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PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY FOR U.S.-LED MILITARY DRILLS IN GEORGIA



U.S. army's M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles being unloaded in Vaziani training area, July 26, 2017. Photo: Georgian MoD

U.S. military equipment, including M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, was delivered via ferry from Bulgaria to Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti for annual joint military exercises, which will start next week outside Tbilisi.

NDI-Commissioned Public Opinion Survey



U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI) released its public opinion survey, which shows respondents' attitudes towards broad range of issues, among them foreign policy, government performance and constitutional changes.

The survey was fielded by the Caucasus Resource Research Centers (CRRC) for NDI between June 18 and July 9 with the financial assistance of the UK Aid. The poll was conducted through nationwide face-to-face interviews (excluding occupied territories) with 2,261 respondents and has a margin of error plus, minus 2.2%.



Official opening of new Jaguar Rover Land Renewed Auto Show

ABOVE & BEYOND



IONIQ electromobile



POLICE INVESTIGATING CAUSE OF FIRE AT RUSTAVI 2 TV BUILDING

Fire at Rustavi 2 TV storage room, July 27, 2017. Photo: screengrab from Rustavi 2 TV

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia is investigating the cause of a fire that broke out in one of the buildings of Rustavi 2 TV, one of Georgia's most-watched television channels.



The probe was launched under article 187 of the Criminal Code, dealing with property damage and destruction committed through arson, a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term of three to five years.

Fire flared up in the storage room of Rustavi 2 TV shortly before midnight on July 26, suspending the television broadcasting for few minutes.

Rustavi 2 TV viewers and politicians soon gathered at the TV building, including the mayoral candidates – UNM's Zaal Udumashvili, European Georgia's Elene Khostaria and independent candidate Aleko Elisashvili.

The Emergency Management Agency of the Internal Affairs Ministry reported late night on July 27 that the blaze was promptly extinguished by six crews of firefighters. "The fire spread to only 40 square meters out of a storage room of 300-400 square meters," the Agency said.

According to Rustavi 2 TV, the fire damaged "part of the computer equipment, studio decorations, lighting and electric devices." The company also said that it hired an audit company for determining the exact amount of financial loss.

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POLITICAL RATINGS IN NDI-COMMISSIONED POLL

A recent poll, carried out less than three months before the October municipal elections, shows the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (GDDG) enjoying strongest public support with 23% of respondents identifying it as "the party closest" to them, compared to the United National Movement's (UNM) 9%.

The survey, released on July 27, was fielded by the Caucasus Resource Research Centers (CRRC) for NDI between June 18 and July 9 with the financial assistance of the UK Aid. The poll was conducted through nationwide (excluding occupied territories) face-to-face interviews with 2,261 respondents and has a margin of error plus, minus 2.2%.

According to the survey, 13% of respondents, either refused to answer or said they did not know which party was closest to them. 37% of respondents indicated "no party" to the question.

The Alliance of Patriots and the European Georgia, party launched this year by former UNM members, received 4% each, followed by the Labor Party with 3%. 7% of respondents named other parties.

In NDI/CRRC's April opinion poll, the ruling party was named by 29% as the party closest to them, followed by UNM – 10%; Alliance of Patriots – 4%; and Labor Party – 3%. 4% of respondents did not know which party was closest to them and 38% indicated "no party" to the question. 8% named other parties.

62% of 2,261 respondents surveyed (68 percent among younger Georgians) said they are undecided about how they would vote if municipal elections were held tomorrow.

"This large number of undecided voters presents both a challenge and opportunity for parties. With weeks until the elections, they have plenty of work to do to inspire and motivate citizens, offer relevant policies, and demonstrate meaningful contrast with their opponents," said Laura Thornton, NDI senior director.

57% of respondents said they would vote in the municipal elections.

Asked which party they would vote for if municipal elections were held tomorrow, 35% of likely voters responded "don't know"; 15% refused to answer, and 5% responded "no party."

GDDG had 27% support among the likely voters, followed by the United National Movement (UNM) – 8% and the European Georgia – 4%. 7% of likely voters named other parties.

Asked on Tbilisi mayoral race, 37% of likely voters said GDDG's Kakha Kaladze would be their first choice as the mayor of the capital city, followed by independent candidate Aleko Elisashvili with 22%, UNM's Zaal Udumashvili with 16%; European Georgia's Elene Khostaria with 5% and a Labor Party candidate with 2%.

8% were undecided; 3% said they would vote for none of the candidates and 5% refused to answer.

Among the whole sample of respondents, the following figures were reported: Kakha Kaladze with 30%; Aleko Elisashvili with 19%, Zaal Udumashvili with 18%; Elene Khostaria with 5% and a Labor Party candidate with 3%.

Television remained the main source of information about parties and candidates for 73% of respondents, followed by internet – 19%. 34% of respondents said they trust Rustavi 2 TV's coverage of politics and current events for accurate information on politics and current affairs, followed by Imedi TV's 32%. The Georgian Public Broadcaster enjoys 3% trust.

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Country's Direction

According to the survey, number of respondents who think that Georgia is going in the "wrong direction" decreased to 31%, compared to 33% in April 2017.

31% of respondents think that Georgia is moving in the "right direction," same as in April 2017 and November 2016. 35% think that Georgia is "not changing at all" (31% in April 2017).

National Issues

The poll shows that respondents perceive jobs (52%), poverty (31%), territorial integrity (30%), rising prices/inflation (28%), affordable healthcare (25%) and pensions (22%) as the most pressing issues; these six priority issues have not changed over the past years and were represented in various sequences in all previous polls.

37% of interviewed respondents named roads among the most important infrastructural issues in their places of residence, followed by environment pollution (22%), water supply (17%), gas supply (17%), traffic (16%) etc.

Foreign Policy

Number of respondents, who support the government's stated goal to join the European Union, has decreased to 77% from 80% in April 2017. In November 2016 and in June 2016 the figure stood at 72%.

The support for the European Union is high across the country with the only exception of settlements with predominantly ethnic minority populations – 53%.

66% of respondents said they approve the government's stated goal to join NATO, a two percentage point decline compared to April 2017. 23% are against joining NATO, up from 21% in April 2017.

Support for NATO membership declined to 29% from 42% in April 2017 among respondents in the settlements with predominantly ethnic minority populations.

On the question of Georgia's foreign policy, 62% (65% in April 2017) chose the answer: "Georgia should join the European Union," while 23% (21% in April 2017) responded: "Georgia should join the Eurasian Union." 8% of respondents agree with neither of the statements.

According to the poll, 90% of respondents (92% in April 2017) have heard about the visa liberalization for Georgian citizens traveling to most of the EU member countries. Of those who have heard of the visa liberalization, 64% feel they have enough information about the procedures/rules of visa free travel, statistically the same as in April 2017.

Performance of Government

According to the survey, 52% of respondents evaluated the performance of the Georgian Dream government as "average," with 10% evaluating it as "well" or "very well" and 35% as "badly" and "very badly."

Asked a similar question on local government, 52% of interviewees responded "average," while 16% named "well" or "very well" and 28% as "badly" and "very badly."

21% of respondents said that they are satisfied with the work of Sakrebulo (local self-government assembly); 15% are dissatisfied, while 46% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

20% of respondents are satisfied with the work of the mayor's office; 18% are dissatisfied, while 45% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Other Issues

Only 32% of Georgians reported that they are aware of the process to change the constitution, and of those few who were aware, the majority (59%) reports they do not have enough information about the changes. Only 2% participated in parliament's public meetings. Further, a mere 6% of those who are aware of the new constitution say the changes reflect the people's opinions, 47% say partially reflect, and 32% report "not at all."

Half of Georgians (52%) are aware of the new legislation revoking the status of seven self-governing cities and merging them with the municipalities, while 44 percent are unaware. The majority of citizens (59%) disapproves of the merging of these cities and having them governed by one body, and only 16 percent approve. Further, half believe it will have a negative impact on the country (45%), while only 11% see a positive impact.

NDI plans to publish part of the public opinion poll involving political rankings on Thursday.

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MOGHERINI: 'LACK OF CONSENSUS AND INCLUSIVENESS' OVER LATEST CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini responded to the joint appeal of Georgian civil society organizations, voicing regret over "the lack of consensus and inclusiveness" regarding the latest developments in the Constitutional reform process in Georgia.

A group of 32 Georgian civil society organizations (CSOs), released an appeal to the international community on June 27, criticizing the ruling party's decision to postpone the introduction of proportional electoral system to 2024 and urging the international community to "deliver very strong messages to the Government and the ruling party, that the attempts towards consolidation of power are incompatible with western standards of democracy."



"We have been closely following the different stages of this process, taking good note of the Venice Commission's Opinion on the draft text of the new Constitution," reads the letter, undersigned by the High Representative on July 26 and published by the Transparency International – Georgia a day later.

"The European Union welcomed the declared readiness of the parliamentary majority to integrate the Venice Commission's recommendations. Nevertheless, the latest draft text adopted by the majority contains important modifications related to the proportional system for parliamentary elections, a central pillar of the whole reform," the High Representative noted.

"We are aware that the latest changes were introduced despite objections formulated by all parliamentary opposition parties and the overwhelming majority of civil society organizations," Mogherini also said, adding that "we regret the lack of consensus and inclusiveness at this decisive phase of the reform process."

"From the very start, we have been encouraging a consensual and inclusive process in our contacts with the different political forces in Georgia, be it in government or opposition. Please rest assured that additional efforts are made to ensure that the reform is based on a broad and lasting consensus," she concluded.

On June 23, the Parliament of Georgia adopted unanimously with 115 votes the constitutional amendments with its second reading. The third and the final hearing will be held in autumn 2017.

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“Foie Gras” and “Fondant au Chocolat” with Fresh Raspberry – French Cuisine Miracles from GPH Head Chef



GPH takes special care of holidays’ comfort by providing a quality service. This year Le ROOF GARDEN restaurant offers delicious French meals and desserts prepared by a well-known head chef together with a wide selection of wines.

Michel Blot tells us himself which French delicacies can be tasted at GPH’s exclusive French restaurant:

As you know French cuisine is widely popular around the world and Georgia is no exception. This is my third consecutive year working in Georgia and I am eager to tell you that I like Georgian cuisine very much. The hotel offers many dining options, the French fine dining Roof Garden, Adjara Restaurant international buffet, with a strong accent on Georgian dishes, our Sushi Bar set by the salt water pool and more relaxed settings like our Pool Bar and Beach Terrace where you can enjoy a snack all day long. With all these options, we have the possibility to satisfy everyone.

I would single out some special meals: our “Mille Feuilles De Saint Jacques et Crevettes”, which is a dignified best-

seller, our “Foie Gras Aux Figues” and “Rib eye and Porcini Risotto”, all which match excellently with our Georgian Chateau Mukhrani and Chablis white wine offered with sea food.

The restaurant’s confectionary menu offers a choice of four French desserts- “Heaton Mess”, “Fondant au Chocolat” and “Orange Delice”. For me the most delicious is our “Fondant au Chocolat”, which we decorate with fresh raspberry.

The main ingredients of French cuisine are butter, olive oil and vegetables. Georgia is distinguished by its bio-natural products and vegetables, fruit and dairy products are always available here. I would like to add French cuisine and the local eco-natural products are a very good match.

As for the specific ingredients of French cuisine, we buy these from our partner companies. All these things make our job easier.

P.S. I am going to share a secret of French cuisine... dairy butter, dairy butter, dairy butter!



PARLIAMENT OVERRIDES PRESIDENTIAL VETOS ON SELF-GOVERNMENT, ELECTION CODES

The Parliament of Georgia overturned on July 26 President Giorgi Margvelashvili's vetoes on the amendments to the Local Self-Government Code and the Election Law.

The bills, approved by the Parliament on June 30 and vetoed by the President on July 21, entail reducing the number of self-governing cities from current twelve to five; introducing new rule of composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the new way of defining the number of majoritarian members in the local municipality councils.

In his written objections to the Parliament, President Margvelashvili said that revoking the self-governing status of the seven cities "goes against fundamental principles of both - the constitution and the self-government."

The President also pointed out that merging the self-governing cities with neighboring communities would worsen the municipal services and citizen inclusion in the governance process.

On the Election Code, Giorgi Margvelashvili noted that the amendments "do not contribute to the trust towards the election administration and the political pluralism in the election management process."

He also said that the new rules for defining the number of majoritarian members in the local municipality councils does not provide for "fair representation" of the cities and other urban settlements that are included in the municipalities, and that it "creates further inequality in terms of the weight of votes."

Parliamentary Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze commented the President's objections during the plenary session, saying they were notable for "absolute deficit of arguments" and for "political bias." "Therefore, we can support the original bill and overturn the President's veto with an absolutely clear and free consciousness," Kobakhidze told the members of Parliament.

The decision to include seven self-governing cities – Mtskheta, Telavi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Ambrolauri, Zugdidi and Ozurgeti - into the neighboring municipalities will come into force on the day President Margvelashvili announces the date of the 2017 municipal elections. Voters in these self-governing units will elect already merged Sakrebulo and mayors in October municipal elections.

Meanwhile, the new rules for appointing the party representatives in the election administration will come into force following the October municipal polls.

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PETRO POROSHENKO REVOKES MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI'S UKRAINIAN CITIZENSHIP

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko issued a decree stripping Mikheil Saakashvili of his Ukrainian citizenship, Ukraine's State Migration Service reported on July 26.



The citizenship was granted to the former Georgian President by Poroshenko himself on May 29, 2015, a day before his appointment as the head of the Odessa region in south-western Ukraine.

Saakashvili resigned from the post of the governor in November 2016, after his relations with Poroshenko soured, becoming an opposition leader and creating his own political party - the Movement of New Forces - in early 2017.

Anton Geraschenko, member of the Verkhovna Rada and advisor to the Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs, said that Mikheil Saakashvili, who is wanted by Georgia on a number of criminal charges, was stripped of the citizenship according to Articles 19 and 21 of the Ukrainian law on citizenship.

According to Geraschenko, "recently the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia provided the Ukrainian side with the facts which it had not known at the time when the decision to grant Mikheil Saakashvili Ukrainian citizenship was made, and which Mikheil Saakashvili deliberately concealed."

He also noted that "the decision to revoke citizen's status is made if the person willing to receive Ukrainian citizenship has provided deliberately false data, lied, provided false documents, or hidden an important fact of his biography."

Presently the citizenship status of Saakashvili remains unclear, since he had been stripped of his Georgian citizenship by President Giorgi Margvelashvili, on the basis of him becoming a citizen of another state – Ukraine.

Saakashvili, who was on a visit to the United States when Poroshenko issued his decision, reacted to the news by saying he would fight for his legal right to return to Ukraine. He also underscored that Poroshenko acted in an "underhanded" manner, while Saakashvili was out of the country.

The former Georgian President pointed out that on July 24 Poroshenko appointed new members to the Citizenship Committee of Ukraine "in order to have a completely subservient commission that would agree to any of the President's whims."

Saakashvili also said that Ukraine's rulers "realized that the opposition is unifying in order to come out into the streets this fall and put an end to their oligarchic pact," and that stripping him of his citizenship was a part of their fearful reaction.

Mikheil Saakashvili added that Poroshenko "crossed a red line" and his action would cause his and his government's "inevitable failure," even before the next election.

Saakashvili also suggested in his statement that Poroshenko recently visited Georgia not because he wanted to "establish ties between the two countries, but in order to come to another agreement, this time between two oligarchic regimes" – Poroshenko's own in Ukraine and Bidzina Ivanishvili's (former Georgian Prime Minister) in Georgia.

According to Saakashvili, they thought up a ploy to strip him of his Ukrainian citizenship by claiming new evidence provided to the Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office. Saakashvili says, however, that since he acquired Ukrainian citizenship no new case has been initiated against him in Georgia.

Russian Prime Minister and former President Dmitry Medvedev reacted to the events in his late-night Facebook post on July 27, saying that "Saakashvili's fate" and "consistency of the Ukrainian authorities" were both "amazing," and adding in English that "show must go on."

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THE WEEKLY TRIPWIRE – ISSUE 4

On the Line – Poroshenko in Khurvaleti: During his visit to Georgia, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko went to the line of control in village Khurvaleti, with its jagged Russian-installed barbed wire cutting visibly the local farmers' land. "We have a common aggressor - both Ukraine and Georgia - and this is the Russian Federation," said Poroshenko after conversing with the local residents. On his Twitter account he posted: "It is painful to look into the eyes of the people who have found themselves behind the barbed wire of the Russian occupation in our friendly Georgia."

Sokhumi Happenings – Assimilation effort targets Georgians in Gali: Sokhumi is telling ethnic Georgians of the Gali district they are not who they say they are, and suggests they consider calling themselves ethnic Abkhaz. The region's Russia-backed leader Raul Khajimba issued a letter implying that the Gali residents were in truth Abkhaz, with the Georgian identity forced upon them in the Soviet period. He added optimistically that "nevertheless the ethnic memory is alive and there are ongoing processes to restore the national identity of the native people."

The re-branding won't go without tagging though. The term the Abkhaz leadership has for the Gali Georgians willing to recover their alleged 'true identity' is "Murzakano Abkhaz," after the name (Samurzakano) which historically included the Gali district's territory. The head of the district administration claims over 30 individuals have applied for a change of their surnames from Georgian into Abkhaz ones.

Western Voices – UK Foreign Office issues its annual Human Rights Report: The Report's Russian Federation section includes the situation in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. It says that "Russian actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to deterioration in the human rights situation in both regions," citing pressure on the freedom of movement and restriction of education in the Georgian language, as well as of the ethnic Georgians' residency and property rights, among the human rights violations in the two provinces.

Sokhumi Happenings – Much ado about NATO: In case someone has missed the often repeated message the authorities in Sokhumi again restated that they don't like NATO. This time their "foreign ministry" said it considered the coming U.S.-led Noble Partner 2017 military exercise in Georgia to be "destructive and aimed at the further escalation of tensions in the region."

Sokhumi Happenings – Concern over the coverage in Russia: Besides the looming NATO threat, Sokhumi authorities are also disturbed by the negative coverage of Abkhazia in the Russian media, triggered by the murder of the Russian tourist and accenting the recent crime wave in the province. The statement they have issued blames "mostly non-state Russian media agencies," and says that their coverage is "frankly negative and sometimes even slanderous."

Sokhumi Happenings – Opposition consultations: After the recent withdrawal of the Abkhaz opposition from the "socio-political stability agreement" it had signed with the region's present rulers in December 2016, several opposition groups held consultations regarding the future prospects. The meeting did not appear to produce any specific plans, but the participants have agreed to keep talking.

The Military Aspect – Military agreement ratified: Tskhinvali "parliament" has ratified the military agreement signed on March 31 in Moscow, clearing the last hurdle for inclusion of the local Ossetian armed units into the official military structure of the Russian Federation.

Russia's Network – Tskhinvali welcomes Malorossiia: In a confirmation of the special relationship between Tskhinvali and the Russian-backed leaders in Ukraine's Donbass region, Tskhinvali "foreign minister" Dmitry Medoev welcomed the peculiar idea voiced by the Donetsk leader Alexander Zakharchenko to replace the present state of Ukraine with the one called "Malorossiia." The term was used for Ukrainian lands in the old Russian Empire and literally means "little Russia". Medoev somehow hopes that "this initiative will give a new impulse for the peaceful resolution and will help break the deadlock."

Russia's Network – Nurgaliev in Tskhinvali: Deputy Secretary of Russia's National Security Council Rashid Nurgaliev went on a visit to Tskhinvali. Among other issues, he and the local Russian-backed leader Anatoly Bibilov spoke about Russia's new law enforcement body that is going to be established in Tskhinvali. Nurgaliev also inspected Russia's newly-built roads that connect several previously disjointed parts of the Russian-occupied territory and, incidentally, also link multiple Russian bases and border outposts.

Russia's Network – Consultations in Moscow: Russia's Foreign Ministry hosted "consultations" with the Abkhaz representatives over the issues like development of ties between Sokhumi and various regions of the Russian Federation, and "strengthening of international positions of Abkhazia."

Russia's Network – Lobbying for investors: Moscow's trade representative held a meeting with the Abkhaz "internal affairs minister" Aslan Kobakhia, talking about "protection of the rights of the Russian investors" in Abkhazia.

Russia's Network – Arkhangelsk diaspora leader in Abkhazia: Roman Ryazantsev has been selected to be the new head of the ethnic Russian diaspora in Abkhazia. While there are local ethnic Russians in the province, Ryazantsev is not one of them. He comes from Arkhangelsk in northern Russia's Arctic parts, and has been residing in Abkhazia only since 2011.

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SOKHUMI PARLIAMENT GIVES GREEN LIGHT TO 'JOINT INFORMATION-COORDINATION CENTER'

The Abkhaz parliament ratified the agreement on the establishment of the "Joint Information-Coordination Center of Internal Affairs Agencies," a new law enforcement agency that will include Russian police officers operating in Abkhazia, local media sources reported on July 26.

Out of the 34 Abkhaz deputies participating in the vote, 23 opted for the Center, nine voted against and two abstained.

When introducing the agreement for ratification on July 26, Sokhumi "internal affairs minister" Aslan Kobakhia said it would "accomplish the task of exchanging important operational information" with Russia, as well as develop databases on the organized crime and "support conducting international search and extradition."

The agreement on the Center's establishment was signed on May 18 in Sochi between Kobakhia and Russian Deputy Interior Minister Igor Zubov. It is part of the treaty on "the alliance and strategic partnership" signed between Russia's President Vladimir Putin and the Abkhaz leader Raul Khajimba on November 24, 2014.

Creation of the Center caused controversy in Abkhazia due to concerns that it would give the Russians more control over the region's internal affairs. Some local politicians and organizations expressed their opposition to the Center, both before and after the May 18 agreement.

The province's Russian-backed authorities responded to the criticism by pointing out that the Center staff is limited to 20 persons, its Center's leadership is going to be rotated between Russia- and Sokhumi-appointed officers, and that the Center will not be authorized to conduct "operative-investigative activities."

One day before the ratification, on July 25, Abkhaz leader Raul Khajimba said regarding the Center that "no one will allow some kind of supranational structure which would parallel the work of the ministry of internal affairs of Abkhazia."

"This agency's purpose will be to support the ministry of internal affairs of Abkhazia; we have spoken about the numerical parity of the employees that will work in this unit, the issue of its leadership is clearly defined [as well]," Khajimba added.

The purpose of the Information-Coordination Center, according to the Sokhumi internal affairs ministry, as well as the text of the agreement, is to coordinate the activities of Russian and Abkhaz agencies in fighting "organized crime and other dangerous types of crimes." For that, the Center will document, analyze and exchange the crime-related information; as well as assist in carrying out "inter-governmental search and extradition of persons," and "the necessary agreed activities to combat dangerous types of crimes that pose threats to the security of the Republic."

A similar agency will be established in Tskhinvali as well.

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Hotel Prometheus is located in the balneology resort of Tskaltubo, 120 metres above sea level. It has served customers for 7 years. In 2011, when the hotel was opened, only 25 rooms were operational. In 2013, as demand increased, another 24 comfortable rooms were added. The hotel was completely renovated in 2016.

The renovated interior and well-furnished yard make each visitor's stay comfortable and exciting. The hotel is designed for all categories of guests, offering accommodation and wellness services for all its visitors. It contains a conference hall which is a significant venue for business meetings and negotiations.

Our hotel often hosts holiday-makers who wish to see the sights in the vicinity, including: the Prometheus and Sataplia Caves, Ocatse and Martvili Canyons, various historical monuments and the Bagrati, Gelati and Motsameta churches. The location of Tskaltubo mesmerizes travellers at any time of year.

Hotel Prometheus wishes you happy holidays!



წყალტუბო
TSKALTUBO



თბილი წყაროები
HOT SPRINGS

Tskaltubo is an ancient resort. It was already well known in the 12th century, and by the 1770s it was a popular health and spa centre which attracted many tourists.

Tskaltubo's first baths were built in the 1870s. Their main mineral resource is Tskaltubo's well-known thermal spring, which contains noble gas, radon emanation and large amounts of nitrogen and helium. The spring water runs straight into the baths without going through a pump, at its natural temperature of 34-35° C, no heating or cooling being necessary.

Tskaltubo is non-seasonal resort, open throughout the year (including holidays). Its health procedures generally last from between 15 to 30 days.

Buildings No 1 and 6 of Balneo-Service JSC are built directly over the springs. They contain five pools,



which offer thermal waters, 50 individual spa water baths, 16 hydro massage chambers, a spinal horizontal extension chamber, 14 pleido-therapy chambers, various healing thermal water showers ("Sharko", "circular" and "ascending"), classic medical massages, physiotherapy etc.

Building No 1 can receive 120 people and Building No 6 160 people per hour. No 6 has two luxurious rooms for VIP guests, where they receive individual packages and high class comfort. Each service (single baths, pool, hydro-massage, physiotherapy etc) is delivered individually and privately with the support of high class medical personnel.

Tskaltubo's thermal-mineral springs heal diseases such as:

Locomotive system disorders (osteochondrosis, osteoarthritis, Bechterew (Strumpell-Marie) Disease etc).

Posture disorders (kyphosis, scoliosis, kyphoscoliosis), rheumatoid polyarthritis, spondyloarthritis conditions (podagric arthritis, psoriatic ar-

thritis, Reiter's arthritis and others).

Cardiovascular diseases (post-stenting and shunting rehabilitation is offered).

Nervous system diseases (polydiscopathia, discogenic radiculitis, brain trauma): services offered include post-stroke care, rehabilitation from neurosurgical post-operative care, further rehabilitation of post-traumatic conditions, orthopedic and spinal post-traumatic care and spine surgery recovery.

Gynecological diseases (including infertility).

Skin diseases (dermatitis, eczema, keratosis etc).

Urological diseases

Child and adolescent diseases like juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, hemophilia, cerebral palsy, autism and so on.

Tskaltubo has considerable experience of treating people affected by hostilities (the resort housed military hospitals during 1941-1945). A naval sanatorium with 100 beds was opened here in 1947, and expanded over time. The Ministry of Defence has had a 400 beds sanatorium here since 1992. Obviously therefore a considerable number of our guests are people who have been involved in military conflicts in recent years. In the near future we plan to reintroduce a dedicated spring for the rehabilitation of earth-

quake victims and people affected, injured and wounded during hostilities and terrorist attacks, both recently and longer ago.



The following procedures are used for the treatment of the above-mentioned diseases:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Mineral water baths | 8. Sharko showers |
| 2. Hydro-massage (underwater) | 9. Circular showers |
| 3. Physical exercise in the pool | 10. Mechano-therapy in mineral water |
| 4. Classic medical massage | 11. Peloido-therapy (mud application) |
| 5. Spinal horizontal extension in mineral water | 12. Pressotherapy |
| 6. Physiotherapy | 13. Colon hydrotherapy. |
| 7. Gynecological irrigation | |



CENTRAL BANK KEEPS KEY RATE AT 7%

The key refinancing rate will remain unchanged at 7%, the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) said in its statement on July 26.

According to NBG, in the second quarter of 2017, "the hike of inflation is in line with existing forecasts," according to which, "due to one-off supply side pressures, the inflation will remain above the target rate for the current year."

"In June, the annual inflation rate has increased, reaching 7.1%," the regulator said, adding that the price increase on Tobacco products and fuel has accounted for 2.6 percentage points increase.

NBG however, added that the inflation rate increase "is temporary," and that it "will experience decline in the second half of 2017, and due to the expiration of one-off factors, will get close to its target rate at the beginning of next year."

"Therefore, there is no need for further tightening of monetary policy. In the absence of additional shocks, it is expected that the key rate will gradually return to its neutral level in the medium term," the National Bank also said.

"The National Bank of Georgia will monitor the developments in the economy and financial markets and will use all available instruments at its disposal to ensure the price stability," the regulator added.

NBG started tightening its monetary policy from February 2015 pushing the key refinancing rate from 4% in February up to 8% by the end of the year. The rate remained unchanged at 8% in the first three months of 2016 but went through gradual easing beginning from April and remained unchanged at 6.5% until January, 2017. The National Bank of Georgia increased the key rate to 6.75% on January 25 and to 7% on May 2.

The next meeting of NBG's monetary policy committee has been scheduled for September 6, 2017.

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RUSSIAN PATRIARCH MEETS ANATOLY BIBILOV IN MOSCOW

Russian Patriarch Kirill and Anatoly Bibilov, July 25, 2017. Photo: presidentruo.org

The Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill hosted the new South Ossetian leader Anatoly Bibilov on July 25 in Moscow.

According to the Russian Patriarchate, the two discussed "religious situation in South Ossetia, relations between the Russian



and the Ossetian peoples, and other issues of mutual interest."

It also said that Patriarch Kirill congratulated the region's new leader on his victory in the April presidential polls.

Bibilov's office reported in its press release of the meeting that the two spoke on the ongoing construction of the Russian Orthodox cathedral in Tskhinvali, as well as the possibility of sending the region's residents in the Russian religious seminaries.

In an interview after the meeting, Bibilov said he intended to intensify relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, adding that "the Orthodox Christianity is the primary religion of the republic [South Ossetia], and we will surely be strengthening it."

An official representative of the Georgian Orthodox Church Father Kakhaber Gogotishvili told Civil.ge that the Russian Patriarch has so far been recognizing that Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia is under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

"This is what we have heard until now, but I am not familiar with what they said after the meeting," he noted, adding that "if the Russian Orthodox Church intends to conduct an activity in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church, it has to address and obtain permission from the Georgian Patriarchate."

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PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY FOR U.S.-LED MILITARY DRILLS IN GEORGIA

U.S. army's M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles being unloaded in Vaziani training area, July 26, 2017. Photo: Georgian MoD

U.S. military equipment, including M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, was delivered via ferry from Bulgaria to Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti for annual joint military exercises, which will start next week outside Tbilisi.

The military equipment was then transferred by rail from Poti to Vaziani training area, east from the Georgian capital, where



the third annual Noble Partner exercise will take place on July 30 – August 12.

Over 2 800 troops will take part in the drills, including 800 Georgian and 1600 U.S. military personnel. Other participating nations include Armenia, Germany, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

The key purpose of the exercise is to enhance cooperation and interoperability between the participating nations. Among the



goals of the drills this year, according to U.S. Army Europe, is "to support the training, evaluation and eventual certification of Georgia's second light infantry company contribution to the NATO Response Force (NRF) for 2017."

Among the planned training events are: airborne operations led by the U.S. 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (based in Vicenza, Italy); joint live-fire exercise of the Georgian Fourth Brigade and an American battalion from the Third Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division; U.S. Naval Forces Europe equipment transfer from Bulgaria to Poti port; and combined arms live-fire exercise built around a defensive scenario.

Noble Partner 17 is a part of a series of U.S.-led military exercises that are being held in the Black Sea region, including the Saber Guardian, held in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, and the See Breeze, held in Ukraine.

Georgian Defense Minister Levan Izoria commented on July 21 that "our strategic partner the United States is particularly represented in this exercise." He also said that the number of troops and military equipment was "unprecedented," which will "make clear the support of Georgia by the NATO member states, especially the U.S."

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TWO OF THREE GEORGIAN NOMINEES FOR VACANT ECHR JUDGE POSITION REJECTED

The Council of Europe Advisory Panel of Experts said in its conclusion that only one out of three candidates for a vacant position of Georgia-nominated judge to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) meets the criteria set by the European Convention, Georgian Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani said on July 25.

Tsulukiani said that Lado Chanturia, former chairman of the Georgia's Supreme Court, will continue selection procedures and added that a competition will be announced to select the remaining two candidates, as Shota Getsadze and Sophio Japaridze failed to meet the criteria due to lack of judicial practice and professional experience.

The nationwide procedures for selecting three three candidates for vacant ECHR judge position have been underway since December 2015. In January 2017, the Committee on the Election of Judges to ECHR, special committee of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, rejected three Georgia-nominated candidates to ECHR, citing lack of qualifications, prompting the Government of Georgia to announce a new call for applications in February.

In May 2017, the 13-member selection commission under the Justice Ministry shortlisted five candidates, three of whom were

later approved by the government and presented to an international Advisory Panel of Council of Europe experts, which offers nominating governments confidential advice on potential candidates before the final list of three is sent to the Assembly.

The Georgian President's administration, opposition parties and civil society representatives criticized the commission's choice, saying the impartiality of commission members "raises questions."

The Coalition for Independent and Transparent Judiciary, including civil society organizations which participated in the selection process, demanded annulment of the competition results.

"Due to the purposeful actions of government representatives, some highly competent and reputable candidates failed to make it to the list of top five and then top three candidates, whereas candidates with questionable qualifications and reputation made it into the group," the coalition said in its statement released on July 3.

Georgia has to submit the list of three candidates to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) before August 31. Once the Assembly receives the list of the three nominees, the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights will interview each of the three candidates in person and will scrutinize their CVs, in a standardized format, before recommending whether or not to accept the list – in other words, whether it believes all three candidates are sufficiently well qualified to do the job. If so, it will indicate which candidates it believes are the strongest. If not, authorities will be asked to submit a new list.

The Assembly - made up of 324 parliamentarians - then proceeds to vote on the candidates in a secret ballot, held during plenary sessions, based on the committee recommendations. An absolute majority of votes cast is required in the first round. If this is not achieved, a second round is held and the candidate with the most votes is duly elected to serve on the Court for a non-renewable term of nine years.

The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights rules on individual or state applications alleging violations of the civil and political rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights.

The tenure of Nona Tsotsoria, current Georgia-nominated ECHR judge, expired in January 2017, but was prolonged due to the PACE committee rejection of Georgia-nominated candidates.

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CSOS: PM KVIRIKASHVILI'S CHURCH STATEMENTS 'IRRESPONSIBLE'

A group of eight Georgian civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights watchdogs, including the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy and the Georgian Democracy Initiative, issued a joint letter on July 25, criticizing Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili's July 23 statement that secularism "in its classical sense is misplaced in Georgia."

Speaking at the opening ceremony of a social enterprise hotel in village Sno of Stepantsminda Municipality in the presence of Iliia II, Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Prime Minister Kvirikashvili said that the Orthodox Church and the Georgian state are "interwoven" and added that although the state and the church are "independent" today, "secularism in its classical sense is misplaced in Georgia."

"We believe that our nation features a unique model [of church-state relations] in the world," he also noted, adding that he would like to thank Iliia II, "whose words are embraced so dearly by the entire nation, for strengthening this model."

Commenting the statements on July 25, the CSOs emphasized that "constitutional secularism has only one meaning and that it stands for the separation of church and the nation state and for their independence from each other."

"The principle of secularism is a necessary condition for establishing a modern, human rights-oriented, democratic and legal state; it represents a cornerstone for legal order," the organizations noted.

The CSOs also said that Georgia's further democratic development and its Euro-Atlantic integration "are impossible" without secularism and added that it prevents the undue influence of both - the state against the influence of clerics and vice versa - the church against the influence of the state.

Stressing that the Prime Minister Kvirikashvili "cast doubt over Georgia's legal order, as well as its major historical and legal values," the organizations called on him to refrain from "irresponsible statements and protect the fundamental principles of the constitution and the religious neutrality."

PM Kvirikashvili's statements earned the criticism of opposition parties as well.

Khatuna Samnidze of the Republican Party convened a special news briefing on July 24, saying that the Prime Minister's statements "are dangerous and unconstitutional."

"European, democratic state based on institutional secularism is the choice of the citizens of Georgia, and the Prime Minister does not have a mandate to cast doubt on this choice," Samnidze said.

"In the period of Georgia's independence, not a single leader has made such an unconstitutional statement," she noted, adding that the Prime Minister "should immediately explain why he went beyond the limits of the constitution."

The Prime Minister was criticized by two parliamentary opposition parties as well.

"[The statement] brings Georgia closer either to the Russian Federation, where the church is directly dependent [on the state] or to the fundamentalist states of the Orient," said MP Sergo Ratiiani of the Movement for Liberty – European Georgia.

"In normal countries the Prime Minister's statement would prompt his resignation or impeachment," United National Movement's MP Roman Gotsiridze noted.

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ABOVE & BEYOND

Tbilisi, July 19, 2017

Official opening of new Jaguar Rover Land Renewed Auto Show

Address: 12 D. Aghmashenebeli Avenue

Opening 19:30 pm

On July 19 the GT Motors company officially unveiled the new Jaguar Land Rover, a car which displays all the features of the exacting Jaguar Land Rover quality standards and thus meets any customer demand.

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GT Motors was founded on March 14, 2007, and its main focus is on trading automobiles and spare parts and providing related services. The company is committed to supporting its regular customers by offering high quality services and original parts.

The company is developing fast; its high-

ly qualified staff undertake regular training and receive updated technical information about our automobiles daily, which makes it easier for them to fulfill their tasks.

The company has been introducing well known British car brands, such as Land Rover, to Georgian customers since 2008 and is the exclusive Land Rover dealer in Georgia. On June 24, 2013 GT Motors also received authorisation to become Georgia's exclusive Jaguar dealer, adding another prime British brand to its showroom.

Jaguar has a proud and exciting history of over 90 years and is continually at the cutting edge of high end car development. It is the fastest growing premium brand in the world and is likely to dominate the luxury car world for many years to come.



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Russia to seize US properties in retaliation over sanctions

By Laura Smith-Spark, Alla Eshchenko and Yon Pomrenze

Moscow (CNN) Russia's Foreign Ministry demanded Friday that the United States cut the number of diplomatic staff it has in Russia and said it would seize two US diplomatic properties, in a sharp response to a new sanctions bill passed by the US Congress a day earlier.

"We have received the Russian government notification. Ambassador Tefft expressed his strong disappointment and protest. We have passed the notification back to Washington for review," the statement said.

new sanctions on Iran and North Korea, was a product of lengthy negotiations between the House and Senate. In the end, it was passed by both chambers overwhelmingly.

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters late Thursday that the President would review

more important" and is "almost final."

Asked if Russian President Vladimir Putin had authorized the move, Peskov said such measures are "impossible without the President's permission."

He added that possible amendments to the bill would



The order -- which affects the US Embassy in Moscow and consulates in St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Vladivostok -- would reduce the number of US diplomatic and technical staff to 455, the same number Russia has in the US, by September 1.

Russia is also suspending the use of a US storage facility in Moscow and a country house, or dacha, outside of Moscow by August 1.

In the statement, the ministry says: "Any new unilateral actions by the US authorities to reduce the number of our diplomats in the United States will be met with a mirror response."

Senate sends Russia sanctions bill to Trump

Thirty-five Russian diplomats were expelled from the United States in December under sanctions imposed by President Barack Obama in response to Russia's alleged meddling in the 2016 US election. The sanctions also included the closure of two Russian compounds, in Maryland and New York, used for intelligence purposes.

US Ambassador to Russia John Tefft has expressed his "strong disappointment and protest" over Moscow's decision to expel the US diplomats, according to a statement to CNN from the US Embassy in Moscow.



Trump still to sign or veto bill

Moscow's latest move comes a day after the US Senate passed sweeping legislation slapping new sanctions on Russia -- over its alleged interference in the 2016 US election, annexation of Crimea and military operations in eastern Ukraine -- and limiting President Donald Trump's ability to remove them.

The bill, which also includes

the sanctions bill. She did not say whether Trump would sign or veto the measure when it reaches his desk. The wide, bipartisan support for the law means Congress could override a presidential veto.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists on a conference call Friday that Moscow had decided to retaliate before the bill went to Trump because "technically the form passed by the Senate is

not change the "essence" of the matter.

Immediately after the US ordered the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats in December, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recommended a tit-for-tat expulsion of 35 US diplomats and the shuttering of two American facilities in Russia. However, Putin at that point took a magnanimous tone, saying they could stay and that he would await the inauguration of Trump as US President before taking any further action.

Commentators said then that the unexpected move by Putin put Trump at a disadvantage even as it sidelined the Obama administration in its dying days.

Putin: Anti-Russia hysteria

Russia's Foreign Ministry said the new sanctions law "con-

firms the extreme aggressiveness of the United States in its foreign affairs."

It accused the US of using the law to "create unfair competitive advantages for the US in the global economy" and said its actions breached international law. "Such blackmail, aimed at limiting the interaction of foreign partners with Russia, carries a threat to many countries and international businesses."

Speaking in Finland on Thursday, Putin said he "very much regrets" the worsening of relations between Russia and the United States, blaming it on "anti-Russia hysteria" in domestic US politics.

He said a lot of Russian diplomats had been expelled "without any particular reason" and warned that Russia would have to respond at some point to what he called "boorish behavior" by the United States.

The new sanctions bill would add to a raft of coordinated sanctions already imposed in 2014 by the United States and the European Union over Russia's annexation of Crimea and its interference in the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. The measures were largely aimed at hurting the Russian economy but also hit certain Russian individuals with travel bans and asset freezes.

The European Union extended its economic sanctions on Russia last month.

However, EU leaders warned the US on Wednesday that the bloc would act "within days" if it did not receive reassurances on the potential impact of the new US sanctions on European interests, amid fears they could hinder several key energy projects in Europe and further inflame internal EU divisions.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said Friday that it was now up to Trump to decide how to proceed.

"We will continue to want to work together. We must not forget what is at stake: We want to overcome the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We agree that it needs political pressure on Moscow. This is the rationale and the standard for our European sanctions, no more, but not less," he said.

But, Sigmar added, Germany "will in no way accept an extraterritorial application of these US sanctions against European companies ... Policy sanctions are neither a suitable nor an adequate instrument for the promotion of national export interests and the domestic energy sector."

CNN's Yon Pomrenze reported from Moscow and Alla Eshchenko from Atlanta, while Laura Smith-Spark wrote from London. CNN's Mary Ilyushina, Emma Burrows and Nadine Schmidt contributed to this report.

NEWS

EUROPEAN GEORGIA RALLIES AGAINST 'RUSSIAN FASCISM' IN GEORGIA

Approximately 2000 activists and supporters of the Movement for Liberty -- European Georgia party gathered in Tbilisi at the "No to Russian Fascism in Georgia" rally on July 23.

They marched along the Aghmashenebeli Avenue, the exact same route the anti-immigration and ultranationalist "March of the Georgians" rally took on July 14. The rally also comes a week after Tatia Dolidze, Georgia's youth delegate to the United Nations in 2016-2017, was allegedly threatened with sexual assault by "the March of the Georgians" organizers.

Speaking to reporters at the rally, Davit Bakradze, one of the leaders of the European Georgia, said the Russian propaganda in Georgia has taken "an alarming form."

"What we see today: aggression, violence, trampling down on Georgia's genuine traditions, intolerance to dissenting opinions, xenophobia -- is the expression of Russian propaganda in Georgia and all of this is what shuts the door to Georgia's European future," Bakradze noted.

He also said the Georgian society has to "rise to its feet and should not let the Russian propaganda win in the name of the Georgian traditions; the Russian propaganda, which, in reality, fights and tramples down on the [very] Georgian traditions."

"When the government is doing nothing and the Georgian Dream is nurturing the oppressors, it is the Georgian society which should articulate that we, the Georgians, are a dignified, European society," Bakradze added.

Elene Khoshtaria, European Georgia's candidate for Tbilisi mayor, was the only one to address the demonstration.

"There won't be violence in Georgia, there won't be fascism in Georgia, no matter how the Russian Federation might desire it and no matter how the Government might promote it. Georgia is a peaceful, free, European country," Khoshtaria said in her brief speech.

"Just like today, when we rallied and said no to fascism in a principled and peaceful manner, we will peacefully get rid of all the problems, we will overcome all the barriers and Georgia will be a free, European country," Khoshtaria concluded.

Leaders of the Republican Party and the Free Democrats, as well as a number of civic groups, joined the "No to Russian Fascism" rally.

"We cannot let our country slip into hatred, immorality and impoliteness: this is part of the Russian agenda that we are portrayed as uncivilized, uncultured and aggressive people so that we become unacceptable for the civilized world, businesses do not invest anymore and we end up in Russia's claws," Shalva Shavgulidze of the Free Democrats told reporters at the rally.

"The country cannot be built on hatred: we will, therefore, stand together with the people who believe that the country cannot be built on hatred, that fascism is not the answer and that they need to be fought back," noted Khatuna Samnidze of the Republicans.

Failed Attempt to Thwart the Rally

On July 20, the "March of the Georgians" movement announced a parallel demonstration on the Aghmashenebeli Avenue to thwart the European Georgia's rally.

Despite calls by the Tbilisi City Hall to postpone the demonstration or hold it at a different location, around 50 activists of the "March of the Georgians" movement gathered at the Pasteur Street at one of the junctures leading to the Aghmashenebeli Avenue.

There was heavy police presence in the area: police officers formed cordons to block counter demonstrators from entering the Aghmashenebeli Avenue. Some minor incidents were still reported, however. Eggs, empty bottles and other items were thrown at the European Georgia activists when they got close to the counter protesters, lightly injuring an elderly woman.

"The March of the Georgians" counter demonstration was preceded by a meeting of its organizers with Patriarch Iliia II and the subsequent calls of the Patriarchate to cancel both demonstrations.

Sandro Bregadze, who met the Patriarch right before the scheduled demonstration, said they obeyed to the Patriarch's calls to cancel the demonstration and urged their supporters not to show up at the rally, but "the Georgians, who are against the butcher Bokeria (Giga Bokeria, one of the leaders of the European Georgia) passing through the Aghmashenebeli Avenue, [still] gathered here."

"The Patriarch called on them as well (the European Georgia) to cancel the demonstration," Bregadze added, referring to the refusal of the European Georgia to call off the demonstration, citing their constitutional right to peaceful assembly.

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