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Georgian fruit exporters welcome return of Russian market

On p. 8

On p. 11
Will Georgia Participate in the Sochi Olympics?

By: Lela Tsintsadze, GT

An online petition calling on Georgia not to participate in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, has been launched by the NGOs Transparency International - Georgia and Fair Elections. It has been signed by more than 10,000 citizens.

The petition addressed to Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, National Olympic Committee President Leri Khabadze and Minister of Sport Levan Kipiani, and its organizers say that the government will have to take into account the opinion of the majority of citizens.

The petition states that Georgia's participation in the Olympics is not appropriate because Russia has systematically broken the Russia-Georgia war ceasefire agreement of August 12, 2008 by continuing to move the occupation force's activities, says the petition.

The organizers add that the Russian government is trying to make the locals flee their villages and that Georgia has been further humiliated by the Russian president's decision to allow a so-called "hero of the 2008 war," pilot Ivan Nichaev, to carry the Olympic Flame. "Taking all these factors into consideration, we reckon that renouncing participation in the Olympics is the appropriate response to Russia's refusal to meet its obligations and international standards. We appeal to the government to thus express our protest against these actions, which damage Georgian sovereignty," they say, adding that Georgia's refusal to participate will send a message to the international community that Georgia will never accept its occupation.

The Georgian National Olympic Committee and the Government of Georgia hope that Russia will act in an appropriate way so that Georgia will not have to review its decision to participate. Paata Zakareishvili, State Minister for Reintegration, has said that Georgia resists participating in the Olympics because someone is carrying a torch is inadmissible.

"This petition must not influence the government's decision," says the petition. "There are some issues on which the government knows better than the petitioners what is happening but cannot reveal everything. I respect this petition's supporters, as they would like to show the world how much pressure the Georgian government is being put under by Russia and civil society. I understand and sympathise with them, but think that refusing to participate in the Olympics is inadmissible," stated Zakareishvili.

Irakli Sesnalsvili, Head of the Security Committee, stated that the government will take a decision about participation based on public and national interest.

"The government should analyse the situation, listen to the public and look at the issue from both sides. It is our responsibility. We will study, listen and take the decision which will reflect public demand," he said.

Analyst Mamuka Areshidze said that Georgian athletes will not refuse to participate in the Games unless they are politicalised and suggested that, as the renunciation of Ivan Nichaev to carry the Olympic Flame is part of the issue, Georgia should find the pilot who damaged Nichaev's plane during the war and make him part of the Georgian Olympic delegation.

"This will serve as an answer. The Russian side cannot gain anything fromappointing this man. Georgia also will not be finding the pilot, but it will also not lose. Why does Russia need to do something different? As is, it has an appointed a feature to carry the Olympic Torch. The only thing this man did during the war was bring his damaged aircraft back to the airfield," Areshidze said.

"For the Georgian Times, adding that there is no need to politicise this issue, and that despite everything he thinks Georgia will ultimately participate in the Sochi Olympics.

Andro Barnovi, Head of the President’s Administration, has not confirmed allegations by former Culture Minister Nika Rurua that Mikhail Saakashvili, the President of Georgia, supported Georgia's participation in the Sochi Olympics after the 2008 war.

"I have taken an interest in this matter, talked to the president and our team members and nobody has confirmed this. I do not know what information Nika Rurua has. Our concern to participate was given before the war, in 2006. If the context changes after such a decision, our position may also change. So I do not understand where Rurua’s information comes from," Barnov noted.

However Rurua is insisting that Saakashvili did personally decide that Georgia should take part. "The Olympic Committee took the decision and the government decided not to get involved. I am not a foreign affairs specialist, and the decision of diplomats proved crucial. The president agreed to Georgia’s participation, specifically saying that we should go. He said it was not pleasant but necessary. To my mind he was wrong then and the PM is wrong now, as he takes the same position," said Rurua, who nevertheless added that the world will react negatively to a Georgian boycott.

The statements of government officials imply that Georgia's participation in the Olympic Games depends on the actions of Russia. However Russia does not regard a Georgian boycott of the Olympics as a tragedy, Vladimir Zhizhnoviy, a Russian State Duma deputy, believes that Georgia would be making a mistake if it refused to participate, as sport is not an aspect of foreign policy.

No one can impose a decision on us. If anyone boycotts a sports event only that country and its athletes will lose. Sport is not a part of foreign policy, just as trade, science and art are not things to do with politics. Thus a boycott is a sign of weakness," said Zhizhnoviy.

It is clear whether the Georgian public nor the Russian governments are going to change their positions. Georgia's participation in the Sochi Olympics will therefore depend on where the Government of Georgia perceives the national interest to lie when faced with these two inimicable forces.

HILLARY CLINTON – GEORGIA FACES A VERY CHALLENGING DILEMMA

Hillary Clinton – Georgia faces a very challenging dilemma! I think you’ve got a very challenging dilemma facing Georgia, the former U.S. secretary of State Hillary Clinton said at Chatham house, where Sulikhan Khabadze, the member of the Institute asked her question.

Hillay Clinton underscored the progress Georgia has made, in the last, now nearly 20 years. "I think you’ve got a very challenging dilemma facing Georgia and you have summarized it well because the progress Georgia has made in the last, now nearly 20 years, is quite remarkable and many of the people who contributed to that progress are currently out of office and you have a new government that understandably wants to continue the progress and figure out the best way to do that," Clinton said.

To Khabadze’s question, what should the government of Georgia do to tackle the obstacle that is on the way in building democracy, Clinton said that “there is so much riding on how you navigate through these next months in terms of your stability, in terms of whether or not you can as you say protect the rule of law, without undermining a lot of the progress that has been made. That takes a lot of very careful thought that has to be depersonalized. You have to think not of the people who you believe may have broken laws, but think about the positions that are currently being held by the new government and whether pursuing prior office holders is going to consolidate democracy or rip the country into a lot of pieces and what I would ask you to do is to try to avoid personalizing it and instead to try to analyze what would be in the best interests of Georgia in five, ten, fifteen years. Because for every person, you say who wants you to do something, there is a person who thinks it would be very unfortunate if you did, and you have to sort that out, there is truth in reconsideration commission models, there are other kinds of inquiries, that could make things public, so that it would serve the purpose of transparency but not create the kind of instability and may be even conflict that could undermine the democratic project in Georgia," Clinton said.

“Our government is under huge, nearly irresistible pressure from the West, not to arrest the previous officials or be blamed for the politically motivated prosecutions, at the same time, the government is under pressure from the public to face the justice for the sake of democracy and rule of law, those responsible to be brought to justice. Maram Bakhtadze, Clinton’s views are greatly appreciated and respected in Georgia; I would be really grateful if you could tell us your views on how we should tackle these obstacles that are clearly on our way in building healthier democracy in Georgia,” Khabadze addressed Hillary Clinton.

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The Parliament of Georgia according to the new edition of the Constitution

Under the new edition of the Constitution the powers of parliament have grown. Parliament is still the supreme representative body which comprises the legislature and defines the main directions of domestic and foreign policy.

The first amendment to Chapter 3 of the Constitution (Article 51, Points a - d) concerns the resolution of parliament, which is not allowed except under circumstances set out in the Constitution. In particular, dissolving parliament within six months of a presidential election is no longer allowed, but an exception to this rule is cases in which parliament cannot agree on the appointment of a government, and the procedure for this is specifically defined.

According to new edition of the Constitution, the number of Members of Parliament has been increased, which enabled to approve the creation of an investigative or other temporary commission (Article 56, Point 2).

The Constitution of 1995 states that parliament was entitled to address a question to anybody accountable by the laws of Georgia, including governmental bodies and city administrations, and the heads of local authorities. However, it specified that the heads of administrative levels and of public institutions receive an answer from them. This norm has changed a little, as mayors have been withdrawn from this list because they are part of local government structures and can’t be held accountable before parliament (Article 59, Point 1).

In Article 59, Point 3 of the new edition of the Constitution, parliament retains the ability to raise the Prime Minister a question concerning the official responsibility of a certain member of the government, provided a majority of the total number of MPs supports such a resolution. In the previous norm, the resolution had to pass by more than half of the total number of Members of Parliament. An organic law will be passed if it is supported by more than half of all Members of Parliament. A constitutional law will be passed if it is supported by at least three quarters of all Members of Parliament. The first two changes are related to increasing the role of Parliament and limiting the involvement of the President in the legislative process, but the number of votes necessary to override the veto of a draft constitutional law has actually increased, as according to the Constitutional Law of 27 December 2011, the proportion of votes required to pass a constitutional law has grown, as defined (Constitution, Article 68).

The 80th Article of the Constitution refers to the procedure for forming the government. It is noteworthy that the law adopted has established in the Constitution the formation of the government by the so-called “Parliamentary Way”. Granting confidence in the composition of the government is now unique to the responsibility of Parliament, and the participation of the President has become merely formal.

Introducing such a mechanism to the process of forming a government is, in the opinion of the Venice Commission, a “step forward”, however, the Venice Commission in its remarks concerning the full procedure for the formation of the government by a newly elected Parliament and the timetables for expressing a vote of confidence in the government, when the authority of a government is terminated. The Venice Commission found it unacceptable that there is an opportunity to vote on the same composition of government twice, and withdrawal will reduce the time it takes to form a government and make the process more transparent.

The core of the constitutional innovations can be presented in the following way:

- The authority of the government is considered removed immediately after the granting of authority to the newly elected government (not after the election of a new President, as in the old edition);
- The election subject which has the greatest presence in the newly elected Parliament will provide a candidate for Prime Minister, who will be formally nominated for the position by the Council of Parliament;
- If the powers of the government were terminated for any other reason than a new Parliament (such as the resignation of the President, nominations for Prime Minister are considered by the constitutional majority, or if there is none, by the faction with the largest number of mandates);
- If the Parliament does not approve the government after two attempts, the President will propose for approval a candidate proposed by 2/3 of the deputies, and only then dissolve Parliament. If no motion of confidence in the government is given even after this third attempt, the President will call new parliamentary elections.

The Parliament of Georgia has the right to declare no confidence in the government (Article 81), with the requisite number of votes of no confidence, as introduced (Article 81). This is explained in more detail below.

The “Law on changing and amending the Constitution of Georgia”, adopted by the Parliament of Georgia on 15 October 2010, gave the Prime Minister the power to make the discussion of a bill in Parliament a vote of confidence in the government. If Parliament expressed confidence in the government in this vote, the bill under discussion could be adopted. This change limited the monitoring functions of Parliament. If Parliament had found a bill unacceptable it was thereby obliged to declare no confidence in the government, the President could have dissolved Parliament, so Parliament, in most cases, had to accept government-initiated draft laws, which were turned into votes of confidence. In 2013 Parliament of Georgia reverted to the previous norm, which states that the President presents the composition of the government and the state programme to Parliament and obtains its confidence only when one third of the membership of the government (but not less than 5 members), has changed. From all this we can conclude that according to the new wording of the Constitution, which will enter into force from the moment the President elected in October 2013 takes his oath of office, both the formal and real roles of the Parliament will increase significantly. The provisions of the new edition of the Constitution, which re-lease Parliament from any pressure from the President concerning economic and organizational legislation matters, give us the basis to assert this. No less important is the fact that the main source of the birth and continued existence of the government is now Parliament, and the constructive vote of no confidence must lead to a new understanding and common standards developing.

Chairs of the Regional Centre for the Research and Promotion of Constitutionalism

Aurantil Demetrashvili
Executive Director of the Regional Centre for the Research and Promotion of Constitutionalism

Vakhtang Zhvania

MIKHIEL SAakashvili: I NEVER LIKED THE SOCHI OLYMPIAD, BUT OPEN STATEMENT ABOUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SPITTING INTO RUSSIA’S FACE

I never liked the Sochi Olympics, but open statement about it would have been spitting into Russia’s face. -Mikheil Saakashvili I never liked the Sochi Olympics, but open statement about it would have been spitting into Russia’s face, President Mikheil Saakashvili told journalists. According to him, Ivan Nekhai’s selection as one of the torchbearers of the Olympics was not accidental and called it political demarche. Mikheil Saakashvili noted Nechaev was actively bombing Georgia in 2008, though the Georgian side damaged his plane so that he could hardly land the plane on the Russian-controlled territory.

He declared as a hero a Terry killing many people. Apart from Nechaev, there is sadist Genady Oryushenko, who disappeared Georgian wins a few days ago and he will torture us again and again, - the President said.

According to him, if he calls on Georgian sportmen not to take part in the Olympic Games, it will be a step against the sportmen, because the decision should be made by the Olympic Committee. To the journalist’s question why the decision on participation in the Sochi Olympics was made under his government, Mikheil Saakashvili said open criticism of the Olympics might have become additional pretext for war from the Russian side.

"Today we are facing occupation and erection of wire fences, and unity should be priority for us. Position from the international community if we don’t have united position inside the country", the President noted.
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One can see with the naked eye that election coverage is now based on the canons of show business coverage. The ups and downs of political intrigues are presented in the format of a sporting performance. For the mass audience, there is no difference between political debates and, for example, motor races, horse races or boxing matches. GT has asked various commentators their opinion on TV debates. One can see with the naked eye that election coverage is now based on the canons of show business coverage. The ups and downs of political intrigues are presented in the format of a sporting performance. For the mass audience, there is no difference between political debates and, for example, motor races, horse races or boxing matches. GT has asked various commentators their opinion on TV debates.

Zurab Bivayva, Political Scientist and Psychologist, says: “First of all, the quality of the debate depends on which form it is held in. I think TV stations, TV programmes and presenters must be professional when conducting such debates, and the formulation of a TV debate culture will mostly depend on this. It would be good if each candidate were conducted here on the same level as in the West. Now the First Channel has announced such a debate let’s see what will happen. It will help the reputation of a candidate if he has answers to all the questions, but he must also appear professional in front of the cameras and show off his oratory skills. I think the campaign staff of each candidate will decide whether it would be good for their candidate to participate in sharp debates, but in general TV debates are quite a positive phenomenon”. TV debates are now becoming the so-called charisma and oratorial skills of the candidate are of great importance. They are intellectual duels in which self-confidence, wit, the gift of the gab and powers of persuasion are more important than manifestos. Sometimes a candidate can embarrass an opponent with their sense of humour or a well-placed one-liner. In fact very few voters actually read boring manifestos, as they vote not for “papers” but for people. Sociological surveys have consistently shown that people very often support a particular party on the basis of personal sympathy for its leader rather than any programme it presents, and therefore making a good personal impression, via the TV screen, is crucial.

TV debates are the best means of demonstrating the personal traits of the various candidates. They concentrate the audience’s attention on the candidates’ images rather than political problems. This meets the needs of the mass audience and serves the interests of political groups alike. However one of the problems of TV debates is choosing the audience. It is very important to avoid instances of extremely “enthusiastic” voters wreaking havoc with live broadcasts. Similarly, when speaking of TV debates, and political debates in general, Georgian voters cannot help but recall Shalva Natelashvili, a politician who will never refuse any sort of TV communication. If having a sense of humour was the main attribute of a politician Natelashvili would win every debate and election, but the TV debates held in Georgia hitherto have been quite unsuccessful, because the time limit of 3.5 minutes per presentation per candidate deprived them of the opportunity to speak up. They would have to read “pre-learned texts”, and end up finishing well within the time limit, waiting with an awkward smile for the other candidate to be called.

Kukha Gogolashvili, Political Scientist and Psychologist, says: “Of course television is very important and can influence people. The refusal of candidates to participate is a form of self-assurance, a quest to maintain their reputation. We have a lack of political culture in this respect, as there is a possibility that the debates will not go the way a candidate wants and they can find themselves in an awkward situation which harms their image. Of course, TV debates are very good practice, but much depends on the structure of the programme, how well prepared the presenter is, whether there are proper questions and so on. We can understand why a candidate would refuse to take part in TV debates, because they fear that their carefully nurtured image will be dent ed and people will see them differently, and the hosts of unsuccess ful TV debates can also blame the candidates for their failures, and harm the candidates’ reputations that way”.

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The relationship between the inhabitants of Khadoni, in Mestia municipality, and the government is considerable strained. The construction of the 720 megawatt Khadoni power station in the village has provoked widespread anger. The locals are categorically opposing the construction, declaring that it will damage the environment and all the territory around it will be flooded to create a reservoir to service the power station. Most importantly, plans drawn up by the company will be evicted from their homes to provide the land to build the reservoir on. However Trans Electrica Georgia, the company implementing the construction project, tends to proceed.

Trans Electrica Georgia is designed to re-duce energy importation from neighbouring countries by producing 500 million kilowatt hours a year. According to Trans Electrica Georgia 700 million kilowatt hours of energy were produced in 2012 and 300 million in the first 8 months of 2013. The company therefore claims that Khadon-nessi will ensure Georgia’s energy security and help the coun-try overcome the unforeseen technical problems which occur such as cessation of supplies and accidents. Some NGOs and energy speci-ALISTS however are categorically opposed to the construction. They claim the plant will badly influence the environment, and is admir-able in theory but not in practice. The government has planned many such constructions, which will result in huge areas being flooded, she stated.

However the project team’s own assessment is that climate change is not expected in the region after the reservoir is cre-ated. “The reservoir will light-e the national interests and private financial interests may lie behind it.”

Head of Caucasian House Naia Gelashvili says the power station will badly influence the environment, and is admir-able in theory but not in practice. The government has planned many such constructions, which will result in huge areas being flooded, she stated.

However the project team’s own assessment is that climate change is not expected in the region after the reservoir is cre-ated. “The reservoir will light-e the national interests and private financial interests may lie behind it.”

The locals maintain that they did not agree to any compensation, 2,500 people have sworn in front of an icon that they will continue to oppose the construc-tion and never leave their vil-lages. "If the local population refuse to leave the Government will have to find alternative ways to proceed," however Technical Di-rector of Trans Electrica Geor-gia Paata Tsetruli says the company will take public and expert consent into account.

“We will not agree to compensa-tion. The people will not go even if they give billions. This is the case, and nothing will change,” she told us.

The state and the World Bank are promising adequate compensation for any damage or removal, maintaining that each settler’s interest will be taken into consideration in the process of settlement. However, a study conducted in 2012 stated that approximately 200 families will have to be evicted from Khadoni, Gajra Khadishi, Likhi, Kveida Tsvirmindi, Laajà, TobaT and Lalkhorali to make way for the power station. The Church of St. George in Khadoni, the grazing and various commu-nal infrastructures will also be affected.

Trans Electrica Georgia says that the same study made it clear that the population want to re-ceive compensation in cash and move to places selected by them-selves. Compensation will be is-sued for all land, buildings and trees affected on the basis of their restorative value, in accordance with international standards. The locals maintain that they did not agree to any compensation, 2,500 people have sworn in front of an icon that they will continue to oppose the construc-tion and never leave their vil-lages.

"If the local population refuse to leave the Government will have to find alternative ways to proceed," however Technical Di-rector of Trans Electrica Geor-gia Paata Tsetruli says the company will take public and expert consent into account.

“These comments will be re-flected in our environmental im-pact studies and in the provision of accommodation. In my opin-ion, we will achieve success as a result of hard work. We will suc-cessfully defend the interests of each family," he says, adding that the inventor, his company, and the state are the guarantors of this.

NGO representatives and the local population are deaf to the pleas of the company. They reckon the only option is to stop the construction. Trans Electrica Geor-gia says that it will take each resident’s concerns and in-terests into account in the project, but will not examine al-tatives to it. Several days ago Minister of Energy Kaka Kaladze declared that the construction will not be stopped because of a few NGOs. He said the locals are denying the state and the latter will not stop doing things because some people may have taken an oath. “We should not accept this precedent. Some people may swear on icons, some on the Ko-petdag, but we will not accept this precedent,” Kaladze declared.

The Ministry of Environment Protection has issued the company permission to con-struct the power station. After elaborating further documents Trans Electrica will begin pre-paratory work. The population removed from the site will be ac- commodated by Canadian com-pany REPLAN and international accomodation expert Fedorov Government.

Will Khudonhesi Power Station Destroy People’s Lives?

By LEA TANSIDZAE, GT

During April 2005 President turned Prime Minister and now once again President Vladimir Putin has declared Russia’s Delta Gas field to be a national gas field. “First and foremost it acknowledges that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical event of the century”. Putin has been in power since 31 December, 1999, some nearly 14 years, and he has just turned 61.

Since the demise of the Sovi-et Union, the world has changed dramatically and so has Europe. Toology Russia to a Soviet satellite state, Lithuania, the six countries have espoused various degrees of interest in join-ing Western political and economic institutions. The six are half a billion Europeans who have seen two world wars in the last hundred years, but relative peace in the past 70.

The Nobel Peace Prize win-ner of 2012, the European Union, will hold its third Eastern Partnership Summit amid pressure from Russia for these countries to consider an alterna-tive to westward expansion and join what is called the Customs Union, a Russian creation incor-porating Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, which acts as a counter-balance to European economic and political influence. Six weeks away from the summit, Georgia is listening at-tentively to the experience of Lithuania, which holds the ro&tating presidency of the European Union. Last week, a dele-gation from Vilnius was in Thilii, and meetings were conducted between delegations led by Lore-ta Grauzinienè, newly elected President of the Lithuanian Par-liament and David Us-padovilch, Chairman of the Par-liament of Georgia.

Grauzinienè said that Geor gia has done "substantial work in the course of EU integration", and therefore it has high expecta-tions of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius come November.

In her address to the inter-national parliamentary confer-ence, she said, “I personally have never doubted Georgia’s decision to follow the European course. I have also never doub-ted that on the way to democracy parliaments in all free coun-tries take the central role in en-suring the will of the people, the decisions of voters and the con-stitutionality of the state are re-spected.”

The Rose Revolution gov-ernmentSC President Mikhail Sushkashvili displayed the EU flag throughout the country for years, and during the verbal ex-change with Russia over “who started what and when" in 2008, the international media por-trayed Sushkashvili draped be-tween the flag of Georgia and that of the European Union as a way “that’s where we be-long”.

Georgia continues to ‘Get Ready’

Last week Alex Petrisadilv, State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic In-tegration, opened the 46th work-ing session of the Governmental Commission on Georgia’s EU integration process, which he co-chairs, here in Thilii.

This is nothing more than an ongoing set of meetings designed to discuss the integration pro cess, through which Georgia is making its case for acceptance known. The session focused on the issues related to the creation of working groups on the trans-lation of the EU-Georgia Asso-ciation Agreement and the im-plementation of the Commu-nication and Information Strate-gy of the Government of Geor gia in the sphere of EU integra-tion. In September, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule said that the European Commission is ready to “do its utmost” and the “al-most impossible” in order to sign the Association Agreement with Georgia “as soon as possible” since treaties are installed at the Vilnius Summit this November.

6 Weeks to Go East Meets West - European Union Summit Vilnius, Lithuania

Not since the end of the Cold War has Europe stood on the brink of such a political transformation as it does today. With the old cliche of East meets West, it prepares for the European Union Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania this November 28th and 29th.

Some six weeks from now the 2009 Eastern Europe Partner-ship Summit will take place. The conditions to accelerate politi-cal integration between Europe and the former Soviet Union states, will meet the world’s big-gest “flag raising” in the Euro- pean Union. Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine make up this partner-ship.

This process has not been easy, as Russia has exerted politi-cal and economic pressure on those slated to attend, and con-cern over the generation of new leaders and the Kremlin over the undue influence Russian seeks to maintain in its backyard today.
By DR. VAKHTANG MAISALIA, GT

The idea of Georgia joining the Eurasian Economic Union is being discussed with increasing frequency, and within some NGOs and amongst the general public some concrete support for this idea has been expressed. According to an opinion poll conducted as part of the annual “Integration Barometer of the Eurasian Bank of Development” program of Integration Studies of the Eurasian Bank of Development, about 59% of the population of Georgia supported integration into the Eurasian Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Space. This means that support for this idea has doubled since 2012.

The assumption made by the Centre in its question may be dubious, but the indications are that joining the Eurasian Union is a more popular opinion than integration with the Euro-Atlantic Bloc. The idea has been discussed at the highest levels, and Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili has commented on it publicly.

It is quite ridiculous that Euro-Atlantic integration and NATO membership have become second-level foreign policy priorities for the key presidential candidates. Unlike in previous election campaigns, NATO integration is not being presented as the one bright star lighting the political path of Georgia. The drive to achieve NATO membership has diminished considerably, and the contrary policy of Eurasian integration is emerging as most attractive option at public opinion level. However, in spite of this the institutionalisation of NATO integration requirements is going ahead. Georgia will be contributing to NATO’s Rapid Deployment Force from 2015 and also become a part of the East European Defence Initiative, possibly contributing a brigade.

In this respect, rumours that the current Georgian government will not pursue the country’s NATO aspirations are groundless and far from reality. Georgia is still seeking to join the Alliance as a full member, and is contributing much to enhancing Euro-Atlantic security structures, either by participating in the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan or promoting democratic values and liberties in its own country. The NATO issue is still a hot one, despite the efforts being made by persons abroad, and some inside the country, to undermine the public support for this.

The Russian pressure on Moldova and Ukraine, which has even gone as far as imposing trade wars on them and the forcing of Armenia to join the Eurasian Economic and Custom Union indicates that the Kremlin is over the possibility that it might lose control of the post-Soviet territories. Taking into account President Putin’s unpredictable behaviour presents dangers for Georgia. It seems that this dark shadow of the 1920-1921 “Sovietisation” is falling on Georgia again under the guise of the Eurasian Economic Community.

The idea of a Eurasian economic union became reality in December 2010, when at the Summit of the Eurasian Economic Community the participants agreed to create a CIS Free Trade Zone, which would include Ukraine, the most problematic nation from The Kremlin’s point of view, as it sees Ukraine as the biggest obstacle to its fulfilling its strategic goals. During that summit Vladimir Putin declared that the plan to set up the Eurasian Union was now being implemented. This entity would have three key pillars: passport control, free currency and a common currency.

Putin has appointed ex-Foreign Economic Relations Minister Dr Sergey Glazyev as his Political Advisor on Reintegration Affairs, and this clearly indicates that The Kremlin is in the over the possibility that it might lose control of the post-Soviet territories. Taking into account President Putin’s unpredictable behaviour presents dangers for Georgia. It seems that this dark shadow of the 1920-1921 “Sovietisation” is falling on Georgia again under the guise of the Eurasian Economic Community.

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The second stage of the 2015-2020 - this envisages incorporating Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In this period a new reintegration model will be pursued, involving the development of common policies (mainly foreign policy), a common currency and common passport procedures.

Fourth Stage: the comprehensive expansion of Eurasia, between 2020 and 2025 – the plan envisages setting up a supra-national collegial structure to be the authority within the Union and control macroeconomic regulation. By 2025 the Union would have a common currency and central bank and sub-projects such as those for the EU. It is also predicted that by 2025 the Eurasian Union’s GDP will be $5.7 trillion, which would make it the fourth largest economy in the world after China, expected to be the leader by that date, the USA and India. Russia is currently sixth, after those of the USA, China, India, Japan and Germany.

This is the only scenario the Kremlin considers a possibility. Georgia has a pivotal function in these plans. The Georgian public should be very careful that we do not end up going “Back to the USSR.”

Associate Professor, IB Euro-Caucasian University
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THE Georgian Defence System: To Be or Not To Be !!!!

The Georgian Defence System: To Be or Not To Be !!!!

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISALIA, GT

The Georgian proverb claims: “an oath is real but its purpose is strange”, and this is a good description of the current national defence system. After nine years of abject surrender to the pressure on the Armed Forces of Georgia, in the which the Czechoslovakian maxim ‘Governments-Army-Society’ was up-ended, and the government’s approach to the Army and its problems should have been more reasonable.

Nominating the experienced politician Irakli Alasania as Defence Minister was a solid indication that the new government will introduce proper reforms and modernise the Armed Forces to at least NATO capability standards. All the ground was prepared to accomplish this mission, in a short period of time, but a year has now passed. What has been the concrete result of these reforms? On the basis of the very recent information on mass food poisoning amongst Armed Forces personnel, for instance, the second time in the recent past, the complete non-transparency of human resource management and the accidents which have occurred, we can conclude – in one word, nothing!

Certainly it is premature to state this so categorically, however, on the accident which demonstrated that the latent erosion which began under previous minister Bachana Ashualia and his predecessor David Kezerashvili is unfortunately still present, although not perhaps as grave in scale as it was then. It is now not known what the substantial reform of the national defence system, and the redshuffling of its structure, doctrinal principles, capabilities, personnel management and logistics, formally announced by the current leadership is actually intended to accomplish. All that can be observed is that the Ministry of Defence has been transformed into a new “Order of Knight’s Templars”, a clan-based organisation from force one.

The outbreak of food poisoning in the Army indicates that the normal food preparation measures at national level are not being followed. The readiness level of the combat units is disproportionately high, but there are serious problems in civilian personnel selection and operational planning and with regard to the restoration of justice for those servicemen who were purged during Saakashvili’s authoritarian regime and forced to leave the Armed Forces.

There were more than 8,000 of these, all of whom are suffering social strife and seek elementary redress. These problems are being addressed with little enthusiasm, or completely ignored, by the current leadership of the Ministry of Defence.

It is a great pity that many professionals who have been trained and highly skilled professional are working outside their professions and socially unprovided for. This happens despite the fact that the very serious and troublesome concerns, challenges and risks are underlining the national security of the state called Georgia. The Jihad videotape incident, the Islamic Emirate’s statement on joining the Global Islamic Jihad, the investigation of the Lopota incident, the simultaneous clashes between Orthodox Christians and local Moslems in the Georgian villages of Tr Diablo, Chola and Gamarjyeba, the assassination of leader of the Abkhazian Januari Jury Gitsba in Gagra, etc. underscore the supreme seriousness of the problem – the inability of an incursion of Islamic militants into Georgian territory. Another serious challenge derives from the civil strife and military conflict in Syria. It is little known in Georgia that over 3 Islamic militants of Georgian origin are fighting side by side with other Islamists, in the military formations opposed to the Assad regime. One of the key leaders of the Islamic Opposition Coalition, the warlord and Commander in Chief of the Northmont Abu Omar Al-Shahabi, is Georgian in origin and another prominent warlord, Abu Al-Barakat, is from Dagestan in the North Caucasus. There are even Georgian Mujahideen combatants in Afghan-
SOCAR’s multi-functional building officially recognized as one of the world’s most popular

Amazing SOCAR-McDonalds on the black sea coast in Batumi
The Georgian Times

Monday, October 14, 2013

Georgian fruit exporters welcome return of Russian market

By: EKA GAZDELIANI, GT

Georgian agricultural products that the EU aims to the Russian market, following the readmission of Borjomi mineral water, wine and other alcoholic drinks.

Head of the Food National Agency of Georgia Zurab Cherkuridze and supervisor of the Russian Veterinary and Sanitary Control Service Sergei Dankvert have signed an agreement which states that from October 14 through 2014, the limitations on Georgia exporting agricultural products to Russia, provided they are subject to sanitary control. Citrus fruit, coffee beans, grapes, apples, pears and quinces will be exported to Russia from Monday. A great harvest of citrus fruit is expected this year as the climatic conditions of the culture has already begun to prepare for this. The agricultural enterprises are making ready and the government plans to open new facilities which may facilitate boxes. The Ministry says that according to the agreement, the facilities which make plastic packing houses will be working in Estonia next year, and the harvest will be more than 110,000 tonnes.

The Georgian Farmers Association is enthusiastic about these measures but says that logistics need to be improved. They believe that the present situation is the result of the Nino Zambalidze, who is the president of the Georgian Agricultural Association, said that they will do their utmost in way of legal translation of those documents to be ready for it. Packaging enterprises are making ready and the government plans to open new facilities which may facilitate boxes. The Ministry says that according to the agreement, the facilities which make plastic packing houses will be working in Estonia next year, and the harvest will be more than 110,000 tonnes.

We do not think that there will be something like the Vegetables Export Company, which helped farmers with logistics. This organization does not function any more. We know the state and the farmers are ready, we simply do not know how it will be done. Georgian fruit used to be sent to Russia on bypass roads. Now we have a direct route. Improving relationships is another matter," stated Nino Zambalidze.

Zambalidze is calling for the establishment of cooperatives. "Farmers cannot export their products individually as they do not produce enough fruit individually. We have no such farmers. If anyone exports individually they will obtain most of their fruit from other farmers," he said. That is why we are holding discussions about this with the Ministry of Agriculture on this question," she said.

Georgian fruit is currently exported to Ukraine and Kazakhstan, but Zambalidze thinks it will have to be restablished itself in Russia. "It is very hard to plan something in advance, when the harvesting has just begun. The first year may be complicated, as Georgian products will have to settle themselves abroad on the market, and the logistics issues will still be pending," he said. "But everything will be fine in the future," she stated.

"We have the strongest connections in Russia. Now we are waiting for their agreements, and everything will depend on the prices and conditions they offer. Based on these, we will decide the type and quantity of products to export," he told us.

"The Tbilisi Trading Company already exports to Ukraine, Kazakhs- tan and Moldova. It has now signed an agreement for 300 tonnes of persimmons and 1,000 tonnes of tangerines. We will inevitably export to Russia. We would like to open the first, the company must up to standard. The advantage of our products is that they are marked, and correspond to all the relevant standards," said Vashalomidze, adding that low price and good quality distinguishes Georgian products in Ukraine. He hopes the Russian market will prove successful for the company.

Minister of Agriculture Shalva Pipia has declared that the state will play a significant role in opening new export markets. "As soon as we had formed the new government we started working on opening up the Russian market. We took concrete steps and concluded agreements. As a result of our work, wine and alcoholic drinks, mineral water and low-risk agricultural products will return to Russia step by step from this year onwards," he added.

Russia banned the import of Georgian wine, mineral water and agricultural products in 2006 due to the tense Georgian-Russian relations. The official reason for this prohibition was "low quality, high price," but in the end added. "We are ready for construction and a concrete commitment. No question, Georgia will be self-sufficient in the sphere of the Eastern European countries. 6 Weeks to Go East Meets West in Vilnius, Lithuania

The first Eastern Partnership Summit was held in the Czech Republic in May 2009 and the second in September 2011. Now it is Lithuania's turn. The change has occurred, but so have the number of member states present in Prague some four years ago.

Belarus

Belarus was one of the signatories of the Eastern European Partnership, which was represented by its Deputy Foreign Minister. The other signatories were all Presidents of their coun- tries.

Since then Belarus has shown little interest in becoming a fully fledged member of the EU and no interest in the spirit of the accord, which calls for good govern- ment, democracy, the promo- tion of reforms and political integra- tion of people to people contact.

Alexander Lukashenko has been in power since 1994, mak- ing him the longest serving lead- er in Europe. Political parties are marginalized, and do not play a major role in the legislative pro- cess.

This authoritarian state is not known for signing the EU integration any time soon. Come November, Lukashenko will not be in Vilnius, unless he’s looking for Matryoshka dolls for his num- ber one supporter outside Belarus - Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

Azerbaijan

Little landlocked Moldova, with a population of 3,600,000 and no important natural oil or gas reserves, is also scheduled to be in Vilnius. It may seem too insignificant for the Council of Europe, like Croatia, but Russia seems to think it should be under its con- trol. Here’s how freedom, on expressions and assembly and association that did not guarantee a level playing field for candidates. Continued allega- tions of candidate and voter in- timidation and a restrictive me- dia environment marred the cam- paign. " http://election.org/ru/ elektsii/106901

Europe is highly dependent on energy supply, and is receiving 25% of its energy from Russia. It is seeking alternative sources from fairly reliable partners as a Plan B to is existence agreements. Therefore Azer- baijan plays a significant role in the energy policy decisions of the EU, and is a key player in the geopolitics of the region. What comes first, good governance or reliable energy supplies from this oil and gas rich central European nation?

The EU and Azerbaijan are currently negotiating an Associa- tion Agreement to succeed the PCA agreement of 1999. Look to Azerbaijan to be in Vilnius to flex its muscles with the decision makers over pending negotiations regarding gas supplies to Europe. 

Moldova

During the 1 st week of Sep- tember President of Armenia Serzh Sarkisian was in Moscow for talks with Vladimir Putin, both telling the other "we will be friends forever." That still represents the Armenian President's decision to opt for the Russian Customs Union instead of the European Union.

This decision came as a surprise to most political observ- ers, as no hint of Sarkisian's in- tentions had reached Yerevan or European capitals.

Like the others who will be in Vilnius, Armenia has a long his- tory within the former Soviet Union, and with Russia it is a natural partner. Armenia also has no land con- nexion to Russia or the EU (un- til the end of the year). Starting in the last month and a half much ink has been put to press over the Armenian decision to sign up with Russia. This has not been named, but has been named, is "Russia has a history of impos- ing bans to exercise political pres- sure on Moldova's sovereign choices."

Negotiations on the Associa- tion Agreement between the EU and Moldova were launched in early 2010, and were technically completed in June. Some talk is as long as 10 years to progress from intent to actual acceptance. Moldova too will be in Vilnius in late November, in hand, ready to initial the final Association Agreement docu- ments leading to eventual EU membership.

Armenia

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Signals suggest that Ukraine wants to part of modern day Europe. The EU has applied po- litical pressure as well, and in- ternational Ukraine not to use defen- sive judicial punishment as a tool of political suppression if it is in- terest in EU integration.

A month and a half from Vilnius, Ukraine is preparing it- self for the true test of its future. The decision made by Kyiv will affect the lives of today’s and tomorrow’s unborn citizens and the future economic value of a country now suffering stagna- tion, and perhaps could have a lead- ership role for the 6th most pop- ular European member state, ahead of Spain, in the future.

Ukraine

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Armenia is a nation with a long history and a rich culture, formed modern Russia and Ukraine, as an argument for the two states to part ways.

Over the summer Russia has used other means to try and con- vincing Ukraine to turn a blind eye to the West and remain a bedfell- ow of Russia. The political pres- sure and economic offers coming from Moscow for this na- tion of 46,000,000 people have left President Victor Yanzhukov, nicknamed at a crossroads prior to Vilnius.

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The Byron Eastern Partnership Summit will be held in the Czech Republic in May 2009 and the second in September 2011. Now it is Lithuania’s turn. The change has occurred, but so have the number of member states present in Prague some four years ago.
The International Festival of Arts in Honour of Michael Tumanishvili –Gift – is on! Tbilisi has already begun welcoming shining stars of the "art galaxy" from all over the world. Yes, I just wrote "art galaxy". No one can measure art, even though no one can measure the perception of it. I don’t think we can consider the world of art less vast than the不断扩大 shining stars that brighten up our simple lives.

They say “earth” without “art” is just “eh”. I couldn’t agree more. If there was no art, life would be work, war, disease, food shopping, in other words life would be “just a bunch of Tuesdays”. This small word embodies a concept so deep that it not only makes the world a better place but is the essence of the world itself. Art is a simple activity for some and a lifestyle for others, but most importantly it’s a language that acknowledges no boundaries, religion nor ethnic origin, and it’s immortal. It’s out there; all we have to do is open our hearts, minds and lives, let it in and simply appreciate it. It’s the language which holds all peoples of the world together, brings the parts of the universe together; it’s what makes living on this “damaged” planet worthwhile.

While Gift is on artists from all over the world share their art with a Georgian audience. Théâtre Des Bouffes Du Nord and Peter Brook’s theatre company opened Gift Festival 2013 with the play Le Costume in the Tumanishvili Theatre foyer and interviewing him for The Georgian Times.

"Let’s start with your professional background. How did you start making movies?"

Well I always thought that I wanted to be an actor, that’s why I went to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. The course only took me a year.

"Did you fulfill your acting dream?"

After graduation acting didn’t feel dangerous enough for me, it somehow felt too safe. Having Hilary Wood as my grandmother, and having a distinctive and acting background in my family, I wanted to do something different.

"Like what?"

I had always been fascinated by photography. It had always sparked my interest as a child. So I decided to apply to the Metropolitan Film School and do a BA. It’s a two year course. I took the Practical Film Making Course. I had the best time of my life finding the profession that I really wanted to be in. It was wonderful. I met a lucky person to have found what I love and be doing it as a job at the same time.

"Tell me about your shorts. What are they about?"

The one here was my graduation film, it’s called “Snail Boy”. It has Hilary Wood and Mel Radzio in it. It’s based on a real event which happened to me and Hilary. We were sitting somewhere having a drink and a young man came up to us screaming like a seagull. We felt he was joining in our celebration, since it was a happy moment for us, but we were wrong. He disappeared, but we found out later that he lived opposite us. He was autistic, he would never speak, he would only cry. He did all the things you will see in the film. It was wonderful it was so important to me to have Hilary in the film as my own grandmother. Having its premiere in the Tumanishvili theatre opposite each other was like a magic.

"What fascinates you as a director?"

The way we communicate with each other. No matter where we are, we all end up living very busy lives. I’m trying to make sure that in all these close connectional relationships we speak and listen to each other properly. I want my films to be about people connecting and communicating with each other in the different worlds they are in. I think this makes the most interesting stories.

"Do you feel completely fulfilled by the film?"

It has taken me about two years to make. It is in its final form now. Like I said, it was my graduation film, and I wrote and wrote and wrote until we got it to the point it was meant to be. Only after that did I want to show it to everyone and see what they say. And here I am premiering it! It’s very hard to find the money to make either short or feature films here in Georgia. How is it in Britain?

"Film making is very expensive in London too. People don’t invest in movies unless your name is already out there, especially when it comes to feature films. You have to have a track record. You have to work hard to establish yourself, and then the funds come.

"What’s your track record?"

I made a couple of other short films at university. What was common to all these films was that I was able to use some brilliant young actors, all trained by my grandmother Hilary Wood. Very few new film directors are able to call on actors from the National Theatre or those like Mel Radzio who already have an international film career.

"How far are you from making a feature film?"

I can’t be sure. I do have plans. I’m going to do quite a bit of shooting, a TV series as well. So we shall see.

"This is your first Gift. What are your expectations?"

This is my first big international festival. I am happy to be here, it’s an absolute pleasure to take part in Gift after a 4 year break.

"How does Georgian art look to Hilary’s eyes?"

The impression I got from Hilary’s words throughout all these years is that Georgians will work and work until they get it done. You have amazing classical actors. This country is full of talented actors. It was always wonderful to hear about them and about the authentic martial energy that makes Georgian art so amazing and exquisitely.

"Are you planning to bring Georgian art into your films? Absolutely! I do have an idea for a film I would shoot here. Roughly speaking, I would like to be given the freedom to do it within the next 5 to 10 years. You must be aware of this year’s programme. What do you think about Gift 2013? All these great performances from abroad, as well as the Georgian productions, are just amazing. It sounds like a Christmas cake that has come early for me and artistically I can’t wait to have it. It is such a rush being able to celebrate this art parade with these amazing people here in Georgia, which has been in my blood since I was a child.

The Georgian Times

By TAKO AGARASHVILI, GT
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