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WEEKLY BILINGUAL
NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA

THE PROBLEMS WITH GEORGIAN DEMOCRACY EVALUATION BY FREEDOM HOUSE

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The report reflects main tendencies in the civil and political life and the author emphasizes the fact that generally the tendency of democratic transformation is positive, with problems occurring though.

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Chelidze drew the audience's attention to the fact that the Black Sea region is more geographical definition than political term taking into consideration that the neighboring countries are significantly diverse from one another. Therefore, he believes that applying the common political approach to the states within the region is very laborious task. Referring to this kind of approach to the region "Black Sea Synergy" strategy was noted. "Black Sea Synergy" is aimed at encouraging political and economic reforms by means of sectoral cooperation together with regional and international organizations.



IF MAP IS PAST, WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF NATO-GEORGIA RELATIONS?

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Although Georgian side had an optimism that giving MAP to Georgia might be discussed in Warsaw, these days Georgian government and NATO representatives do not focus on that and make different comments to explain what is there for Georgia on Warsaw Summit. As for the Minister of Defense, Tinatin Khidesheli, she said that the central goal of Georgia on the summit is to gain more instruments on the ground that on opening the door of NATO, Georgia should be ready for entering.



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OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATE OF LARI AGAINST FOREIGN CURRENCIES

1 USD	=	2.2318
1 EUR	=	2.5130
10 RUB	=	0.3367

DETERMINING THE PERCENTAGE OF QUALIFIED SUBJECT – WHAT NON-PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION IS ASKING FOR?

EKA PKHOVELISHVILI

The ruling coalition and opposition parties cannot reach the consensus about the election reform until now. The reasons for disagreement are overtaking the barrier and abolition of the majoritarian electoral system for 2016 parliamentary election, that government does not agree.

The main proposal of the inter-party group was not to cancel the majoritarian system. Their request was to change the staffing election administration and overtake barrier. The changes were also related to the election representatives and advertising parity. In addition, demand has also responded to the use of administrative resources.

The negotiations between the intra-party groups and government to reform the electoral system are quite complicated. Non-parliamentary opposition parties stated that the government does not have the political will to change the electoral system. Thus, it calling into question the legitimacy of the elections.

Opposition emphasizes unfulfilled demands; however, it is possible to reach agreements on certain issues. This includes lowering the percentage of qualified subject, which can be decreased from current 3% to 2%.

This means that if the political union has accumulated 2% of the votes, the party would be deemed as a qualified subject

and therefore, would have budget funding. Qualified subjects will also receive free air time. If they reach an agreement all the political parties that during the last election took about 35 thousand votes, will take the budget funding.

Deputy Zakaria Kutsnashvili does not like this agreement. He claims that the regional parties can also collect 35 thousand votes, therefore, the threshold for qualified entities should be higher.

The members of the majority said that the issue was one of the requirements of internal party. After the announcement of the information has been stated that the financial trade is the major problem for the opposition. However, it is unlikely that the non-parliamentary opposition stressed only this issues, because their main demand from the government is lowering the threshold. Along with this requirement, logically, changes should apply to qualified percent of the political entities.

According to the current legislative system only those parties what take 5% will be in the parliament as a result of the elections. Kukava explains that their demand was to decrease the threshold from 5% to 3%.

“We requested that the threshold decreased to 3%. They offer another barrier regarding

the qualified subject. Today it is only enjoyed by those parties that have been overcome by 3% in the last elections. As they proposed us, the threshold would become 2%.” – Kukava said in the interview with “Politkomsant”

“Consensus has been reached on 4 out of 5 issues” – The Vice-President Kakha Kaladze announced. As he said, it demonstrates that the country is developing democratically. The government promotes „small parties” to receive funding and be able to conduct election campaign under the normal conditions.

This decision is the subsequent of the democratization process happening in Georgia. Determining qualified subject with 2% of votes would contribute to pluralism, equality and rule of law. It should be noted that in Europe the percentage, in most cases, is 4-5%, however, in Europe (especially in the Nordic countries) political parties enjoy a direct financing from the state budget, as well as a public funding. This is quite problematic for Georgian political spectrum.

Demanding the percentage of the qualified subject is vital importance in terms of Georgian political reality. Given the fact that the parties are nor represented as the qualified subjects, they remain to stay without state basic



funding. This creates significant problems for their party activities: the necessary expanses of the party, especially before the election period.

How the pre-election campaign is, it is important to assess whether the fight among the candidates is fair and equitable. Non-parliamentary opposition’s demand to decrease the barriers is quite low, but consistent with the current political situation.

It is unlikely that the major issue for the inter-party group is only to increase the pre-election funding, because the practice of previous years does not prove this evidence. However, it is clear that the problem of funding is always relevant. The most recent election’s analysis gives the evidence that the ruling party had

no financial problems. Therefore, if we are talking about the increase funding from state, we should set a priority for the parties, that are unable to independently search for funds. The only source for them may be the state funding. The decreased percentage at 2%, in turn, will lead more parties to be given government funding.

The government should temporary impose certain rules for the transitional period, which will give non-parliamentary majority an opportunity to exist and develop properly. The government-opposition cooperation cycle is of vital importance for the democratic state. The Inter-Party group discussion on this issue contributes to the multi-party democracy in the country.

KVIRIKASHVILI: Our European friends should know more about the achievements of Georgia

Georgia’s democratic institutions, the rule of law, judiciary, human rights reforms, the 2016 parliamentary elections and the situation in the region were the main topics of the meeting held between the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President Pedro Agramunt.

Prime Minister reiterated that the government will ensure free, transparent and fair elections in compliance with international standards. After the meeting, the PACE President and the Prime Minister made joint statements to the media. Kvirikashvili thanked Pedro Agramunt for invitation and noted that the he had a fruitful meeting.

“It is important to discuss Georgian reforms with our European friends so that they know more about the achievements that Georgia has. It is very important to give answers to the questions that they may have,” said the Prime Minister and thanked his European colleagues for their continued support in the country’s democratization process.



CURRENT SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

GIORGI CHAPIDZE, *from Bulgaria* **EXCLUSIVE**

“The Atlantic Club of Bulgaria” held conference “Current Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region” on April 22, which was attended by the representatives of all the countries within the Black Sea Region and NATO officials. From Georgian side speeches were delivered by Gizo Chelidze the head of the Sustainable Development and Euro Integration Department of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Georgia and professor at Tbilisi State University and Black Sea International University and Nika Chitadze director of the Black Sea Region Geopolitical Research Center. Among the keynote speakers were NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow and Vice-president of the European Parliament Ioan Mircea Paşcu.

The conference was dedicated to the security challenges facing the Black Sea region and was comprised of three panels discussing topical issues. Speaking within the panel of “Hybrid Warfare and Propaganda Campaigns” Gizo Chelidze outlined several security concerns prevailing in the Black Sea states. According to the speaker, the most noteworthy issue with reference to the Hybrid war is the nature and specificity of the threat since it involves various methods of offensive actions and “we will never know when and where the threat will appear and what kind of threat it would be”. Chelidze went on to declare that the Hybrid warfare has unique character and is conducted on several battlefield in parallel to each other. It should be noted that Hybrid warfare implies the combination of the conventional/regular war coupled with cyber and irregular war that is the reason why coping with these challenges is exceptionally complicated task, especially without relevant experience and equipment. Hybrid warfare is more challenging consideration for the small states with the lack of proficiency in cyber security matters making its institutions extremely vulnerable in the times of war.

Apart from these issues, Chelidze drew the audience’s attention to the fact that the Black Sea region is more geographical

definition than political term taking into consideration that the neighboring countries are significantly diverse from one another. Therefore, he believes that applying the common political approach to the states within the region is very laborious task. Referring to this kind of approach to the region “Black Sea Synergy” strategy was noted. “Black Sea Synergy” is aimed at encouraging political and economic reforms by means of sectorial cooperation together with regional and international organizations. This initiative was kicked off in 2010 and includes the joint effort in dealing with the energy, cross border, maritime transport, fishery and other relevant fields. One of the objectives of the “Black Sea Synergy” strategy is to tackle environmental security concerns such as water pollution and promote eco-innovation, research and monitoring of the sea.

The second part of the speech referred to the threats coming from the terrorism that is of pivotal importance for the Black Sea states as far as the so called ISIS is a direct neighbor of the region. As stated by the presenter, having common approach and joint effort when coping with the terrorism threat is a matter of crucial significance in order to neutralize these challenges. Uneven and conflictual approaches towards the “ISIS” harms the joint effort against criminal activities and terrorism. He also spoke out that calling “State”, “caliphate” or “Islamic” is instrumental in promoting the propaganda of the terrorist organization since they deem themselves to be the representatives of the Muslim world. Therefore, international society should call them a terrorist organization and not “state” or the “caliphate”. This kind of approach leads us to the labeling of ordinary criminals/terrorists as part of bigger socio group – Islamic society. Therefore, we should not encourage terrorist perceive themselves as legitimate fighters against “injustice” and western society in the name of defending Islam values.

The director of the Black Sea Region Geopolitical research center Nika Chitadze gave a speech in the panel about the “Islamic State”. He stated that the

terrorist organization is exploiting rich oil fields in the Middle East region that is the main source of income for the radicalized group and is a component of its strength. Nevertheless, in 2016 ISIS has already lost approximately 1/3 of its territories that have decreased its revenues significantly. Chitadze also declared that defeating ISIS may pave the way to the implementation of the energy projects that would be very essential for the Black Sea Region, referring to the possibility of the initiative alternative to the idea of “Nabucco” pipeline. He also concluded that the energy projects in the Middle East region is connected to the Black Sea States. For instance, lifting sanctions imposed on the Iran may have the influence on the energy sector of the Black Sea Region countries.

Chitadze noted that after the recent deterioration of the relations between Turkey and Russian Federation, President Erdogan and foreign minister of Turkey stated the intentions of the accelerating of the constructions of the “Shahdeniz II” pipeline that will provide Turkey with energy resources from Azerbaijan via Georgian territory. Above mentioned pipeline is planned to be finished by 2018 and will bring a considerable change in the Black Sea Region energy security.

The president of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria and former Bulgarian foreign Minister Solomon Passy stated that not inviting Georgia in the NATO after the August War have encouraged the Kremlin for the annexation of the Crimea. Passy believes that the issue of Georgia’s integration in the NATO is an important matter even nowadays. With regard to this statement, the Deputy Secretary General of the NATO declared that enlargement will not be number one issue on the Warsaw Summit and put a particular emphasis only on the case of Montenegro when addressing the question about the new members. This statement illustrates that Georgia’s integration in the NATO is not on the agenda and when speaking about the enlargement officials only discuss Montenegro’s case. Therefore, Georgia has a very little chance of getting real result

from the upcoming summit.

NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow claimed that “Russia is challenging international law and the sovereignty of its neighbours, with its illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Eastern Ukraine”. Furthermore, instability on the southern doorstep of the Alliance increases the risks of the infiltration of the terrorist groups and uncontrolled migration in the Member States and Bulgaria is situated in the point where these issues are intercepted. As stated by Vershbow, in order to address these challenges NATO has undertaken surveillance flights using “Airborne Warning & Control System (AWACS)” aircrafts and plans to increase maritime patrol on the Black Sea. It is noteworthy that USA is going to intensify its rotational forces in the Black Sea region and augment prepositioned equipment in Bulgaria and Romania. These measures will increase the security level in the Black Sea Region that is relatively low since the Russia’s annexation of the Crimea. One of the important considerations is A2/AD (Anti-access/Area Denial) system that has been implemented in the Crimea after its annexation. A2/AD system impedes NATO forces to communicate with certain coastal regions and hampers the movement of the ships and aircrafts. Russia also violated Ukraine’s energy security by occupying the continental shelf rich with carbon resources potentially worth of several billion dollars. Also by taking this step Russia influenced on the energy security of the Black Sea states.

In order to address these challenges NATO plans to increase its maritime patrol in the Black Sea. Also USA is going to keep its rotational forces in Romania, near Constanta and, as stated by the NATO official, installation of the anti-ballistic system in Romania serves to neutralize the possible fires that may be launched from the Middle East region and is not a threat for the Russian Federation.

Nowadays, Black Sea Region is facing several significant security challenges. The main destabilizing factor is the Russian

PM pays official visit to the U.S.

On April 25-29, the Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili paid an official visit to the United States. He has scheduled meetings with the US Vice-President Joseph Biden and the members of the Senate and the House.

During the visit, Giorgi Kvirikashvili will meet with top American business leaders and non-governmental organizations.

The Prime Minister will meet with World Bank President Jim Yong Kim and Deputy Managing Director of the IMF, Zhu Min.

Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s will give a speech at the US Institute of Peace and the University of Illinois. The Prime Minister will also meet with Georgian students living in Boston.

The delegation consists of Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dimitri Kumsishvili, Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze, Chairman of the Foreign Committee, Tedo Japaridze.



Federation, its annexation of the Crimea and venture in the Eastern Ukraine. At this point of time the Kremlin is the main security challenge for the region. Also energy security issues should be noted, that became important issue since the deterioration of Russia-Turkey relations. This consideration can be overcome by the finalization of the “Shahdeniz II” pipeline. Furthermore, NATO plans to increase its patrolling forces on the Black Sea and deploy military-training forces in Bulgaria and Romania ensuring the safety of the NATO’s Eastern Flank. These measurement will protect NATO member states (three countries are NATO members out of six Black Sea States) but is not to neutralize the threats in the region, especially when the source of this threat is within the region. NATO member states are in need of taking more effective measures to cope with the existing security challenges in the Black Sea Region.

IF MAP IS PAST, WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF NATO-GEORGIA RELATIONS?

GURAM PTSKIALADZE

Warsaw is getting ready for the NATO's 27th summit this summer. The discussion about what is there for Georgia is getting active. Some politicians and experts believe that this summit is another opportunity for Georgia to advance its relations with NATO; while the second part considers that this year's summit will pay less attention to the enlargement and it will consider Georgia in the same way as it was at the previous summit in Wales.

In 2014, the main focus of NATO summit was Ukrainian crisis; the presence of Russia in Crimea, enhancing military troops in Eastern Europe; the mission in Afghanistan and other key issues. Georgia hoped ahead of the summit that meeting in Wales would bring up giving Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia, but it remained unaccomplished.

Up to Warsaw Summit, several announcements have been expressed. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu made clear that he and his country fully back up Georgia in relation with NATO and pointed out that on the next ministerial of NATO holding in May, he is about to have a voice in supporting Georgia to be given a membership without MAP.

"I think that Georgia is capable of joining NATO without

even Action Plan. We heartedly advocate Georgia to become a member of NATO and I am going to put the issue on the agenda in May while the ministerial," stated Cavusoglu.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Douglas Lute unambiguously stated that NATO will not expand in the near future: "In practical terms I don't see much additional room in the near term, the next several years perhaps or maybe even longer, for additional NATO expansion", - said Lute and added that Russia plays an important part in the strategic environment and the strategic environment will put a brake on NATO expansion.

Although Georgian side had an optimism that on Warsaw Summit member states would discuss the possibility of giving MAP to Georgia, these days Georgian government and its members do not focus on granting Georgia with Action Plan on the summit. Foreign Minister said that Georgian side expects that the progress Georgia achieved for the integration will be emphasized and actual steps will be made to increase Georgia's potential of self-defense.

As for the Minister of Defense of Georgia, Tinatin Khidsheli, she said that the central goal of Georgia on the summit is to gain more instruments on the ground that on opening the door



of NATO, Georgia should be ready for entering. "MAP- is a sort of past. It was said that the MAP became part of political processes and it no longer has anything in common with the practical instruments, as far as you know, the document clearly says that Georgia has all the tools for membership even without MAP," she said to Rustavi 2 broadcaster.

Ahead of the statement of Khidsheli, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs James Appathurai revealed that there is no any consent on giving Georgia MAP and it will not be an issue on Warsaw Summit too.

NATO member states will discuss migrant crisis and its role solving the crisis, Ukraine will still be on the agenda. Besides, they will exchange views on enhancing military troops in Eastern Europe and NATO-Russia relations. In last months, as Jans Stoltenberg expected, Defense Ministers of NATO members states approved the plan that includes strengthening the position of the alliance on the Eastern borders.

As he made clear, further decisions will be made in this regard while Warsaw Summit being held. In case of Georgia, member states will sum up the dual relations between Georgia and NATO and discuss all the projects and decisions that was made in Wales in 2014. For Georgia, it

is important to get new instructions that helps improve relations with NATO and then Georgia will start implementing it.

The Head of the NATO Liaison Office in Georgia, Mr William Lahue stated that the previous government politicized the issue of getting MAP. That is why, Georgia will find it difficult to have consensus with all 28 member states in this regards. He also said that the main mean for Georgia to integrate into NATO is to fulfill reforms that are carried out successfully.

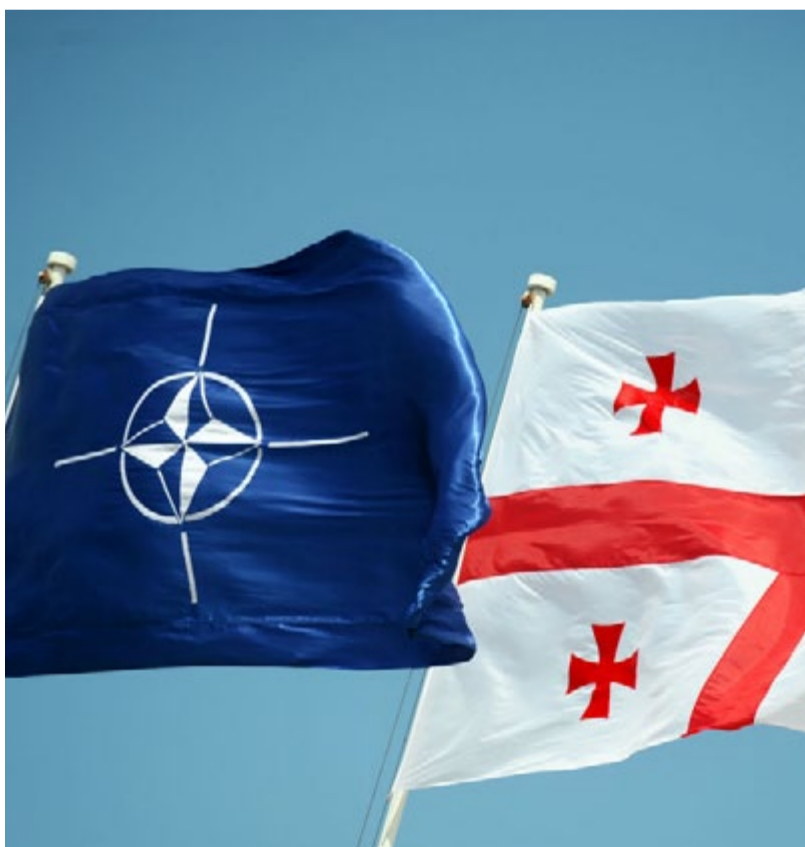
Before Warsaw Summit, more than two months remain, but it is clear that the issue of granting with MAP will not be on the agenda, let alone the possibility of really getting it. Though Georgia tried to achieve its goal by getting MAP on Wales Summit and Georgian side went on mentioning it from time to time, but recently it seems obvious chances of it is utopian.

Georgian Ministers are aware that asking for the action plan now is not real taking into consideration current situation worldwide. For that reason, Georgia will focus on the projects and initiatives that were mentioned on Wales Summit and will try to get next steps toward NATO. Recent challenges made NATO rethink on its foreign policy. Migrant crisis, Ukraine's case, its relations with Russia have influence over NATO's expansion policy. Besides, paying attention to its

Eastern borders emphasizes how carefully the alliance looks at Russia. Statements by officials of NATO made clear that the organization does not have a will to expand its boundaries in the near future and it concerns to general policy and is not related to one specific country such as Georgia. Even Montenegro, which remains as the first candidate to join NATO, now seems to wait for several years despite the fact that NATO invited it to join in December, 2015.

After the end of the last year, there was a massive talk between Montenegro and the alliance over joining it but Russia responded it with ferocious statements, as the Kremlin always react actively on hearing that NATO is about to expand on Eastern border or even south. Now, ahead of Warsaw Summit, talks over Montenegro's entry is being halted for a while.

It is true that Montenegro's membership is not a red line for Russia, but it clashes its foreign policy that aims not to allow NATO expand its borders on Eastern borders and closing it. NATO takes into account Russia to a great extent when shaping its policy on expanding its borders and it avoids to worsen relations with Russia. Migrant crisis, Syria civil war, where Russia cooperates with the West and other factors force NATO to stop thinking on expanding at least for several years.



THE PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA PAID AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO FRANCE

On April 20, the President of Georgia H.E. Giorgi Margvelashvili and the First Lady Maka Chichua paid an official visit to France.

French President H.E. François Hollande hosted the President of Georgia H.E. Giorgi Margvelashvili at Élysée Palace.

“I met the president who supports the interests of Georgia and after this meeting, I am even more optimistic about the issues that affect the future of our country,” said the President. François Hollande also discussed Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

In respect of the President of Georgia, the official welcoming ceremony was held at historical Palace of Invalides in Paris.

Within the official visit frames, the meetings were also held with the President of the Senate of France Mr. Gérard Larcher, and with the Director-General of UNESCO Mrs. Irina Bokova. President H.E. Giorgi Margvelashvili will meet the representatives of IFRI expert circles at the International Affairs Institute and will answer the questions.

As stated the Foreign Relations Secretary to the President of Georgia Mr. Tengiz Pkhaldze, the dynamics of bilateral relations is developed sufficiently actively between Georgia and France. “Georgia and France are reliable partners that cooperate regarding too many issues, such as political, economic and



security issues. In multilateral cooperation format is discussing European and Euro-Atlantic Integration topics. In this respect, it is significantly important to check and agree on the positions. We have ahead the most important developments in both directions and it has significantly huge embark for us the French position in this regard”, - was admitted by Mr. Tengiz Pkhaldze.

In the framework of his official visit, Giorgi Margvelashvili together with the First Lady saw the Georgia’s first republic diplomatic archives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France. The Head of State and the First Lady also visited Leuville Georgian estate and laid the wreath of patriot graves. The President of Georgia met the descendants of Georgia’s First Republic Government members and visited the renovated library

financed by the Reserve Fund of the President of Georgia.

The President of Georgia attended the reception dedicated to the 25th anniversary of restoration Georgia’s independence and addressed to the audience.

Georgian delegation included: The Head of the Administration of the President of Georgia Mr. Giorgi Abashishvili, Secretary of the National Council Mrs. Irine Imerlishvili, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Davit Dondua, the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues Mr. Gela Dumbadze, the Ambassador of Georgia to the French Republic H.E. Eka Siradze – Delone, the Foreign Relations Secretary of the President of Georgia Mr. Tengiz Pkhaldze, and Political Secretary Mrs. Pikhria Chikhradze.

The official visit of the President of Georgia to France ended on April 23.

The ninth round of the EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue

The European Union and Georgia held the ninth round of their annual Human Rights Dialogue in Brussels on April 20. Both sides welcomed the continued progress on Human Rights in Georgia, also acknowledged by the positive recommendation on Visa Liberalisation by the European Commission in December 2015. They agreed on the importance of a free and pluralistic media environment, and political pluralism as a prerequisite for the conduct of democratic elections.

The European Union welcomed the changes to the electoral systems aimed at ensuring equality of suffrage, and encouraged Georgia to continue efforts to further increase participation of women and national minority representatives in politics.

The EU welcomed the progress achieved in the field of civic integration, and encouraged effective implementation of the Civic Equality and integration state strategy. The European Union encouraged Georgia to continue effective implementation of its anti-discrimination law and stressed its commitment to the universality of human rights for all, regardless of religion or belief, race, sex, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability or other.

The EU commended Georgia for its initiative to further strengthen the institutional mechanism on gender equality at the executive level and encouraged the country to proceed with the ratification of the Istanbul convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The European Union welcomed the adoption of the Juvenile Justice Code and the law on early and preschool education as good progress to address children rights, as well as the efforts of the Georgian Government to prevent trafficking among minors. The EU also welcomed revival of tripartite social dialogue and encouraged Georgia to adopt amendments to its labour code in line with ILO standards and to continue efforts to ensure enforcement of all labour rights. The EU positively noted the ongoing justice sector reforms with a view of building an institutional democracy in Georgia.

Both sides agreed on Georgia’s

good progress in combatting torture and ill-treatment, in particular noting improvement in prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners. The EU welcomed that the Independent National Prevention Mechanism under the Public Defender’s Office enjoys full access for monitoring closed facilities. The EU and Georgia agreed on the need for Georgia to continue working on establishing an independent and impartial investigative mechanism for the efficient investigation and prosecution of certain crimes against human rights and freedoms committed by representatives of law enforcement agencies.

The EU commended Georgia’s commitment to settle the cases lodged with the European Court of Human Rights (the ECHR), with a purpose of providing prompt redress to the victims of human rights violations at the national level and reducing its caseload. The EU welcomed the introduction of the legislative package on granting financial compensation to the victims.

The dialogue allowed for an open, constructive exchange on the human rights situation in Georgia, on the country’s commitment to achieving sustainable progress in this area and on the EU’s commitments and policy framework for the promotion of Democracy and Human Rights. It is also an integral part of monitoring of the implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. In line with its policy of consulting civil society ahead of its meetings on human rights, the EU met with representatives of Georgian and international NGOs prior to the dialogue as well as with representatives of international and regional organisations present in Georgia.

The EU delegation was led by Ms Elisabeth Tison, Head of the Human Rights Strategy and Policy Implementation Division in the European External Action Service, while the Georgian delegation was headed by Mr Gigi Gigladze, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. The dialogue was planned to coincide with the Justice, Freedom and Security Subcommittee, to be held on 21 April. The next Human Rights Dialogue between the EU and Georgia is scheduled to take place in Tbilisi in 2017.



THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION EXEMPTED GEORGIA FROM RED-FLAGGED STATUS

Georgia has successfully fulfilled all international obligations in terms of civic aviation on the grounds of which the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) deprived Georgia of the Red-Flagged Status – the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dimitri Kumsishvili made an announcement about this at Friday’s briefing.

As the Minister stated, according to the results revealed by the audit of the International Civil Aviation Organization Georgia’s index exceeded the 60 % identified in the Global Aviation Safety Plan of ICAO (according to preliminary data 64.4 % was shown) which is unprecedented for our country.

“I would like to thank the management of the ICAO and all the staff who did their best to exempt Georgia from the Red-Flagged status. This means that new airline companies will become more willing to register in Georgia; it also means that the airline companies registered in the country as well as their safety, personnel and all the procedures that airline companies must be working in line with are fully tested,” said Dimitri Kumsishvili.

According to the Vice Prime

Minister, the ICAO conducted an audit in the overall Georgian aviation system in June 2007 on the grounds of which they stated that Georgia could not meet 68 % of International Aviation Standards, the Georgian Civil Aviation Agency was unable to fulfill obligations imposed on them or provide enough supervision of flight security. After this Georgia started sorting out these areas.

In October 2013, another audit was conducted in the overall aviation system in Georgia. The audit revealed that in compared to the audit in 2007, Georgia had improved the overall index in terms of fulfilling the obligations of the ICAO by 24 %. The Georgian Civil Aviation Agency showed an increase in every area in its competence.

Although the Civil Aviation Agency had improved by 44 % in terms of supervision of aircraft operators, the ICAO detected a fault in the certification process. According to the audit the aircraft operators licensing process had to be revisited. Thus, Georgia was red-flagged.

The Georgian Civil Aviation Agency of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development took all necessary

measures to fix this problem: made changes to corresponding normative acts, announced moratorium on the registration of new companies from September 2014 to May 2015, revisited special warrants and admissions issued in the process of certification; they also carried out an additional inspection of airline companies specializing in international transportations.

All this information was uploaded to the ICAO base after which the ICAO conducted a Coordinated Validation Mission in Georgia. The audit concluded that the Georgian Civil Aviation Agency showed an improvement in every tested component:

The ICAO will make a final decision within 90 days; the preliminary percentages are as follows:

- a) Provision of aircraft validity has improved by 20.82 %.
- b) Effective Implementation of standards and recommended practices in aviation legislation increased to 81.82 %. The average international index is 67.8 % (An improvement of 59.09 % compared to last year).
- c) In terms of provision of aircraft operators the index increased to 82.73 %. The average international index is 66.6



% (An improvement of 22.3 % compared to the audit of 2013).

d) Organizational part (ORG) which was only partially discussed by the audit due to its correlation to other issues, has improved by 15.34 %.

In addition, the improvement of flight security, aviation security, aviation legislation and service quality are also approved through the results of other international audits conducted in the Georgian Civil Aviation Agency: For instance, a standardizing audit of the Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft Programme (SAFA) of the European Aviation Safety Agency was conducted in 2013. No faults were detected at the time. Also, in 2015, as a result of the ICAO audit Georgia’s overall index in terms of supervision of aviation security amounted to 87.8 % which is

an improvement of almost 30 % compared to ICAO audit results in 2008.

“In general we are having quite a successful year in aviation: In the first quarter of the year the number of arriving passengers had increased by 19 % which is very good. I would also like to remark that flights in summer will be operated in 27 different directions by 30 airline companies.

New flights to Kutaisi will be added in September and additionally, we have started intensive works on domestic flights and development of regional aerodromes. We have started private and public dialogues and meetings with interested investors and we expect to have some very good news about various new aerodromes,” said the Vice Prime Minister.

Germany to allocate 140 million Euros to Georgia

On April 20 the Minister of Finances of Georgia Nodar Khaduri and the Ambassador of the German Federal Republic to Georgia Ms. Bettina Cadenbach signed an agreement on financial cooperation between the Georgian government and government of the German Federal Republic. The document a framework agreement under

which Georgia 140 million euros will be assigned to Georgia to support the execution of the following projects: Supporting the financial sector in Georgia, Climate-friendly waste management II, Open programme of power line extension II and Provision of Adjara with water and arrangement of the drainage system. The Minister of Finances

Nodar Khaduri thanked the Ambassador of the German Federal Republic for the support Georgia is getting from Germany in terms of financing important projects as well as building stronger relationship with Europe. Lars Oermann Tbilisi Office Director of German Reconstruction Loan Corporation (KfW) also attended the signing ceremony.

THE WORKING GROUP ON WINEMAKING AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT WAS FORMED IN KAKHETI

To develop winemaking and tourism in the region of Kakheti, the special working group will be established, which in addition to government agencies includes business representatives working in the region.

This initiative was discussed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dimitry Kumsishvili at the meeting with businessmen. The working group will study the situation and prepare recommendations on how to further promote the development of tourism and wine making in the region.

According to the Deputy Prime

Minister, the region has to offer wine tasting opportunities and that the wine tourism development will attract more tourism

The Head of National Tourism Administration, Giorgi Chogovadze made presentation of the region and the activities planned.

At the end, the discussion was held, where both sides decided that the next meeting will be held in a few weeks, during which specific areas will be discussed.

The meeting was attended by the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development together with the Kakheti regional governor, Irakli Shiolashvili.



HOLLYWOOD TOP PRODUCERS FAMILIARIZING THEMSELVES WITH FILM-MAKING CONDITIONS IN GEORGIA

The Entrepreneurship Development Agency of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has actively started promoting the new component of supporting film industry “Film in Georgia” across the USA.

On April 20-21 Georgian Delegation Members met with representatives of Los Angeles film industry. Disney, Paramount Pictures, NBC universal, Universal pictures, Warner Brothers, HBO and Fox are the outstanding companies the representatives of which attended the presentation of the programme “Film in Georgia” held by the Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia Ketevan Botchorishvili and representative of the Entrepreneurship Development Agency Ana Kvaratskhelia in Los Angeles. The

high-class introductory meetings were organized in Georgia by the Motion Picture Association with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Georgia.

Within the framework of the visit to Los Angeles, Georgian Delegation Members, including private production companies JTW Metro, Millimeter Film and ABK Communications visited the Walt Disney Studios where they had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the working process, studios and stages.

On April 21, Disney hosted the presentation of the programme “Film in Georgia” which was attended by representatives of the company, owners of Marvel Entertainment, LLC and ABC Television Group in particular. They listened to the conditions included in the component carefully

and familiarized themselves with Georgia as a prospective center for filming in Eastern Europe.

It is noteworthy that Disney has already shown interest in the film industry encouragement component and their delegation is planning to visit Georgia in the immediate future.

All along, an exhibition “Location Show” is to be held within the framework of the visit to publicize the programme. “Location Show” invites representatives of film industries from all over the world, thus it is a good opportunity for Georgia to show off its potential and sign contracts with leading filmmakers in this respect. On April 25 the Agency is also arranging a reception for top Hollywood producers where they will be presented the programme.



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THE PROBLEMS WITH GEORGIAN DEMOCRACY EVALUATION BY FREEDOM HOUSE

IRAKLI PAVLENISHVILI

The authoritative nongovernmental organization Freedom House specializing in studying civil and political liberties and rights, published an annual report “Countries in Transitional Period 2016” on April 11. The report discusses and assesses the quality of democracy in Georgia as well as areas affecting democracy index in the country. According to the chart, countries are evaluated in different categories and an average democracy index is defined. The scale measures with points from one to seven, one being the highest and seven being the lowest in assessment. The report shows development of democracy in 29 Post-Soviet, Balkan and Central European countries in 2015.

According to the study, democracy index in Georgia has improved to 4.61 compared to last year; the progress is thanks to the improved independence index of the juridical system which has increased to 4.75 compared to 5.00 last year. According to the report, the situation has not changed, i.e. the situation has not improved or worsened, in areas such as national democratic governance (5.50), election process (4.50), civic society (3.75), independent media (4.00), local democratic governance (5.25) and corruption (4.50).

The report reflects main tendencies in the civil and political life and the author emphasizes the fact that generally the tendency of democratic transformation is positive, with problems occurring though. For instance, civic forces financed by groups cooperating with the Russian Political Center are becoming more and more active. They are actively

carrying out anti-European campaigns. According to the report, the Georgian Orthodox Church is also of anti-European nature. In this context, it is interesting why Freedom House underestimated the fact that Georgian National Communication Commission licensed new televisions without a poll, while a strong pro-Russian propaganda can be spotted in the Georgian media.

Interestingly, corruption index in the report has not changed for the worse, however it is therein emphasized that compared to 2013 when only 12 % of the population claimed that nepotism had firmly been established in the executive government, the number of this type of group of people increased up to 25% in 2015. Also, regarding corruption they ignore elite corruption in the context of which excitement and protests occurred as a backlash against officials’ increased bonuses. While in 2012 1,202 billion laris were allocated for bureaucratic purposes, in 2016 this number has increased to 1,658 billion laris. The opposition appealed to the ruling party to stop the wrong practice of bonuses and perks. It is surprising that this factor was neither taken into account nor mentioned in the report.

As it has already been pointed out, according to the study, the only area in which the Georgian state has progressed and which is the reason for a higher democracy index in the country, is the independence index of the juridical system. One of the reasons for this is that the government has abolished active-criminal prosecution of former officials from the Georgian Na-

tional Movement; however the report also emphasizes that new problems are being identified in the juridical system as the City court is often associated with the Georgian Dream, and the Constitutional court – with the National Movement. Thus, in fact, there is a danger of politicization of the juridical system which makes it hard to understand what positive changes have occurred within this institute.

The argument about abolishing active criminal prosecution of former officials from the Georgian National Movement given in the report is very weak as the lack of politically motivated criminal prosecution is due to the fact that officials and Ministers of the former government that used to create the political atmosphere and activities are already imprisoned by the Georgian Dream. In addition, questions raised at their trials (for example, the fact that witnesses provided different attestations at different times) are not mentioned in the report.

Also, it is not mentioned that the former Mayor Gigi Ugulava is actually considered a political prisoner by European society. The fact that the newly appointed President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Pedro Agramunt named fighting for the rights of Gigi Ugulava, Nadiya Savchenko and other political prisoners as one his goals is proof enough.

According to the report, the attack that the government carried out against the independence of the media - the main episode of the attack being the trial against the TV Company Rustavi 2 – was a serious problem in 2015. This makes the improved inde-



pendence index of the juridical system seem to be paradoxical, given the condition that legal disputes ordered by the government are in action in the country.

The City Court is logically associated with the Georgian Dream because they make decisions preferred by the government, and the Constitutional Court is associated with the National Movement because it tends to abate the non-constitutional decisions made by the City Court. For instance, the decision made about Gigi Ugulava’s case in September, according to which the controversial norm permitted imprisonment for longer than it is allowed by the law, was a violation of the right of the convicted protected by Paragraphs 1 and 6 of Article 18 of the Constitution.

According to another respected organization AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, “due to the decisions made, judges were severely criticized by government officials and became victims of intimidation from the side of government support groups”. This fact is not mentioned in the study done by Freedom House.

The study largely ignores the issue of the informal governance which after the resignation of Bidzina Ivanishvili from the government has often been discussed by international society and Georgian non-governmental sectors. Sudden and unexpected dismissals, for instance, dis-

missal of Gharibashvili without ceremony and satisfying other publicly announced wishes of Ivanishvili raises sensible doubts on informal governance. The European Commissioner Stefan Fule talked about the problem of informal governance at a conference held in Tbilisi in September last year. As he said, he did not get an adequate answer from government members about this problem; in addition, in the framework of a report on the two-year governance of the Georgian Dream prepared in May 2015, 15 Georgian nongovernmental organizations named informal governance as the main problem but the study does not focus on this issue either.

When talking about the media, the law on advertising is not mentioned; certain nongovernmental organizations believe that the law has been made only against one TV Company Rustavi 2. The report also fails to mention the nonexistence of the law on Media Funding Transparency.

It surely is pleasant to learn that Georgia’s democracy index has at least slightly improved in the report prepared by such a respected organization as Freedom House, but the report would have been better if the problems of the Georgian state had been fully evaluated and presented, which would further contribute to improvement in Georgia’s democracy index.

Election of the Rector of Georgian Technical University for a Third Term Is Against the Law

Transparency International - Georgia comments upon the third term election of the rector of Technical University and claims that this action goes against the law. Apart from this, we should also consider the fact that for this reason various Technical University lecturers have been on hunger strike for nine days.

In January 2016 Archil Prangishvili was elected as the rector of Georgian Technical University for the 3rd term. The Minister of Education and Science stated that the Ministry was unable to detect any violation in Rector Elections. The Ministry considers the reason to be frequent changes to legislation and juridi-

cal form of the university.

Despite this, election of Archil Prangishvili as the Rector of Georgian Technical University for the 3rd term violates the Georgian law on “Higher Education” and his activities on this position are illegitimate.

It is worth noting that the law on prohibition of electing a uni-

versity rector for more than two terms was in force as well as included in Technical University Regulations at all three stages of electing Archil Prangishvili as the Rector. According to the Ministry’s argument, in case of prospective change to the juridi-

cal form of the university, Archil Prangishvili may be able to take part in Rector Elections for two more terms. Currently, legitimacy issues regarding Rector Elections at Georgian Technical University are being considered by Tbilisi City Court.

SHOULD MANDATORY MILITARY SERVICE BE ABOLISHED?

GVANTSA SILIKASHVILI **EXCLUSIVE**

The Minister of Defense Tina Khidasheli became the center of attention once again when stating that the Georgian military will be completely contractual. First she met with experts to discuss the changes and then started active discussions with students. Raising the problem prior to the election has even become of political nature as the leader of the Republican Party has won the hearts of many young people through the reform. However Khidasheli explained her actions differently:

“Georgia has taken lots of responsibilities including the abolishment of mandatory military service before 2016. I am willing to appeal to the committee as well as Parliament to launch discussions”, the Minister of Defense said that each and every aspect is important and interesting, but this not going to serve as a solution to the problem; “it is necessary to come to a final political consensus on what kind of army Georgia should have,” she added.

The initiative has been supported and opposed by many. However, it is irrefutable that the current system needs to be reconsidered and improved. Especially when many youngsters do not manage to acquire necessary basic military skills even in a year as they have never served in a barrack.

Under the Georgian law on “Military Obligations and Military Service”, every citizen with corresponding skills is required to take part in the mandatory military service. People temporarily residing in Georgia are also required to take part in the Georgian mandatory military

service.

To make the mandatory military service more prestigious, it is a prerequisite in certain jobs. For example, if a person has not taken part in the mandatory military service will not be appointed on a diplomatic position. Taking part in the mandatory military service is also an essential criterion to get a job in some security forces.

The faulty mandatory military service and necessity of changes are also discussed in NATO’s recommendations for Georgia. According to NATO’s recommendations, which Georgia must accomplish, we must abolish the mandatory military service by 2016 and shift to the contractual one.

By now, the mandatory military service exists only in four of the 28 NATO member states – Estonia, Turkey, Greece and Norway.

Most Western European countries abolished the mandatory military service in the 1990s, after the Cold War was over; Eastern European Countries abolished it from 2000 through 2008.

The mandatory military service is still in effect in European neutral countries. In Finland recruits serve from six to twelve months (depending on the training programme and the military status they are seeking). In Austria they serve for seven months. In Switzerland recruits periodically take trainings lasting for a few months or weeks, however they can opt for a 300-day non-stop service.

In an interview with the OBSERVER, expert in military issues Giorgi Goguadze touched upon the negative sides of the

Georgian military model.

“As it turns out, one loses a year of his life with no valuable gain – no military experience - in return. The government has quite a parasitic approach – it uses recruits for state strategic defense, for example, as a guard at a module – one either ends up in the barrack or as a guard of an asset. Thus, in real war situations these people are not ready. That is why I think that the general mandatory recruitment must be abolished as it does not meet current requirements and targets”.

Supporters of the mandatory military service back up their position by a lower self-defense potential of the country on the grounds of the existing system. Yet, in 2013, under the recruitment announced by the then Defense Minister Irakli Alasania, over 4000 recruits applied which is 2.5 times higher than the number of citizens recruited (1599) by the Ministry of Defense in 2015. This indicates that many people in Georgia aspire to be soldiers.

As for taking risks of war activities into account, as Giorgi Goguadze explains, we have to be rational and approach the situation realistically:

“We cannot prepare for a total war such as a war against Russia. The divisions and battalions will just not be enough for fighting against such a huge country. Thus, a rational approach should be called for. Our main objective is to stop this force in war situations until we get international support”

In addition, shifting to the contractual army will in the long-term solve many problems. For example, students will not at-

tempt to take master’s degree directly after bachelor’s only not to join the army. There have been cases when young adults intentionally get injured.

On the other hand, a big part of juveniles remain inexperienced in regard to military. They do not know how to deal with a weapon and will not be able to help the motherland in case of a total war. But still there is not a big difference because of the way they are trained nowadays. Either the system has to be improved in terms of recruitment, training and intensive courses, or shift to the professional military service,” Goguadze remarked.

As he said, conditions in the professional army are quite good. Except for a reasonable salary, soldiers get good medical insurance from the US and Germany. Career advancement opportunities also occur step by step.

Thus, he considers this to be one of the advantages of the professional army: “They not only serve their country and do their duty, but the army is their source of income too, which increases motivation and ensures further resources to be provided by each person serving in the army”.

In case of the contractual army model though, the necessity of good reserves is pressing. A reserve is manned with people trained in a short period of time. According to the expert, you can train a soldier in the reserve better in a short period of time than if the training lasted for a year.

There is an explanation as to why recruits spend one year guarding instead of getting trained at the barrack. It is important to have a guard in security forces. If recruits are not em-

ployed there, then the state will have to hire an employee and pay to them. As for recruits in the mandatory military service, they are paid minimum wages.

As the expert states, the least amount of money in the region is spent on military expenses:

“Both Armenia and Azerbaijan spend more on the military service than us. The expenditures in 2006-2007 were higher than now. It is obvious that due to higher military expenditures, costs in other areas, like social welfare and education, have to be cut but this is the way it is”.

However he adds that, the budget is enough for the contractual army. Through the optimization of the amount of money spent today it could even be enough for 35 000 soldiers.

There have been talks about the military reform for the last 2-3 years. First they decreased the period of recruitment – from 15 months down to 12 months. Now they are considering the abolishment of the mandatory military service. According to the expert, this issue has become so pressing particularly now because of the forthcoming election as it affects electors. But he does not think it is right to politicize this issue.

What kind of model will have been developed by 2017 and whether the mandatory military service will be abolished or not is yet unclear. According to Giorgi Goguadze, the main thing is the result rather than the model. We must get a mobile, flexible and strong army as a result. Today only professional brigades meet these criteria which cannot be said about soldiers having taken part in the mandatory military service.

150 Soldiers have been granted apartments in their ownership

Last week the Minister of Defense of Georgia granted living areas to 150 military personnel in person. Tinatin Khidasheli congratulated the new owners of the apartments and wished them success.

This time, the apartments at Abashvili Street N3 were granted to those military personnel who qualified for it through their years of service and under the contracts approved by the order N135, 19 March 2007 of the Minister of Defense of Georgia

on “military personnel with an officer’s status doing their military service in the Ministry of Defense of Georgia”.

The Minister of Defense talked about the criteria for granting apartments and prospective plans. As she pointed out by 2017 it will be possible to fulfill the obligations imposed on the state.

“We have roughly more than 1000 military personnel left that have not yet been granted an apartment. During my years in

office up to 400 military personnel already received apartments. In two weeks, after Easter, 120 more apartments will be provided and about the same number will be handed over to military staff in June; we suppose that two more blocks of apartments will be available for military personnel by the end of the year and the list will be almost halved. In 2017 it will already be possible to fulfill this obligation. Within the framework of these obligations, people are sorted accord-

ing to certain features – large family, social status and years of service. Naturally, wounded military staff is prioritized. We have completed providing the families of departed military staff,” said Tinatin Khidasheli.

Apartment distribution was based on a ballot. Military staff was granted apartments in the form of direct selling, for a symbolic price – 1 lari.

After the ballot, the Minister of Defense visited the new apartments together with the military

staff and their family members and observed renovation works.



OUTSTANDING SUCCESS FOR FOUNDER OF GOOGLE DEVELOPERS GROUP TBILISI

GURANDA DZAMELASHVILI

EXCLUSIVE

23-year-old Ninutsa Nanitashvili is one of the founders of the Google Developers Group in Georgia in 2012 and has been leading it ever since. During this time she has organized dozens of events and initiatives, has been invited to international summits at Googleplex (the corporate headquarters complex of Google) as a participant, speaker and moderator several times. She has just become a winner of the European Union Award “Women in Computing”, and on April 20, in Washington, she was granted the Young Leaders Award by the US State Department; she now ranks among 10 persons from the world that have been granted this award for social impact.

Nino, after you were nominated for the European Celebration of Women in Computing, people on Facebook were actively supporting you. Tell us about the contest...

The Women in Computing Award is the European Commission’s attempt to find females working in the technological sphere so that they can set an example. On April 25-26 this year, a large-scale event European Celebration for Women in Computing is to be held in Brussels under the aegis of the European Commission within the framework of which speaker sessions will be arranged and the winners will be awarded. Today a number of international organizations talk about encouraging the involvement of females in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Education scholarships are given, conferences are held, we even started working in this respect in Georgia four years ago through the “Women Techmaker” project, which is supported by Google.

How did you happen to participate in this contest and what was the result? How big was the support from Georgians?

My colleague nominated me for the award and I qualified for the top 5 which was followed by voting. I would like to say that really impressive ladies were presented in all the three categories and it was hard to believe that I was one of them. In addition, I was greatly supported by Georgians among others. Everyone

got involved in the voting campaign. The final decision was made by a panel of qualified juries on April 14; based on the number of votes and nominee profiles I became the winner in the Social Impact Category.

The European commission grants the Social Impact Award to women seeking for solutions to various social problems through technologies and innovations and changing the world for the better. What do you think Georgia should change in this respect? In what way should women become more active?

Nowadays, information technologies provide lots of opportunities. We might be using them on a daily basis to entertain or communicate with friends, but their potential to change reality and solve certain problems is far greater be it through prosocial use of webpages or applications or development of new platforms.

Tell us briefly about yourself. Where and what did you study. What do you do now and where do you live?

I earned a Bachelor’s Degree in sociology at TSU (As an exchange student I studied at the University of Groningen in Holland). Now I am in my second year of Master’s Programme in Public Policy Administration at Ilia State University. I am trying to use the combination of knowledge acquired in social sciences and modern technologies to introduce new approaches to solve and support various issues. I often travel, but I live in Tbilisi. It is essential to realize that on the one hand it is important to study abroad and create international contacts, but on the other hand, we need every young adult back in Georgia, leading changes.

A few years ago you founded Google Developers Group in Georgia. What does this group specialize in? What kind of cooperation do you have with Google?

Google Developers Group Tbilisi (GDG Tbilisi) was founded more than four years ago, which was an act of joining over 100 countries worldwide and marked ourselves on the international map, we received more attention from Google and started carrying out events and projects.

This initiative aims to support local professionals (programmers, designers, entrepreneurs, etc.) to deepen knowledge and acquire further practical skills, build strong cooperation, have an opportunity to meet successful speakers from different parts of the world and produce real prototypes of certain ideas. We wanted to launch something new, introduce a technological phenomenon and establish events that are of usual nature today (e.g. Hackathon, i.e. a “hacker marathon”). This is not a paid job, every organizer is a volunteer and we try to execute programmes with the help of Google and other local companies.

You have been invited to summits at the headquarters of Google as a participant, speaker and moderator. What issues did you have to give a speech about?

Google holds important annual meetings that managers and staff of GDG attend. The topics included women in technology, mentorship initiatives or ways for active mentors to motivate school girls and boys, benefits we can bring to society by means of technologies, importance of fighting against the technological abyss and easier access to the internet and computer awareness for everyone.

You received a letter from the Editor of Forbes New York saying that they had heard about you and they wanted you to be one of the speakers at the Under 30 Summit. Tell us about this.

The Forbes Under 30 Summit, was held in Israel this year. Over 600 young professionals from different spheres such as entrepreneurship, engineering, education, game industry among others gathered there. The summit is a very high-level event ranking among the twelve most authoritative events where you have to be specially invited. I was very lucky to get a letter from them. I really did not expect such a thing. Various high-ranking speakers paid a visit during for days, including Shimon Peres, the former President of Israel and Nobel laureate, government officials, Hollywood actors among others. One of the sessions was dedicated to innovative peace initiatives carried out on territories that have experienced conflicts.



At this session I talked about the project by the organization “Elva” within the framework of which we helped Georgian and Abkhazian youngsters to make friends with one another through computer games. We also created a completely new game Peace Park which along with playing aims to develop mediation and peacebuilding skills in young adults. The project was executed within the framework of the joint initiative COBERM of the United Nations and European Commission.

You are also a winner of the Future Leaders Exchange Programme (FLEX). What kind of experience did you get in the United States? What influence did it have on your career?

The school exchange programme in U.S. has a really big influence on every participant. This was a really transitional period for me. I got a lot of opportunities to realize my potential and to understand what I wanted and what I could do well. I realized what it means to be a volunteer and serve a great goal with your little work; I realized that America relies on every citizen’s involvement. This exchange programme also gave me a great responsibility to share what I had acquired with Georgians as well as promote or engage in volunteering and civic activities here too. We as alumnae carried out hundreds of events; we launched our own organizations, companies and initiatives. The alumnae of every US-financed programme are actively engaged in the civil sphere, you can see them in the government too, on

leading positions.

You have impressive career achievements at quite an early age. What were the difficulties you have gone through during this time?

The more you do, the better you realize how much more you have to do, more things are happening to you. I have often had moments when I did not have time for friends and family members; I had not seen them for months due to traveling or my tight schedule. Striking a balance here is probably the biggest challenge. When you are young, you want to take lots of responsibilities, manage to do many things, work on three positions, be a volunteer at two other places and postpone every weekend. But perhaps at some point we all need to pause, look back and think where we are needed most, what job and relationships are most valuable.

How about your future plans?

In the future I really want to reach beyond Tbilisi. We already have several initiatives that, for instance, include computer programming lessons in 10 schools across Georgia, meetings with young people and introducing the opportunities existing in the innovation and technology sphere to them. The government is currently supporting the launch of innovation centers in regions which is complimentary. It is essential for us - organizations as well as individuals to engage in this process and make an effort. Finally, I would like to carry out even more projects in terms of restoring trust and peacebuilding.

A MEMORANDUM OF FRIENDSHIP HAS BEEN SIGNED BETWEEN TBILISI AND ISTANBUL

Tbilisi Mayor Davit Narmania paid an official visit to Istanbul on April 19. Within the framework of the visit, a Memorandum of Friendship between Tbilisi and Istanbul was signed by Tbilisi Mayor Davit Narmania and Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas at the City Hall of the local municipality. Before signing the agreement the parties talked about the long-term relationship between the two countries and cities and pointed out that the memorandum implied building stronger relationship and advancing it to a new phase.

“It is important that we chose particular issues as a scope of our cooperation. These issues include: Investment support, tourism development and culture too. To some extent, Istanbul’s experience is interesting for us, for example, management of municipal transport and restoring the city while retaining cultural

heritage. Thus, we will have an intensive prospective cooperation in these areas. It is especially delightful that Istanbul Mayor is willing to visit our capital this year, hence we will soon make arrangements and plan the date of his visit”, - said Tbilisi Mayor Davit Narmania.

In line with the Memorandum of Friendship, the parties will be sharing knowledge and experience in the areas of local government, culture, monument protection, tourism, greening, transportation, urban planning, information technologies, youth affairs and sport with each other. They will be supporting sustainable and peaceful development and intercultural dialogue.

The cities will be supporting each other through various activities such as arranging fairs, exhibitions and festivals in the areas of trade, investment, finances, culture and tourism.

They will be helping investors and entrepreneurs to build stronger cooperation. According to the memorandum, Tbilisi and Istanbul will be supporting each other on the international stage as well as cooperating on every international platform. Before signing the Memorandum of Friendship, Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas hosted Davit Narmania behind closed doors where the parties discussed the basic trends of the memorandum face-to-face and planned particular activities; they also presented each other gifts. Narmania also made an entry in the guestbook. At the meeting it became known that as a celebration of friendship, Istanbul City Hall will present five buses to Tbilisi. After having signed the memorandum, Davit Narmania together with his spouse and Georgian delegation members attended a reception arranged by Istanbul Mayor.



Admission Ceremony dedicated to “ERASMUS+” Held in Ireland



Erasmus+

An admission ceremony dedicated to ERASMUS+ Project “Peace Research Curriculum Development in Georgia” financed by the European Commission was held in the Georgian Embassy in Ireland. Representatives of higher education institutions of Georgia and Ireland attended the ceremony.

Temporary Trustee of Georgia in Ireland Giorgi Zurabashvili

greeted the audience and expressed hope that the project will play an important role in terms of peace research in Georgia.

The coordinator of the project is Dublin City University. Four Georgian universities – Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Caucasus University, Ilia State University and Sokhumi State University – are also involved in the project as well as

leading European Universities in the field of Peace Research: Trinity College Dublin (Ireland), University of Innsbruck (Austria) and Ulster University (the UK).

The project financed by the European Commission within the framework of institutional cooperation will be in effect for three years. It aims to implement the field of Peace Research in Georgian higher education institutions on the grounds of sharing experience with European partners.

German Journalists to visit Georgia

A group of German journalists will be visiting Georgia on May 1-5. The visit is organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the Ambassador of Georgia to Germany.

The Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Georgia to German Federal Republic Lado Tchanturia held a meeting with the Berlin Press Club who are actively involved in organizing the journalists’ visit to Georgia. Tchanturia imparted Ger-

man journalists with information about current events, situation and achievements in Georgia and presented the pre-planned agenda to the participants of the press tour.

In the context of the press tour, journalists will be visiting different parts of Georgia as well as studying the development and achievements of the country. The purpose of the journalists’ visit is to popularize Georgia in Germany.

A Memorandum of Friendship has been signed between Kobuleti and Rovno, Ukraine

A business forum “Georgia-Ukraine Cooperation Perspectives” was held in the city of Rovno, Ukraine. Within the framework of the event, Rovno Mayor Vladimir Khomko and Kobuleti Mayor Sulkhan Evgenidze signed a memorandum of friendship between the two cities. With regard to the City Day, Rovno delegation is to visit Kobuleti on June 30.

Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Georgia to Ukraine Mikheil Ukleba, Rov-

no Mayor Vladimir Khomko, GUAM General Secretary Altai Efendiev and Kobuleti Mayor Sulkhan Evgenidze addressed to the audience. After the event, the Ambassador of Georgia and Kobuleti Mayor opened the photography exhibition “Здравствуй, Грузия!” (“Hello, Georgia!”). Photos taken in Georgia by Ukrainian photographers were presented. The audience was offered Georgian wine and dishes at the opening ceremony of the photography exhibition.

Presentation about Georgia’s tourism potential held in Saudi Arabia

“Riyadh International Travel Fair 2016” was held in Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia. Within the framework of the event, the Georgian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made a presentation about Georgia’s tourism potential.

During the presentation, it was remarked that last year Georgia hosted 10 000 tourists from Saudi Arabia and 40 000 people from GCC countries (Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates). In line with this data, an increased number of tourists from these countries are

expected to visit Georgia.

It is noteworthy that 55 countries took part in the fair, Saudi Arabia, Georgia and the rest of GCC countries among others.

After the presentation, the Georgian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched negotiations with certain leading local tourist companies. It is planned to produce brochures depicting Georgian sights as well as include information about Georgia in tourist leaflets where advertisements about sightseeing tours in Georgia will be placed.



EROS RAMAZZOTTI'S CONCERT OPENED THE PROJECT "CHECK IN GEORGIA"

World-renowned singer Eros Ramazzotti opened a series of concerts at Tbilisi Sports Palace on April 24. The Italian singer presented "The Perfetto World Tour" to Georgian listeners. Ramazzotti won the hearts of the audience through an outstanding performance of everyone's favorite hits and a grand 3D show.

"The musician whose concert opens the project "Check in Georgia" has arrived. A show with such modern technologies has never been held in Georgia before. Apart from the music, spectators are to witness a spectacular show," said the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection Mikheil Giorgadze.

"It is a great honor to open the project "Check in Georgia" in which lots of famous musicians are to take part in. I see that the country is willing to develop and increase awareness. I hope I will play a positive role in the process of the country's popularization. I always make an effort to please spectators. Although I sing in Italian – an incomprehensible language for many people, I hope I will touch their hearts," Eros Ramazzotti said.

The Italian singer dedicated this concert to the memory of Prince: "He played an important role in the development of music and I am very sorry for his early death".

Eros Ramazzotti is able to combine classical and contemporary music with the help of his band which consists of talented musicians from all over the world: Luca Scarpa (piano), Giovanni Boscaroli (synthesizer), Giorgio Secco (guitar), Thomas Pridgen (drums), Paolo Costa

(bass guitar), Joe Leader (saxophone), Christian Pescotta (percussion instrument), Monica Hill and Roberta Montanari (backing vocalists) and legendary guitarist Phil Palmer who occasionally cooperated with Bob Dylan, Frank Zappa and Robby Williams.

The manager of the Italian star Mauricio Salvador is happy that the first concert in Georgia turned out successful and listeners welcomed Ramazzotti. Mauricio pointed out that the concert was similar to the ones held in Europe two weeks ago within a world tour.

The following hits included in the album "Perfetto" were performed: „Terra Promessa“, „PiùChePuoi“, „Cose Della Vita“, „Più Bella Cosa“, „AdessoTu“ and „Se Bastasse Una Bella Canzone“ among others. This album charts as the top 60 bestselling albums worldwide.

Eros Ramazzotti's show was managed by Luca Tommasini who has long been cooperating with the world's largest music production companies as well as famous musicians such as Madonna. The Producer of the tour is Mauricio Salvador "Trident Music", sponsors: „Trentino“, "Radio Italia"; official carrier: "Meridiana".

The concert was held in Georgia with the support of the Italian Embassy in Georgia. "I am present here as a fan of Ramazzotti and the Ambassador. Eros has songs that are related to different stages of our lives. As an ambassador, I can say that sportsmen, musicians and other artists gain publicity to the country best. Eros's life story is very interest-

ing. He was born in a province, became a world-renown star and has sold millions of albums," remarked Antonio Bartoli, Ambassador of Italy to Georgia.

Eros Ramazzotti left Tbilisi Sports Palace shortly after the end of the concert. Having gotten cold and tired, Ramazzotti thanked the audience in Georgian and assessed the concert with one word – fantastic. The singer hopes that this is not his last performance in the presence of Georgian listeners and looks forward to the next meeting with the fans.

Eros Ramazzotti's concert was held within the framework of the large-scale project "Check in Georgia" initiated by the Georgian government. The project aims to turn Georgia into a cultural center and attract plenty of tourists. As government officials state, the project will significantly contribute to popularization of our country, increased awareness of the tourist and cultural center as well as its international image.

As the ministry states, over one thousand transactions have been made from abroad. Tickets for Eros Ramazzotti's concert were available starting from April 7 and more than 5000 tickets were sold. As for the other large-scale concert, tickets for Robbie Williams's concert have been available since April 15 and by now 31 000 tickets have been sold. Robbie Williams will be performing for the Georgian audience at Dinamo Arena on May 27. As for transactions from abroad, tickets have been bought by 52 countries (Germany, Azerbaijan, the USA, Russia, Great Britain among others).



GIORGI MIKADZE INVITED AS A SPECIAL GUEST TO THE NATIONAL JAZZ MUSEUM IN HARLEM



The Georgian artist Giorgi Mikadze residing in New York will take part in the concert dedicated to International Jazz Day at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem on April 30 in line with a private invitation from the art director of the museum Jonathan Batista. Together with four young and famous musicians, the musician holding various music awards will be performing

several compositions at the event at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem.

International Jazz Day was initiated by the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova and Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO musician Herbi Hancock in November 2011. Nowadays Jazz Day is celebrated by dozens of countries including Georgia.

Karel Cudlín - The most difficult thing about being a photographer is to survive

GURANDA DZAMELASHVILI **EXCLUSIVE**

He was given an old Exakta camera at the age of 14 by his father and that paved way for his passion for photography. Over years, inspired by American photographers, he found his style - social documentary photography. All his life, famous Czech photographer Karel Cudlín has been travelling to various countries to hold exhibitions and take pictures. He decided to hold an exhibition in Georgian when he accidentally met a Georgian friend on the plane. His exhibition is to be presented from April 20th to May 1st at the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia in cooperation with the Georgian National Museum and the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tbilisi.

Is this your first time in Georgia? How well do you know this country?

It's the third time I'm visiting Georgia. I've been here twice - two years ago and 8 months ago. I know that it's a country of great history. I know a little bit about the history of Georgia and I'm familiar with Georgian food, Georgian wine, etc.

Why did you decide to hold an

exhibition here?

The idea to make an exhibition struck me when I met one of my Georgian friends from the Embassy. I was traveling to Georgia last time. We were contemplating on holding a photography exhibition here and I thought it would be quite good for me to hold one. I had some photos depicting the "withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia" that, to my mind, would interest Georgian people. My friend said 'yes' and she contacted the museum. I think it will be interesting for Georgians because we experienced similar things in the Soviet era. Czechoslovakia was governed under communist regime for only 40 years while in the Georgia the communist regime started in the 1920s.

Could you tell me more about the current exhibition 'Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Czechoslovakia'. What is the story behind the photographs and what is it you want to say with it?

Czechoslovakia got occupied by the Soviet army in 1968. These photos depicting the with-

drawal of Soviet troops were taken in 1991. My photographs are mostly in black and white. I like it because it's my style; I like working in black and white colours, but I am also presenting my photographs in colour on a special monitor. I don't know what I want to say, but it's a part of history, a very important date for Czechoslovakia.

You have travelled a lot in Eastern European countries. What was the most interesting country to take pictures?

Well.. I've been to Ukraine many times since 1991 to take photographs there. I've also been to Armenia and Azerbaijan. It's was quite interesting to work in these countries.

You've been granted many awards in photography. What motivates you to move forward and search for something new?

I haven't got big plans for future but I'm going to hold a large exhibition in Prague next month and I'm preparing a book with all my photos. All along, I'm a teacher, which means I have to do things for students; in addition, I'm trying to execute some



of my projects and that's it.

What is the best thing about being a photographer and on the other hand, what is the most difficult thing about your job?

It's a bit difficult to say because everything is changing nowadays due to the internet. I've spent all my life photographing, and I think the most difficult thing about being a photographer is to survive and to do what you really want. It's difficult because even if you're a professional photographer you still have to survive, you have to earn money through photography.

If you have enough money

you can just do whatever you want and that's the best situation. But sometimes you have to do something for survival, to earn a living. It's far more difficult to survive if you're a photographer, especially when the media is totally changing.

How long are you staying in Georgia? Are you thinking of holding another exhibition here?

I came here for a very short time. We prepared the exhibition and I'm leaving - I won't be attending its opening. I don't know yet if I will hold another exhibition here. Only time will tell.

Guram Tsibakhashvili's Exhibition "Sister"

NINI MACHAVARIANI **EXCLUSIVE**

Guram Tsibakhashvili's Charity Photography Exhibition depicting the life of the photographer's sister took place in the European House on April 20. The 45 photographs exhibited range from 1962 to 2015 and evoke Lia Tsibakhashvili's everyday life which was also presented as a video.

Lia Tsibakhashvili was born on March 25, 1962. As the baby was born, her parents were told that the child had Down syndrome. They could not explain what this meant and did not know how to treat Lia, how to raise her. At first, they did not even know if the syndrome was treatable; they were unsure about how to integrate her into society or if it was even recommended. Thus, Lia was growing up the way she was. After giving birth to her, mother quit the job and became a housewife because Lia needed special care. As Lia grew up, she went to a special school but her relatives felt that this was a problem

because at the time they tended to have this kind of approach to the syndrome.

"When Lia was born, I was two years old then; first they took her to local doctors, and then decided to show my sister to doctors in Moscow. That is how I happened to travel to Moscow for the first time. I guess I was 10 then and Lia - 8. There my parents were told this syndrome does not require treatment but rather a specific approach in raising the child", - the photographer remembers.

Lia liked watching TV, listening to music, reading newspapers and she was a very affectionate person.

"Since an anniversary is an expression of remembrance, a period of paying tribute to a person, I decided to dedicate a photography exhibition to her - this is a truer form of expression, better than a casual traditional anniversary," the photographer pointed out when talking to OB-

SERVER.

Three portrait photos presented at the venue that the photographer took of his sister when he was 11 are very impressive.

The photo exhibition was not planned, thus you will not come across photos taken deliberately. However, the few photos chosen for the exhibition depict Lia Tsibakhashvili's life and retell her story to some extent.

Lia Tsibakhashvili worked at the Social Therapy House where she had friends; there they did lots of different jobs, for instance, filed notebooks, produced candles, etc.

"I retold my personal story because she was my sister. I want society to think about this matter and try to integrate those people into their circles. We think that they are different, while in fact they are valuable members of society. We can learn a lot from them, for example, love," noted the photographer.

The author of the photos con-

siders photography as a visual memory; hence, a photographer can retell a story just like a writer can.

He has dedicated his entire life to photography and he thinks that this profession changed his vision completely. Inspired by the art of the American photographer Duane Michals, he was given an opportunity to become a real artist. But he does not deny that works of some other artists might change his vision and let him see the world differently.

First he gets to know the object - the person; he learns their characteristics and then starts shooting. The photographer is interested in many areas thus he chooses and creates photos in line with one's personality and interests. As Guram Tsibakhashvili says, it is difficult to take photos when you don't know the person: the object changes the person and they often think they are not the way they should be, thus they try to be different

which always shows in photos".

The photographer considers morale as the essential feature, manipulation by the camera or forcefully depicting someone out of particular interests is unacceptable to him.

To his mind, criticism is an important factor in an artist's life because it is necessary to listen to others' opinions, but remarks that there is no professional criticism in Georgia.

Guram Tsibakhashvili was born in Tbilisi in 1960. Since the 1990s his personal exhibitions have been held not only in Georgia but also in Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, Bratislava, Basel and etc. In the future he plans to exhibit handmade items at the Acer Berger gallery in the context of a book festival in Vienna, Austria.

Photography is very popular in Georgia; that is why he predicts the future of this sphere to be prosperous and the profession to be valued and seen as important.

MODERN CHOREOGRAPHY TROUPE IS FOUNDED IN GEORGIA FOR THE FIRST TIME

NINI MACHAVARIANI **EXCLUSIVE**

Shota Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi held a premiere of a Choreographic Fantasy “Shakespeare About Love” on April 20 dedicated to the 400th anniversary of the death of the famous English playwright and poet William Shakespeare. At the performance arranged by the theatre together with Giorgi Aleksidze Foundation for the Development of Contemporary Choreography, actors expressed themselves not through words but rather through body language and evoked Shakespearean characters through the contemporary language of dance.

The choreographic fantasy was special in terms of the musical score too. They used an audio cassette of Shakespearean plays that were read by John Gielgud and John Cage as well as compositions by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and John Cage. Pianist Nino Zhvania played the compositions by the latter live.

The following Rustaveli Theatre actors took part in the performance: Lela Alibegashvili, Lela Akhalaia, Natia Kvashali, Nino Makashvili, Rusudan Makashvili, Gaga Svanidze, Ketiv Svanidze, Beka Songhulashvili, Bacho Chachibaia, GegaChkhaidze,

KetiKhitiri, LashaJukharashvili and the soloist of Giorgi Aleksidze Tbilisi Contemporary Ballet NatiaBunturi.

The performance was done under the management of the director Robert Sturua and according to the choreography of Giorgi Aleksidze’s daughter Mariam Aleksidze. A month ago Maria Aleksidze founded a contemporary choreography troupe that consists of 10 dancers. The troupe will be specializing in different directions and Giorgi Aleksidze’s choreographic elements will be preserved and they will definitely be performed in line with the modern vision. There is no such troupe in any Post-Soviet country; this is going to be an innovative initiative.

“Every choreographer dreams to have their own chamber troupe so that they can hand down their own vision and signature to generations. Although my father was the head of an opera and ballet troupe for 30 years, he still dreamt to have his own troupe,” said Mariam Aleksidze in the interview with the *OBSERVER*.

Next year the young choreographer also plans to open a contemporary choreography school where applicants over 12 will be

admitted. Professionals as well as dilatants will be able to study at the school; however dancers must have basic knowledge in classical dance.

“Contemporary choreography with narrow bounds is very different from classical ballet choreography. Modern Ballet is a different style which as a genre was being formed for a long time and is still in constant process of development; it has its templates and essential stylistic features though,” the head of the choreographic troupe pointed out.

Contemporary dance is close to human nature, it represents natural human movements, ability to think and muse through body. Unlike classical ballet, it is in close connection with music and literature as this dance is becoming more and more philosophical. It has reached such heights that it is possible to express anything one wishes to say. The performance will focus on any issue that is connected with nature and that disturbs man. It can be abstract with no plot, for example, it can apply to various moods and touch upon very serious topics.

“The first performance that we will do will be a scenography



based on poems by Galaktion Tabidze which was my first performance; also the last miniature ‘The Moon Over Mtatsminda’ directed by my father; it was his intention to make it into a complete performance and I fulfilled his wish. And now we will present a more perfect and renewed version to spectators,” said Mariam Aleksidze. The young choreographer came back to Georgia in 1990. She was a soloist at the Opera and Ballet Theatre for 10 years and performed solos in almost every performance. She was simultaneously involved in

various different projects.

Her sister Ana Aleksidze is an artistic director of the ballet troupe “the Crown of Russian Ballet” in Moscow. They have projects in the context of which they travel around the world.

Mariam Aleksidze promises to carry out plenty of interesting projects in the future. It is already known that the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian youngsters dancing in the contemporary choreography troupe of Georgia are taking part in a mutual project presenting premiere performances in July.

Tbilisi Concert Hall Hosted Annual Festival “Book and Music”



From April 21 to April 24 the Georgian book festival “Book and Music” was arranged at Tbilisi Concert Hall by the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection, Tbilisi City Hall and “Georgian Book Institute”. During four days, festival guests had an opportunity to buy books at a great discount, attend book presentations and listen to live music dedicated to the International Copyright Day which was held for the second time.

Within the framework of the festival, DatoTurashvili,

LashaBughadze, EkaterineTogonidze, TamtaMelashvili, Tamar Kvizhinadze, MerabPipia, Ana Tchabashvili met with readers. The following musicians and bands held concerts on the main stage of the festival: The Bear Fox, Tserili, Mtsvane Otakhi, Shota Adamashvili, Backwarmer, Rezo Kiknadze, Soft Eject Systems, Lady Heroine, The Window, Blue Sun and the Black Marrows.

“Book and Music” was first held during the May 22-24 period, 2015 at Tbilisi Event Hall.

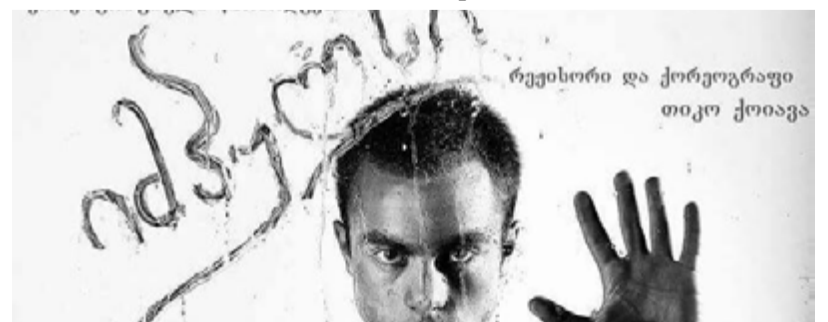
The event is distinguished by the combination of different areas in one space which is a key to its success as well. Publishing houses, book stores and cafes were represented at the festival. Different authors and books were presented; public lectures and reading sessions were held during the festival. Viewers had an opportunity to listen to different music bands as well as attend Cooking Masterclasses and shows. Reading sessions, painting and art lessons were arranged for visiting children.

Contemporary Choreography Theatre at Lithuanian International Festival

With the support of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia and Culture Development Fund “Triumph”, the Contemporary Choreography Theatre will participate in the Lithuanian Festival “Riga Spring 2016” during the April 20-26 period. Spectators will see the latest choreographic performance “Impulse” by the theatre. During the tour Master classes in the traditional

Georgian folk dances will be given.

“Impulse” is the third choreographic performance by the theatre. It comprises real stories, completely independent of one another the performance of which evokes a special feeling of an impulse. The cast includes students, choreographic school graduates and professional actors. Most of them are socially unprotected.



NEW CHALLENGE FOR THOSE WILLING TO BECOME TEACHERS

MARY TABATADZE



A new one-year Teacher Training programme will come into effect starting in September 2016. As a result, anyone holding a higher education diploma, willing to become a teacher will have an opportunity to first take this university programme and then start working at school as a teacher.

As the Ministry of Education and Science states, the main purpose of the execution of the programme is to attract the best staff and eradicate deficit of teachers in particular subjects and regions.

“In order to increase motivation and attract new staff, a new decision has been made – after the training programme teachers will start working in schools at a developmental stage which provides them with wages equalized with the average salary” – the Ministry states. Out of the four categories of teachers (Practitioner, Senior, Lead and Mentor teachers), this statement refers

to senior teachers whose wages amount to 800 laris.

Teachers will be financed based on state-provided quotas according to deficits both in Tbilisi and other regions. According to the Ministry, there will be 337 places available in Tbilisi and 611 – in other regions. Correspondingly, within the framework of the abovementioned programme, the Ministry plans to finance 948 persons willing to become teachers.

Active teachers can also take part in the programme; however their studies will not be financed by the state.

Before candidates matriculate in the one-year programme at particular universities, they have to pass a subject exam organized by the National Assessment and Examinations Center (NAEC). After having acquired the proof of competence, an applicant chooses the desired accredited university which is allowed to execute this programme and at-

tends an intra-university interview. After having finished the programme, a one-year trial period at school takes place. The teacher’s performance will be studied through external observation based on which the candidate will be granted a Qualified Teacher Status.

By now, 12 university education programmes have been accredited both in Tbilisi and in regions. Regarding this matter, it is noteworthy that every regional university has accredited one-year teacher training programmes, i.e. they meet national standards. The programme is also executed by a few private universities; state funding will not be available for those universities but applicants can still choose them, especially given the supposition that the number of applicants will be low there.

The chairman of the Educators Free Trade Union of Georgia Maia Kobakhidze gives a positive assessment to the state’s ac-

tions aimed at engaging young staff in the system. She deems the state-initiated programme to be important and points out that young staff should be engaged in line with objective principles, so that the state can support active teachers as well as change generations objectively.

Regarding this matter, the Minister of Education and Sciences Tamar Sanikidze remarks that, in the context of the programme, they expect getting 800-1000 new teachers each year. As she explains, each year approximately the same amount of teachers step down most commonly due to their age.

Under the active law, successfully accomplishing the teacher training education programme is the only way for those holding bachelor’s, master’s and/or equivalent academic degree, but not allowed to start a teaching career with their diploma.

According to the Ministry of Education and Sciences, the new one-year programme is loyal – it has become easier to start a teaching career and now applicants have a serious opportunity for career development. The law will be in force until 2021 meaning that people of other professions will have an opportunity to become teachers until then.

As the Ministry explains, the one-year teacher training programme included in the current education reform is designed for the transitional period. The programme will in the short-term produce trained teachers

and eradicate problems related to staff deficits. On the other hand, the programme will ensure employing better prepared staff at school that are more capable of coping with contemporary school challenges. The programme will be focused on methodological aspects.

Teachers will acquire contemporary teaching methods including information technology. The practical aspect will be reinforced which means that the programme will be carried out in contact with schools. The programme is considered to be a solution to one pressing problem – earlier universities produced staff with less practice. There is a change in this regard.

In general, changes in the teacher training process have occurred over more than a one-year period. In February 2015, a new plan on starting a teaching career, professional development and career advancement was approved. The plan aimed for the profession to gain prestige, to attract new staff and to increase teachers’ qualifications and motivation. The one-year teacher training education programme (60 credits) to come into effect in September can be seen as its continuation. It is a principled innovation in the system and can be considered as a stage of changes in the scheme and certain laws. As for the 2016-2017 action plan it includes integrated bachelor’s and master’s five-year (300 credits) programmes to come into effect in 2017-2018.

DUAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN WINE-MAKING IS BEING IMPLEMENTED

Last week, the head of Wine-Making Department of the Bavarian State Research Center George Batz and 25 German students visited Georgia. The purpose of the visit was to implement the German Dual Vocational Education Model in wine-making in Georgia which can be achieved through the involvement of private vocational education sector. This would help vocational education programmes to meet demands in the labor market, studying historical/traditional technologies of the country thoroughly, sharing

international experience, implementing innovative approaches and getting familiarized with modern technologies.

The First Deputy Minister of Education and Sciences of Georgia Ms. Ketevan Natriashvili introduced the role of viticulture and wine-making in education to the German students; she discussed the vocational education reform and the importance of implementation of the German Dual Education Model in Georgia.

In the context of the meeting, the German students vis-

ited Chateau Mukhrani Palace, familiarized themselves with the ancient tradition of wine-making in Georgia and met with wine-making vocational students. The German experts and vocational students shared the German experience in dual vocational education in viticulture and wine-making and following employment issues with the audience.

The project is being carried out with the support of the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). In recent years, the Ministry of Education and



Sciences has developed a strong cooperation with the German organization in regard to vocational education. This organization is one of the supporters of the vocational education reform and it supports the strategy ex-

ecution for the vocational education reform in Georgia. Within the framework of the project “Private Sector Development in the South Caucasus” by the GIZ various initiatives have been accomplished successfully.

GEORGIAN JUDOKAS “INVADE” KAZAN

VAKO KIPIANI

The European Judo Championship 2016 took place in Kazan from April 21 to 24. The Georgian judo team consisted of the best judokas made significant achievements. On the first day of the championship Vazha Margvelashvili brought success to the team. The representative of Gori Judo Club competed at the European Championship with dignity and won a gold medal in 66 kg category. Margvelashvili defeated his adversary Collin Oates, representative of Great Britain, by ippon. At the beginning of the fight Vazha injured his hand. Despite the trauma, he managed to throw the Brit on his back through a flexible technique.

In 60 kg category, Amiran Papinashvili was defeated in the fight for a bronze medal.

On the second day of the championship, three Georgians qualified for the final, but without a gold medal. In 73 kg category we witnessed a Georgian fight in the quarter-final. Nugzar Tata-

lashvili and Olympic Champion Lasha Shavdatuashvili wrestled against each other. Shavdatuashvili surpassed Tatalashvili by one Shido.

In the fight for a bronze medal, Nugzar defeated Russian Denis Yartsev and earned a bronze medal in addition to the team's acquisition. In the final, Lasha Shavdatuashvili showed outstanding wrestling. He did not give a chance to Azerbaijani Orujov. Lasha was defeating the opponent by waza-ari but nine minutes before the end of the fight Lasha was given four Shidos and Orujov became the champion. The referee made a wrong decision, for a few seconds Lasha was protesting against the referee's decision, but referees made no change and Shavdatuashvili had to accept a silver medal.

In 81 kg category, Avtandil Tchrikishvili did not wrestle in the first round. One of the strongest representatives of Georgian judo won all the three fights by

ippon and he wrestled against Russian Hasan Salim Murzaev. Unfortunately, the Russian judoka defeated Tchrikishvili by waza-ari.

Dutch Esther Stam's performance who wrestles in the name of Georgia in 70 kg category for women is noteworthy. Stam unexpectedly qualified for the final where she was defeated by French Emma Jervis.

In 90 kg category Varlam Liparteliani earned a gold medal. The Georgian judoka earned a medal at the European Championship for the eighth time in a row. Varlam defeated Polish Kucera by ippon in two minutes in the semi-final. In the final his rival was Hungarian Christian Toti. Toti caused Varlam a shido, however, Liparteliani threw him on his back through an effective technique and finished the fight 3 minutes and 7 seconds early.

Beka Ghviniashvili was defeated in 100 kg category. After winning the first fight, he got de-



feated by an experienced Dutch judoka Henk Grol who earned a gold medal. We had two representatives in heavyweight category. Adam Okruashvili was defeated by Ukrainian Adam Gordiyenko who on the other hand later got defeated by Levan Matiashvili; in the semi-final Matiashvili wrestled against legendary Teddy Riner who defeated our judoka at the last second by ippon. Before that Rinner was

defeating Matiashvili only by one shido.

Levan Matiashvili defeated Hungarian Barna Bor by two shidos in the fight for the third place and earned a bronze medal at the European Championship for the first time. Irakli Uznadze's apprentices took the first place in the unofficial team standings. Our judokas earned two gold, three silver and two bronze medals.

SPORTS NEWS

WRESTLING

Greco-Roman wrestler Revaz Nadareishvili brought 29th ticket to Georgia at the Olympics.

BASKETBALL

Beka Burjanadze's "Leyma Basquet Coruña" defeated "Rio Breogan" by 90:86. This was the first match in the playoff. Beka earned 20 points and 5 rebounds.

RUGBY

Mikheil Nariashvili was named the best player of Top 14 by Midi Olympique. Nariashvili's "Moussy" defeated "Stade Français" by 26:20. Misha was outstanding in the lineup.

SWIMMING

22-year old Teimuraz Kobakhidze is the second swimmer in



the history of independent Georgia that has earned the Olympics License. The Georgian sportsman swam the 200m freestyle in 1:51.45 at the Belarusian Open Championship, which was also a licensing tournament for Rio Olympics, and earned a silver medal and a Rio license.

Teimuraz Kobakhidze improved the licensing normative at the tournament held in Brest – instead of 1:51.75 he swam the 200m in 1:51.45. Kobakhidze earned license B which means that the Georgian Olympic team has one guaranteed license, but if another Georgian swimmer shows a better result in at least one other discipline, then, according to the regulations of the

International Swimming Federation, that swimmer will be the one to travel to Rio.

FOOTBALL

Dinamo Tbilisi is the champion! Dinamo guaranteed the championship 4 rounds before, after the victory against Poti "Kolkheti", "Dinamo" went 13 points ahead the Samtredia - second runners.

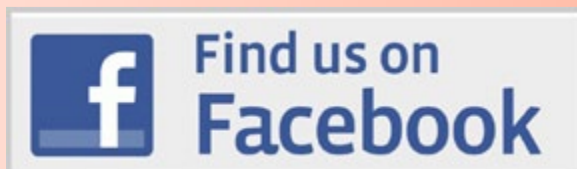
JUDO

The European Judo Championship was held in Kazan on April 21-24, the final competition was held between the Georgian and Russian teams. The victory gained Georgia team, which became the European champion for the 8th time.



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