6 Workers Reported Dead, 3 Injured in Georgia’s Mindeli Mine

BY THEA MORRISON

At time of going to press, 6 miners have died and at least three have been injured in Mindeli Mine, Tkibuli, Georgia, in a tunnel collapse.

As reported, the injured miners were transferred to Kutaisi hospital, while works to remove the bodies from the mine are underway. Georgia’s First Vice-Premier and the Minister of Economy, Dimitry Kumsishvili, is on his way to Tkibuli.


According to the Interior Ministry, an investigation has been launched into the case under the second part of Article 240 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which implies a violation of safety rules in mining, construction or other works. The offense envisages up to 5 years of imprisonment.

The representatives of the Labor Inspection Service of the Ministry of Health say the accident happened at 4am on April 5. Another tragic incident also happened in Georgia’s Shukruti Mine, Chiatura on March 26, which claimed the life of 45-year-old Zaza Abramishvili. The Georgian President has called for a stricter labor law and has stated the situation is “dramatic.”

Photo source: mining.com

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NEWS

US, Germany, EU Support Georgia's Peace Initiative

BY THEA MORRISON

The United States, the European Union and Germany support the peace initiative: "Step toward a Better Future," which aims to combat poverty in Georgia.

The Georgian package of legislative acts — Step toward a Better Future, envisages amendments to the country's tax code, creating a favorable environment for business, and simplifying trade along its international borders.

De facto Abkhazian Foreign Minister, Daur Kove, claims Georgia's initiative is "an action for its own political ambition." "After exhausting all the resources of imposing pressure on Abkhazia, Georgia has once again decided to show the world something like friendship and to hide its true intentions behind these initiatives," Kove said, and called on the European Union to stop pretending to have a friendly attitude towards the occupied region.

"Abkhazia is an independent, sovereign state. The only step towards its better future is recognition of the Republic of Abkhazia by Georgia and the establishment of a comprehensive inter-state dialogue between our countries for stability and development of future generations. This process does not have any alternative," he stressed.

The Georgian package of legislative amendments on peace making incorporates three key directions: 1) Enhancing and simplifying trade along the boundary lines by creating new opportunities.

2) Creating additional opportunities for quality education and simplifying access at every level of education both in the country and abroad. 3) Creation of a mechanism simplifying access to the benefits and goods available to Georgia resulting from the country's development, including European integration, visa waiver, free trade rights, and others.

The State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili stated that the Government of Georgia is making an open and determined statement that its peaceful policy is unwavering.

"The top priority is peace, confidence-building between communities divided by the conflict, and taking care of the population, which is suffering from the gravity of the unresolved conflict," the Minister underlined.

The peace initiative, a Step toward a Better Future, envisages amendments to nine legislative acts.

Georgia Simplifies Tax Procedures to Promote Economic Growth

BY THEA MORRISON

Georgia’s Finance Ministry has initiated simplified tax procedures in order to promote the economic growth of the country.

At a special press-conference, Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze introduced three new initiatives, noting that their main aim is to combat poverty in Georgia and see the significant economic growth of the country.

"As a result of the proposed initiatives, we will encourage entrepreneurs in Georgia, create additional jobs, simplify tax administration, and at the same time provide a very important basis for attracting more foreign investments into our national economy," the Minister stated, adding the projects are innovative and addressing humanitarian challenges.

"The United States reiterates its full support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," the Embassy added.

"We support initiatives aimed at building bridges across the dividing lines and addressing humanitarian challenges. We are looking forward to the discussions in the Parliament of Georgia and the final outcome of the process," the statement says.

The statement ends with the EU reaffirming its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders and noting that it “remains firmly committed to conflict resolution and its policy of non-recognition and engagement in Georgia using all instruments at its disposal through a comprehensive approach.”

Helke Potisch, Ambassador of Germany to Georgia, also released a statement regarding the issue, saying she supports the initiatives that promote the improvement of the living conditions of the people living on both sides of the administrative border.

"The Embassy will closely monitor the process of discussion of the package in Parliament," her statement reads.

"If purchasing products from non-entrepreneurs, customers will benefit from reduced taxes. And when buying products from persons with micro business status, the company will not pay profit tax," Bakhtadze explained.

"The transformation of Georgia into a regional financial hub. "According to this initiative, non-resident individuals will be able to register their companies in Georgia online and will have access to bank accounts at the same time," the Minister said, adding that these people will be able to enjoy benefits from Georgia’s free trade agreements with China and the European Union.

"The three new initiatives are really as large-scale and innovative as the already initiated reforms," the PM said, highlighting that turning Georgia into a regional financial center will benefit each citizen. "I am sure this initiative will be a very important new source of income for our country," he added.

Georgia's Finance Ministry, Mamuka Bakhtadze. Source: 1tv.ge

Photo: Georgia’s Finance Minister, Mamuka Bakhtadze. Source: 1tv.ge

Photo source: backynews.com

TODAY

GEORGIA

APR. 6 - 9, 2018

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In 2017, democracy faced its most serious crisis in decades, according to independent watchdog Freedom House, as fundamental human rights, the rule of law and civil society came under attack around the world. For open government advocates the reaction has been palpable as hard-won gains were eroded in many countries, and the political champions for openness on the global stage struggled to face down the rise of closed government.

It is in this context that Georgia was selected to be the new co-chair of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a huge achievement and recognition for how far the country has come since the Rose Revolution in 2003, and how seriously it has taken OGP since joining. In July, Tbilisi will host Heads of State, ministers and civil society leaders from over 75 countries, one of the largest international meetings Georgia has ever organised. The opportunity is to show the world a more hopeful path that puts citizens first and advances the frontiers of open government reform to deliver public services more effectively, reduce corruption and give people more of a voice in how they are governed.

Georgia has many successes to showcase as it finds itself in this international spotlight. A recent report from OGP’s independent monitor shows outstanding progress on a public officials asset declaration monitoring system, citizens engagement in audit and the adoption of an environmental assessment code. The Open Budget Index for 2017 ranked Georgia 5th worldwide for fiscal transparency, ahead of many much older democracies like the UK and US. Georgia’s Public Service Halls, bringing together essential services under one roof so that citizens can access them more easily and reduce the risk of paying bribes, has been exported to several other countries. These are reforms other countries can learn from as they seek to restore trust in government, ensure fair budget allocations and reduce corruption. Uniquely, Georgia also has high-level buy-in for the open government agenda from multiple branches of government, including the parliament, the judiciary and other oversight institutions, Tbilisi City Hall and local municipalities. Combined with civil society voices, who have an equal seat at the table in Georgia’s Open Government Forum, this forms a powerful coalition for openness in a country which still suffers from foreign interference in its politics and the occupation of 20 percent of its territory.

It is because of this record of achievement, that in this crucial year for the open government movement worldwide it is vital that Georgia not simply rest on past accolades, but set out a bold vision for the future that demonstrates continued commitment to reform. No country is immune from backsliding on democracy, as OGP has seen in some of its members in the past several years. Civil society organizations in Georgia are pushing for establishing independent Anti-Corruption Agency, the iChange platform which allows citizens to petition their government needs greater publicity to encourage uptake, there is a need to create institutionalized mechanisms for citizen participation at all levels of government, and a long-standing commitment to pass a new Freedom of Information Act is expected in the coming months. In addition, Georgia made international commitments at the London Anti-Corruption Summit in 2016 that should be taken forward, such as exploring a public central register of company beneficial ownership information and implementing the principles of the Open Contracting Data Standard. In short, there are many reforms for Prime Minister Kvirikashvili to announce on stage at the opening plenary of the Tbilisi Summit, to both reassure his own citizens about the direction of the country and to serve as an inspiration for other political leaders visiting from around the world.

OGP is only seven years old, yet in many ways today feels like a different era. We now live in more challenging times for democracy and openness, and yet that makes the work of the partnership even more important. Georgia is uniquely well placed to offer a different kind of leadership, one rooted in a story of democratic transition and building a new citizen-state compact after decades of totalitarian rule. 2018 can be the year when Georgia redoubles its efforts, and shows the world why the values of openness matter so much, to so many.
Ivanishvili’s arrest was politically motivated as he was appointed Secretary General of the UNM after the 2012 parliamentary elections. In February 2014, a Georgian court found Merabishvili guilty on the charge of exceeding his official power, and he was subsequently sentenced to four years and six months in prison. Ivanishvili claimed he was innocent, adding his pre-trial detention was politically motivated as he was appointed Interior Minister of Georgia under the previous United National Movement (UNM) government, when Mikheil Saakashvili was President. He was arrested in May 2013 after the current government had breached Article 18 of the European Convention on Human Rights when arresting Merabishvili.

According to the ECHR report, the Government of Georgia paid the money on February 22 as it had three months to enforce the court’s decision, made in November, 2017. The defendant filed a lawsuit with the ECHR, which in June 2016 ruled out that Merabishvili’s pre-trial detention was lawful, and based on reasonable grounds decided that Georgia was to pay Merabishvili €4,000 in respect of non-pecuniary damage and €8,000 for costs and expenses.

The decision of compensation was later appealed by the Georgian side, but the Grand Chamber upheld the decision of the ECHR, made in June last year. The ECHR said that Merabishvili’s pre-trial detention had not principally been meant to remove him from Georgia’s political scene. However, the Court concluded that the predominant purpose of that restriction had changed over time.

Within the framework of his official visit to the United States, Georgia’s Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mikheil Janelidze, met Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wes Mitchell in Washington.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry reports that the US side expressed strong support for Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration, sovereignty and territorial integrity and democratic and economic development of the country.

“2017 was significant in the results achieved in terms of US political and practical support,” the Georgian Minister stated.

Janelidze said the sides discussed the US-Georgia’s close relationship and further steps on how to deepen cooperation in the fields of defense and security. Steps for Georgia’s integration into NATO were also mentioned during the meeting.

“Georgia is doing everything to further progress in NATO integration, and the United States will continue to support Georgia in this process,” said Janelidze.

The sides also discussed a peace initiative ‘Step toward a Better Future,’ proposed by the Government of Georgia, which envisages improvement of the humanitarian, social and economic conditions of those living in Georgia’s Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia).

According to Janelidze, in parallel with the support towards Georgia’s sovereignty, the US supports the peace initiative, which is aimed at reconciling locals on different sides of the occupation line.

“Georgia is a US partner and ally not only in the field of security but also for trade-economic relations. Georgia is an important platform for American business in the region, which is seen in the Anaklia Deep Sea Port with the participation of a US company and other American investments implemented in Georgia,” the Georgian minister stated.

Janelidze is paying a four-day visit to Washington from 3 to 6 April.

During the visit, Minister Janelidze will hold meetings at the US Department of State and the Office of the US Trade Representative. He will also exchange views with leading experts of scientific research centers working on Georgian issues.

Within the framework of the visit, meetings will be held with various officials of the executive authorities and the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA).
No, Russia Will Never Change!

OPED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The world remembers a number of extremely critical moments of escalation of tension between Russia, alias USSR, and the West in the early fifties and early sixties of the bygone century. Amazingly, Russia changed its attitude in the late eighties, becoming more benign in international affairs by means of dropping her habitual military threats against Europe and America and propagating that a human life is higher than any other widely accepted value in today’s world. But Russia would not be Russia if she maintained the peaceful status quo forever. Russia has gotten bored and tired with its role as a dove of peace: she now wants to reside on top of the world once again, using her nuclear capability to terrorize the globe.

Why? What has turned the tamed bear into a ferocious beast again? This is a very easy guess to make – Russia cannot and will not change her vital values that are in direct contradiction with the current world order. This is the way Russia is! Values like life, liberty, brotherhood, pursuit of happiness, rights, equality, integrity, consent and reliability are not in the veins of the Russian Empire and its people. Russians idealize values like autocracy, orthodoxy, power, clout, empire, royalty, authority and monocracy. Russians cannot physically be in step with the rest of the world. For survival, they need their own rhythm and pulsation – different from what the Mankind is equipping itself with nowadays.

I love Russians – they are among the most likable people in the world in person-to-person relations, but taken together as a mass, they make a bully who wants and is ready to attack the normalcy of life on the planet. Our good Russians have a terrible proclivity to entertain a “Putin.” They badly need the Putins in their life. They can’t do without at least one Putin. Putins are indispensable in Russia, and once they make a choice in favor of a Putin, they want to keep the Putin in place forever. Russians hate change. They suffer a propensity of getting attached to what they have and feeling comfortable with a continuous presence of a patrician sovereign to rule them perennially. Putins are not simple leaders like regular prime ministers or presidents: Putins are gods in Russia – omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

The Putin-wrapped Russia maintains her historical image and deeds. Let the world change its values and attitudes because the world is wrong in dealing with Russia – this is how an average Russian would reply to an average global citizen should they meet in space and have a discourse on how Russia and the rest of the world should relate to each other. No, they are not being strong-headed. This is just the way they are, and they love it.

Russians are among the most likable people in the world in person-to-person relations, but taken together as a mass, they make a bully.

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Image source: rbth.com/ Grigory Avoyan

Image source: 4th.com/ Gregory Avoyan

that without the Russian presence, the world cannot go on. Après nous, le deluge! This is the historical Russian attitude which makes the rest of us shudder. And the ‘rest of us’ means the remaining part of our beautiful earth which might explode any time if the embittered Russians feel like pressing the button when cornered and isolated so much that the global blast occurs to them with no qualms to execute it. Isn’t it amazing that things have not changed in Mother Russia since the times of Ivan the Terrible? The tsars and communist bosses and contemporary leaders have all been tempered and forged in the same crucible, with the same badge and brand on the body.

Russia is chronically nonchalant to what the world thinks and does in general. Even if you catch them red-handed, they will defy the blame with a naïvely surprised expression on the face as if the criminal world is flagrantly desirous of tarnishing their impeccable reputation as an international player. As the saying has it, habits make second nature, and if this is true, then the hope that Russia might change any time soon is flimsy. Russia will not change. Russia likes herself and is sincerely proud of her historical image and deeds. Let the world change its values and attitudes because the world is wrong in dealing with Russia – this is how an average Russian would reply to an average global citizen should they meet in space and have a discourse on how Russia and the rest of the world should relate to each other. No, they are not being strong-headed. This is just the way they are, and they love it.
Russia–Turkish Rapprochement: Implications for the South Caucasus

OP ED BY BENYAMIN POGHOSYAN

Russia – Turkish relations are going through tremendous transformations. Just two and half years ago, Turkey was a target of harsh Russian criticism, as Moscow accused Ankara of supporting the Islamic State, despite various other terrorist groups deployed in Syria, and oil smuggling. However, since summer 2016, bilateral relations have improved significantly. Syria is a stark example of that thaw, seeing Russia tacitly supporting the Turkish invasion into Northern Syria in summer 2016 as well as turning a blind eye to the Turkish offensive in Afrin. The bilateral economic ties are steadily growing too. On April 3, 2018, the Russian and Turkish Presidents signaled the start of the construction of the first Turkish nuclear power plant. The project is finally financed and implemented by Russia. Two turbines of the “Turkish Stream” natural gas pipeline have already reached Turkish territorial waters. Both states are actively cooperating with Iran. The Russia – Turkey – Iran alliance has the potential to alter the strategic balance of power in the Middle East and put the US in defensive positions in the region for the first time since the end of the Second World War.

The growing Russian – Turkish partnership and possible creation of a trilateral Russia – Turkey – Iran strategic alliance may have far-reaching geopolitical implications in the South Caucasus. The region is squeezed between Moscow, Tehran and Ankara. All three South Caucasian states are watching carefully the latest developments in the region, each with different expectations.

Armenia has a strategic alliance with Russia and is anchored in the sphere of Moscow’s influence. Armenia’s security relations are strongly conditioned by the neighboring Russian and Nagorno Karabakh conflict, where Azerbaijan and Turkey are putting joint pressure on Armenia, effectively implementing a “war of attrition” strategy. The large-scale shipments of Russian modern weaponry to Azerbaijan in the period preceding the April 2016 “Four-day-war” in Karabakh has shattered the perceptions of Russia as a sole guarantee of Armenia’s security. The growing Russia – Turkish relations create some anxiety in Armenia regarding the possible shifts in the Russian position regarding the Karabakh conflict. Currently, the negotiations are in deadlock. Azerbaijan rejects any possibility of Nagorno Karabakh independence, offering instead a high level of autonomy. In such circumstances, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh are not ready to have any discussions regarding the fate of the security zone.

Russia is not the only actor involved in the Karabakh conflict negotiations. The US and France, as Minus Group co-chairs along with Russia, have their own leverage on the conflict management. However, if Russia and Turkey, in cooperation with Iran, make the decision to find a way to move the negotiation process forward, effectively ending Armenia’s involvement, this may put joint pressure both on Armenia and Azerbaijan to overcome the current impasse resulting in changes to the status quo unfavorable for Armenia.

Georgia continues its course towards Euro-Atlantic integration, simultaneously trying not to provoke Russia and avoid any repeat of the August 2008 scenario. Despite the fact that there are no viable chances for either EU or NATO membership in the foreseeable future, the fostering of relations with both organizations is perceived in Georgia as an efficient way towards sustainable economic development. In this context, strategic relations with Turkey are important for Tbilisi as a land border with NATO and as a tool to ensure its vital transit role for the East – West corridor, bringing Azerbaijan and Central Asian exports directly to the EU. In parallel, some circles in Georgia view Russia as a potential leverage against growing Turkish influence. In this context, the possible emergence of a Russia – Turkey alliance may complicate Georgia’s efforts, making it more vulnerable to Russian pressure and simultaneously depriving Georgia of potential leverage against Turkey.

Meanwhile, Baku is cooperating with Russia and Iran to establish a North – South transportation corridor to connect India with Northern Europe via Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. Just recently, the Iranian and Azerbaijani Presidents launched the Iran – Azerbaijan railway, which will play a key role in making this corridor operational. At the same time, Azerbaijan is engaged with the West to bring its oil and gas to Europe, circumventing Russia. If Russia and Turkey meet terms regarding the security architecture of the South Caucasus, it may well thwart the delicate balancing act of Azerbaijan, compelling Baku to deepen its relations with Moscow.

The rapid improvement of Russia – Turkey relations will definitely have significant implications for the South Caucasus. The region is important for Moscow as its immediate neighborhood, which it sees should be under tight Russian control to prevent potential Western encroachment. Turkey, for its part, is more focused now on Iraq and Syria where it is effectively expanding its zone of influence. Any grand bargain between Moscow and Ankara will likely strengthen Turkey’s position in the region and diminish the ability of the South Caucasian republics to pursue a more balanced foreign and security policy.

PM Praises Continued Positive Economic Performance

Georgia’s Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili has praised the positive performance of the economy this year and spoken optimistically about the positive years ahead, pointing to various economic indicators as proof for Georgian continued growth.

Speaking of the favorable investment environment at a government meeting, he highlighted the importance of the good economic situation for “investors to implement new plans and new investments.” While real economic growth reached 7% in 2017, “this year, an already high rate of economic growth was revealed during the two months of 2018 – 4.9% January-February and 5.5% in February,” he noted.

According to his remarks, the results are a product of the various improvements in the economic policy. Throughout the years, the government has followed a “correct and consistent” approach, which it aims to continue in the future. “As for other factors contributing to growth, net cash transferred abroad increased by 8.7% in 2017 against 7% in 2016, which means a reduction by $531 million. This is very important for the stability of the exchange rate,” Kvirikashvili stated.

In February, the positive dynamics were significantly conditioned by events in the foreign trade. In particular, in February, export increased by 25% and imports by 8.7%,” he continued. In line with major development projects, the focus by the government to improve the tourism industry led to an additional increase of 16.5% in February, he added.

The Ministry of Economy made similar remarks recently, pointing to the positive years ahead. “The average growth of the gross domestic product amounted to 5%. 2018 has started with an impressive economic growth rate. It is important to note that Georgia is to have one of the highest growth rates in the region in 2018-2022, if such figures continue,” Georgia’s Economy Minister Dmitry Kumishvili.
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Georgia Still to Execute 36 Judgments of the European Court

BY BENJAMIN MUSIC

The annual report by the Council of Europe assessing the execution rate of judgments by the European Court of Human Rights points to 36 judgments involving Georgia which have yet to be executed. The report calls on Georgia to accelerate the execution process, as it is “imperative for the insurance of human rights.”

The Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers is responsible for monitoring the implementation, or “execution,” of judgments from the European Court of Human Rights and publishes an annual report with the results for each European country.

The monitored cases are classified into different categories to allow for ease of understanding. All cases are classified as either “leading” or “repetitive.” Leading cases are those revealing new structural and/or systemic problems, whereas repetitive cases relate to issues that have already been raised before the Committee.

Georgia was involved in 10 new cases in 2017, a light increase from 2016 with its 7 new cases. Of these 10 cases, three were leading cases, and seven were repetitive. Countries often lack behind in the implementation process for years, trying to avoid necessary measures or pointing to an unfavorable situation to implement legislative amendments. In 2016, Georgia still had 39 pending cases to implement, decreasing slightly to 36 last year, out of which 23 are repetitive and 13 leading.

The Committee selected six pending cases to be subject to enhanced supervision, which is a supervision procedure for cases requiring urgent individual measures, pilot judgments, and judgments revealing important structural and/or complex problems as identified by the Court.

Presently, Georgia has five such pending cases, which have been awaiting execution for more than five years. With regards to monetary compensation, also called “just satisfaction,” Georgia awarded €20,151 in 2017, almost twice less than in 2016 (€221,000). However, the State itself is inducted with payment to the victims, which rarely takes place in a timely manner. In 2017, Georgia respected the payment deadline in eight cases, while for four cases, the payment was still pending past the set deadline.

The report highlights two main pending cases, which it urges the government to implement due to their importance regarding human rights. The first case is Tsintabadze vs Georgia, dealing with the lack of protection against homophobic attacks during a demonstration. Touching again the issue of the first case, as adequate investigation procedures were missing also for this case, the European Court’s judgment points to a “Failure to adequately protect against inhuman and degrading treatment inflicted by private individuals to LGBT activists (in May 2012) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (in 1999-2003) during marches or meetings.” Following the broad scope of the judgment, this case deals with the freedom of religion and the freedoms of assembly and association. Furthermore, the report highlights essential improvements undertaken by the government with regard to closed cases. The Committee closed the Garibashvili vs Georgia case, as the effectiveness of investigations was improved through the better involvement of the victims in the investigation, new rules for witness interrogation, and reinforced institutional independence for investigating bodies. In addition, the prevention of excessive use of force by the police in the course of arrest and ill-treatment in custody has been improved, notably through the creation of internal monitoring mechanisms in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Corrections.

Monitoring legal improvement and law amendments, the Committee praises Georgia for the “On Common Court,” foreseeing that all judicial acts, including the operative part of decisions adopted, will be published on the website, thus increasing transparency. In conjunction with these measures, numerous training and awareness-raising measures have been undertaken.

Besides the assessment of improvements based on specific cases, the report highlights general advances in the field of human rights and safety. The power of bailiffs to arrest individuals is better circumscribed, and guarantees for the holding of a public hearing and respect for the equality of arms have been adopted. The possibility for detained persons to obtain compensation for their illegal or unjustified detention is ensured, independently of conviction or acquittal.

Rehabilitating Georgia’s past, legislative amendments were adopted in 2011 and 2014 in order to grant compensation to the victims of Soviet-era repression. Improvements have also been observed in the electoral law.

Continued on page 10
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Georgia Still to Execute 36 Judgments of the European Court

Clear criteria were introduced to define when the Central Electoral Commission can use its power to invalidate elections, alongside the introduction of an effective remedy against its decisions.

On a European level, the countries with the highest total number of pending cases at the end of 2017 were Russia (1,689), Turkey (1,446), Ukraine (1,156), Romania (553) and Italy (389). Of the 7,584 pending cases at the end of 2017, 1,379 (18%) were leading cases and 6,205 (82%) were repetitive cases. The countries with the highest number of leading cases pending at the end of 2017 were Russia (216), Turkey (177), Ukraine (136), Bulgaria (77) and Moldova (76). The countries with the highest number of repetitive cases pending at the end of 2017 were Russia (1,473), Turkey (1,269), Ukraine (1,020), Romania (495) and Italy (335). A strong decrease in pending cases could also be observed on a European level, as 3,849 pending cases were under enhanced supervision at the end of 2017, down from 6,718 at the end of 2014 (a drop of 43%).

Although Russia tops the statistics in pending cases, they strongly lag behind resolving or implementing them, surpassed by Italy and Hungary. The countries that closed the highest total number of cases in 2017 were Italy (2,001), Hungary (296), Russia (254), Romania (144) and Poland (133).

In 2017, the court awarded €14.6m in “just satisfaction” against Russia, €12.5m against Italy, €11.6m against Turkey, €5.9m against the Slovak Republic and €3.7m against Greece. The total figure is €60.4m compared to €82.3m in 2016.

Ultra-Nationalist Georgian March Announces Protest Rallies

BY THEA MORRISON

Far-right, ultra-nationalist group Georgian March members have announced they will hold regular protest rallies in solidarity to their eight activists who were detained on charges of hooliganism in connection to the March 19 rally at Rustavi 2 TV headquarters.

Eight members of Georgian March were arrested for attacking Rustavi 2 journalist Davit Eradze and damaging a car with TV anchor Giorgi Gabunia inside, who was the main target of the far right group, after he made some comments about Jesus Christ. An investigation is underway under Article 139 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which envisages imprisonment up to 5 years. On April 4, the members of the nationalist group held a peaceful protest rally at Rustavi 2 TV headquarters with family members of the detained activists. The protesters lit candles and prayed in a group.

The group members stated they will block state buildings and hold protest rallies until their activists are released. The Georgian March members slammed the Patriarchate of Georgia for its “silence” over the case, saying the members of the group were imprisoned “for the love of Christ, yet the Patriarchate and its parish keep silent about this case.” “Loving Jesus is not a crime,” the Facebook post of the group reads, adding that the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia (POG) had offered them a plea bargain but they refused. The POG denies they proposed a plea bargain.
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One of the focus points of the conference was the forthcoming deadline for GDPR compliance. Eurofast’s experts discussed in detail the impact the relevant legislation will have on businesses active both in and outside the EU, and brainstormed ideas on a smoother transition.

A wide range of smaller scale workshops with greater geographic as well as service-specific focus prompted participants to think outside the box and develop new services for existing clients as well as carve out niche markets. Synergies between offices both in terms of cross-selling and towards common approaches to target markets were also explored.

The conference was yet more proof that the main strength of Eurofast is its closely-knit team of advisors who are always ready to join their efforts towards improving the quality of service provided to clients.

For further information on Eurofast and its services please visit www.eurofast.eu

Head of Gazprom Refuses Ukraine “Gas Prospects”

After the introduction of the Nord Stream-2 and Turkish Stream gas pipelines, the transit of Russian gas through the territory of Ukraine will be greatly reduced, said Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller.

“Small volumes of Russian fuel will certainly go through Ukraine, but these will not be the volumes that Russia is transporting to Europe via this country.”

In addition, Miller believes the parties will still need to sit down at the negotiating table, but not at all on the conditions that Gazprom received in the litigation in the Stockholm Arbitration.

“We are not talking about completely blocking transit through the territory of Ukraine because there are contiguous states-countries on the border with Ukraine in Europe. Supplies to these countries of Europe will be carried out via transit through the territory of Ukraine. But these are volumes that will undoubtedly be less significant. We are talking about 40-45 billion cubic meters of gas a year,” said the Head of Gazprom, noting that negotiations on this issue with Ukraine will not take place on the terms “received as part of the suit in the Stockholm Arbitration Court.”

Last year, Gazprom transported 93 billion cubic meters of blue fuel through the territory of Ukraine to European consumers.
Evolution Gaming Opens First Production Hub in Georgia

By Benjamin Music

Evolution Gaming, based in Latvia, with its mother company in Sweden, has opened up the first Live Casino production hub in Thilisi. The company prides itself as the world’s leading B2B Live Casino supplier, offering operators the very best live gaming solutions and infrastructure — including the widest selection of shared and bespoke table games and the most flexible approach to online and multi-channel delivery.

After a production hub in Latvia, Malta, and Canada, Thilisi is Europe’s third live casino location. The company has explained the opening to meet the growing demands of the sector. “The opening of the Thilisi studio comes during a period of intense growth, with high demand for Evolution products in digitalized environments. Consequently, Evolution’s third major central production studio in Europe has been built to act as a service hub for multiple markets and licensees,” it is expected that the site will be able to manage Evolution’s growth for the next two to three years, adding significantly to the capacity of its existing major central studios in Riga and Malta,” reads the opening statement by the company.

Initially, operations are starting off with roughly 100 employees, partially from other Evolution production hubs and partially new employees from Georgia. According to the company, this number is expected to grow as operations expand in Thilisi.

Evolution Gaming CEO Martin Carlesund commented: “We are delighted that our latest major Live Casino studio in Thilisi is now live and fully operational. Thilisi is a fast-growing city of over 1 million people, offering strong development and investment opportunities, so it offered the perfect location for us. This is a large commitment and project for Evolution and I am proud to see the organization delivering.”

“At Evolution, we constantly strive to improve our service to our licencees and continue to increase our leadership in Live Casino. The Thilisi studio is no exception, as we have leveraged knowledge from over 10 years of building studios to create our most advanced facility yet. The new studio is an investment for the future and will support us in our ambitious development plans in the coming years,” Carlesund added.

Evolution Gaming has worked with the leading gaming and betting offices in Europe, including William Hill, Mr. Green, and a host of smaller clients such as Bally Club London.

Founded in 2006, it expanded rapidly, opening its first Live Casino studio in North America this year.

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WHEREVER YOU ARE — at school, at work, at a football stadium or at home
WHATSOEVER YOU DO — to make a cake, an exciting dish, or watching a movie.
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IT TAKES EXPERTISE TO FLAVOR LIFE
**WHAT’S ON IN Tbilisi**

**THEATER**

**TBILISI VASO ABASHIDZE MUSIC AND DRAMA STATE THEATER**
Address: 182 Aghmashenebeli Ave. Telephone: 2 34 80 90
www.musictheatre.ge
April 10 WELCOME TO GEORGIA
A musical, theatrical play and romantic comedy telling a story about Georgia and its people by combining song, dance, culture, traditions, history, national costumes and local cuisine.
Musical
Language: English, some Georgian (with English subtitles)
Start time: 20:00
Ticket: 60-80 GEL

**AMIRANI CINEMA**
Address: 36 Kostava Str.
Every Wednesday ticket price: 5 GEL
April 6-12

**MOVEMENT THEATER**
Address: 182, Aghmashenebeli Ave.
Telephone: 68 20 20 77
Address: 27 Marjanishvili Str.
Telephone: 577 21 91 79
March 6 – April 11

**CINEMA**

**EXHIBITION**

**MUSEUM**

**READY PLAYER ONE**
Address: 4 Rustaveli Ave.
Telephone: 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
www.museum.ge
Exhibition "GRAY ZONE" BY GIORGI UGULAVA
The exhibition reflects the "zone" of corruption in modern culture and is connected to the sphere of influence.

**MUSEUM OF SOVIET OCCUPATION**
Address: 8 Sioni St.
Telephone: 2 98 22 88
March 21 - April 10
EXHIBITION "BLACK SEA" - KARVASLA
Discover the State’s personal files of “subversive” Georgian public figures, orders to shoot or exile, and other artifacts representing Soviet-era cultural and political repression in Georgia.

**MUSEUM SIMON JANASHIA**
March 30 – April 18
PERMANENT EXHIBITION
The majority of these paintings were exhibited at the Art Expo New York 2017 and in London at The Brick Lane Gallery

**AMIRANI CINEMA**
Address: 36 Kostava Str.
Telephone: 2 99 99 55
April 6-12

**CINEMA**

**TIKTI BAR**
Address: 36 M. Kostava Str.
Telephone: 2 99 99 19
Cafe Kala
K.G.B
RESTAURANT PASTORAL
halgroup

**READY PLAYER ONE**
Address: 4 Rustaveli Ave.
Telephone: 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
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**NEW YORK-LONDON- TBILISI**
New York-based visual artist Levan Songulashvili’s recent works in conversation with Berlin-based artist Christian Awe in Berlin, Germany.

**ART SCHOOL VERTIGO**
Address: 27 Marjanishvili Str.
Telephone: 577 21 91 79
EXHIBITION
Collaborative workshops arranged by the Museum of Contemporary Arts Tbilisi and Art school Vertigo. Participants: Eka Asatiani, Elene Edisherashvili, Tikanu Imanadze, Nini Jinchardze

**MUSIC**

**KELLER BAR**
Address: 36 M. Kostava Str.
April 6 LASHA CHAPEL
RATI
NEEDEZ
Start time: 23:00
Tickets: 10 GEL
April 7 AUTUMN TREE
SPILE
Start time: 23:00
Tickets: 8 GEL

**TBILISI CONCERT HALL**
Address: I Melikishvili St.
Telephone: 2 99 00 99
April 12
The Royal National Ballet Presents
FIDESZ
New life to the Oriental Collections
New York-based visual artist Levan Songulashvili’s recent works in conversation with Berlin-based artist Christian Awe in Berlin, Germany.

**GALLERY**

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**KELLER BAR**
Address: 36 M. Kostava Str.
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY LIKA CHIGLADZE

Celebrated Georgian opera singer Eteri Lamoris Chkonia has been coined by music critics as the 21st century’s Violetta and a Pearl of Opera for her amazing performance in La traviata. At the age of 23 she was acclaimed as “one of the best voices” in the Operalia World Opera Contest (1994), where she also earned a special award: the Public Prize of Vienna, together with tenor Jose Cura. Eteri Lamoris is laureate of nine international competitions, in five of which she was awarded the first prize. Eteri has performed in many prestigious concert halls, including Carnegie Hall in New York, and famous opera theaters of Vienna, Madrid, Bonn, Naples, Verona, Parma, Washington and Los Angeles. Some years ago, the Princess of Sweden gifted her a golden merit as The Greatest Singer of our Time. After her international breakthrough in the role of Musetta in Franco Zeffirelli’s La Scala production of La Boheme, she performed in the following operas and theaters: Teatro Di San Carlo - La Boheme (Musetta); in the same role following operas and theaters: Teatro Di San Carlo - La Boheme; Verona, Parma, Washington and Los Angeles; Teatro Di San Carlo - La Boheme (Musetta); in the same role performing in the principal role. We organize festivals and bring together people from different countries. Many Georgian performers come and take part. We organize international competitions, concerts and workshops together with invited famous stars. We try to help Georgia by promoting Georgian artists abroad as well as handing out prizes and scholarships.

In the past, classic music in Georgia had a real audience. Today’s world of art is very commercialized. You have won’t be able to stand out and eventually succeed. Yet, it does not matter how successful you are abroad, you still feel like a guest. So, it is not Georgian artists’ fault that they are obliged to leave their country. In the past, classic music in Georgia had a real audience. Now, at a performance one might come across only elderly people or priests who just want to show off. I want my future performances in Georgia to serve important missions, such as charity purposes. My sister Nato and I established a summer academy in Austria. Nato is the president and I am the principal. We organize festivals and bring together people from different countries. Many Georgian performers come and take part. We organize international competitions, concerts and workshops together with invited famous stars. We try to help Georgia by promoting Georgian artists abroad as well as handing out prizes and scholarships.

Today’s world of art is very commercialized.

YOU HAVE COLLABORATED WITH MANY ARTISTS AND HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY ACQUAINTED WITH INTERNATIONAL HIGH OFFICIALS. TELL US MORE

Traditionally, my family has always been close to the high officials of their time, yet my family never sought it. My grandfather Akaki Chkonia, who was a famous publicist and Head of the Tbilisi Opera Theater, personally knew Stalin. Joseph Stalin respected and liked him to such an extent that he even wanted to promote him in Moscow, yet later he was executed on Beria’s order. As for me, I’ve had friendly relations with princesses and princes of Austria, Sweden and Spain, as well as become relatives with the former chancellor of Austria, Franz Vranitzky. I know Hillary and Bill Clinton personally, as well as Helmut Kohl, the German statesman who served as Chancellor of Germany from 1982 to 1998.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES OF WORKING IN THE WORLD OF OPERA?

Today’s world of art is very commercialized. It can be felt that PR dominates over real art, and artists and managers are mostly career-oriented. Corruption is also a common thing. Very often, one can hardly find art in today’s contemporary music. This is why artists and musicians feel empty inside. As for opera, it has an advantage over other fields of art, since you constantly stay in touch with high quality art, enabling you to develop when you are not only focused on your career. Personally, I have always struggled with myself when you are not only focused on your career. To overcome this feeling and not to lose the passion for music.

We Georgians have to overcome many difficulties before we firmly establish ourselves and reach international success in our careers. Even if you are better than others and have proved your superiority many times, you still have to prove that you are good at your job. If you don’t surpass many foreign colleagues or singers, then
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