

# Caucasus ELECTIONSWATCH

A weekly review of elections related processes in the Caucasus Region

25 September 2012

Editorial Comment

## Zero Tolerance to election fraud!

**Georgia goes to the polls in a few days' time. What happens on 1 October will determine the future of the country for a long time. It is for the Georgian people to decide who they want to govern them and what sort of future they want for their country. But Europe has a duty to observe this process carefully, and to give a true and fair assessment afterwards. Thousands of observers and journalists will be in Georgia these days to do just that.**

On too many occasions Europe's vision of Georgia has been clouded by considerations that are certainly not valid for the current circumstances. Georgia has a damaged society, partly a result of a style of government in recent years that has been confrontational in its approach. The prisons torture scandal over the last days has further exacerbated the problem. The European Union and the United States, Georgia's two main friends in the world, should have done more in the past years to help raise concerns and address serious shortcomings in the field of democratic governance, human rights and the rule of law.

It is important that these failures of the international community will not be repeated in the context of these parliamentary elections. The electoral campaign that has been raging on for months has been far from perfect, but at least Georgians now have a credible choice of parties to choose from. The message of the opposition parties which was initially muffled and distorted eventually broke through, so no Georgian can now say that he has not been able to hear the different sides.

The heroes of the story are the Georgian NGOs, such as "GYLA", "Transparency International Georgia" and "This affects you", who's crusade, over the last year and more, to ensure a free and fair election has been heroic. Foreign observers, who turn up in Georgia a day or two before the elections, or even those who arrived four weeks before, need to listen very carefully to what the local civil society is saying on these elections.

Despite all the problems that occurred, and the poisoned climate that at times has marked the atmosphere around the elections, there is still a chance for these elections to be a turning point for the political evolution of the South Caucasus, and of Georgia in particular. However there should be zero tolerance from election observer missions for election fraud, and problems if they occur need to be spelled out in unambiguous language. If on the other hand the process is flawless than an equally clear assessment is necessary so that the people of Georgia can move on, the healing process can start, and the long term ambitions of all main Georgian political forces, that of embedding the country in the European and Euro-Atlantic community, can start taking shape. ■



The Georgian political scene was shaken by videos showing prisoners in Georgian prisons being tortured and sexually abused. Karina Gould retraces the events as they happened and their impact on the electoral process on pages 4 and 5.



On the eve of the Georgian Parliamentary elections the European Policy Centre in Brussels hosted a round table discussion with Georgian politicians and representatives of EU institutions and civil society. Read a report on page 3.



Interview: Mikheil Machavariani speaks about the plans of the United National Movement for Georgia in an exclusive interview with Caucasus Elections Watch on pages 6 and 7.

## Stop Press • Stop Press

As we were going to press reports are coming in from Georgian media sources of many arrests of opposition activists in various parts of the country. More on this story and the Georgian elections is available on our website [www.electionswatch.org](http://www.electionswatch.org).

Caucasus Elections Watch is a specialised weekly publication focusing on elections related processes in the Caucasus, with news and analysis compiled by experts with long experience of the region.

Caucasus Elections Watch is also distributed electronically. For more in depth articles you may also visit our website [www.electionswatch.org](http://www.electionswatch.org) or join our facebook page.

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### The Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership held a conference on 15 September 2012 under the theme "Parliamentary elections and Georgia's EU integration prospects". This was one of a series of events held in Tbilisi ahead of next week's parliamentary elections at which civil society organisations aired their concerns ahead of the polls.

The conference adopted the following statement:

The 1 October parliamentary election is an extremely important challenge for Georgia's statehood and democratic development. Ensuring a free and fair election environment and holding the elections to high standard will in large part determine the future progress of Georgia's European integration.

It is the state that is bound to ensure free elections, so accordingly the government bears a large share of responsibility. At the same time, it is important that all actors in the election process comprehend their own share of responsibility and act in a way that respects the rule of law and conforms to civilized and democratic practices.

The National Platform urges all participants in the electoral process to react appropriately to the problems outlined below in the short period of time remaining before the election in order to ensure that Georgia's citizens can express their will in a fair and competitive environment.

The pre-election situation in Georgia is characterized by growing polarization and tension, which inhibits a healthy and competitive election process. Conditions of competition are being violated, the development of a democratic political culture is being hindered and tension is escalating, creating the danger of civil confrontation.

One of the causes of the polarization and tension is the use of hate speech, insulting terminology, unfounded accusations, sharply negative PR and, in some cases, the use of physical violence against political opponents. Such "rules of the game" are unacceptable in a country which declares that its main goal is European integration and, consequently, strives to establish European values and democratic standards.

Accordingly, the Georgian National Platform urges:

\* The Georgian government and its relevant bodies – as the main bearer of responsibility for the holding of the election in a fair and equitable environment – to approach the issue of forming the election environment with a deep sense of accountability and not create any bases for the further escalation of tensions and not allow unfair or selective approaches to be applied towards political subjects;

\* Political subjects to comprehend their own share of responsibility refrain from discrediting or provoking political opponents in an unacceptable manner and uphold the rules of healthy competition in order to reduce existing dangers;

\* Media outlets to comprehend the importance of their role in forming public opinion and not facilitate further polarization, especially while covering electoral processes, and be guided by journalistic ethics and the norms of professionalism.

The existence of a pluralistic media environment is of decisive importance in ensuring free and fair elections, the free expression of the will of the voters, and the development of democratic processes. Access to a diverse array of information is critically important both during the campaign period and during and after the polling day in order to ensure trust in the democratic electoral process.

To this end, the enshrinement of the "must carry, must offer" principles in law (obliging cable TV providers to carry all stations that cover news) has been a step forward. However, the matter that these regulations expire on Election Day does not correspond to the public interest, as the election process and the public's high degree of interest in it does not end on polling day. Furthermore, the public interest in having a diverse media environment is not limited to the election period alone. A pluralistic media – given its importance and the current situation in Georgia – in reality represents such an important public interest that the state is justified in setting a special regulation.

The National Platform calls on:

\* The Georgian president to immediately convene a special session of parliament and raise the issue of extending the validity of the "must carry, must offer" law in the country;

\* The Georgian parliament to discuss this issue at a special session and provide legislative guarantees that the "must carry, must offer" principle is extended until the establishment of digital broadcasting in the country.

One of the main factors hindering the dissemination of diverse information – even under the "must carry, must offer" law – is the population's limited access to cable operators' services, especially in the rural areas, where the only way to receive diverse information is with satellite dish antennas. Accordingly, discriminatory conditions are in place for a large part of the population.

We consider the impoundment of satellite dish antennas of a private TV company on the basis of so-called "reasonable suspicion" (that they were intended for distribution as part of an alleged vote-buying scheme) to be a constraint for society's access to information and a hindrance to the formation of a fair election environment. Against this backdrop, we welcome the Intergovernmental Commission's statement that it is willing to lift sanctions on Maestro TV's satellite dish antennas and allow for their distribution under certain conditions.

The National Platform urges the government and other political actors to ensure that this process goes ahead quickly and effectively,

that a deal is reached among political subjects on the basis of non-discriminatory and mutually acceptable conditions and that satellite dish antennas are distributed as quickly as possible ahead of the election.

\* The National Platform, for its part, is willing to take part in monitoring the process and ensuring that the public receives detailed information about it;

\* The National Platform believes that in future mass media outlets, including independent TV stations, should not be hindered from developing their own distribution systems.

The most important precondition for conducting the election in accordance with Western standards is the creation of a competitive and equitable pre-election environment. This implies honouring the supremacy of the law and prioritizing the interests of voters. Parity among the election subjects is significantly hindered by several factors, one of the most important and pressing being the illegal use of administrative resources. "Illegal use of administrative resources" is defined rather narrowly in Georgian legislation and its definition in fact applies to the use of technical resources (buildings, transport, communications and news outlets) while other important manifestations of the use of administrative resources remain beyond the reach of the law.

Still, it is difficult to oversee the application of the regulations set out in the law, especially given that in many cases there is no clear boundary between the state and the ruling party in terms of the use of budgetary resources as well as the participation of state officials in election campaigning.

The Georgian National Platform urges:

\* Relevant state bodies to do their utmost to stop the illegal use of administrative resources and, guided by the spirit of the law, respond adequately to violations thereof;

\* Political parties with access to administrative resources to refrain from using them illegally in order to ensure equal conditions for election participants and ensure that the electoral process is not discredited.

The National Platform is concerned about the lack of voter information regarding the secret ballot principle and, in some cases, deliberate efforts aimed at casting doubt on the secrecy of the ballot, exerting psychological pressure on voters and limiting free expression of their will. This has an extremely negative influence on the pre-election environment.

We call on the Central Electoral Commission: \* Launch a wide-scale campaign to educate voters about polling day procedures which clearly and unequivocally states that the principle of the secret ballot will be upheld strictly and unwaveringly;

\* Ensure that electoral laws and the principle of the secret ballot are upheld unwaveringly on election day.

The Georgian National Platform believes the activities of international and local observers play an important role and thanks the international community and international organizations for sending large numbers of observers. The Platform expresses the hope that this will help ensure the transparency and credibility of the election.

We call on all subjects participating in the election to work actively with both international and local monitoring organizations in order to ensure that the election is held in a fair and transparent manner. The National Platform also expresses its willingness to cooperate actively with representatives of international and local monitoring organizations throughout the election process.

The Georgian National Platform urges political parties, the wider society and the media: \* Not to facilitate the escalation of the situation and uphold European democratic values and the universally recognized and declared norms of personal human freedom and constitutional rights;

\* To ensure that Georgia's electoral legislation is fully adhered to on election day as well as during the coverage of election day and the poll's results;

\* To respect the political will of Georgia's citizens expressed in the election, as summarized in line with the rules established by the Georgian legislation and as recognized by local and international monitoring organizations. ■



Speakers at the Conference of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform included the EU Ambassador to Georgia and Georgia's new Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Tornike Gordadze

# European Policy Centre hosts event on Georgia in Brussels

**“Any shvili is fine as long as he is the true choice of the Georgian people.”**

The leading Brussels think tank, The European Policy Centre (EPC), on 19 September hosted a round table discussion on the Georgian elections with the participation of Georgian politicians, and representatives from European institutions and civil society. The well attended event was chaired by Amanda Paul, Senior Analyst at the EPC.

The different views of the Georgian political spectrum were presented by Giorgi Kandelaki, Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Georgian Parliament and an activist of the United National Movement who gave a spirited, somewhat aggressive presentation, whilst the opposition view was presented by a more statesmanlike presentation by Tedo Japaridze, Georgia former Foreign Minister and currently International Secretary of the Georgian Dream coalition.

The European perspective was given by the Estonian Ambassador to the EU Matti Maasikas, Polish MEP Krzysztof Lisek, Jacqueline Hale, a senior policy analyst at the Open Society Institute in Brussels and Dennis Sammut, Executive Director of LINKS, the London based think tank.

“After these elections, parliament will become the only source of power in Georgia. The process is irreversible and will bring Georgia closer to NATO, which is a deeply-rooted social contract in our country,” said Giorgi Kandelaki, in his opening remarks. Kandelaki cited a number of concerns with Georgian democracy, accusing the opposition ‘Georgian Dream’ coalition’s of an “on-going and persistent campaign to discredit the elections before they’ve even been held”.

He accused opponents of flooding Georgia with polls funded from “dubious” undisclosed sources and introducing “fake election monitoring”. Moreover, Georgian Dream is “attacking the legitimacy of voters’ lists,” he claimed. He accused Georgian Dream of attempting to erode the consensus in Georgian society regarding the need to integrate ethnic and religious minorities, and claimed that the coalition was seeking to erode the consensus over Georgia’s EU/NATO outlook.

Kandelaki concluded by declaring that “despite shortcomings, we have a pluralistic society in which ideas are debated freely”.

“I could also deliver a long list of accusations, but I’m not here in Brussels to do that. The government [of which Kandelaki is a member] has made major achievements since the Rose Revolution, and you can feel them on the ground. But state-building isn’t the same as democracy-building,” said Tedo Japaridze, Secretary for International Affairs in the ‘Georgian Dream’ political coalition.

“We need to make Georgia a democratic state. At the moment, we have one strongman at the centre of everything. We want to make Georgia a country of the rule of law,” said Japaridze, accusing the government of “wanting to erase the opposition as a class from the Georgian political landscape”. He argued that Georgia needed “to go back to where we belong – in the region. Don’t play stupid geopolitical games for which we don’t have the capacity”. He said his assessment was based on “realism, pragmatism and realpolitik”.

“We should become a bridge, a facilitator or a hub in the region,” Japaridze said.

The four EU speakers took as expected a somewhat more detached approach.

The Eastern Partnership “is for countries that dream of aligning themselves with the EU and perhaps one day becoming members,” said Estonian Ambassador to the EU Matti Maasikas. “The Eastern Partnership is bilateral, between the EU and the partner country, whereas the ‘more for more’ principle of the European Neighbourhood Policy is a tool for developing relations,” Maasikas explained.

“Georgia doesn’t just have a responsibility to its people to hold free and fair elections, but also to the other Eastern Partnership countries.



The EU hopes to complete negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement next year, including a free-trade agreement and a visa agreement,” he said.

“I’m sure all Georgian politicians understand what’s at stake,” the ambassador said. “There’s a good chance that the 1 October parliamentary elections will be broadly held according to international standards. There’s certainly no reason to pre-judge them,” Maasikas said.

“Georgia has shown huge success in fighting corruption – more so than some EU countries. Its economy is also very open,” said Polish MEP Krzysztof Lisek, a member of the Group of the European People’s Party and vice-chair of the European Parliament’s sub-committee on security and defence.

“I’m glad that all the main players in Georgia support its pro-Western direction and European perspective, which in my opinion means future membership,” Lisek said. “For the first time, Georgia has a strong opposition. For a long time, the parliamentary opposition was tiny. This is a good sign. Hopefully it shows that Georgian democracy is alive and well,” he said.

“All parties in Georgia seem to understand that the international community’s message is that we appreciate the Rose Revolution and recent progress, but now we want to see the development of a normal democracy,” Lisek said. “Democracy needs to work in the parliament too, not just in the street,” the MEP concluded.

“We want to create a non-partisan civic space in which all actors can call political parties to account,” said Jacqueline Hale, a senior policy analyst at the Open Society Institute. “Georgia is a very partisan environment. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to maintain an independent space. We need to be vigilant and ensure that the elections are held honourably and freely,” Hale said.

“We’ve seen some good steps forward, for example the law obliging all cable companies to carry TV channels from across the political spectrum. But we still see obstacles to a truly level playing field,” she said. “There are concerns over polarisation. How will political actors handle this in a manner that allows a free, fair, healthy and competitive contest? So far, the signs aren’t good,” Hale warned. “We must take care to remain balanced in Europe and not take sides. Europe is a friend of Georgia and vice-versa. We owe it to Georgia to show it tough love, to maintain high expectations of democracy, and to hold whoever wins to their promises,” Hale said.

“I hope the electoral process will be a step towards the eventual target of EU membership. The campaign so far has been very competitive, and largely without violence. That’s positive, and we hope it’ll continue until Election Day,” said Dennis Sammut, executive director of the London based think tank LINKS.

“It is for the Georgian people to choose their future government. Europe should be ready to work with whoever wins, be it Saakashvili, Merabishvili, Ivanishvili, or even Natelashvili... or indeed any other shvili as long as he is the true choice of the Georgian people,” said Dennis Sammut

“There’s a need for consensus politics in the country, and more checks and balances. The ‘winner takes all’ idea under Saakashvili doesn’t really work in Georgian society. It’s good to talk about the achievements of the last 8-9 years, but let’s be honest: there are still major problems and a seriously divided political class,” Sammut said, adding that however this election still has the potential to change for the better the Georgian political scene. ■

source: report prepared by CEW with www.epc.eu

# Georgian politics sh prisoners' abuse sca

**Georgia's already tense campaign environment has been intensified amid the revelation of a major prisoners' abuse scandal last week.**

On Tuesday 18 of September, videos emerged showing prison guards physically beating and sexually assaulting an inmate in a Georgian prison. Since then more videos have surfaced, mass protests have been held in the capital, two ministers have resigned, eleven officials arrested and the outcome of the upcoming parliamentary elections more precarious than ever.

The international community has reacted swiftly demanding the perpetrators be brought to justice and a transparent investigation be conducted, the United Nations, Council of Europe and European Union making note that these practices are not tolerated in their communities.

The six-minute video, dated August 24, 2012, which sparked the upheaval in the small South Caucasus nation was aired on Maestro TVs evening news on Tuesday and depicts an inmate being beaten and raped with a broomstick by several prison guards who are being cheered on by their colleagues. The assault is alleged to have taken place in Gldani Prison 8, in the suburbs of Tbilisi.

A tidal wave of disgust combined with outrage over the inhumane treatment of the prisoners has spread across Georgian society, resulting in thousands of protesters taking to the streets Tuesday evening demanding justice. Protesters, accompanied by representatives of Georgian NGOs such as the Georgian Young Lawyer's Association (GYLA), Transparency International Georgia and Open Society Georgia, met outside the Philharmonic Concert Hall, where President Saakashvili was rumoured to be attending a musical show, demanded the immediate resignation of the Minister of Corrections, Probation, and Legal Assistance, Khatuna Kalmakhelidze, Minister of Justice Zurab Adeishvili, Minister of the Interior Bacho Akhalaia, who held Kalmakelidze's position from 2005-2008, and Chief Prosecutor Murtaz Zodelava.

So far both Kalmakelidze and Akhalaia have resigned.

Former Public Defender, Giorgi Tugushi, has been tireless in reporting the plight of prisoners in his annual reports for years. Annual reports, that until last week, fell on the deaf ears of parliamentarians, which in 2011 voted to "take note" of his findings.

The Public Defender and civil society organisations have been decrying the state of prisons and the treatment of inmates for years. Georgia has the sixth highest per-capita prison population in the world and an alarmingly high prisoner mortality rate. In 2011, 144

prisoners died while serving their sentences, 90% of these deaths occurred in Gldani Prison 8.

President Mikheil Saakashvili, has described the video's contents as "a horrific affront to human rights and human dignity." In his efforts to quell the anger and begin on a path of reform, Saakashvili has appointed Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili to overhaul the prisons system. The PM is widely recognised for his success in police reform and thus viewed as a trustworthy individual to take charge of this extremely important task.

Furthermore, the President has sent the police in to prisons while the remaining guards are investigated, has called for the establishment of a parliamentary commission and has stated that he will allow public defenders to be present in prisons. Of even greater note is the appointment of Giorgi Tugushi as the new Minister of Corrections, Probation and Legal Assistance.

"I am appointing as the head of this system a very fierce critic of this very same system and I am doing [so] purposefully, because it should turn into a completely different system."

Saakashvili called the response of his government "more radical than any government" of any other country.

The President appealed to the public not to let the appalling events of Prison 8 overshadow the progress made by the current government, "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater," he urged.

"It should be society's main instinct to make the country move forward and not to let it return back into its dark past," said Saakashvili.

The government, while conceding that prisoner abuse is part of a systematic failure, has turned this scandal into evidence of a deliberate plot to discredit the current government and return Georgia to the past, one that envisions Georgia as part of Russia's imperial territory.

At first the authorities tried to claim that the videos were commissioned by Tamaz Tamazashvili, the father of an important Georgian Dream majoritarian candidate and father-in-law to one of Ivanishvili's closest advisers, Irakli Garibashvili, who is serving time for possession of illegal firearms in Prison 8. Out of the 11 individuals arrested in relation to the abuse charges, the government has claimed that three of them were in fact bribed by Tamazashvili to film the abuse so that it might be used as campaign material to discredit the prison system in Georgia.

# Shaken by Scandal

The authorities have now moved on to blaming elements of the past that use "Russian money" and Russian tactics of collecting compromising material to dismantle the new Georgia. A veiled reference implicating the opposition leadership in the release of the videos. Throughout the campaign, Saakashvili and the United National Movement have consistently presented their party as representative of Georgia's new path and relationship with the West, while insinuating that Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream coalition have ties with Russia and the oppression of Georgia's communist history.

However, the official story was seriously put into question by the recent testimony of journalist Irma Inashvili, who claims she leaked the material. Inashvili denies any involvement of either Maestro TV, TV9 or any political party in obtaining the videos. According to a report from The Messenger Online, Inashvili obtained the video from Vladimir Bedukadze, a former deputy warden at Prison 8 who filmed the abuse.

Bedukadze has stated that he was instructed to film these occurrences by the Warden of Prison 8 and has collected material over the past year and a half. The approximately two hours of footage he has in his possession he claims reflects the material that was not sent to former Interior Minister Akhalaia. According to the whistle-blower, abuse is common practice in Georgian prisons, however, only "interesting individuals" such as "ideological enemies of the President" were filmed. Making a major accusation, Bedukadze said this practice began in 2005 when Akhalaia took charge of the prison system.

Bedukadze has denied any link with the opposition or Tamazashvili and is currently seeking political asylum in Belgium.

Leader of the Georgian Dream opposition coalition, Bidzina Ivanishvili, called for President Saakashvili's resignation on Friday 21, September.

"Resignation," he said at a campaign event in the town of Khoni in Western Georgia, "will to some extent save the dignity of the authorities, as these videos have been shown all over the world and the entire civilised society is appalled."

Ivanishvili also claims the videos reveal to both Georgia and the world the true colours of the Georgian government led by Saakashvili, describing it as a "machinery of lies" and "violence."

Both Ivanishvili and Georgia's Patriarch Ilia II have called upon demonstrators to scale back activities ahead of the forthcoming 1 October parliamentary elections to ensure a peaceful environment in which to conduct the polls.

**"We condemn the acts of torture and ill treatment perpetrated against inmates at a prison and juvenile detention facility in Georgia that were exposed in at least 4 different videos made public this week. We call on the government to ensure that all allegations of such human rights violations and not only the ones exposed in these videos but any others that have been taking place are promptly, impartially and effectively investigated and that perpetrators are brought to justice."**

**The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in a statement issued through his spokesman in Geneva on 21 September 2012.**



**Thousands of students demonstrated in Tbilisi following the emergence of video footage of prisoners being tortured in Georgian jails.**

"We should manage to reach the elections in an organised manner, without much emotion and to change these authorities through elections," stated Ivanishvili, after he called the demonstrations of the 19 and 20 of September a "healthy reaction" of the Georgian population.

Though protest numbers have subsided over the weekend, some students still held demonstrations both at Gldani Prison 8 as well as in front of the newly built Justice House on Saturday. Four protesters were arrested for disobeying police orders when they tried to forcefully enter the Justice House. A large protest is being planned for Monday in Tbilisi.

While the changes made by the government are welcome, if exceedingly belated, the attempt to deflect responsibility to a conspiracy theory against Georgia is a scapegoat for a government that must take responsibility for an immense failure and appalling human rights abuses that occurred under its watch. Ample evidence had been provided to the authorities before the videos were released this past week, they simply chose to ignore what was in front of their eyes the whole time.

"The release of these videos was deliberately timed just before the elections in order to make voters cast [their] ballot impulsively, under [shock]," claims Saakashvili. Whether the release of the videos was politically motivated or not, the government has an obligation to fix this glaring blot on Georgia's reputation. It is unfortunate that the threat of a lost election is needed for leaders to act responsibly. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould

# MIKHEIL MACHAVARIANI: “The United National Movement platform on its past achievements in the



**Ahead of the parliamentary elections in Georgia, Caucasus Elections Watch interviewed Mikheil Machavariani, Deputy Chairman of the Georgian Parliament and Secretary General of the United National Movement, the party of government. In the interview Machavariani speaks at length on the achievements of the UNM government and the party's plans for the future.**

## **What is the most important issue for the United National Movement in these elections and how does the party plan to make a difference on this topic in Georgia if elected?**

The UNM builds its election platform upon the past achievements in modernisation of the country, namely, on the success in fighting organised crime and rampant corruption, characteristic for late Shevardnadze's regime. If not the breakthrough in making public institutions workable, neither the GDP of Georgia would have tripled since 2003 and nor the state budget would increase several times, while democratic check and balances, outlined in the constitution of 1995 would have remained as a pure window dressing.

So far, increased state revenues have been used to rebuild the infrastructure, to pay salaries and pensions, develop state security institutions, as well as fund the education, healthcare, social benefits for families in special need. First time in Georgian history state owned TV channel was converted into public broadcasting funded through strictly defined GDP share. First time in Post-Soviet Georgia, entering universities did not require nepotistic connections.

In a couple with the intensive foreign relations, these and many other reformist steps made Georgia to survive as a state after Russian large scale military aggression in August 2008. Despite the fact of the occupation of about 20% of Georgian territory, international surveys show that average Georgian feels now safer than the citizens in some of more affluent countries with longer experience of democratic existence.

However, we understand that the benefits such development brings are not equally felt by each and every family. We were able to build the foundations for fighting poverty, but poverty, and its main cause, unemployment, is still large. We were able to build or renovate about 150 hospitals, but not every citizen can afford expensive medical care. Georgia has a capacity of relative self sustainability in food production but this capacity is not utilised yet. Hence, together with continues efforts for de-occupation and European and, as well as Euro-Atlantic integration, the UNM defines its policy priorities being 1. Job creation; 2. Affordable healthcare; 3. Agricultural development.

**According to the National Democratic Institute survey conducted this past June, jobs and unemployment are the most important national issue for the Georgian electorate. What is your party proposing to do to address the issue of unemployment and to create jobs in Georgia?**

In the forthcoming 4 years cycle after elections, the government will be able to create approximately 250 000 jobs through its infrastructural programs, development of tourism industry and agriculture. Building of roads and several new of hydro-power plants will provide approximately 50-60 000 permanent jobs. Reaching the target of 7 million visitors per year is realistic and it relates to the creation of additional 140 000 jobs. By the end of the above-mentioned cycle, agricultural production can be doubled through extensive irrigation projects, development of food processing industry and state sponsored support of agricultural export. It all relates to the thousands of new workplaces.

**With regards to territorial integrity and relations with Russia, almost half of all Georgians feel the situation has deteriorated since January 2008, according to the survey mentioned above. Furthermore, about the same number of respondents felt that Georgia's prospects for EU and NATO membership remained about the same as in 2008. Could you please briefly outline your party's position on foreign affairs and which issue it will focus most on in this area?**

De-occupation and state re-integration remain the main objectives of national security strategy. These objectives are directly related to Georgia's pro Euro-Atlantic foreign policy, developed and constantly supported by the UNM. This policy, which remains without alternative, if one wants to make Georgian independence and democratic development irreversible, meets a fierce resistance from current Russian leadership which still looks for some sort of restoration of former sizes of Pax Rossica. Georgia cannot allow that, if we seriously treasure our independence and democratic choice. That was the main reason, why Russia constantly manipulated with our conflict zones in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, abused its status of broker and peace-keeper and eventually, after Georgia made clear indications it wanted to internationalise conflict management and showed signs of success in its Euro-Atlantic integration, Russia opted for military aggression. Luckily, Russian desire to achieve a regime change in Georgia failed due to public support of the government, efficiency of its institutions and international support.

Now it is high time to address the results of this aggression through intensification of diplomatic efforts internationally, as well as vis-a-vis Russia. In parallel, Georgia will continue to implement its strategy of reintegration of the occupied territories, through various state funded or international programs, which address the basic needs of internally displaced persons and those who live behind occupation lines. It will be accompanied with

# United National Movement builds its election modernisation of the country.”

Georgia's further steps towards integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions, which are the main preconditions for making Georgia continuously attractive for Abkhazian and Ossetian compatriots.

There are successes in these respects: Chicago Summit of NATO addressed Georgian security concerns extensively and NATO-Georgian commission reports on progress made by the country in its approximation towards NATO standards; the European Union launched negotiations on Association agreement including free trade provisions and as it was recently stated, expects to finalize the this process by the end of the next year. The US congress, as well as the European parliament defined Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region as zones, occupied by Russia. It means setting up a clear international diagnosis of the situation which is nothing but a solid precondition for “curing” the disease. The US, as well as some European countries agreed to accept Status Neutral Documents, issued by Georgia for those Abkhazs and Ossetians who need to travel abroad but are not in a position to take Georgian passport. Through that we achieve two objectives: a) make our strategy for reintegration internationally accepted; b) check forceful Russification undertaken by Russian officials in occupied zones through mass distribution of Russian citizenship and passports.

Georgia unilaterally declared its intention to struggle for re-unification through only peaceful means. We expect Russia also declares unilaterally that it will not use force against Georgia. Until its done, Russia remains in a awkward situation internationally which cannot continue indefinitely if Russia wants to address its long term developmental needs.

And last but not the least: Georgia fights for hearts and minds of the citizens of Russian Federation. Strategy on engagement with North Caucasians, as well as lift of visa requirements for any Russian who respects Georgian laws is one but not the only tools for that. We are sure Russian society once reconsiders its morally, politically and financially costly policies towards Georgia and by then, we will have a strategic patience, continuing our struggle along the same lines. Job approval rate of the current leadership of the country, as well as overwhelming support of its Euro-Atlantic policy shows that despite difficult situation, our strategy and tactics has understanding within Georgian society.

**Media freedom and diversity has been a controversial issue in the lead up to the elections and has received considerable attention from the international community. What does your party intend to do to ensure and protect both the safety of journalists and freedom of expression?**

We think that accusations about intimidation of journalists is grossly exaggerated. The Law provides their total safety and mechanisms like interagency task force, chaired by the secretary of NSC provide a rapid reaction opportunity if pre-election emotions somehow, somewhere created problems for media representatives. On the other hand, media owners and journalists must also develop better sense of professional ethics and understanding that journalism does not mean interference into the public activity of the officials or representatives of any political party. BY and large, to provide informed choice opportunity to all citizens, Georgian parliament recently passed legislative provisions, obliging any cable network to accept

media production of every TV company. Thus that TV channels with clearly opposition profile have an opportunity to cover the whole country.

**Universal health care is a central item on the campaign agenda. Could you please elaborate on your party's position on healthcare and what policies the United National Movement is proposing in this area?**

Health care policy of the UNM is based on the principles of market economy, state subsidies for those in financial need, and support of the development of medical facilities. As mentioned, about 150 hospitals have been recently built or renovated. They are well equipped. State does its best to support life-long learning for doctors. These are preconditions for professional medical care of patients. At the same time, the state centrally funds medical insurance of pensioners, children up to 6 years, those in the register of social protection. Since September every second citizen is covered by various insurance agencies, by 2013 their number will reach 3mln. Through the implementation of the election program, we intend to have all Georgian citizens covered by insurance privately or through state help.

**Given the significant role agriculture plays in the Georgian economy, what policies does your party intend to develop to stimulate and support rural economies?**

As mentioned above, thousands of additional hectares of agricultural land will be covered by irrigation systems. We intend to provide the agriculture with about 2000 new machines. Depots for storage of harvest are being built by the state and special centres are being built throughout the country to provide peasants and farmers with agricultural knowledge and fertilisers. In addition, the state will address the poverty through ad hoc measure of providing each family with vouchers of 1000 GEL worth. Individuals can use it during four years for covering communal taxes as well as for buying fuel or fertilisers for farming.

**Considering there are only nine current female members of parliament, does your party have an action plan to encourage more participation of women in politics?**

Georgian legislation provides financial incentives for parties with will have at least 2 representatives of opposite sex through every 10 names of the party lists. We hope to have an increase of women members of the parliament through this or awareness rising measures. However, we cannot fully balance gender in the parliament overnight. One has to mention that in the executive branch as well as in parliamentary staff the situation is better in this respect.

**Is there any other point, related to your campaign platform, that we have not discussed that you would like to mention?**

The efforts will continue to consolidate the results of previous reforms. We will focus on strengthening of rights and capacities of local government, as well on farther professionalization of public service. ■

# Does Azerbaijan's Opposition Movement need a breath of fresher, younger air?

**With Azerbaijan's 2013 Presidential elections around the corner, political activists in the country are beginning to question the tactics and plans not of the government but of the opposition.**

For many political activists, the government's plan is well known, and given its track record a transparent and fair transfer of power seems highly unlikely. Incumbent President, Ilham Aliyev, has been in power since 2003, and his father, Heydar Aliyev, was Azerbaijan's President before him. Democracy advocates in Azerbaijan understand how their political system works, what they're trying to reform now are the methods of the opposition, a movement some younger activists feel is outdated and in need of reform.

The opposition, under the umbrella of the Public Chamber (PC) publicly declared its intent to boycott the presidential elections unless certain changes were made to the Electoral Code of Azerbaijan this autumn. So far, those changes remain on the desks of the PC, yet no boycott has been confirmed, and even if there was a boycott, would it exert enough pressure on the government to make a difference?

Some political pundits in Azerbaijan are beginning to question the wisdom of this hope and the tactics of the opposition, arguing they are tired and tried – maybe the Azerbaijani opposition needs a breath of fresh air, they say.

Emin Milli, a political blogger who was jailed in 2009, describes the leaders of the opposition in Azerbaijan in a blogpost as “those individual politicians in opposition who choose being eternal leaders in waiting.” Milli was referring to Ali Kerimli and Isa Gambar, the leaders of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan and the Musavat Party, respectively, the two most prominent opposition parties in Azerbaijan.

Milli wonders in his post whether opposition leaders seriously believe that the West supports them as potential governing parties. The dissident blogger argues that Western governments, interested in preserving oil and gas supplies and investments in Azerbaijan, use the opposition to legitimise Aliyev's government through falsified elections; elections in which the opposition readily participates.

It's time for a change of leadership asserts Milli in his blogpost, one in which leaders are willing to take greater risks for the future of Azerbaijan.

Shahla Sultanova wrote last week on eurasianet.org that Milli's criticism reflects a “generational gap” between the old guard of the opposition, which cut its teeth in Soviet Azerbaijan, and the new, younger generation of political activists who found their political feet in the age of the internet.

The point is that the opposition movement which has been around for twenty years in Azerbaijan has been unable to unseat the YAP, even in 2003 when it was clear to most Azerbaijanis that Isa Gambar had actually won the elections. Instead of taking to the streets and defending his position, Milli accuses Gambar of listening to Western diplomats and staying in his office, waiting out the storm.

While young opposition leaders such as Milli or internet activist Bakhityar Haliyev, appreciate the trails leaders such as Kerimli and Gambar blazed over the past two decades, they also recognise that young Azerbaijanis need new sources of inspiration and motivation not currently found in the opposition leadership. Dissatisfaction within the opposition has resulted in calls from these younger activists for the opposition to start setting the agenda with the government, be more proactive by proposing its own plans and to reach out and interact with the people.

Aziz Shahhuseynov, commented to Sultanova, that instead of an “opposition of ‘rejection, condemning everything the government does,” he would like to see “an opposition of proposals, with its own programme.”

Haliyev would like to see the opposition interact with everyday people, especially outside of the capital, Baku.

“It's enough to visit crowded places and talk to people,” said Toghrul Juvarli who writes for the Turan news agency.

Both Kerimli and Gambar welcomed the input from the young political activists, however, they also maintained that their failure is not simply rectified by changing tactics, means of communication or decision-making procedures.

“Government pressure, the non-democratic environment in the country and financial difficulties” are all obstacles that contribute to weakness of the opposition in Azerbaijan, stated Kerimli.

Gambar also asserted that the country's mainstream opposition does not need to be “shown the door” as insinuated by Milli when he called for the “purification” of the democratic movement in Azerbaijan, but rather “renewed.”

Hopefully, Azerbaijan's restless young democracy advocates can find a way to breathe new life into the opposition movement, contributing their communications-technology expertise and resources to what could be a strengthened opposition force ahead of the 2013 Presidential elections. Hopefully, the experienced opposition politicians will not simply welcome their words, but also take their advice to heart and to action. ■

Report prepared for CEW by Karina Gould