of interference. Just a few months ago, as 22-acre representatives of the OSCE dealt with the Thracian Lion and Russian border, party lawmaker Samed Sargsyan, a member of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Baku office, the Azerbaijani state press has earlier reported that the NDI was financing a "facebook revolution," a charge that the U.S. Embassy in Baku has denied.

Kenan Aliyev and Robert Coalson, RFE/RL

"Unfortunately, from different aspects, we see a lot of interference. Just a few months ago, as 22-acre representatives of the OSCE dealt with the Thracian Lion and Russian border, party lawmaker Samed Sargsyan, a member of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Baku office, the Azerbaijani state press has earlier reported that the NDI was financing a "facebook revolution," a charge that the U.S. Embassy in Baku has denied.

Actors in the OSCE's winter election election results were made public.

In recent months, Azerbaijan has seen street protests, many of which have been broken up by police violence.

Aliyev, who has been president since 2003 and who pushed through a 2009 constitutional change that allows him to continue running for president indefinitely, is widely expected to be awarded a third term in October.

The move to downgrade the OSCE office comes after the March 14 arrest of three activists, including a program officer of the well-funded Na
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Kenan Aliyev and Robert Coalson, RFE/RL

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Israel Welcomes Georgian Tourists

By LISA TONKANANYAN

Israel wants more tourists from Georgia – both to increase its income and to strengthen cultural ties between the two countries. Despite various visa violations, Tel Aviv has expressed a readiness to facilitate the issuing of visas for groups of Georgian visitors.

Two percent more Georgians visited Israel in 2012 than in 2011. The Israeli Consulate issued 4,443 visas last year, but only 850 were given to groups of tourists. Ambassador of Israel to Georgia Yuval Fuchs had not satisfied with these figures, and held a meeting with local travel agencies at the Holiday Inn Tel- Aviv on March 19 in order to discuss ways of increasing the number of Georgian visitors to Israel, and its tourism.

The Ambassador says that such tourism contributes to the economy of Georgia as well as Israel and both countries are trying to strengthen their relations. The Embassy and Consulate are ready to cooperate with local travel agencies in order to facilitate the issuance of visas for tour groups.

Fuchs emphasised that tourism is not only a good source of income, but also a way to improve cultural relations between the two nations. "I have here Shota Rustaveli’s The Knight in the Panther’s Skin in Hebrew, and it’s not just a translation – Rustaveli lived in Jerusalem and probably did this, too. There is a Georgian community in Israel, and there are many Georgian Jews, so it’s not only about deriving benefits from economic interrelationship," he told the Georgian Times.

The commitment to make it easier to obtain Israeli visas brought joy to many tour operators and travellers. Travel agencies in Georgia have had a positive decision and hope it will yield results in the near future.

"We expect the initiative of the Embassy to simplify the entire process. Previously, when groups of tourists went to Israel for Christmas and Easter we had to send a stack of papers to the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Israel and wait for their approval or refusal of the applications, even though in the majority of cases we faced no problems. But since 2011 the visa application has been toughened for Georgians, probably due to an occurrence which triggered us – almost all the passengers on one particular flight overstayed in Israel illegally," Vazani of Tzarev’s Travel Agency.

The founder of Iveria Tour, Nino Tsvaia, confirmed that such things have happened. "We had two tourists who never returned from Israel after our company took them there. After Easter 2012 group visas were refused to all Georgians, as serious violations had occurred during the holiday itself. Since December we have had only individual tourists. However I do think the restrictions on the visas for groups of Georgians was politically motivated, as many Russians also break the law but they do not need visas anymore." Tsvaia told GT.

Tamar Bachelashvili, 5th, visited Israel on an 8-day trip in 2011. She says that she applied for a visa in February but her application was only accepted by the Israeli MFA in April – exactly two weeks before the departure date. "The most thrilling and irritating thing was the uncertainty – I didn’t know whether I was going or not. There were 22 of us awaiting for a decision, and unfortunately seven didn’t get a visa. I think all this was linked to the arrest of some Israeli businessmen. This year I’m also going to visit Israel, and I have already sent my documents to the agency. I was not asked to present any documents confirming my job this time," she told GT.

The Ambassador of Israel has called on everyone to stop speculating about why the visa regime was tightened in 2011 as “this is getting us nowhere.” He didn’t deny that there were problems with visas in 2011 but maintained that this had nothing to do with politics. “There’s no room for special treatment. The only reason the Israeli MFA refused visas to groups from Georgia was the surprising number of tourists who stayed illegally in Israel. No country can tolerate this. We want more tourists, but, of course, not at the expense of an influx of illegal immigrants. If we can’t solve this problem we can’t see any problem with issuing visas for groups,” Yuval Fuchs told GT.

The Ambassador added that the situation has improved a lot at the moment – the procedure has been facilitated, so the Consulate can provide some input to this process. “This is important, as we’ll get to know the tour agencies and they will know us, and if they have a problem or question or any difficulty, they can approach us. The idea is to improve the direct communication between us. I think this is a trial period for the change and we hope it will facilitate the procedure;” he stressed.

He emphasised that 2012 had been a very good year for the two countries – many high-level meetings and there had been an obvious improve- ment in the volume of Israeli-Georgian relations. In that year Israeli defence firms extensively involved in the Georgian military’s modernisation pulled out of deals with Tbilisi, but Israeli imports of weapons is on the rise. The commitment to make it easier to obtain Israeli visas has been welcomed by both the Israeli and Georgian Governments. After the visit of Grigol Vashadze, the Georgian Minister of Finance, to Tel Aviv, where he discussed with Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli Defence Minister, the possibility of introducing visa-free travel for Israeli-Georgian citizens. The Ambassador of Israel has stated that initially this agreement would only apply to the holders of diplomatic and service passports, but it is now ready to be signed.

I mentioned earlier about the pressures a teacher feels to show the success of their teaching methods. The teacher must hold accountable for the work they produce. This accountability must not be allowed through assessment of both their students’ knowledge and assessment of their ability to convey that knowledge to the students.

Below I have discussed several types of assessment that classroom teachers should use in order to facilitate and foster student learning. Teachers in fostering students' knowledge a student has achieved for. It might measure knowledge a student has acquired by making everyone responsible for their learning.

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MARRIOT Tbilisi
MARRIOT Sheraton Metechi Palace
Tavida
Veri Palace
Hotel Varazi
River Side
Holiday Inn
Ambassador
Radisson Blu
Old Metekhi
Old Tbilisi
Kopala
Hotel KMM
GTM
Penthouse
Hotel Ponto

CAFE-BARS & RESTAURANTS
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Marakesh Express
Cafe Lefe
Machakela
Glazego
Kanape
Sake
Samurai
Piano
Cafe de France
English Tea House
Discovery
Al Magreb
Gufalo
Tenerife
Corner Bar
Jazzve
Cafe Leffe
Jazz Cafe
China Town
No 11
Prospero
Lit Cafe
Little House
Jazz Event
In House

BANKS & BUSINESSES
Cartu Bank
Bank Respublika
Liberty Bank
Rico
Bank of World
Georgian Bank
National Bank
Tao Bank
Basis Bank
VTB Bank
RICCO CREDIT

PROCREDIT Bank
Ziraat Bank
Kor-Standard Bank
Tbc Bank
BTA Bank
Crido
Khalik Bank
Embassies, Consulates & Diplomatic Representations

France Embassy
China Embassy
Kazakhstan Embassy
Norway Embassy
Sweden Embassy
Greece Embassy
Belgium Embassy
Turkey Embassy
Czech Embassy
Latvia Embassy
Azerbaijan Embassy
Hungary Embassy
Estonia Embassy
Ukraine Embassy
America Embassy
U.K. Embassy
Germany Embassy
Bulgaria Embassy
Israel Embassy
Netherlands Embassy
Lithuania Embassy
Switzerland Embassy
Italy Embassy
Poland Embassy
Japan Embassy
Iran Embassy
Romania Embassy
Armenia Embassy
Iraq Embassy

Businesses
Geocell
Ps P
Versi
Borjomi
Clinic of Garamia Nestle
Clinic of Cuzanov
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We Do What We Know!
On March 19, the Georgian Beer Company Ltd. and Germany’s Bitburger Braugruppe signed a cooperation agreement at an official ceremony. The agreement gives German’s Bitburger Premium Beer company the right to produce the German premium brand König Pilsener on licence at the Zedazeni brewery, in strict accordance with the standards of technologies of the original and Germany’s beer purity law, the Reinheitsgebot.

By: EMMA BARDAMOVA

Bitburger brewery (Bitburger Braugruppe Th. Simon GmbH) is a large German brewery founded in 1817 by Johann Wallenborn. Bitburger ranks third among German breweries, with annual sales of 3.86 million hectolitres in 2008. Continuing the unchanged family tradition which has prevailed in Bitburg since 1817, Bitburger Premium Beer is brewed by only the most experienced brewers, who have been around for seven generations.

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TAKO AGARASHVILI

Fall 2013 seems very promising for Georgian art. We can appreciate art. After years of neglect, the 23rd International Festival of Arts in Honor of Michael Tumanishvili – Gift was held in London. Film director Katia Dudzie is happy for the festival again. She has hosted the festival for every event over a decade. Even though the festival experienced a few years of fall out, it still is the ‘it’ event of the year.

Film Actors’ Theatre in Honor of Michael Tumanishvili will be hosting a marvelous event this year. Katia Dudzienko is the Art Director of the theatre again. She is back to her office and that’s where she hosted the Georgian Times for an interview, and awards, photos are looking at you from the walls. This woman is a little bit of a cinematography, theatre, acting, events, Awards, worldwide tours. She took Georgia across the border and introduced her whole life to the world. Throughout her entire life she has been fighting for what she believes. She has been on her whole life. Katia doesn’t know of any her hero, of excellence, or creativity. Her crew has seen the world only because she had a will, she found a way. She believed in Georgian art enough to work her life off for her country proud. She is a living exemplar of commitment of Georgian national art.

How did it all start?

The idea of the festival appeared in 1989. After seeing the play "ือ" by David Doiashvili, Irakli Chakikashvili, "Don Juan" by Michael Tumanishvili, great films like William Butler Touchi, co-founder of the greatest international art festival – Fringe (Edinburgh) and Ian Scocheon, producer of Fringe, were surprised that a country producing the best filmmakers did not have an art festival of its own. While visiting the film festival of Moscow, the idea of an international art festival appeared. You could not just "do" a festival back then. The only way to do it could do without Moscow granting the festival the money it needed. It was on 1993 that the talks started. Eduard Shevardnadze’s government decided to be included in the state budget and give it the state’s endorsement. We were sponsored by the government and in 1997 finally the first Gift was held. Festival started in 1998. Back then it was the festival was no longer a state event. The festival was no longer a state event. She had the money for the festival. She had the money for the festival. The festival was on even since up to 2007. Mr. Saakashvili attended the festival. He had dinner with Andrei Kanchukhovskiy and other prominent guests. At the closing gala, he named me an Angel. He named me an Angel. The next year, that important festival was held in Svetlogorsk. I think we can keep on having it. It changed the name Gift to something else. He couldn’t possibly imagine that he was invited to a different festival. It was unacceptable. They told the idea, the guests, even the timing. I simply got punished for changing my political views. Most surprising was that my foreign colleague was fighting against it, but Georgians who made the directors (David Doiashvili, David Tarvashvili and others) agreed with it. Mr. Saakashvili explained.

Richard the Lionheart, who died in 1199, is the first event that made Georgia a part of the cultural world. The war with Russia, the war with Russia, the war with Russia, and when you look from beyond, you are irritated/

The art world grows and expands. There is no longer the need for many Michael Tumanishvili will never be a member of a FEMA. It (since some people are already invited) will take place in September, because October is mine. We will have an outstanding Gift this year, we will have a festival of outstanding Gift this year. Peter Brook’s theatre is going to open the festival this year with play by "Le Costume". Also his daughter’s "Irina’s Dream theatre" will be staging. How much more can you believe. They are very please. She is bringing a trilogy, Finnish circus is invited, Dadi Keshishian’s "Laboratory" with four astonishing plays. We are the only ones who are invited to outstanding figures that are no longer with us like Natela Ushadze, Ramaz Chalidze, Gogi Gregchikov, Guram Saghadjaridze, etc. They all were honored with the special prize in the name of Michael Tumanishvili. This year Dimitri Kriwitz will be holding the "in the name of the Angels of Gift" on the little stage in front of the Tumanishvili theatre. We will have grand performances for the foster care kids. Like I said is much more.

The first board director’s, Thelma Holt is friend- ship with Vanessa Redgrave, Daniel Craig, Harvey Keitel, Tim Burton and Daniel Craig. I hope we can get a couple of them to come to the festival. London is a cultural center in the eastern world and his beautiful Indian sitar players. I can see the world of slaves" up to today. We will have Richard Brodax in the water, and nature and take care of the world’s resources.

Londoners will have the opportunity to enjoy Georgia Baghaturishvili’s art in June, 2013.
SUNDAY BRUNCH

Gather around with your friends and family on Sundays for brunch at Tbilisi Marriott where we will cater to every family member! Sunday Brunch at Parnas captures the essence of Marriott’s glamorous culinary tradition where Chef Pedro Gonzalez offers a variety of delights on the buffet with comfort cuisine combined with modern flavor. Everyone will find Sunday Brunch exciting with unlimited complimentary wines from Telavi Wine Cellar, mimosas for the ladies and kids’ game room equipped with Xbox KINECT for your little one to enjoy!

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It’s Time to Save the Planet!

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

Earth formed approximately 4.54 billion years ago, and life appeared on its surface within one billion years. Since the first life appeared, the planet has just been giving and giving to all the livings. It has been the mean of subsistence to every breathing/growing/existing creature out there. All the species got so comfortable with it, that hardly anyone ever thought about giving something back to the planet Earth.

Living in the XXI century it’s scary to imagine how much we, all of us, have taken from it and how many times we have done something to support it.

Now is the time – proclaimed the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2007. 2.2 million Residents of Sydney participated by turning off all non-essential lights. Following Sydney’s lead, many other cities around the world adopted the event in 2008. The event has since been held in many countries worldwide. They launched the ‘I Will If You Will’ campaign to encourage positive action for the environment. They don’t limit us – livings – with actions. They encourage us to think bigger, to involve people or groups, simply to contribute to the planet that has been nourishing everything that has ever been conceived. Be creative, inspire others to do a little or big, but a giving gesture to protect the planet. The ‘I Will If You Will’ campaign spread over 50 countries, generating momentum behind Earth Hour’s push to be an ongoing movement for change.

Preparations across the globe kicked off for Earth Hour 2013 with the creation of the world’s first Earth Hour Forest in the East African nation of Uganda, to fight against the 6,000 hectares of deforestation that occurs in the country every month.

People all over the world have actually been involved in this project. Georgians have gotten used to being left out of worldwide events because life here is hard enough, not to spend a bunch of money and time. It has been here since 2009. It has been getting bigger and bigger. More and more people, organisations have been getting involved in different ways – sponsoring, supporting, advertising, accommodating, etc.

The leading names are: the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Georgia, United Nations Office in Georgia, Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Georgia, the Sheraton Metekhi Palace Hotel (Tbilisi and Batumi), New Light, Beeline, Gulf and Georgia Today. On March 22, these organisations held a press conference each of the representatives making a speech explaining and calling for the cause. Logo “60+” is green now, like candles and ribbons the project is using.

This is the time when we can make the change. This is not doing a favor; this is making the world a better place, the world that we live in, we are a part of, all the human kind and living species should stand together to better the planet.

At the press conference at Sheraton Metekhi Palace on March 22 the head of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Georgia Khutana Gogaladze encouraged us not to do it as a one-time event, but to turn it into a lifestyle. “Let’s make a habit out of saving, supporting, and protecting the planet.” March 23 was the day for the Earth Hour 2013. Gogaladze, Ina Paulovica (UNDP Georgia), Anne Nemitsveradze-Daniels (CENN), Nino Isakadze (Sheraton), Tita Mchiladze (New Light), Nino Jibladze (Gulf) and Maia Tsereteli (Georgia Today) reached out to the media and asked the country to turn off the lights on March 23rd from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM. The essential buildings and public places in Tbilisi, Batumi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Bolnisi, Tkibuli and Telavi went dark for an hour including: Tbilisi TV Broadcasting Tower, Peace Bridge, Narikala Fortress, Rustaveli and Aghmashenebeli Avenues in Tbilisi, Municipal Buildings, UN House, Sheraton Metekhi Palace and Sheraton Batumi Hotel, and many more. These prominent women also invited citizens to join them at the event dedicated to the Earth Hour in Round Garden for candle lighting, photo exhibition and a live concert. We all saw how Tbilisi looks dark together on March 23rd at 8:30 pm. It was a fascinating, a little spooky, yet felt just marvellous knowing that we all were there for the great cause.