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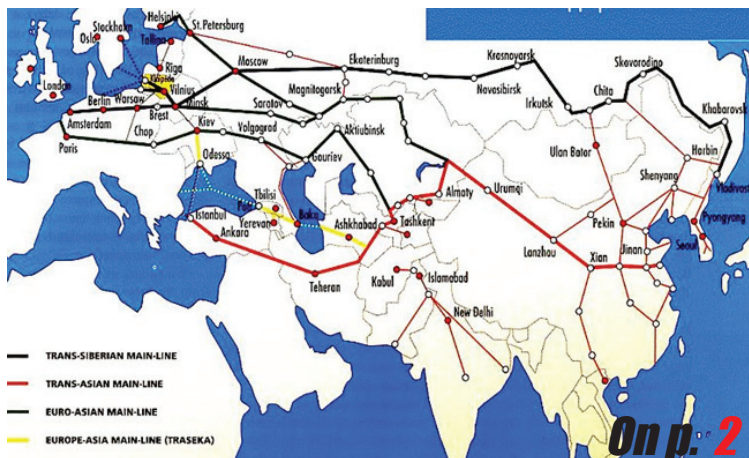


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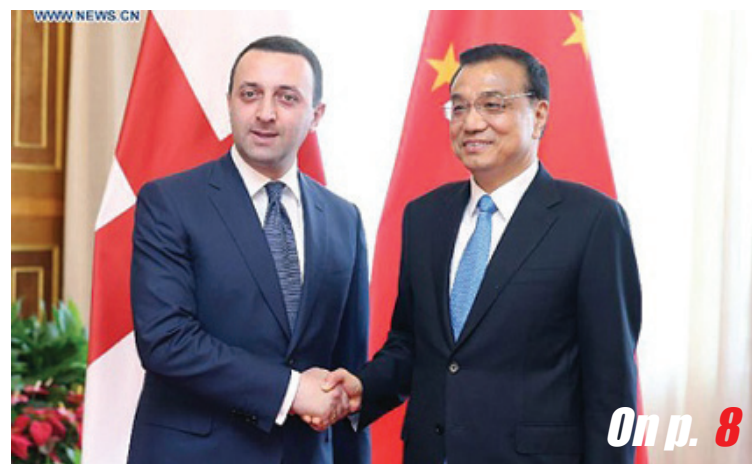
The Russian government has decided to directly intervene in Syria with all available military capability.



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Georgian PM Meets Chinese Premier

Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili met Chinese Premier Li Ke-qiang on September 10 on the sideline of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in the China's northeastern port city of Dalian.



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Georgia's Foreign Policy in Flux: Is the Multivector Approach Real?

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

The Georgian government has put itself in a quandary again, not due to internal reasons but a shifting of foreign policy priorities. It has yet again been reshuffled, new ministers being appointed to the important Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economic Development.

The reshuffle was announced by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili on September 1. George Kvirikashvili, a Deputy Prime Minister, has been moved from Economic Development to Foreign Affairs, replacing Tamar Beruchashvili, and ex-Deputy Mayor of Tbilisi Dmyrty Kumiashvili, who was also Deputy General Director of Bidzina Ivanishvili's Cartu Bank between 1999 and 2011, has taken the Economic Development portfolio.

But along with the pro-Western direction, we will take into account lots of other interesting developments which are taking place in the world, including of course those which affect relations with the east, the new processes taking place on the Eurasian continent".

Kvirikashvili repeated these sentiments in his first public address as foreign minister, a meeting of ambassadors. There he said: "It should be noted that strengthening Georgia's potential in terms of east-west transit and logistics and Georgia's integration into the transport and logistics networks of the region, as well as those of our far and near neighbours, is vitally important to fully achieving Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The East-West direction is especially important, and a lot of ef-



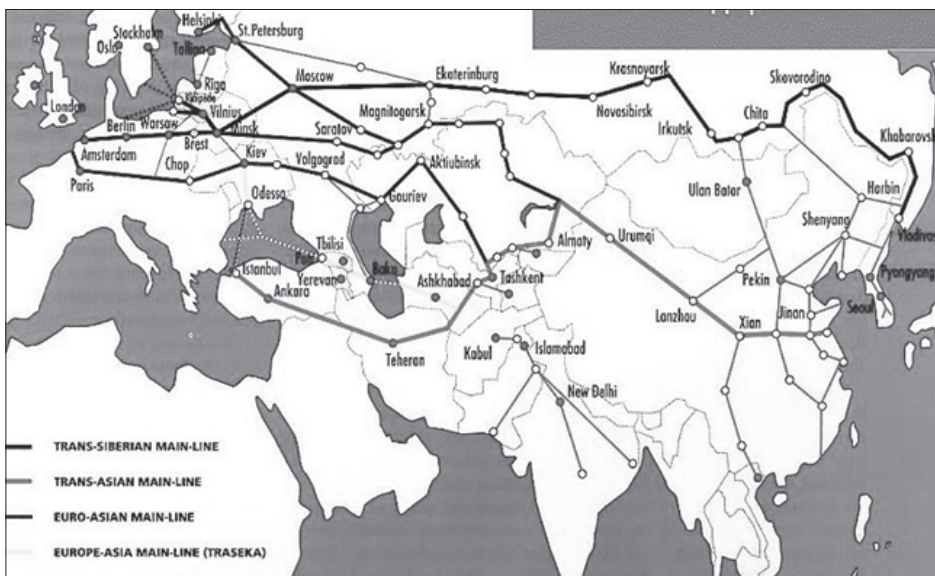
ter being appointed foreign minister] Mr. Kvirikashvili mentioned that we will consider all the potential available on the Eurasian continent, and I want to note that this is the right direction, the right message. Along with our main goal, Euro-Atlantic integration, we should also continue and further deepen relations with China and other countries in Asia and the Middle East". Even more interestingly, he later added, as if to clarify the reasoning behind the alteration, that: "The pragmat-

and governments are bound by such statements of priorities in Georgia, they are not merely suggestions or indications. Therefore the new orientation will have to be treated as a new concept: "supplementary foreign policy", which will be pursued only as far as it serves the purposes of the main, stated policy, rather than to develop an independent, complimentary set of relations.

The 'supplementary foreign policy' could be configured in the following way:

continuing to negotiate on political and security issues at the Geneva International Discussions and other forums, at which special representatives will work on economic and humanitarian issues, and the bilateral dialogue between the Georgian PM's Special Envoy for Relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, which could expand further. The recent official visit to Russia of opposition politician Jondi Baghaturia, who proposed

financial investment from Asian countries, mainly from China. Soon after appointing the new Foreign Minister Gharibashvili paid an official visit to China and attended an international conference on the New Silk Road project, in which China wants to invest more than \$22 billion to foster "East-West" transit corridor potency and India is also expected to play a major role. The "Miss China 2015" contest will also be held in Georgia.



As always, NGOs, the media, the business community etc. regarded this as just another reshuffle, but it has some interesting implications. When the Prime Minister announced Kvirikashvili's appointment at a government session, the new minister's first comment in that capacity was that Georgia's foreign policy vector would be "prone to change", and presumably drastic change. He was quoted as saying, "Georgia's pursuit of European and Euro-Atlantic integration will remain our main purpose. Special focus will be put on economic relations in order to translate the excellent political relations Georgia has with the West into the same level of economic relations – this will be our num-

ber one priority. But along with the pro-Western direction, we will take into account lots of other interesting developments which are taking place in the world, including of course those which affect relations with the east, the new processes taking place on the Eurasian continent".

Georgia has not previously oriented its foreign policy towards Eurasia and the East, even in part. A clear change of direction can also be inferred from the warm support Kvirikashvili is being given by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, who said the following at the same meeting: "Yesterday [af-

ports will be directed to developing it. It is now important to fulfil the great Silk Road project. As you are aware, in October we will be hosting a high-level dialogue on this as part of the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum. Making full use of the country's transit potential and increasing our participation in regional energy and transport projects will be a priority direction".

Georgia is therefore taking on two new geopolitical missions: in addition to its attempts to integrate with Euro-Atlantic structures, it will now seek political and economic cooperation with both Eurasia and the "oriental" bloc (i.e., China and the Middle East). This is not what the government said when it originally set out its foreign policy priorities,

- Political Content- continuing to pursue Euro-Atlantic and European integration and ultimately membership of NATO and the EU, all actions towards other countries being taken for this purpose;

- Economic Content- fostering economic relations with Eurasian Economic Union member states and candidates. The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) includes almost all the countries of the "Post-Soviet" space, with the notable exception of neighboring Azerbaijan, but as that country is a "dialogue partner" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which is in conflict with the EU and USA, it is in the EEU's camp politically.

- Security Content - con-

some concrete measures to the Russian Parliament, including the possibility of establishing Russian military bases in Georgia and developing "strategic partnership" relations with the Russian Federation, can be interpreted as an early attempt to pursue this policy.

- Financial Content - attempting to attract significant

In this way Georgia will pursue European and Euro-Atlantic integration by pointing in the opposite direction. To what extent this will be allowed remains to be seen.

The Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Studies Institute, Chairman

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ავერსი  AVERSI

Customers' idea about ideal lottery

-  There must be a wide variety of prizes;
-  It would be good to win several times;
-  Receive the prize the moment you win;
-  The rules must be easy;
-  In case of cash prizes, decide myself what to buy.

Having taken into consideration your wishes
“Averssi” **grand lottery** has begun!

The prizes are



The lottery will be held on the 20th of November 2015 in the broadcast of “Rustavi-2”,
after “Kurier” 18:00.

Russia's Military Gambit in Syria: Why Has Moscow Put Its Forces in the Caucasus-Caspian Basin on Alert?

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

The Russian government has decided to directly intervene in Syria with all available military capability. This has been acknowledged by Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov. He stated the following: "We have never made any secret of our forces' presence in Syria. Our military specialists are working there, helping their Syrian colleagues master the use of our combat weapons. However, where it is needed we will be taking further steps, in accordance with our national legislation, international law and our existing international obligations, with the full consent of the legal Syrian government. We have helped, are helping and will help the Syrian government when it comes to supplying the Syrian army with everything it needs. Russia is sending planes to Syria which carry both military equipment, in accordance with current contracts, and humanitarian aid. Hence, Russia will remain in Syria".

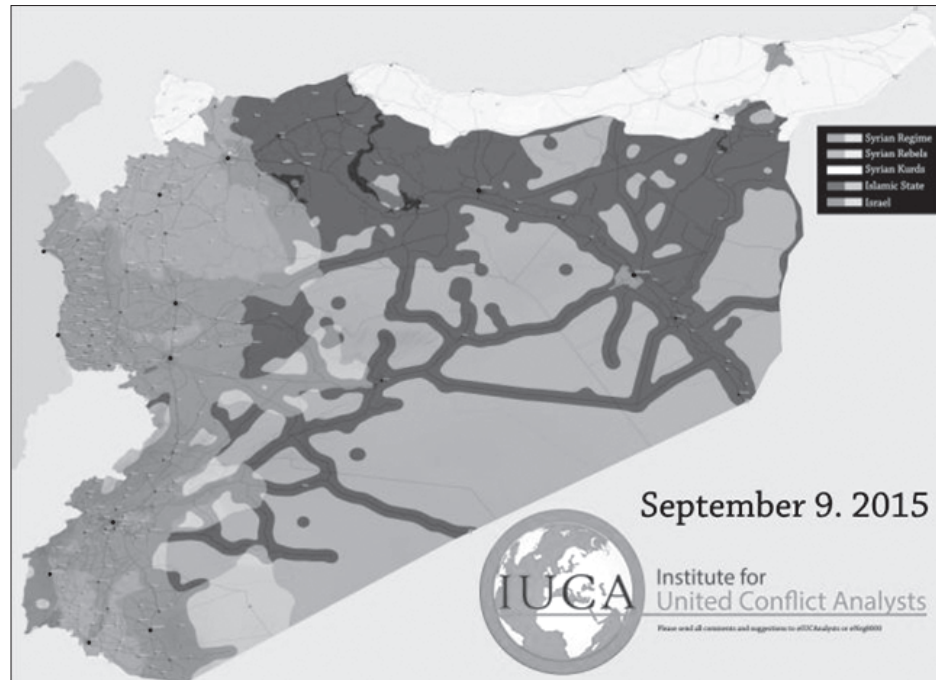
This is a very serious statement, which confirms Russia's controversial approach to the geopolitical crisis in Syria. Moscow has remained a staunch ally of the Assad government throughout the uprising which began in March 2011 and the subsequent civil war. For the time being, Russia is not actually reinforcing its troop complement in the country, and has proposed to the USA that they create a common coalition against the Islamic Caliphate and reinforce their joint efforts to completely destroy ISIS at regional and global levels. However, Russia maintains a naval base in Tar-

tus province and Russian forces are building a long runway capable of accommodating large aircraft near the Hmayeen military airport to the north of this, in Latakia province.

In May of this year Assad appealed to the Russian government to establish Russian military bases in Syria. At the beginning of September, with the endorsement of an emergency National Security Council session held in Sochi at the end of August, Russia ordered those troops already in Syria to launch airstrikes on ISIS units, using MiG-31 jets it sold to the pro-Assad Syrian Air Force, and began to provide military equipment and armaments to Syria via all available transit routes. Therefore Russia is pursuing its own policy in Syria alongside, but also in conflict with, the other members of its prospective anti-ISIS coalition, who are not supporters of Assad.

Among the transit routes it is using, at the imperilment of the local population, are the following:

The Black Sea Route: this was historically used to supply the pro-Assad forces by both sea and air. The route was efficient, as it made it possible to deliver armaments, specialists and combat units directly to Assad-government controlled seaports and territories and rotate the members of the Russian Navy's Mediterranean supplementary force. However NATO members Greece and Bulgaria have now closed their air space to Russian military transport jets, including those which provide humanitarian cargo, as this is not provided by the Ministry of Emergency Situations but by the Ministry of Defense. This has left Russia with much more limited naval transit.



The Caspian Sea Route: this is currently more effective, as it works via linkages with Russia's strategic ally Iran, whose own presence in Syria is obvious. Iran has more than 15,000 combat units, mainly from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp and special units from the AL-KODS formation and Hezbollah formations, deployed in Syria in support of the Assad government. Iran is pursuing its own geostrategic and geopolitical interests in the region, which include protecting itself from the western parts of Syria, those with a predominantly Kurdish population, preventing ISIS formations from entering Iran from northwest Iraq and the Iran-Iraq border and limiting American activity in these areas. However, the route is no longer as secure as previously due to its vulnerability to attack by Jabhat-al-Nusra (a group close to Al-Qaeda) or ISIS formations.

The Caucasus-Caspian Land Route: this route is also efficient and reliable, as it starts in Russia's North Caucasus region, where there is a concen-

tration of 250,000 troops who are part of the South HQ Operational-Strategic Command, and runs through Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Northern Iraq to Syria. This route explains why Georgia is considered the most volatile and vulnerable "variable" by The Kremlin. However, under a special agreement signed in 2010 by former president Mikheil Saakashvili's government and the Russian Federation, brokered by Swiss diplomatic channels, Russians are allowed to deliver non-combatant armaments, equipment and troops to the Russian military base at Gyumri in Armenia through the Georgian border point at Larsi. Russian also uses Georgian air space, without asking any permission, due to the Georgian Armed Forces having inadequate Air-Defence capabilities and surveillance systems, the distinct Georgian Air Defence Force having been liquidated in 2009.

As the geostrategic situation in Syria deteriorates, the Russian military leadership is taking further steps to secure these routes. The Russian MoD has put both its Caspian Flotilla

and South Command units on full combat readiness, and has reinforced its military bases in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. This indicates that it is delivering weapon to Syrian the same way it did to Cuba prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Despite the economic crisis in Russia, these expensive deliveries (they cost approximately \$50-100,000 a time) will clearly continue until more reliable transit routes can be found.

The sending of Russian railway troops to occupied Abkhazia to restore the Ochamchire-Gali-Enguri River railway line, and the seizure of more Georgian territory by moving the boundary fences in "creeping occupation", are also a means of securing control of these transit routes. As the new, entirely unauthorized, boundaries created by Russia now enclose 2 km of the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa oil pipeline and are only 400 metres from the main Gori-Tbilisi highway The Kremlin could easily try and blackmail the Georgian government into allowing combatant weapons to also be transited through Georgia.

The Kremlin's support for

Assad is designed to further the following geopolitical goals:

To protect Russia's geo-economic and economic interests in Syria, such as those owned by LUKoil and Gazprom, in accordance with paragraph 32 of the Russian Military Doctrine;

To block other countries' gas supply projects which involve using Syrian territory, such as those which would deliver gas from Qatar and Egypt to EU markets. The realisation of these projects could provide stable alternative energy supplies, and greater energy security, for EU member states who are now dependent on the Russian Federation for 80% of their gas supplies;

To combat ISIS within Syria, as part of the so-called "forward defence" strategy of preventing the reinforcement of ISIS-affiliated groups in the North Caucasus. Russia is concentrating a special Army Grouping of 10,000 mainly special destination and airborne unit troops in Syria, who will be reinforced by mechanised infantry and Air Force units;

To provide direct military assistance to Russia's strategic allies, the Assad government and Iran, and thereby enhance Russia's status as a global military power.

The present situation in Syria is very strange and difficult. According to AMAN, the Israeli military intelligence agency, the Assad government controls only 20% of Syrian territory, ISIS controls 40%, the Kurdish Democratic Union 15% and the pro-Al-Qaeda Jabhat Al-Nusra 15%. This situation makes it clear why the Russians are engaging so aggressively in Syria's affairs.

The Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Studies Institute, Chairman



UGULAVA RELEASED FROM PRETRIAL DETENTION

Ex-mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugulava, was released from 14-month pretrial detention late on Thursday night, a day after the Constitutional Court ruled that keeping an accused person in detention beyond 9-month limitation is unconstitutional.

Ugulava was freed from a courtroom after a motion by his defense lawyers was heard by a three-judge panel of the Tbilisi City Court – a proceeding, which was viewed largely as a formality, because, according to legal experts, the court had no other option but to take decision in line with the Constitutional Court ruling and release Ugulava. But the hearing lasted for almost five hours two of which were allocated for prosecutors, who requested time to study the Constitutional Court's ruling.



Courtroom, packed with Ugulava's supporters, erupted in applause as the presiding judge was announcing decision; his and UNM opposition party supporters were also gathered outside the court building, who met the ex-mayor with chanting his name.

Ugulava, who is one of the leaders of the UNM party, said shortly after he was released that the defeat of the Georgian Dream ruling coalition in the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for October 2016, is "inevitable."

"They have billions in their hands, they have power in their hands, but they will have a defeat in their hands too; I promise it to them and it will happen very soon," Ugulava said.

"Elections are coming. We will win early elections, if there are early elections; we will win the elections if they are in October 2016 [as scheduled]. We will win anyway even if they don't change the electoral system. Their defeat is inevitable. Our victory and the victory of all the pro-European forces is inevitable," he said.

"[Bidzina] Ivanishvili does not care about anything except of maintaining power," Ugulava said, referring to ex-Prime Minister. "We will go to elections; important is to reach elections calmly and peacefully and we will see this man [Ivanishvili] off and put an end to nightmare brought by him upon the country... I hold no grudge, because I do not want to be like Ivanishvili, who is driven only by grudge."

Georgia's ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili, who is now governor of Odessa region in Ukraine and formally also remains chairman of UNM party, welcomed Ugulava's release through posts on his Facebook and Twitter accounts.

"I welcome release of innocent Gigi Ugulava, the end of 14-month absurd and the beginning of the end of Russian oligarch's regime," Saakashvili wrote, using a term – "Russian oligarch", which UNM politicians usually use in reference to ex-PM Ivanishvili.

Speaking to Rustavi 2 TV shortly after being released, Ugulava also said that he considers more than 14 months that he had to spend in pre-trial detention as a "gain" and "not as a waste of time."

"It was an opportunity for me to test myself and to look at life from other side... This is a huge experience for me," he said.

"If he [Ivanishvili] again gives me such an opportunity, he will of course have to pay a political price," Ugulava added.

He was alluding to a possibility of being re-arrested. Ugulava is facing multiple criminal charges in several separate cases, which he denies as politically motivated. Trials in those cases are still ongoing and one of them is already in its final phase; if he is found guilty and convicted, Ugulava will be arrested to serve a prison term.

First set of criminal charges against Ugulava were filed in February, 2013 – at the time he was Tbilisi mayor; charges involved alleged mispending and embezzlement of large amount of public funds and money laundering into two separate cases.

Additional charges were filed against Ugulava in December, 2013 involving alleged mispending of GEL 48.18 million of public money in 2011-2012. In connection to these charges court at the time turned down prosecution's motion for Ugulava's pre-trial detention, but ruled in favor of a request to suspend Ugulava from Tbilisi mayor's office. In May, 2014 the Constitutional Court ruled that Ugulava's suspension from office was unconstitutional.

Separate set of criminal charges were filed against him in July, 2014, when Ugulava was chief of UNM's campaign for local elections. Charges involved alleged money laundering scheme through which, the prosecution claims, he was financing UNM's election campaign. The court ordered his pre-trial detention in connection to this case.

Ugulava was in pre-trial detention, when in July, 2014 prosecutors filed new set of charges involving exceeding of official authorities, stemming from breaking up of the November 7, 2007 anti-government protests, as well as raid on and "seizure" of Imedi TV station and other assets owned at the time by tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili, who died in February, 2008. Ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili and some other former senior officials were also charged in connection to the same case.

When the original 9-month pre-trial detention for Ugulava was nearing its end and he was about to be released, prosecutors re-qualified in March, 2015 one of the criminal charges against him, which gave the prosecution ground for asking the court to remand the ex-mayor in custody.

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DELAY IN VERDICT OVER UGULAVA'S CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLAINT AS JUDGE REFUSES TO SIGN IT

One of the nine members of the Constitutional Court is refusing to sign a verdict into a complaint lodged by ex-mayor of Tbilisi Gigi Ugulava over 9-month pre-trial detention limit, making it impossible for the court to announce its decision, which was originally planned for September 15.

Although the verdict is actually delivered, it cannot be issued either to the parties of the case or to the public unless all nine members of the court sign it.

Merab Turava, who became a member of the Constitutional Court in March, 2015 after being nominated by lawmakers from the Georgian Dream ruling coalition, says that he has not yet signed the verdict because he had no "reasonable time" for studying the decision.

Ugulava's lawyers and politicians from the opposition UNM party have accused Turava of trying to buy time for the prosecution, which is pursuing multiple criminal charges against ex-mayor in several separate cases.

Trials over these charges against Ugulava, which he denies as politically motivated, are still ongoing; meantime he remains in pre-trial detention for more than 14 months already.

In April Ugulava, who is one of the leaders of opposition UNM party, appealed the Constitutional Court seeking repealing of legislative clauses, which he argues contradict constitutionally set 9-month limitation of pre-trial detention.



Constitution says that the term of pre-trial detention of an accused person should not exceed 9 months.

But criminal procedures code allows detention beyond 9-month limitation if new charges are filed against the same person.

When the original 9-month pre-trial detention for Ugulava was nearing its end, prosecutors re-qualified in March, 2015 one of the criminal charges against him in order to remand him in custody pending court's verdict.

Similar tactic was used by the prosecution against ex-defense minister and former prison chief Bacho Akhalaia, who was arrested in November 2012 and whose pre-trial detention was extended for several times by gradually adding new charges against him before he was convicted in October, 2014.

The Constitutional Court said at noon on September 15 that it was going to announce its verdict into Ugulava's complaint at 5pm local time.

But in the evening the court said in a statement that it had to delay issuing of the verdict as one of its members – Merab Turava – failed to show up at a session to sign the decision, citing health problems.

Turava arrived in one of the hospitals in Black Sea city of Batumi, where the Constitutional Court is based, on September 15.

On September 16 he said that although he had blood pressure problems, health issue was not the main reason of his refusal to sign the Constitutional Court's decision on Ugulava's complaint.

"I have not signed [the verdict] not because of my health... but because I am asking for reasonable time for studying the 50-page decision and laying out in a written form my objections if I have any," Turava told journalists in the hospital in Batumi.

Turava says that the verdict was submitted to him for signing at short notice only an hour before the Constitutional Court said it was going to announce the decision on September 15. He said it was "disrespectful".

The Constitutional Court has denied one of its members' allegation and said that all nine judges were given "reasonable time" to study the verdict.

Members of the Constitutional Court, including its chairman Giorgi Papuashvili, met Turava in the hospital on September 16 to seek his signature on the verdict.

After that meeting the Constitutional Court released a written statement saying that Turava was refusing to sign the decision.

The court said that a judge has no right not to sign the final verdict regardless of his or her opinion over the case.

It also said that it would refer Turava's decision not to sign the verdict to the Constitutional Court's ethics commission.

Ugulava's lawyer, Beka Basilaia, said on September 16 that Turava was deliberately dragging out putting his signature in order to delay issuing of the Constitutional Court's decision.

He claimed that the prosecutor's office, hoping for a guilty verdict in at least one of the cases against Ugulava in Tbilisi court, wants to delay issuing of Constitutional Court's decision in order to keep ex-mayor in detention. If Ugulava is found guilty and convicted in one of the criminal cases against him, Basilaia said, winning of the constitutional court case will no longer be relevant for Ugulava as it won't help to release him from pre-trial detention.

Speaking at a parliament session on September 16, UNM MP Giorgi Gabashvili accused Turava of acting upon "direct orders" of ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili, who, he said, wants to keep Ugulava in "illegal detention at any cost."

Parliament speaker, Davit Usupashvili, commented on the issue earlier on September 16 before Turava's remarks and the Constitutional Court's response. Usupashvili said that this situa-

tion was not contributing to the confidence towards the Constitutional Court.

"Yesterday I had a conversation with chairman of the Constitutional Court and I asked him to clarify the issue as soon as possible. Of course we have not discussed anything related to the content of the verdict. The fact that this situation caused speculation – one the one hand over possible hast as the announcement was made [by the Constitutional Court] to issue the verdict, which technically was not fully finalized, and on the other hand over possible attempt to drag out the verdict as it was not possible to put a signature of one of the judges because of incomprehensible or implausible reasons," Usupashvili said at a parliamentary bureau session on September 16.

"Neither of these versions – whether separately or in combination, contribute to establishment of a constitutional rule in the country and to authoritativeness and trust towards the court," Usupashvili added.

Although the Georgian constitution explicitly says that the term of pre-trial detention of an accused should not exceed 9 months, one of the clauses in the criminal procedure code, which was adopted in 2010 when the UNM was in power, was allowing detention beyond 9-month limitation if new set of charges were filed against the same person.

When in March, 2015 Ugulava's pre-trial detention was extended beyond 9 months, he denounced it at a court hearing as a "rape of the constitution".

In late April his lawyers took the case to the Constitutional Court, which ruled on September 16 that holding of an accused person in pre-trial detention beyond 9-month limitation is unconstitutional.

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PRESIDENT WEIGHS IN DEBATE OVER ENFORCEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULING ON PRETRIAL DETENTION LIMIT



President Giorgi Margvelashvili said on September 17 that the Constitutional Court's decision on a 9-month pre-trial detention limit should be enforced "immediately by the common courts."

Ex-mayor of Tbilisi Gigi Ugulava, who has been in pre-trial detention for more than 14 months, has won a landmark case in the Constitutional Court, which ruled on September 16 that the clause of criminal procedure code allowing the keeping of an accused person in detention beyond 9-month limitation is unconstitutional.

The decision was followed by a debate about how the verdict should be enforced in respect to the accused persons affected by this clause, among them Ugulava.

Ugulava's lawyers and his political allies from the opposition UNM party claim that the ex-mayor should have been released from the pre-trial detention immediately after the Constitutional Court issued its verdict and accused the authorities of dragging out the process.

Late on September 16, UNM party members and supporters gathered outside the Tbilisi prison where Ugulava is being held and demanded his release.

The prison system ministry stated in a response that the penitentiary is only authorized to release an inmate upon the direct order of a court and the order should be delivered in respect to each and every accused person to whom the Constitutional Court's ruling applies.

Ugulava's lawyers have appealed the Tbilisi City Court with the request to revoke pre-trial detention for their client based on the Constitutional Court's decision. They said that they appealed the court in order not to leave any pretext to the authorities for keeping Ugulava in the detention.

The Tbilisi City Court is expected to launch a deliberation of the appeal at 5pm local time on Thursday.

Those legal experts, who share the view that the only legal mechanism to enforce the Constitutional Court's decision is through the common courts, say that deliberation over the appeal to release Ugulava from the detention is largely a formality as judges will have no other option but to take decision in line with the Constitutional Court and to order Ugulava's release.

President Giorgi Margvelashvili appeared to share the same opinion that the Constitutional Court's decision should be enforced through common courts.

In a brief televised statement on September 17, Margvelashvili said, "the main purpose of the state is to protect fundamental human rights. The purpose of justice is also about securing these fundamental rights. The Constitutional Court and common courts should guard these rights."

"The decision of the Constitutional Court is final and it has to be enforced. Therefore yesterday's decision should be immediately enforced by the common court."

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GEORGIAN PRESIDENT SPEAKS BY PHONE WITH MOLDOVAN, UKRAINIAN COUNTERPARTS

Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili held phone conversations with his Ukrainian and Moldovan counterparts, Nicolae Timofti and Petro Poroshenko, respectively, on September 16.



Ukrainian president's office said that Poroshenko "commended Georgia's consistent and comprehensive support for Ukraine" and confirmed Ukraine's "consistent position" of supporting Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Ukrainian President thanked Georgia for providing humanitarian assistance to his country, as well as for hosting over 110 children from conflict affected areas of eastern Ukraine in Georgia's sea resort and providing two-week rehabilitation course for seven wounded Ukrainian soldiers. "It is a position of partner and friend," Poroshenko said.

Georgian president's office said that Margvelashvili noted importance of upholding the Minsk ceasefire agreement.

"The two presidents also spoke about the need to further deepen bilateral relations and focused on intensifying European integration and regional cooperation formats," Georgian president's office said.

In a phone conversation with the Moldovan counterpart also on September 17, President Margvelashvili said: "Georgia and Moldova have many common challenges and joint efforts on the European integration path would be better."

Moldova's President Nicolae Timofti plans to visit Georgia in November.

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NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR TO GEORGIA TAKES OFFICE

New U.S. ambassador to Georgia, Ian C. Kelly, presented his credentials to President Giorgi Margvelashvili on September 17.

Kelly, who has been in the foreign service for about 30 years, was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as ambassador to Georgia in late June, replacing Richard Norland.

"I have always wanted to serve in Tbilisi," Kelly told journalists shortly after arriving in Tbilisi on September 16.

"My main priority I think will be to support Georgia and to deepen bilateral relationships between U.S. and Georgia. And



one of the main priorities of the United States is to support Georgia and its aspirations to become more integrated with Euro-Atlantic institutions."

"I feel very confident in saying that I don't think you will find a stronger advocate for Georgia and its Euro-Atlantic vocation, and I don't think you'll find a more passionate supporter for deepening U.S.-Georgian relations," he said.

Kelly served as State Department spokesman in 2009-2010 and was the U.S. ambassador to the OSCE in 2010-2013. He also served as a co-chair of the Minsk Group on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution in December, 2012-September, 2013.

Ambassador Kelly's previous assignments also include being the director of the Office of Russian Affairs at the Department of State in 2007-2009, public affairs adviser at the U.S. mission in NATO, press attaché at the U.S. embassies in Italy and Turkey.

As the director of Democratic Initiatives to the Newly Independent States at the State Department in 1994-1996, he was coordinating the activities of about dozen federal agencies involved in democracy programs in the former Soviet Union countries.

Also on September 17, new Swiss ambassador to Georgia, Lukas Beglinger, presented his credentials to President Margvelashvili. Previously Beglinger served as head of mission in Warsaw. Switzerland acts as a diplomatic mediator between Russia and Georgia since the two countries have cut diplomatic relations after the August 2008 war.

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EUMM HEAD MEETS RUSSIAN OFFICIALS IN MOSCOW

Head of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia, Kestutis Jankauskas, visited Russia on September 15-16 with the purpose "to maintain working contacts in Moscow," EUMM said.

Lithuanian diplomat, Kestutis Jankauskas, who heads EUMM since December 2014, met in Moscow with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin and Chief of the Border Security Directorate of the Russian FSB Border Service Nikolay Kozik.

"Both meetings were held in a friendly, constructive and professional atmosphere," EUMM said in a press release on September 16.

It was the first visit of EUMM head to Moscow since 2011. EUMM, which is mandated to monitor the compliance with the August, 2008 six-point ceasefire agreement, has around 200 unarmed monitors in Georgia; they, however, have no access to breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

"In line with the normalization, stabilization and the confidence building mandate of the Mission the main purpose of the visit to the Russian Federation was to maintain working contacts in Moscow and to address concerns of all sides in order to maintain stability and to prevent escalation of the situation on the ground," EUMM said.

"The security situation on the ground in Georgia, along the Administrative Boundary Lines with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, was discussed in the framework of preparations for the next rounds of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meeting and the Geneva International Discussions. Issues of borderisation, freedom of movement, access of local population to agricultural land as well as military exercises were raised and discussed as were practical issues such as interaction in the field between security actors. Commitment of all sides to use the existing instruments such as the IPRM meetings and the Hotline was stressed in order to maintain stability and predictability on the ground," EUMM said.

Co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, talks launched after the August 2008 war, also visited Moscow this week. EU, OSCE and UN representatives, who co-chair the Geneva talks, met Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin, who is Russia's chief negotiator in the Geneva talks. The next, 33rd round of the Geneva talks, which involves negotiators from Georgia, Russia and the U.S., as well as from Tskhinvali and Sokhumi, is scheduled for October 6-7.

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FOUR BOARD MEMBERS OF BANKING SUPERVISORY AGENCY CONFIRMED

Parliament confirmed on September 18 four members of seven-seat board of the Financial Supervisory Agency, a body which is being established after banking oversight functions have been removed from the National Bank of Georgia.

Four members of the board, who have been nominated by the government, are Irakli Kovzanadze; Ekaterine Galdava; Sascha Ternes, and Efreum Urumashvili.

Irakli Kovzanadze has served as CEO of the state-owned investment fund Partnership Fund since late 2012. He was chairman of parliamentary committee for finance and budget in 2004-2008.

Ekaterine Galdava has served as director of the internal audit department at former PM Bidzina Ivanishvili's Cartu Bank since May, 2012. In 2005-2007 she was vice president of the National Bank of Georgia, overseeing banking supervision department.

Sascha Ternes is a managing partner at the recently launched real estate, asset and property management Ternes Real Estate Fund. In 2012-2014 he was CEO of ProCredit Bank Georgia and deputy CEO of Bank of Georgia in 2014-2015.

Efreum Urumashvili has been a partner in Tbilisi-based corporate law firm Nodia, Urumashvili & Partners; he served as deputy chief financial officer at the Bank of Georgia in 2007-2010.

Kovzanadze, Galdava and Ternes have been confirmed as board members for a seven-year term and Urumashvili for five-year term.

The government, according to the law, can nominate five out of seven board members. Government's representative in the parliament, Shalva Tadumadze, said that a candidate for the fifth seat will be nominated later.

Two other seats in the board will be taken by the president of the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) and one more member of NBG's board.

The head of the Financial Supervisory Agency will be nominated by its board members and confirmed by the Parliament.

Bill, removing banking supervisory functions from NBG and transferring them to a separate agency, was adopted by the Parliament in July, but it drew criticism from international financial institutions, business associations, opposition parties, a group of civil society organizations and from the central bank itself.

President Giorgi Margvelashvili vetoed the bill in late July, but the Parliament overturned it on September 3.

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EU, U.S. WELCOME CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULING ON PRE-TRIAL DETENTION LIMIT

The U.S. embassy and the EU delegation to Georgia have welcomed the Constitutional Court's September 16 decision, which ruled that keeping an accused person in pre-trial detention be-

yond 9-month limitation is unconstitutional.

The ruling was issued based on a complaint lodged by ex-mayor of Tbilisi and one of the leaders of opposition UNM party, Gigi Ugulava, who spent more than 14 months in pre-trial detention. The Tbilisi City Court ordered Ugulava's release late on September 17 based on the Constitutional Court's ruling.

Carlo Natale, new deputy head of the EU delegation to Georgia, said that the Constitutional Court's ruling is "a landmark decision, because it shed clarity and gave a legal certainty on the issue, which is extremely important", related to detention of an accused person in the course of investigation and trial.

"This was an issue, which had been regulated in different ways and it was a cause of concern for us and we consider that the decision of the Constitutional Court [gave] certainty to these fundamental aspects of the due process," Natale told journalists in Tbilisi on September 18.

"A big step forward has been made in clarifying fundamental legal aspects, especially giving legal certainty to rules which apply to deprivation of freedom for citizens," the EU diplomat added.

After the Constitutional Court's ruling, opposition UNM party and defense lawyers of Ugulava were demanding his immediate release, claiming that the authorities were dragging out the process. They also argued that no further decision from the common courts was required to enforce the Constitutional Court's verdict.

"Regarding the application of this decision, we noted that it was applied quite swiftly – basically within 24 hours, which we also welcome," Natale said, but declined to comment further on the specific case.

The U.S. embassy in Tbilisi said in a statement on September 18, that it "welcomes the Georgian judicial system's adherence to the rule of law and Constitutional principles."

"A strong, independent judiciary bolsters Georgia's image as a rules-based, transparent democracy that upholds the rule of law and due process for all of its citizens. We reiterate the importance of ensuring all cases are handled in accordance to the highest international standards of due process and rule of law," it said.

The Tbilisi City Court ordered Ugulava's pre-trial detention in early July, 2014. When the original 9-month pre-trial detention for Ugulava was about to expire, prosecutors re-qualified in March, 2015 one of the criminal charges against him, which at the time gave the prosecution ground for asking the court to remand the ex-mayor in custody pending court's verdict.

Similar tactic was used by the prosecution against ex-defense minister and former prison chief Bacho Akhalaia, who was arrested in November 2012 and whose pre-trial detention was extended for several times beyond original 9-month limitation by gradually adding new set of charges against him before he was convicted in October, 2014.

The U.S. Department of State's annual report on human rights, covering developments of last year, noted concerns of local monitoring groups that prosecution was using "legislative loopholes" to prolong 9-month limitation of pretrial detention.

"Each new set of charges restarts a nine-month clock, and prosecutors often waited to file new charges until the pretrial detention clock was about to expire on the original charges," reads the report.

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ALBANIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER VISITS GEORGIA



Albanian Parliament Speaker, Ilir Meta, who is visiting Tbilisi, held meetings with the Georgian leadership on September 14-15.

He met President Giorgi Margvelashvili and PM Irakli Garibashvili on September 15 and also held talks with his Georgian counterpart Davit Usupashvili and Foreign Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili on September 14.

Meta said after the meeting with Usupashvili that Georgia and Albania "share common future", adding that his country "fully supports Georgia's aspirations to become a NATO member. As a candidate for EU membership, Albania also "supports European perspective for Georgia," Meta said.

"We thanked [Ilir Meta] for Albania's clear support for Georgia's NATO membership. As a member of NATO, we asked Albania to pay attention to developments in our region and to facilitate further Georgia's NATO integration," Georgian Parliament Speaker Davit Usupashvili said after the meeting on September 14.

The Speaker of Albanian Parliament participated in Open Government Partnership's Legislative Openness Working Group conference along with more than 70 delegates from over 30 countries.

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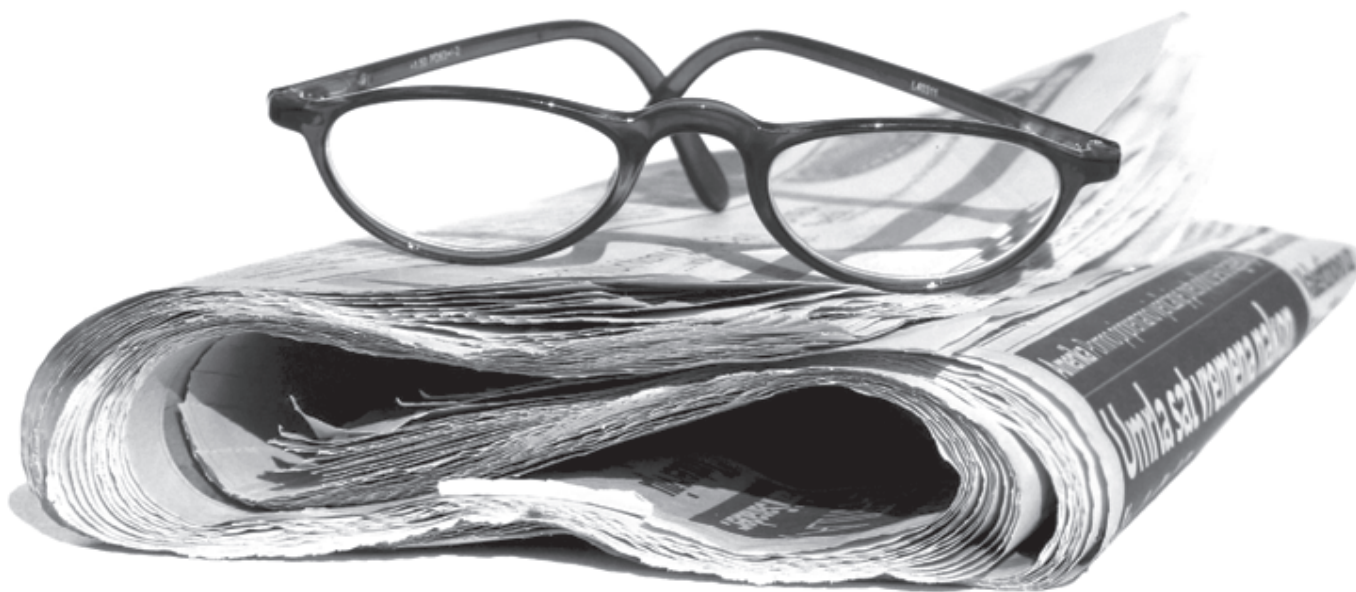
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GEORGIAN PM MEETS CHINESE PREMIER

Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili met Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on September 10 on the sideline of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in the China's northeastern port city of Dalian.

"One of the main topics of discussion with the Chinese Premier was about launching free trade talks... Georgia will become



the first country in the entire region, and not only in the Caucasus, but in wider region, in Europe too, which will have free trade with China. It will contribute to strengthening of our economy," PM Garibashvili said. In Europe China has free trade agreements with Iceland and Switzerland.

Georgia and China agreed in March to launch feasibility study of possible bilateral free trade agreement between the two countries. According to a study by Tbilisi-based Policy and Management Consulting Group (PMCG) and China's University of International Business and Economics, free trade agreement between the two countries will result in 9% increase in Georgian export to China.

PM: 'Strong Ties with China Very Important for Georgia' The Georgian PM also said that Georgia has "intensified relations with China over the past two-three years."

"Now relations between Georgia and China are moving to a completely new level. I had a very interesting and fruitful meeting with the Chinese Premier. We have discussed projects of strategic importance," he said.

Reiterating support for China's initiative of One Belt, One Road plan to rebuild Silk Road trade links and develop infrastructure along the route, the PM said Georgia "wants to be part of this project as it will create new opportunities for our country."

"We do not want Georgia to be the place of and reason for confrontation. We want our country to be the place for reconciliation, negotiations, mutual understanding and peace. Therefore we should everything in order to have a progress in accomplishing this mission," PM Garibashvili said.

PM's trip to China will continue with visit to Beijing where he will meet senior executives from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) on September 11. A two-day meeting of officials from the founding members of the AIIB was held in Tbilisi last month. Garibashvili said on September 10, that he expects to attract funding from the bank for number of infrastructure projects in Georgia.

"The Chinese Premier noted that they are interested in Chinese companies to participate in the Anaklia deep-sea port project," the PM said, referring to planned port project on Georgia's Black Sea coast.

State-owned Power Construction Corporation of China (PowerChina) is in one of the two consortia, which have moved through to the final phase of the bidding process on design, construction and operation of Anaklia port.

Also on September 10 Georgia's Foreign Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, who is accompanying the PM, met in Dalian with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a press release after the meeting that the two countries are deepening cooperation in trade, economy and infrastructure sectors. It also said that cooperation in frames of China's initiative on New Silk Road will also help to speed up negotiations on the bilateral free trade agreement.

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PM DISMISSES GRAPE PRICE PROTEST AS UNM'S 'PROVOCATION'

PM Irakli Garibashvili slammed a protest rally by grape growers in Gurjaani, eastern region of Kakheti, as "provocation" by "destructive" opposition United National Movement (UNM) party.

A group of grape growers continued protest rally against lower grape prices in the town of Gurjaani on September 14, demanding from the government to increase grape price subsidy.

"I want to tell politicians... that their provocative actions are directed against our state," PM Garibashvili said at a government session on Monday.

"I know one of the MPs, [Giorgi] Gviniashvili, who for years was a governor of Kakheti region... is active there to prove his loyalty towards Odessa governor [Georgia's ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili]," he said referring to UNM lawmaker, who is elected from Gurjaani majoritarian single-mandate constituency in the Kakheti region and who was with the protesters in Gurjaani on September 14.

"I want to ask the law enforcement agencies and [Interior Minister Giorgi] Mgebrishvili to maximally control situation there in order for the people not to face any obstacles in delivery [of grapes to factories]," Garibashvili said.

"We should get rid of this provocateur. If any provocateur tries to stir tension, you will act in frames of law," the PM told the Interior Minister.

"This is completely inadmissible that such discredited organization like UNM goes there and tries to spoil positive image of grape harvest with the help of 20 or 30 people through intrigues and provocative methods," he said.

He said that farmers are "misled" and manipulated by the UNM. "There is a need to provide more information [farmers] in order not to trigger perception as if there was lack of efforts from the state or as if we have cut subsidies," the PM said.

The declining export of the Georgian wine has pushed grape prices down by roughly 40-55% compared to last year, when the average price for a kilo of grapes varied from GEL 1 to GEL 1.9, depending on quality and variety of grapes in Kakheti region, which is home of more than half of Georgia's vineyards.

Similar to last year, the government keeps subsidizing grape prices, adding GEL 0.35 per kilo of white grape on top of what the wine maker companies and processing factories will pay; subsidies amount to GEL 0.15 per kilo of red grape in Kakheti.

"With such provocative actions and useless noise and fuss these people – I mean this so called opposition United National Movement – are pitting Kakheti and farmers there against other regions [of Georgia]," PM Garibashvili said, adding that there were problems with apple, citrus fruits harvest in other parts of the country.

"Yes we said that vine growing is a strategic direction and because of [state] assistance it was possible to add 4 hectares of new vineyards."

"I want to tell our dear farmers not to be misled; do not allow anyone to use you for their political purposes," he said. "Do not listen to those provocateurs; get rid of these provocateurs."

Protesters in Gurjaani have also been demanding a meeting with Agriculture Minister Otar Danelia.

"I would advise you not to meet provocateurs and not to give an opportunity to destructive forces to use this meeting for further tensions," Garibashvili told the Agriculture Minister. "Meet the constructive part of the population – real, healthy farmers and [do not meet] UNM members disguised as farmers, who have not even seen a vineyard and who don't care about peasants."



UNM parliamentary minority leader, MP Davit Bakradze, said he was "bewildered" by the PM's remarks, and added that Garibashvili's comments on "getting rid of provocateur" was an instruction to the law enforcement agencies to "arrest" MP Giorgi Gviniashvili.

"Instead of taking measure to resolve farmers' problems, the Prime Minister is instructing the police to arrest Gurjaani majoritarian MP just for performing his duties and standing beside the people," UNM parliamentary minority leader, MP Davit Bakradze, said. "Unlike government members and [Georgian Dream ruling coalition] lawmakers... Gurjaani majoritarian MP will keep on performing his duties and standing behind farmers in Kakheti."

"This is not a political issue, we do not want to politicize grape harvest, but at the same time we should all know that we will stand beside people wherever people are deceived," he added.

Speaking at a government session on September 14, Agriculture Minister Otar Danelia said that on top of price subsidy, the state-owned companies will buy excess of grapes, which will not be bought by private wine producing companies and grape processing factories. This scheme, in combination of price subsidy, will cost about GEL 60 million to the state budget, PM Garibashvili said.

Georgian wine exports have declined by 45.7% in the first eight months of this year to 19.8 million 0.75-liter bottles, compared to 36.5 million in the same period of 2014.

The fall is caused by sharp drop in wine exports to Russia and Ukraine, which declined by 58% and 63% year-on-year, respectively, in January-August, 2015.

Georgian wine exports to its other major markets have increased in the first eight months of this year.

Despite the sharp decline, Russia still remains the largest export market for Georgian wines, where 10.1 million bottles were exported in January-August 2015, followed by Kazakhstan – 2.9 million bottles; Ukraine – 1.73 million bottles; China – 1.18 million bottles, and Poland – slightly over 1 million bottles.

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GRAPE GROWERS IN GURJAANI PROTEST OVER LOWER PRICES

Police and dozens of wine grape growers, protesting lower grape prices, scuffled briefly in Gurjaani, eastern region of Kakheti, after the demonstrators tried to block the main road running through the town on September 11.

At least three people were detained by the police. The declining export of the Georgian wine has pushed grape prices down by roughly 40-55% compared to last year, when the average price for a kilo of grapes varied from GEL 1 to GEL 1.9, depending on quality and variety of grapes in Kakheti region, which is home of more than half of Georgia's vineyards.

Grape growers have been protesting for the last couple of days in Gurjaani, demanding from the authorities to increase subsidies and claiming that the existing prices fail to cover their expenses.

Similar to last year, the government keeps subsidizing grape prices, adding GEL 0.35 per kilo of white grape on top of what the wine maker companies and processing factories will pay; subsidies amount to GEL 0.15 per kilo of red grape in Kakheti.

Responding to a protest rally in Gurjaani on September 10, Agriculture Minister, Otar Danelia, said that the government was initially going to scrap the grape price subsidy scheme, but decided to keep it taking into account falling wine exports.

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Danelia also said on September 10 that the government will not increase the grape price subsidy, adding that the scheme is in itself controversial as many are opposed to the state subsidies. He also said that if private wine producing companies and grape processing factories would not buy the excess of grapes from farmers, the state-owned companies would purchase the remaining stock for a price ranging from GEL 0.6 to GEL 0.85.

The Agriculture Minister's statement about the government's refusal to increase subsidies was followed by a renewed protest rally by grape growers in Gurjaani on September 11.

On the same day, a group of farmers from Kakheti arrived in Tbilisi and attended a session of parliamentary committees for agriculture and economy with the facilitation of opposition lawmakers. They were also demanding an increase of state subsidy.

"You were promising [to farmers in Kakheti] that the grape price would have be no less than GEL 1 per kilo and people remember this promise. Now they came here to see if you will make good on this promise," UNM MP Nugzar Tsiklauri said at the hearing.

Chairman of the parliamentary committee on sector economy, MP Zurab Tkemaladze, said that a separate hearing will be scheduled for early next week to discuss the issue in details.

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BILL ON PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE REFORM PASSED WITH SECOND READING

Parliament passed on September 16 with 69 votes to 12 with its second reading package of legislative amendments introducing new rule of selecting and electing chief prosecutor for a non-renewable six-year term.

Currently Prime Minister appoints and dismisses the Chief Prosecutor upon nomination of the Minister of Justice.

The bill, which has yet to be adopted with its third reading, envisages more complicated procedures for electing Chief Prosecutor introducing in the process the Parliament and new body, Prosecutorial Council; the government and Justice Minister will still keep a significant role in the process.

The bill envisages setting up of 15-member Prosecutorial Council, which will be chaired by the Justice Minister, who will be an ex-officio member.

8 seats in the Council will go to prosecutors elected by the Conference of Prosecutors – a body, which is also a novelty envisaged by the bill.

2 seats will be allocated to parliamentary members – one of them will be representative of the parliamentary majority group and another one representing lawmakers, who are not members of the majority group in the parliament; selecting of an MP for this latter quota will be up to the opposition lawmakers.

2 seats will go to judges, selected by the High Council of Justice.

And the two remaining members of the Prosecutorial Council will go to members of civil society and academic circles, elected by parliament through a simple majority.

According to the bill, the selection of a candidate for chief prosecutor starts with the Justice Minister holding consultations with representatives of civil society and academic circles.

The Justice Minister then nominates three candidates to the Prosecutorial Council; the Minister will have to explain the choice.

The Prosecutorial Council then has to endorse one of the three candidates with 2/3 majority votes – that is support of at least 10 council members; in case of a deadlock, the Justice Minister will have to name new candidates.

After a candidate is endorsed by the Prosecutorial Council, the nomination will go to the government, which has the power to block the nomination and in that case the process of selecting new candidates will start over.

If the nomination offered by the Prosecutorial Council is endorsed by the government, the candidate will then have to be confirmed by parliament.

Support by a simple majority – that is at least 76 MPs – will be required for a candidate to be confirmed as Chief Prosecutor for a non-renewable six-year term.

Opposition lawmakers criticize the bill for keeping the government and ruling coalition's strong role in the process of nomination and confirmation of a candidate for Chief Prosecutor.

When the bill was debated with its second reading on September 4, Free Democrats opposition party MP Shalva Shavgulidze said that under the current proposal the government and the ruling coalition maintain "full control" over the process and therefore it fails to depoliticize the Prosecutor's Office.

UNM MP Giorgi Vashadze described the bill as an "imitation of reform".

Republican Party GD MP Vakhtang Khmaladze, who chairs the parliamentary committee for legal affairs, said that the proposed reform will make the prosecutor's office accountable before parliament and create mechanisms for parliamentary oversight on the prosecutor's office. He said that the bill is a significant step towards making the prosecutor's office politically independent.

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