

# The Georgian Times

# Times

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# Happy Easter



**Importance of car re-export for Georgia** *On p. 6*

**President Offers Consultations on Proposal to U.S. Congress for Georgia Support Act** *On p. 6*

**New Infrastructure Minister Appointed** *On p. 6*

**Georgia Expels One over Salisbury Attack** *On p. 6*

**Why does Armenia misappropriate Georgian churches in Georgia? – Religious dispute** *On p. 7*

**43<sup>rd</sup> Round of Geneva International Discussions** *On p. 7*

**Georgia, Luxembourg FMs Discuss Bilateral Ties** *On p. 9*

**Satsire – is going to be first European village in Georgia** *On p. 9*

## Georgia's Security Deadlock – Russia's New Geopolitical Brutality



Georgia's security situation is still fragile and fluid, as is that of the Caucasus as a whole. After the brutal murder of Georgian citizen Archil Tatunashvili, whose corpse was returned to his family in Tsilkani village only after he had been dead 20 days, the Russian occupation forces and Ossetian separatists under the control of Russian law enforcement agencies kidnapped two more Georgian citizens from the area bordering Abkhazia, which is controlled by the Kremlin. *On p. 2*

## Russia's "Soft Power" in Action with Full-Pledge Operational Scope



# Georgia's Security Deadlock – Russia's New Geopolitical Brutality

By Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia, IBSU Geopolitical Research Centre

**Georgia's security situation is still fragile and fluid, as is that of the Caucasus as a whole. After the brutal murder of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili, whose corpse was returned to his family in Tsilkani village only after he had been dead 20 days, the Russian occupation forces and Ossetian separatists under the control of Russian law enforcement agencies kidnapped two more Georgian citizens from the area bordering Abkhazia, which is controlled by the Kremlin.**

The torture and murder of Archil Tatumashvili by specific persons from so-called South Ossetia has resulted in the Georgian Parliament adopting a special resolution restricting

tured and killed by cutting his fingers off his hand in Tskhinvali prison). Therefore the main responsibility for this murder rests with the Russian Federation. The UN Human Right Protection Committee has directly accused the Russian government's law enforcement bodies of committing this brutal act and is seeking to establish permanent human rights monitoring missions on these territories, as is the European parliament, which has adopted a special resolution to this effect.

The Russian official structures' impudent and cynical reactions to this terrible and brutal killing, such as that of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has once more confirmed who was behind it. But despite this, the Georgian government, in the person of Prime Minister George Kvirikashvili, has expressed a willingness to en-



volvement. We are ready for a direct dialogue with the Abkhazians and Ossetians, and we would like to welcome the con-

this request for dialogue was very uncertain, low-profile and meaningless. By responding in this way Russia demonstrated its geopolitical superiority over Georgia but also its awkward position at large stance. However the Georgian side has accepted the Russian rhetoric and is unsure about what Russia's signal to Tbilisi is. The Prime Minister stated diplomatically that "Many things may be unacceptable in Russia's response, but the answer leaves space for dialogue", but that

to Georgia and his meeting with Prime Minister Kvirikashvili, can be seen as another manifestation of this policy, coming as it does after the Russian elections of 18<sup>th</sup> March and Putin's remarkable 77% endorsement for a fourth term of Presidency. The President of Belarus has been sent to deliver concrete messages to Georgia in informal meetings. The Georgian government had been seeking opportunities to informally approach The Kremlin concerning possible communica-

tions in the near future. It is clear that Georgia is in a so-called "security deadlock" (this is a special geopolitical term defines as a situation in which any decision taken by a country's political leadership increases both the internal and external threats to that country). The murder of Archil Tatumashvili and Georgia's weak response to it demonstrate this. As relations between Russia and the Western community (the EU and USA) are now strained due to the Salisbury



all rights of movement abroad for particular individuals. The international community has also condemned the brutality of the event, and all Georgia's strategic partners have expressed deep concerns about not only the self-proclaimed South Ossetian leaders but also the Russian authorities.

Since the "bilateral agreements" between the Russian Federation and the so-called South Ossetian authorities were signed in 2016 all the law enforcement organs of the break-away region have been put under the control of Russian Federation governmental structures. These even include the prisons located in the Tskhinvali, Java, Znauri and Akhlagori districts (Archil Tatumashvili was tor-

hance dialogue with Moscow and launch political communications with the Abkhazian and Ossetian sides. He said: "Diplomatic ties have been terminated. The recognition of the independence of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by Moscow has deadlocked the perspective of establishing normal interstate relations. Now we have a choice - to meet this date with mutual accusations and sharp statements, or to take reasonable, even small steps to get our relationship out of this vicious circle. We have already stated before, and again confirm, that we are interested in achieving real progress in the Geneva International Discussion Process, for which I have confirmed the readiness of my personal in-

structive approach of the Russian side in this regard. In the event of political will, it is possible to take other reasonable steps, too. Unfortunately, we face a difficult reality today. We have restored bilateral trade-economic relations, but the chain of tragic events still continues. This undermines the prospect of regulating Georgian-Russian relations. The most recent tragic example of this is the death of our citizen Archil Tatumashvili under uncertain circumstances in Tskhinvali two weeks ago. Despite the efforts of the Georgian authorities, the Catholicos-Patriarch and the international community, his body has not been transferred to the family so far".

The Kremlin's response to



"space" seems to be very general and clandestinely menacing, indicating that the long-standing Kremlin policy of trying to force Georgia to change its foreign policy stance is still being pursued.

Indeed, the official visit of Russia's closest ally, Belarus President Anatoly Lukashenko,

tion before the Prime Minister's statement, and Kvirikashvili's official visits to Yerevan and Baku within a very short period were a means of generating such communication, as these countries have friendly ties with the Russian leadership. However, there are few grounds to expect a serious shift in rela-

incident and the cyber attack on the US elections in 2016, Georgia's geopolitical capabilities are being tested and it can no longer afford pure diplomatic maneuvering. Where Georgia goes from is still opaque, despite the formal profession of a pro-Western foreign policy orientation.

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თსკალტუბო  
TSKALTUBO



თბილი წყაროები  
HOT SPRINGS

The main therapeutic factor of resort Tskaltubo is radon mineral water. It is a non-seasonal resort and is open for 365 days throughout the entire year with no holidays.

Mineral water debit ranges from 13-15 million liters per 24 hours (day-night) based on the seasons. The natural temperature of water (33-35°C) makes it possible to use it without pre-heating.

Indicators of Tskaltubo mineral waters high-quality include:

- 1) Invariability of natural optimal temperature which allows easy tolerability of baths;
- 2) The water is spouting right from the springs in the bathrooms without using pumps;
- 3) Treatment is conducted in continuously running water which means that the water is running in and out of the bathroom in a non-stop mode until the end of the procedure by which the water retains physico-chemical and therapeutic properties, its uniformity and temperature. Hence, a person is under constantly renewable water.

Tskaltubo is a health resort of global importance. It is located in the West Georgia 7 km away from Kutaisi, 250 km away from Tbilisi and 70 km away from the Black Sea. It is at 95-120 meters above sea mean level.

4) It does not contain toxic substances which is not aggressive by its composition. Age of holidaymakers is unlimited (from 4 up to the elderly).

Tskaltubo mineral waters are used for treatment of the following diseases:

- Locomotors system (Osteochondrosis, Osteoarthritis, arthritis, Discogenic Radiculitis disease etc).
- Cardiovascular diseases (post stenting and shunting rehabilitation, hypertension etc).
- Central and peripheral nervous system diseases (neurosis, central blood circulation disorders, neuritis and neuropathies etc).
- Gynecological diseases (inflammatory processes, infertility etc).
- Urological diseases (inflammatory processes, impotence).
- Skin diseases (Psoriasis, eczema, neurodermitis etc).
- Diseases of endocrine system (Diffuse goiter, gout, some forms of diabetes mellitus etc).

We developed relevant therapeutic treatment programs for the mentioned diseases which are administered individually in con-

sideration of patient's general condition, diagnosis and age. In these programs, 16 different types of therapeutic procedures are applied.

It is widely acknowledged that particular importance is given to non-medication treatment methods in patients' modern rehabilitation conditions. Balneotherapy or radonotherapy occupy the leading role among these methods. It is also proven that radon and its dissolving products intensify the protective functions of the body, strengthen the immune system, activate the blood circulation, regulate the blood pressure, promote the cells recovery-regeneration (in the aftermath of injuries and burns), have an analgesic and anti-inflammatory effect, is characterized by sharply expressed sedative (comforting) effect and activate cognitive functions.

There was the time when representatives of Europe's elite circles considered the spring water treatment as a prestigious. Today, the tendency gains wide traction on going back to the natural treatment methods.

The buildings of springs No 6

and No 1 of JSC "BalneoService" are directly built on the springs (mineral water griffons). These therapeutic-rehabilitation centers are equipped with the modern medical equipment produced in Europe including hydro units. Five pools full of healing mineral water are included in it together with 37 individual cabin-baths, 16 hydro massage rooms and horizontal extension room. The capacity of springs is 1500 people per day. The aforementioned centers are composed of highly qualified medical personnel.

The following therapeutic procedures are carried out in JSC "BalneoService":

1. Mineral water baths;
2. Underwater (hydro-massage);
3. Hydro-vibration massage;
4. Treatment physical exercise in the pool;
5. Classic medical massage;
6. Spinal horizontal extension in mineral water;
7. Physiotherapy;
8. Gynecologic irrigation;
9. Shower "Sharko";
10. Circular shower;
11. Mechano-therapy in mineral water;
12. Peloido-therapy (mud application);
13. Pressotherapy
14. Hydro colon therapy (Deep intestinal lavage);
15. Stimulation of the Prostate + rectal tamponed;
16. Inhalation



- The direct effect of the treatment using Tskaltubo mineral waters is the recovery of the following professional diseases: sportsmen, dancers, pilots, cosmonauts, sailors, oil dealers, miners, military, special services, military servicemen etc. the well-known representatives of the abovementioned professions used to rest in Tskaltubo during the last century.
- It is noteworthy that the resort has a rich experience in

treating the victims of the hostilities (the military hospital was operation during 1941-1945 in Tskaltubo). Sanatorium with the capacity of 400 beds had been also operating in Tskaltubo until 1992 under the subordination of Soviet Union Defense Ministry.

At present, the majority of holidaymakers include the persons who were involved in the recent military conflicts.

Treatment using Tskaltubo mineral waters in the rehabilitation of certain diseases of child and adult are direct indicators – juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, hemophilia, rehabilitation of cerebral palsy in children, autism etc.).

Speleotherapy is also available at the resort a respiratory therapy involving breathing inside a cave for treatment of respiratory and vascular diseases.

Increasing popularity of Tskaltubo can be easily confirmed by the geographical composition of visitors who arrive here for treatment. The number of international travelers has also significantly increased (DAY-SPA) whom we offer a wide range of spa-relaxation procedures (at around 6-7), we successfully cooperate with local and various foreign travel agencies with our flexible offers and comfortable services.



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- There are 49 comfortable rooms at the hotel.

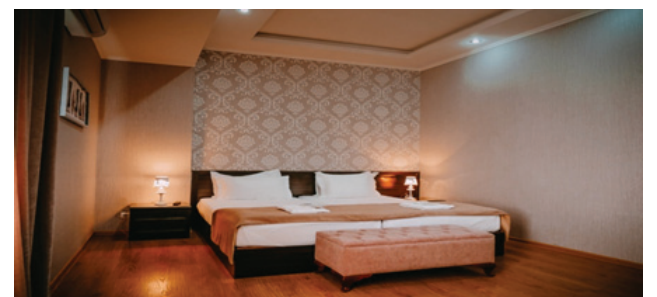
1 room is comprised of a bedroom, bathroom and balcony. Total area 22 m<sup>2</sup>.

The room is equipped with: air-conditioning/heating system and access to the internet, Wi-Fi/TV set, direct phone connection, laundry, taxi service and conference hall. There is a single bed or 1 King size double bed. 1 more bed either for a kid or adult can also be placed.

Hotel's medical services include wellness procedures – mineral baths, classical massage and physiotherapeutic procedures.

- You may enjoy warm evenings of the spring in the amazing lounge bar of the hotel.

Visit Hotel "Prometheus", relax and become healthier!



# Russia's "Soft Power" in Action with Full-Pledge Operational Scope

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Georgia is ahead to forthcoming Parliamentary elections which are very critical to further development of the whole nation. These elections are dominated by the foreign policy factors and indications as due to the political system of Georgia contemporary estab-

mation warfare or more precisely about "network-centric warfare", which one of the important parts consisted its political background i.e. "soft power", is to be outlined that the warfare is linked to new generation of battle field strategy – called "fourth warfare genera-

their adherence only toward "Hard Power" capabilities and reoriented to tailor and introduce its own version of "Soft Power" strategy based on several unique leverages and components: **information leadership, aggressive propaganda campaign, "historic memory"**

strategy has been starting to elaborate since 2010 and it concludes of tress-passing and systematic realization of each elements of the strategy. What have included these elements?

- Setting up and further promulgation geopolitical media project: "Russia Today" to dominate and compete with American CNN at global level;

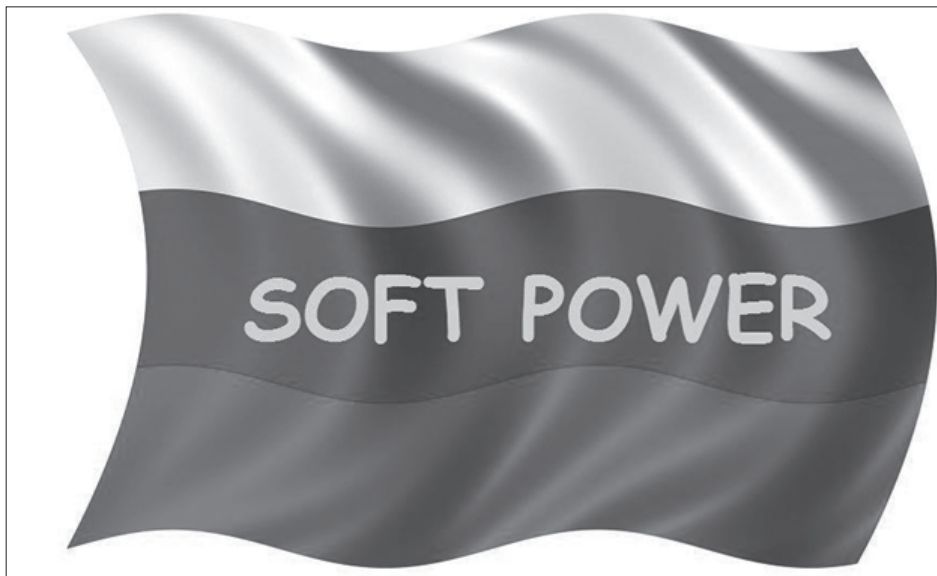
- Setting up and further promotion military TV channel: "ZVEZDA" – reaches domination at regional level in aegis of Post-Soviet space;

- Introduction of Russian origin social media projects: ODNOKLASNIKI, VKontakte, etc.;

- Creation and run similar to American style – "SKOLKOVO" new technology development center project;

- Setting up and running in aegis of FSB (Russian analogy of Soviet KGB) special hacker-team "YASTREB" to strike down and decipher Western communication systems (mainly USA military structures).

Russia's incumbent authority has prepared a solid basis for such activities. Even in February 2008, the Russian President Vladimir Putin signed up a special conceptual document: "Strategy on Development of Information Society of Russian Federation" and later adopted new: "Foreign Policy Conception of Russian Federation" (revised three times in 2009, 2012, 2013 – where in aegis of special part of the document – "Information Implication of Foreign Policy Activities" is outlined as one of the key goals as – "increasing of Russia's mass-me-



lished, namely the Parliament of Georgia is a leading political institution among other branches of power responsible for formulating decisions on foreign and defense policy issues. Hence, "battle for the Parliament" is most decisive logo for those political parties and movements seeking to get power into their hands and decide where the country could move to. Unfortunately even tragic events of August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia did not preclude a scenario upon to which Russia's authoritarian regime foreign policy goal "shadow" and its geopolitical narrative became still powerful enough even to dominate even among 20-25% of the population (in accordance to recent NDI research poll survey). What is occurring and why so slightly the Kremlin geopolitical agenda slowly affected to still (and I do hope that it is to be frozen on that scope and even decrease soon or later) minority part of the society. Besides of the geopolitical shifts at global and regional levels, the Russian incumbent policy-makers are picking up new methods and skills in promoting their information warfare strategy missions at those areas counted as the most geo-strategic spaces for hegemony. Certainly, Georgia is sought to be one of the areas from the current Kremlin rulers. When we are talking about the infor-

tion dimension". Final goal of the strategy is to destroy enemy's or foe's cultural values and subvert its political will for resistance. Certainly, jargon "Soft Power" was introduced by the American well-known scholar and political analyst Dr. Joseph Nye and this is pure American political innovation. This is a unique part of power that is, getting others to want what you want. "Soft Power" can rest on such resources as the attraction of one's ideas or on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences others express. Since 2008 after the Georgia-Russia August war, the Russian incumbent policy-makers reconsidered

**implication or political mythology, modern communication technologies (cyber-warfare), network-centric dominance (social network and social media), ideological imperatives, development and adoption of new national technologies in telecommunication-information sphere, cultural warfare and targeted network-centric dominance geopolitical ideological confrontation** (like, aggressive anti-American rhetoric). There are only several implications based on what is possible to identify how works "Soft Power" strategy in real life and what are real leverages of the one. The Kremlin's "Soft Power"

dia means positions at global level"). Moreover, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 a new doctrine on national security was subsequently adopted. The document identifies the domestic threats to Russia's state sovereignty, society, information space, economy, transport and energy infrastructure, natural environment as well as foreign-born risks. In the document, at first time was mentioned information war as one of the key "soft security threat" component. Based on the documents attached with several new ones – the most latest document introduction of new draft of "Information Security Doctrine of Russian Federation" will be adopted in 2017 and "Main State Policy of Russian Federation for International Information Security till 2020", key priorities of the Russia's "Soft Power" strategy imply to dominate on information-telecommunication sphere at least in Post-Soviet space and last in Global political level. Hence, the Kremlin truly perceives importance of "Soft Power"

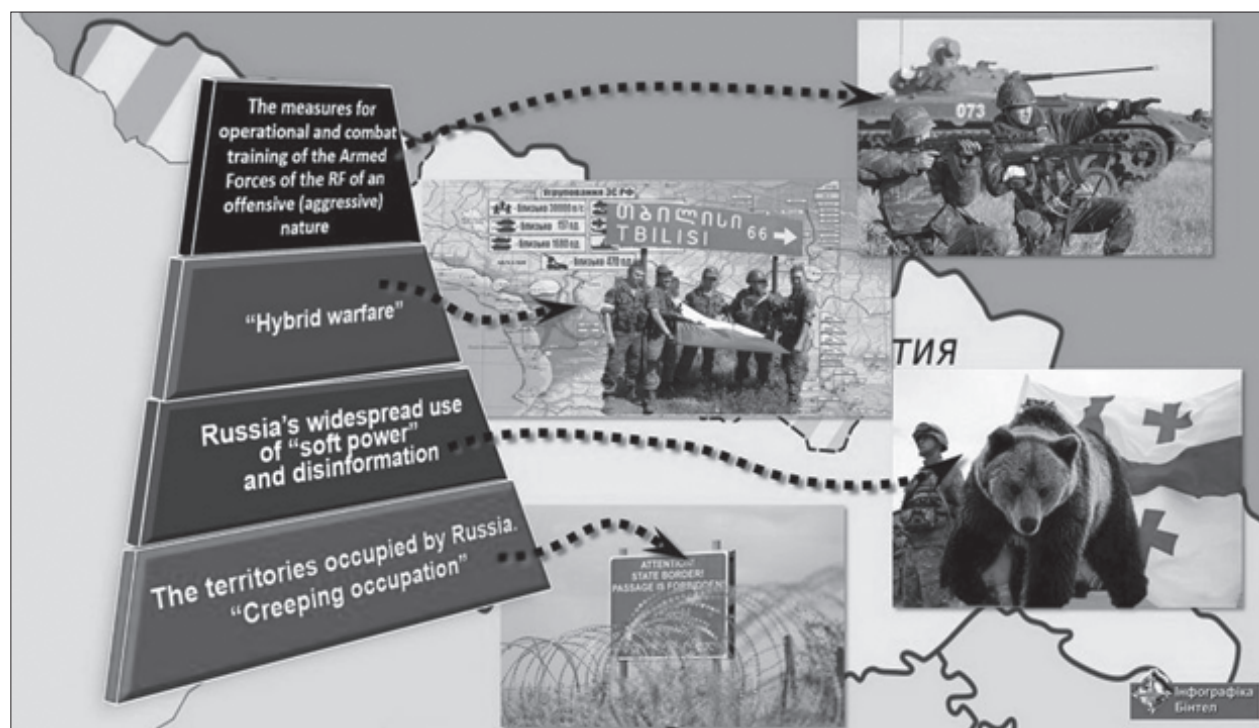
strategy implementation and already has been launching the project in real life. As for Georgia, the Kremlin and its adepts have launched the realization of the strategy with manipulation of several above-mentioned components of the one. For instance, the contemporary Russian "Soft Power" politics toward Georgian politics in prior to the Parliamentary elections are grounded on several concrete directions and components:

- Very open and aggressive "pro-Russian" narrative: legitimize of Russian military bases in Georgian occupied territories (and beyond where it becomes possible), granted dual citizenship status to Georgians residing abroad, main target group is in Russian Federation and introduction Russian pensions to the country – these are proposals stemming from very pro-Russian oriented political party "Centrists" (Temur Khachishvili-Vladimir Bedukadze) – this group picked up from the strategy namely those components: aggressive propaganda campaign+ network-centric dominance;

- Non-alignment and Neutrality Foreign Policy declaration supporters are keen to opt for the following components: information leadership+ cultural warfare;

- Lately emerged on screen so-called "Socialist Georgia" public-political movement (Grisha Oniani and Temur Pipia) are using the following components: political mythology+ aggressive propaganda campaign

However all three directions of the strategy are linked with most effective component agenda: aggressive Anti-American rhetoric and propaganda that is domain goal of the Russia's "Soft Power" strategy encroachment to Georgia.



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# Importance of car re-export for Georgia

By NINO OTARASHVILI

In the last few years Georgia has become a regional hub for the car business. There are only a few similar hubs across the world, and few in this region. Finland supplies cars to Russia, and cars from all over the world are stored in Dubai for later distribution, and now Georgia has become a similar hub.

Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Northern Russia import cars from Georgia, as do Middle East and Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Iran. The establishment of Georgia as such a hub is very important for our economy.

How has this happened? Here **The Georgian Times** interviews **Giorgi Surguladze**, Executive Director of Caucasus Business Group, on this and similar questions.

**What has made Georgia so important to the car industry?**

Flexible regulations and state support. For instance, dealers are allowed to import cars to Georgia without clearance for 90 days, and only afterwards put them in customs clearance. If a car is not customs cleared it is free of excise tax and therefore cheaper – people in neighbouring countries find it efficient to buy such cars. That has made our neighbourhood and the Black Sea coast a gateway for imported cars.

A single dealer can import 5-10 cars, sell them and see their profits flow into the country in the form of foreign currency.



These include currency revenues expressed in US Dollars, which are of the utmost importance for the country.

The cars imported from abroad are effectively raw materials. It is an accepted international practice to purchase second-hand cars at insurance auctions, often in the United States where this industry is fairly developed. The insurance companies pay the costs of damaged cars to their owners and then buy them in order to sell at auction throughout the world and within the United States. These cars are cheaper, and can be repaired and returned to the market. These damaged cars, which require new parts, are imported here and this is now a big industry in our country. We have numerous car services here which can restore and then re-export them.

Caucasus Auto Import considers itself one of the sector

leaders. We hold only 10% of the market, but the other companies are in the shadows. Caucasus Auto Import has been operating since 2004, importing cars for its clients. We have imported at around 50-60,000, half of which have then been re-exported.

Our other arm, Caucasus Auto Service, is a regional enterprise – a factory in which damaged cars are brought as raw materials and repaired in line with Western standards.

**How has the government helped with this process?**

A couple of weeks ago, the government took the decision to simplify the re-export of cars. Mamuka Bakhtadze, the Minister of Finance, said in a statement:

“You may know that we have good statistics concerning the re-export of cars. Numerous people are engaged in this activity. We made a decision to

simplify this process further and foster the aforesaid sector. We have decided that if a vehicle is registered for export within 90 calendar days of its importation, or is re-exported, we will pay 100% of the excise tax. We previously paid 50%. This is an important change which strengthens Georgia’s position in this business. We believe the competitiveness of our entrepreneurs will increase as a result of the mentioned initiative”.

This is a very serious change which will encourage the promotion of the re-export market. This fell through in 2014-2015 as a result of the fluctuations of regional markets. Oil prices slumped in Azerbaijan, then the currency devalued and we suffered economic volatility. Though the Azerbaijan economy is generally stable, people stopped buying cars and thus our re-export market was set back. However, in 2016-2017

things improved and Azerbaijan’s economy stabilised. Re-exports tripled, and Armenia began importing our cars to sell in Russia under the customs clearance agreement it has with that country. Ukraine is also quite a large part of our market.

**Why is this so important?**

When the re-export business was still at an early stage of development a dealer had 45 days to repair and sell a car as per the law. If he failed to do so he was given another 45 days and had to pay 500 GEL in tax. When the market was small this system worked well, but then dealers started importing five times as many cars. It was impossible to repair that many cars in 45 days, so importers had to pay 500 GEL or even a penalty of 1,000 GEL on each car they couldn’t turn round in time. Two years ago the 45 days were extended to 60, with 30 more at 150 GEL of tax. This encour-

aged the dealers who imported a lot of cars, and the re-export business grew.

**What happens if you fail to sell a car within 90 days?**

You pay a penalty of 1,000 GEL or put it in the customs clearance zone and sell it from there. This zone is at the market, which is convenient, but dealers do not like to put their cars there because foreign customers know that these cars were not sold within the time limit. They are therefore less trustworthy, so they think.

But if a dealer can clear a car and pay the excise tax he can sell it the normal way. He can conduct test drives in the customs clearance zone. If a car is cleared and excise tax paid, the dealer is given a further 90 days to sell it and it can be re-exported easily. He can also completely recover the excise tax without suffering any loss.

**How much is the excise tax approximately?**

It depends on the car. The cars repaired for export are relatively new. The state made the right decision when it increased the excise duty on old cars. This encouraged dealers to import only new cars. Neighbouring countries are adopting similar laws. We need to import cars which are in demand in Azerbaijan and neighbouring countries. Hence the customs clearance fee varies, depending on what cars are requested, but it is in the 2,000-2,500 GEL range. The dealers pay it but reclaim it back as soon as they sell their cars. It is a positive thing when the government imposes flexible regulations which significantly encourage those operating in the relevant sector.

## NEWS

### PRESIDENT OFFERS CONSULTATIONS ON PROPOSAL TO U.S. CONGRESS FOR GEORGIA SUPPORT ACT

President Giorgi Margvelashvili offered today political consultations to Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze on his recent proposal to the United States Congress for a bipartisan Georgia Support Act.

President Margvelashvili first voiced the initiative during his recent trip to the United States, telling U.S. legislators that the Georgia Support Act would consolidate the American-Georgian relations “into a very high level of cooperation.”

The President’s press office reported today that an official letter was submitted to the Parliament Speaker and the Prime Minister, notifying them of the proposal details and expressing “willingness for consultations.”

The press office said verbal communication had already taken place between President Giorgi Margvelashvili on the one hand, and Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze on the other.

Commenting the matter, David Rakviashvili, secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, said the document would be “very timely,” and “an adequate response” to the increasing challenges emanating from the Russian Federation.

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### NEW INFRASTRUCTURE MINISTER APPOINTED

Zurab Alavidze, Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Maia Tskitishvili, March 30, 2018. Photo: gov.ge

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili appointed today Maia Tskitishvili as new Regional Development and Infrastructure



Minister, replacing Zurab Alavidze, who served at the post from November 2016.

Maia Tskitishvili, 43, has worked as head of the Georgian government’s administration since November 2012. For almost a decade before that, Tskitishvili held a number of managerial positions at ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili’s companies.

Speaking at a press briefing today, PM Kvirikashvili said Maia Tskitishvili was “a very successful” head of administration. “It will be hard to find a person who will lead the administration as successfully as her, but the position of the Regional Development and Infrastructure Minister is so important, I had to make this decision,” the Prime Minister noted.

Giorgi Kvirikashvili spoke on Zurab Alavidze as well, saying he filed for resignation himself and that he would continue his tenure in private sector. The Prime Minister said Alavidze “did not envision himself in public sector in the long run.”

PM Kvirikashvili also commented on media reports on his possible resignation. “I would like to reassure everyone that the stop-watch that some persons (implying the opposition) have started, won’t run out for at least several years,” he quipped.

The ministerial appointment does not require approval from the Parliament. Confidence vote from the legislative body is only needed when more than one-third of the 14-member cabinet is changed.

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### GEORGIA EXPELS ONE OVER SALISBURY ATTACK

The Georgian Foreign Ministry condemned the use of chemical weapons on the territory of the United Kingdom, and decided to expel a staff member of the Russian Interests Section at the Swiss Embassy in Tbilisi.

The use of chemical weapons in Salisbury “represents serious challenge to common security,” the Foreign Ministry wrote in its brief statement on March 29, adding that the country stood in solidarity with the United Kingdom.

“[The Ministry] declares a member of the staff of the Russian Federation Interests Section at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tbilisi as a not acceptable person and requests to leave Georgia within 7 days,” the MFA said.

Georgia condemned the Salisbury incident previously as well, with Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze expressing Tbilisi’s “full support” to the UK “in its quest for truth.”

Georgia severed diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation shortly after the August 2008 war.

Switzerland, which has a record of representing other countries in third party nations, opened its Russian Federation Interests Section on March 5, 2009. Simultaneously, the Georgian Interests Section was opened by the Embassy of Switzerland in Moscow.

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# Why does Armenia misappropriate Georgian churches in Georgia? – Religious dispute

By SALOME SAMKHARADZE

Armenia has been seeking ownership of churches situated in Georgia for more than two decades. In 1995, S. Karapetian published a map-guide in Yerevan in the Armenian language called “Armenian Churches in Georgia”, the main edition of which was translated into the Russian and English languages and distributed throughout the world. He mentioned 653 churches, and added that this list is incomplete and there are actually many more.



Karapetian was later revealed in fraud. In fact, 80-90% of the listed “Armenian” churches are actually Georgian.

On December 12, 2014, Bishop Mirzakhaniani of the Armenian Eparchate in Georgia filed an application with former Prime Minister Irakli

Gharibashvili regarding the transfer of 442 churches in Georgia. The application did not contain any scientific evidence concerning the Armenian origin of these churches, it was merely a list. When asked to provide such evidence, the list of churches was sent again with 90 percent of

the churches emblazoned with short captions taken from the works by S. Karapetian, not scientific analysis and academic research. An interview with S. Karapetian was also published in the press, demanding the gradual return of the churches in batches of 20.

The status of the Sahak

Tandoiants Holy Virgin Church is under urgent discussion following a court application by Bishop Mirzakhaniani to transfer it to the Armenian eparchate. The church is situated at 38 David Aghmashenebli Ave, Tbilisi (the former Plekhanovi Avenue). During the Soviet times it housed a

yard keepers club, until in 1949 it was transformed into the Kolkheti Cinema by Mikheil Nepritsev.

The Georgian Times recently met art expert Inga Vacheishvili, archaeologist, and professor Merab Dzneladze, art historian Ketevan Abashidze and lawyer Levan Merabishvili at the Gallery Vache. They showed us all the pieces of evidence they will present in order to prove their case.

“The Armenian claim is unfair, we have all the docu-

and Vakushti Batonishvili indicated who each church belonged to when the area was surveyed. The name of a country was not applied to either of these churches, they were merely listed by their patrons and locations. The name New Village was probably bestowed in the time of Shah Abbas, when the area was destroyed and restored afterwards. The village is included in the map of 1735, at a time when Georgian tombs were being discovered as a result of archaeological digs”.

Ketevan Abashidze told us that the Armenians must supply real evidence that the church belongs to them. “The king resettled people from a village called Kukia, in Trialeti-Samshilde, in what we call Kukia today. Kukia was not part of Tbilisi then. Even if the church was gifted by either side, this still requires evidence”.

Lawyer Levan Merabishvili is representing the academics. “We are not respondents, we are involved parties, as the church is our property, registered as a possession of the Patriarchate. A dispute is going on, but we are not parties to it, we are simply stating that these ruins are of a Georgian church. The Public Registry registered it as property of the Patriarchate on the basis of an application submitted by the Ministry of Economy and our letter – i.e. it restored historical justice, and this is what we are trying to defend. I believe this is the responsibility of all Georgian people”, he told us.

ments to prove that this church is Georgian and we shall present them at the trial,” Inga Vacheishvili stated. Merab Dzneladze added, “We want to present genuine documents which will prove that this church is indeed Georgian. Its location was once called “New Village”,

## NEWS

### 43<sup>RD</sup> ROUND OF GENEVA INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSIONS

The 43rd round of Geneva International Discussions (GID) – the multilateral mediation forum to address security and humanitarian consequences of the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 – was held on March 27-28.

The GID are co-chaired by the representatives of the OSCE, EU and UN, and involve representatives from Georgia, Russia and the United States, as well as members of both the Georgian exiled administrations of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and the two regions’ Russian-backed authorities.

#### POSITIONS TAKEN: GEORGIA

The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement regarding the March 27-28 negotiations, saying the main discussion points were “the arbitrary deprivation of Archil Tatumashvili’s life,” and the establishment of international security mechanisms in line with the August 12, 2008 ceasefire agreement.

The Georgian MFA stressed in its statement that the “torture and murder” of Archil Tatumashvili was a result of the “inaction of the Russian Federation and its occupation regimes” on the cases of Giga Otkhazor and Davit Basharuli, which “encouraged violence against ethnic Georgians.”

“The Georgian side laid full responsibility on the Russian Federation on the matter, as the country exercising effective control in the occupied regions,” the Ministry said, calling on Moscow to refrain from creating any obstacles to the ongoing investigation.

The Foreign Ministry also noted “an intensive discussion” took place on the non-use of force declaration (NUF), with Tbilisi representatives stressing that the declaration should have served “a concrete purpose, namely the start of the implementation process of the ceasefire agreement.”

According to the MFA statement, participants from Georgia and the United States underlined the need for Russia to commit and fulfil the non-use of force obligation, but the Russian side demonstrated its “destructive approach,” and “drew the talks to a deadlock with their intentionally provocative statements.”

The Ministry also said “a detailed discussion” was held on security, humanitarian and human rights situation in the occupied territories. Here, Tbilisi representatives expressed their concern regarding “continued militarization of the occupied regions,” and

“steps towards their factual annexation by the Russian Federation.”

The MFA added that ethnic discrimination of Georgians residing in the two regions was stressed during the talks, including registration of the Gali Georgians “as foreigners” and violation of their fundamental rights and freedoms, destruction of the homes of the Georgians, and restriction of the Georgian-language education for children in Gali and Akhgori districts.

#### POSITIONS TAKEN: RUSSIA, TSKHINVALI, SOKHUMI

The March 28 statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry (MID) said the Georgian diplomats “turned the meeting into a publicity event, contrary to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s reassuring statement of March 9 on his country’s resolve to make progress at the talks in Geneva.”

The Ministry stressed Georgia’s pedaling of “the alleged Russian occupation” and its attempts to “shift the blame for their own inability to normalize relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia onto Russia,” were “futile.”

“Instead, Georgia should start thinking about ways to restore trust in relations with its neighbors, launch a direct dialogue with Abkhazia and South Ossetia based on mutual respect, stop encouraging other countries to deny visas to these republics’ residents, abolish the Law on Occupied Territories, and stop hindering the republics’ cultural and humanitarian events abroad,” the MID statement reads.

The Russian Foreign Ministry touched upon the non-use of force declaration as well, saying it was “regrettable” that the participants failed to “coordinate” the draft statement. “This time, the U.S. delegates proposed unacceptable wording characterizing the August 2008 events,” the Ministry said, pointing out that Russia had no unfulfilled commitments with respect to the August 12, 2008 ceasefire agreement.

The Russian Foreign Ministry also expressed its concern regarding Georgia’s cooperation with NATO and criticized the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) for its “violations of Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s state borders.”

The March 29 statements of the Russian-backed authorities in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali echoed Moscow’s messages.

The Abkhaz “foreign ministry” stressed that the joint non-use of force statement, which “could have served as an important step on the road to signing a legally binding non-use of force agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia,” was not adopted at the 43rd round of discussions,

since “this time, the American wording characterizing the August 2008 events was unacceptable.”

The Tskhinvali “foreign ministry” repeated that the non-use of force statement “could have become a constructive step on the road to developing a document, which would guarantee the security of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia.” “Representatives of the American delegation proposed knowingly unacceptable changes, which went against the format and the spirit of the Geneva discussions, and [with that] annulled the confidence-building efforts of many months,” it said.

#### POSITIONS TAKEN: THE UNITED STATES

The United States Mission to Geneva said in its press statement that the GID delegation condemned “the tragic death of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili,” and called “for a full and transparent investigation.”

“The United States cited the tragic death as the most recent example underscoring the immediate need for international mechanisms to improve security and stability on the ground,” reads their statement.

The U.S. GID delegation also noted that there was “no agreement” on a non-use of force statement, and that it regrets participants were unable to discuss the issue of the internally displaced persons because of Russia’s walk-out.

#### GID CO-CHAIRASSESSMENTS

The GID co-chairs issued their own press communiqué, assessing the overall security situation on the ground “as relatively calm and stable,” but reiterating their “strong concern over the tragic death of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili.”

Here, the co-chairs emphasized “the need to address properly this and similar cases to avoid repetition and raising tensions,” and called for “a thorough investigation into the case and for cooperation among relevant stakeholders.”

The GID co-chairs then noted that despite “intensive engagement” by all participants, “it did not prove possible to finalize the draft joint statement on non-use of force.” The co-chairs said to continue their consultations in this regard.

The press communiqué also said that “unfortunately, it was again impossible to complete discussion of all agenda items given long-standing divergent approaches to the issue of IDPs/refugees.”

The next round of the GID is scheduled for June.

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**GEORGIA, LUXEMBOURG FMS DISCUSS BILATERAL TIES**

The Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, and his Georgian counterpart Mikheil Janelidze met in Tbilisi yesterday and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between the two countries.



According to the Georgian Foreign Ministry, the two ministers spoke on the country's European and NATO integration processes, as well as the prospects of economic cooperation between the two nations.

"Georgia enjoys a very strong support from Luxembourg in terms of its European and Euro-Atlantic integration; we spoke about these issues today, and about the reforms that will bring us closer to full-fledged membership in the European and the Euro-Atlantic families," FM Janelidze said at a joint press conference after the meeting.

"We [also] appreciate Luxembourg's strong support of our territorial integrity," the Foreign Minister Janelidze also noted, adding that despite "very close" political and economic relations, there was "a much larger potential in various fields, be it banking, financing or education and culture."

FM Janelidze spoke on the EU visa waiver anniversary as well, stressing the country would continue implementing measures to reduce the growing number of Georgian applications for EU asylum.

Later on March 28, Jean Asselborn held meetings with President Giorgi Margvelashvili and Deputy Parliament Speaker Tamar Chugoshvili. Today, he is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili.

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**IN QUOTES: GEORGIAN LEADERS ON EU VISA WAIVER ANNIVERSARY**

On March 28, Georgia is marking the one-year anniversary from the launch of the visa-free travel to the European Union, which enabled Georgian citizens to travel to the Schengen area for up to 90 days without visas.

More than 250 000 Georgian citizens have enjoyed visa-free travel to the Schengen area in the last twelve months.

To mark this milestone, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze and Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze have issued statements. Below are excerpts from their statements.

Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili: "March 28, marks the anniversary of the enactment of the visa waiver ... Georgia managed to secure free movement for its citizens in the European Union, the Schengen Area countries. This is, however, not only about the right to travel visa-free, this is also a significant political step from the European Union ... and a demonstration of their great trust to Georgia. At the same time, this is a huge responsibility, and the steps undertaken by the Government to reduce the growing number of visa waiver abuses will surely yield results, and we will be able to preserve this great benefit."

Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze: "A year ago our European friends granted us the right to travel visa free to the EU countries, which is a great privilege and a great responsibility for us. This has to be well-recognized by the government and individual citizens, and I am sure that we will treat the issue with such responsibility. It is important that we present ourselves coherently before our European friends, which will become a prerequisite for moving closer to Europe and the European Union."

Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze: "Visa-free travel to the EU countries has a great political importance along with its practical aspects, since Georgia has come closer to the European family, since Georgia has been recognized as a reliable and valuable partner, and since we have received strong support of our European aspirations. Visa liberalization is not only a result of the government's tireless efforts and its reforms, but a result of the historical choice of the Georgian people – of its European aspirations and of its unwavering support on this path. The government and the society value this important achievement and spares no efforts to fulfil the visa waiver-related terms."

Over the last few months, a number of European countries have voiced their concerns over the increased number of crimes and asylum seekers from Georgia, triggering doubts that the European Union would temporarily suspend the visa-free regime for Georgia.

To address this problem, the Georgian government has pledged to implement a set of legislative reforms, as well as to intensify police cooperation with European partners, and to carry out country-wide information campaign.

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**ARCHIL TATUNASHVILI HAD GUNSHOT WOUND TO THE HEAD, THE VICTIM'S MOTHER SAYS**

Rusudan Tatunashvili, the mother of Archil Tatunashvili, a thirty-five-year-old Georgian citizen, who died at the hands of the Russian-backed authorities in Tskhinvali on February 22, said the man was "brutally" tortured and had a gunshot wound to the head.

Rusudan Tatunashvili spoke on the circumstances surrounding her son's death on March 27, three days after the retired Georgian serviceman was laid to rest at Mukhatgverdi military cemetery in the outskirts of Tbilisi.

Speaking to the Tbilisi-based TV Pirveli, Rusudan Tatunashvili said the man regularly crossed into Akhlagori Municipality in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia for the last seven months, where he was trading fruits and vegetables transported from Georgia proper.

Rusudan Tatunashvili specified that the family, including the deceased man, had Tskhinvali-issued "permits," allowing them to visit their home in village Kanchaveti of Akhlagori Municipality.

"During one of such visits, Archil was detained by Akhlagori police allegedly for drug test, which he did not resist since he was not a drug user... they had him in Akhlagori police for some time and then he was transferred to Tskhinvali police," Rusudan Tatunashvili noted.

She added, citing unidentified sources from Tskhinvali, that local authorities wanted him to admit that he was "plotting a terrorist act in Tskhinvali to disrupt Putin's elections (implying the March 18 Russian presidential election in the region)," and that "he was sent by Georgia, with the support of the United States."

Archil Tatunashvili, according to his mother, refused to do so, with Tskhinvali authorities torturing him "brutally and inhumanely." She said the man had signs of torture on his hands, legs and face, as well as a gunshot wound "running from the right temple through the left ear."

"His hands were nailed, his palms were burnt and the backs of his hands were entirely bruised and torn ... Two of his fingers were particularly injured, with iron pieces still visible in his finger; the fingers were all battered," Rusudan Tatunashvili said.

Reports that Tatunashvili was tortured to death emerged shortly after his death, with Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria saying the man was already dead when he was taken to hospital.

According to Irakli Toidze, a forensic expert, who attended the examination at the National Forensics Bureau in Tbilisi, Archil Tatunashvili's body had "multiple [blunt] injuries, scratches and bruises almost all over the body," pointing at the likelihood that he was tortured.

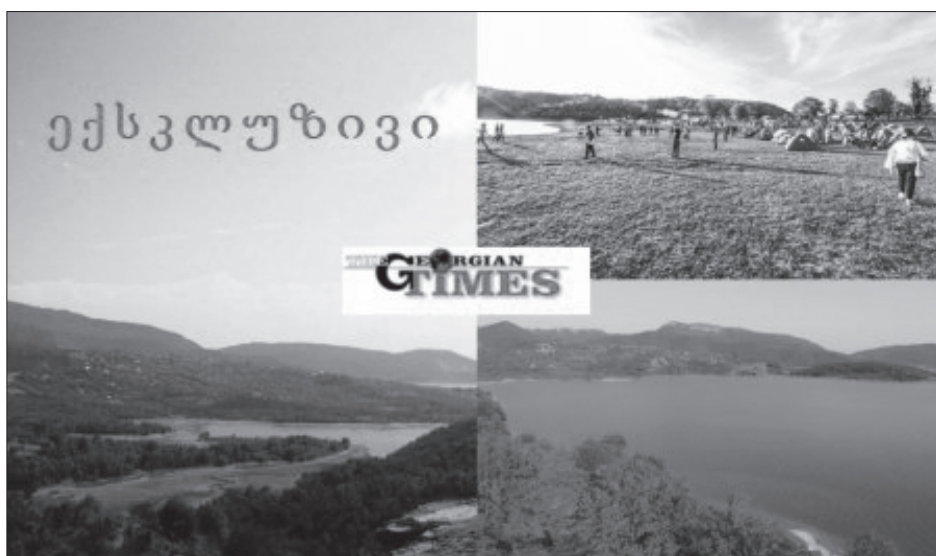
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**Satsire – is going to be first European village in Georgia**

Satsire is a unique resort in the mountainous Region of Imereti, located between Kutaisi and Tkibuli which will soon become the first European village in Georgia. It takes only an hour from Kopitnari Airport to the village of the future, which is distinguished with its curative properties of the unique climate and location. In addition to this, Satsire has been declared as a new touristic destination by National Tourism Administration which was due to the fact that there are many cultural monuments in the vicinity of the village, including: Gelati, Motsameta, Nikortsminda, Tsutskhvatisa and Sataplia Cave, Nine Cross Mount and Shaori Lake.

The development fund of the resort Satsire, which currently unites more than 200 people, has been involved in the development of Satsire since 2015 exerting all their efforts to bring the idea into reality in order to transform the resort into a magic touristic attraction. The fund started to cooperate actively with different state organizations since it has been established. It should be mentioned that Imereti Region Administration also actively supports the development of the resort Satsire. "The Georgian Times" interviewed Gela Bubashvili, Head of Satsire Development Fund:

"Satsire is a village of my childhood. At earlier times, numerous visitors were com-



ing there. The resort was always full of holidaymakers. The village sprang to life during the summer. But everything changed in the aftermath of 90<sup>th</sup> developments. The village lost its life and everything faded. Young people started to leave the village. The number of locals significantly decreased and the number of schoolchildren was reduced as well" – Gela Bubashvili says.

According to Gela Bubashvili, he came up with an idea of transforming Satsire into European village on his visit to Switzerland when he found great similarities between Satsire and San-

Moritz: "After visiting San-Moritz, I had been thinking of Satsire all the time that it had prospects to become like San-Moritz. The resorts are quite similar in terms of location and nature. The beneficial events which took place further had driven me to believe that Satsire could have been prosperous within a new scope and color" – he explains.

Dimitri Japaridze, Professor of Iliia State University developed a strategic plan for the development of Georgian village at the example of Satsire. The project named "Satsire – Village of the Future" was set up which

is aimed to build up city-style infrastructure as well as development of small and middle-business. The goal of the strategy is the creation of favorable conditions for young people living in the villages and impediment of migration process.

As far as it is acknowledged, the project is comprised of three directions such as: arrangement of solid infrastructure, which is necessary for holidaymakers and local residents, as well as support of small and medium size business which implies increase of employability rate of local people and impediment of migration. Another direction is the cultural, sport and educational

development of young people. Gela Bubashvili explains that the infrastructural development of the village Satsire was supported by the state agencies which attracted a large amount of investments. As he says, the results are visible already:

"New Railway station has been built. Motorways have been rehabilitated and new lightning system has been installed. The Center for West Georgia Teacher Training Center is under reconstruction. A project which is designed to arrange new canalization system is being worked out. Ministry of Education has carried out works regarding the rehabilitation of the local school: a new playground was arranged and the school was roofed. I would like to not the charity by "Redco" Director Miriam Katamadze who funded the construction works of St.Holy Trinity Church in the Village Satsire. Currently, the construction works of a media library is underway. Public Center and Bank Office will be operational at Satsire as well as a Police Department. A café, Beauty Salon and cinema will be opened in the newly built railway station with the financial support of the project "Produce in Georgia" in near future. The project "Panorama Satsire" which will be realized in the future encompasses construction of sport complex, cottages, carping area near the lake and horse riding services.

We have an ambition to make Satsire the first European village in Georgia, which will be equipped with city infrastructure, where small and medium size business will be run and young people will have all opportunities to develop further. We are approximating to our goal although there is

still much to do" – Satsire Development Fund Director says.

As it is known, the company "Redco" signed a memorandum with Satsire Development Fund as a part of the aforesaid project the investment value of which amounts to 4 million Gel. The Partnership Fund also expressed desire to fund the aforementioned project the investment value of which is 8 million Gel. As Gela Bubashvili said in an interview with "The Georgian Times", apart from the unique location and climate of Satsire, the uniqueness and implementation of the project is due to the active participation and involvement of 30 students of Business Administration Program of Free University. According to Gela Bubashvili they are ready to engage in business administration.

Mariam Taliashvili, one of the leaders of Free University students made a comment for "The Georgian Times" who is the author of a number of business plans:

"The students of Free University have been participated in the project since 2016 and developed at around 15-20 business plans. The group worked on three projects. These are: beauty salon, cinema and café. The aforesaid projects will be the first startups which will be opened in Satsire at the newly built railway station meeting the European standards. We are engaged in funding programs and decision-making process which is a huge experience for us. We hope our customers will be not only locals but people from the adjacent areas" – Mariam Taliashvili said in a conversation with "The Georgian Times".



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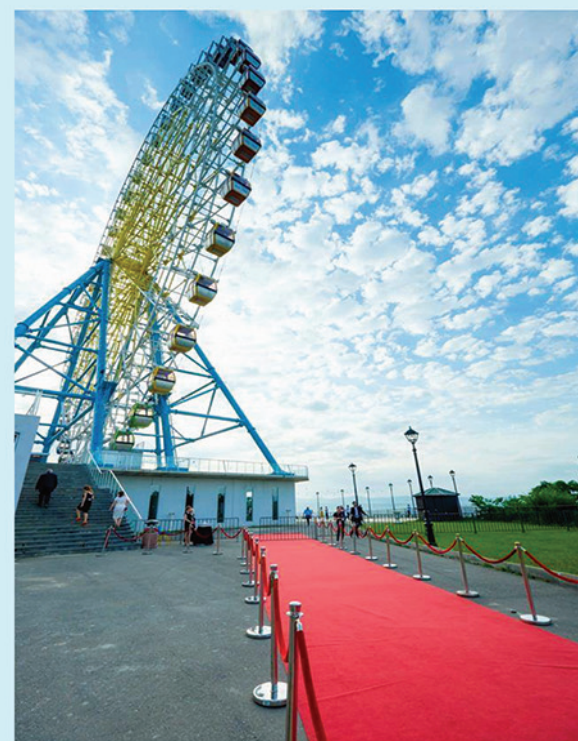


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