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WWF CAUCASUS



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NEWSLETTER

# WWF AND THE GOVERNMENT OF AZERBAIJAN SIGN THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Azerbaijan seems to be getting serious over its responsibilities to protect its unique nature. One by one, the country has announced the establishment of protected areas of various categories; the latest in the list is the state nature reserve “Eldar Pine” established by a presidential decree on December 16, 2004. According to Mr. Huseyn Bagirov, Minister for Ecology and Natural Resources, “... there is a clear and well-coordinated policy of regulation, protection and control of the environment in Azerbaijan and all problems concerning the country’s nature and wildlife are treated with as much attention as the economy and politics.”



The memorandum signing ceremony in Baku / WWF Caucasus PO Photo library

Earlier, in October of the same year, Azerbaijan made another important step towards nature protection and signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the WWF and the Ministry of

Ecology and Natural resources of the republic of Azerbaijan on the Collaboration in Nature Conservation in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The document was signed by Mr. Bagirov and Mr. Magnus Sylven, director of WWF International’s Europe and Middle East programmes. The scope of the Memorandum encompasses many areas of joint activities and among them are the creation and expansion of the protected areas network, administrative, legal, social and economic aspects of sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity monitoring, conservation of flora and fauna, climate change, deforestation and desertification issues, forest management, restoration of affected forest ecosystems, ecosystem research activities and more.

After the signing ceremony that took place at the Ministry for Ecology and Natural Resources in Baku, Mr. Huseyn Bagirov pointed out that: “Cooperation between Azerbaijan and WWF will definitely make for the easier protection of Azerbaijan’s biodiversity.”

“It was an important experience”, - Mr. Magnus Sylven commented on the event. - It was not only the signing of a piece of paper but of a most essential document. To WWF it gives the go ahead to work in one of the most biologically diverse countries.”

## BEZOAR GOAT WILL RETURN TO GEORGIA

This is something that WWF Caucasus has been working on, expectantly, for a long time! An animal, hunted to extinction during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is about to return to Georgia. On October 14, 2004, the government of Armenia issued a permit for capturing Bezoar goats in the Vayots Dzor and Syunik provinces with the aim of reintroducing them to Georgia; pretty soon this highly endangered species will be transported from special enclosures of the Yerevan Zoo to Georgia's Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park.

The Bezoar goat (*Capra aegagrus*) is a middle-sized animal but is smaller than other kinds of goats. The Male animals' average body length achieves 1.5 m, its crest height is about 80-95 cm. Males usually weigh 70-80 kg and are bigger than females. The animal has relatively short, thick legs, a small head and a relatively long and thin neck. Males have a heavy wedge-shaped beard on account of which they are sometimes called barbate goats. Males' horns are charcoal grey, sometimes almost black, long and sabre shaped. Bezoar goats roam in small herds of five to ten, staying near cliffs in the forest belt and alpine areas. The Bezoar goat is highly endangered in the Caucasus due to poaching and loss of their natural habitat to agriculture. The animal is unwary of people and settlements, and is therefore easily approached and killed.

WWF Caucasus has started the first phase (*Reintroduction of Bezoar Goat to*

*Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park*) of the more far-reaching project, - *Recovery of the Bezoar Goat in its Natural Range*, - in 2002 with financial support from WWF Switzerland and with the long-term goal of re-establishing a viable population of the Bezoar goat in the northern part of the Lesser Caucasus.



Bezoar goats in Yerevan Zoo, WWF Caucasus PO  
Photo library/ K. Manvelian

Now that the Armenian government has given the much needed green light for the project and has facilitated the completion of its initial objectives; the WWF Caucasus is now actively engaged in the follow up activities' preparation process that includes the establishment of reintroduction facilities in the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, the implementation of educational and awareness raising programmes for the local population plus the most important efforts, with the help of the local communities, of releasing the goats into the wilderness zone of the National Park.

## OSCE AND WWF's JOINT EFFORT IN AZERBAIJAN'S SHIRVAN NATIONAL PARK

Though the Shirvan National Park (54,373 ha) in Azerbaijan is renowned for having the largest gazelle population in Eastern Europe, some of its areas, like Lake Gizil-Gaz or Gushgol, also play important roles providing homes to wintering and migratory birds and are considered as important tourist sites. Unfortunately, like in every Caucasian country, financial problems associated with the transition period negatively affected the park's management system. For instance, according to the information provided from the senior staff of NP, the latest clean up of the feeding channel for Gizil-Gaz was carried out 12 years ago; the lake is almost inaccessible in bad weather and the use of secondary roads causes considerable damage to the ecosystem.

The implementation of the Management Improvement Project at Shirvan National Park is OSCE /*Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*/ and WWF's joint effort that also includes a number of supportive players from state institutions and experts. The 30 day long project aims to clean up the feeding channel for Lake Gizil-Gaz, to carry out maintenance on the water levels and the surviving neighboring wetlands, to construct bird hides and to improve access road conditions. All these activities have been launched after consultations with leading specialists from the Institute of Zoology of Azerbaijan Academy of Science. "This is the first project undertaken jointly by WWF Caucasus Programme Office and OSCE's representation in Azerbaijan and we are looking forward to our future cooperation. We hope that this important step proves to be a starting point for further mutual efforts in

favour of Azerbaijan's biodiversity" – said Thale Shamchiyev, WWF Caucasus Baku Office Director.



Lake Gizil-Gaz feeding channel, WWF Caucasus PO Photo library



Gazelles in Shirvan National Park, WWF Caucasus PO Photo library

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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## WWF CAUCASUS FINISHES THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

It all started in March 2004 and lasted for almost 8 months. In October, after what seems like numerous meetings of the staff members in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, hundreds of interviews, both internal and external, agreements and disagreements, workshops, millions of cups of tea and coffee and often hilarious moments the WWF Caucasus Programme Office completed the Organizational Assessment process.



OA working session in Tbilisi, WWF Caucasus PO Photo library/L.Pataraiia

Today, after its successful completion, all staff members unequivocally considered the whole process as a timely, intensive and productive undertaking; especially taking into account the fact that WWF Caucasus activities are not confined to Georgia only but encompasses the whole Caucasus ecoregion.

The main reason for the WWF Caucasus to carry out the self assessment was to find out more about the ways of dealing with growing staff numbers; funds and projects; to identify where to focus its efforts in order to strengthen the program; and to create a roadmap of how to move forward and have a clear understanding of our strengths and weaknesses.

The process relied heavily on the engagement and enthusiasm of the OA team and the whole WWF Caucasus staff in the offices of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia who spent many hours together to produce quality information on different organizational capacities. This information provided a good basis for the action plan, which will gradually help to develop its capacity where necessary and to increase its effectiveness and impact.

The process was also a very useful source of learning for WWF Caucasus. Lessons learnt were recorded and will be used to improve the process guidelines and tools, and in case of any interest can be communicated to other offices interested in undertaking OA.

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## WWF CAUCASUS NAMES THE MAN-IN-THE-FIELD OF THE YEAR

He is the most energetic, communicative, enthusiastic and mobile gentleman at WWF Caucasus who proudly carries the nickname, - Master of Ceremonies. People both knowing him well and not too well often swear that on many occasions they've seen him at several places at once; and those who have worked with him say that this man is simply unstoppable. He knows everybody and everybody knows him in the areas where he has worked and works presently; he lights up faces and people trust him as if they feel that he's on a mission; and rightly so.



Meet Zaza Gamtsemlidze, a biologist by education, botanist by specialty and WWF Caucasus's Man-In-The-Field of the year.

"I was just a small kid when my senior friends took me to the mountains for a week and that's when I got hooked, - says Zaza, - "Something went off inside of me and it was like a revelation that changed my whole life; those first

sparks of excitement later took me to the most amazing and extreme ecosystems." Zaza started to work for WWF Georgia during very turbulent times for the country but the grandeur and difficulty of the project, the implementation of the first national park in the Caucasus, intrigued him enough to completely dedicate the following five years of his life to it. It's hard to believe but as the park implementation coordinator, he has walked over almost the whole 76,000 hectares of the forests not to mention the six surrounding districts. And he turned out to be a man of many talents who seemed to be responsible for everything, from the shelters' construction to the trails' arrangement; all with amazing creativity.

"Nature is not something that consists of only flora and fauna; without humans it looks incomplete and that's why it is so important to spend much time with them in the areas we work. They learn a lot but you learn more and only that mutual knowledge makes a difference" – says Zaza.

With his last project, Sustainable Use of the Medicinal Plants Resources, Zaza went even further, both literally and figuratively. This time his office was three small villages in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a small number of families involved in each. The success of the project was crucial to WWF Caucasus Programme Office for it was an experiment that aimed at broadening the experience in the Caucasus and Zaza made it happen almost single-handedly, the way only man in the field of the year can accomplish things.

# WWF CAUCASUS NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH MS. TAMARA LEBANIDZE, GEORGIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTER, ON BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN PIPELINE

***Allow me to start with summer events when the security council decided to suspend the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline construction and once again ask you to discuss the problems that triggered the two weeks suspension of construction in the Borjomi region.***

Well, I would like to point to the fact that it was actually the Environmental Ministry's decision to halt construction of the pipeline. As you know, the Ministry issued the Environmental Permit that includes thirteen conditions, which can be considered as the heart of the whole document. According to it, BTC Co. has certain obligations to meet some of these conditions before the construction, some during the construction phase and some during the operational phase. But all this has somehow lingered in time and seems to have become pretty flexible; it means that in the case that work standards don't match up to one of the conditions of the permit the Georgian government has the right to demand from BTC Co. to meet these standards or introduce even stricter measures. Unfortunately, BTC-Co failed to meet the permit conditions to the financiers and the head office but it preferred to interpret this as if the permit had already allowed it to start construction. Now, if you look at the Georgian (original) and English versions you can notice that the Georgian version points at the permit document that consists of all thirteen conditions as being the most important part of it while the English version considers these conditions as supplementary activities. And I must say here that it hasn't happened by accident but rather BTC Co. interpreted it according to its needs and aspirations. Shortly put, BTC Co. reviewed and sent over the first two pages of the documents and according to them, the company had already acquired a permit to start construction. That caused a large misunderstanding among many and especially after we halted construction, for it triggered allegations that BTC had the permit and consequently the rights to start the construction but it simply was not true. We halted the

construction on the following grounds: 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph of the permit conditions deals with the possible security problems in the Borjomi region coming from various external factors, including third party involvement. Of course the competence of the ministry concerning the security issues is very limited and that's why we involved the Security Council in the process. They had to tell us whether BTC Co. has done the job according to the permit requirements and only after that could we either accept it or not. As for the process, usually it goes like this: BTC Co. presents a report on the work done, then the report goes to local experts and in any case where Georgia has not the relevant experience we involve foreign experts; then, when the experts have finished their work and provided the government with a final report we can figure out whether BTC Co. has done the job properly or not. That's what happened in August; BTC Co. sent us the report on security issues and as Georgia had no expertise in this matter we sent it to the United States and it was reviewed by one of the most well known and respected companies there. The report that we got back from them clearly stated that the measures undertaken by BTC Co. didn't correspond to the best available technologies. Consequently, BTC Co. had to work more on pipeline security and that's what we asked them to do but we got no response from them; a bit later we asked again and when we failed to receive a reply again we were literally forced to halt the works on the grounds of the violation of the 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph. It lasted for only two weeks and understandably the timeframe didn't allow BTC Co. to revise their security project thoroughly enough thus we came to an agreement that BTC Co. would present the revised integrated version before September; as the long delay was not in the interests of the Georgian government we granted them the right to continue construction but we didn't get the report in September either /I'm talking about the integrated security plan/ though they did present a slightly improved project. It went on like this for a while and as for a result at the moment we have a more or less satisfactory security plan; work goes on and hopefully BTC will improve it during the course of the time.



Qtsia-Tabatskuri area, WWF Caucasus PO Photo library / K. Tolordava

***Getting back to the 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph and especially the clause on the alternative routes, can you confirm that the Georgian government is absolutely convinced about the absence of the alternative routes?***

Both as a Georgian citizen and the Minister of Environment I'm absolutely convinced that it was possible to choose another, more secure route; it was an incorrect decision. As for the question, what could we do or not do about it let's be real; when I started my job as minister half of the construction work had already been done. It was an impractical dream to talk about route changes by then and here I have no intentions to talk about what happened back then, during the route selection process. The only thing I would like to say here is that despite the fact that the route was selected wrongly the environmental permit allows us to demand the maximum from BTC Co. I said it before and I'm saying it now: I can only imagine through what stress the environmental ministry had to go through then and the fact that it succeeded to put so much into the permit definitely facilitates our work now. If it weren't for this permit we would have no leverage to protect our rights. Today, if we want to eliminating the risks as much as possible /and the risks are serious especially in the Borjomi region and there's no "zero risk" at all/ we have to trust the environmental permit issued by the ministry back then.

***If I understand it correctly, in case of force majeure all responsibility lies on the Georgian government but it agreed to put a pipeline through the landslide and seismic areas in Borjomi region; I would especially like to mention the Kodiana area; Don't you agree that put mildly, there is a lack of logic in that decision?***

Of course the government is responsible for all the projects that are active in the country. And the government has to be clever enough to make projects as secure and safe as possible within the country. All our energy is directed towards that. We mention Borjomi a lot but it is not only important for its mineral water or biodiversity; that just goes without saying, but please let's not forget that the region is so steep in relief and geologically that makes it all twice as risky. I would like to answer your question by informing your readers of the ministry's role in the whole process: BTC Co. works on the project concerning the landslide areas; then the project goes to the experts and when they finish their job we give a green light to the ones that convince us that the risk factors are close to zero. We do our best to involve the best experts that'll allow us to continue with the project. And despite all these, something negative may still happen along the way and that's what the government is responsible for. In case the government decides to push the project to the point that its not done decently, then of course, the scale of responsibility gets higher. Despite the allegations, and you probably hear a lot of them, that the management plan in the landslide areas is not properly done, we do our best to satisfy the local experts as often as possible /we ask for maximally competent representatives/ and I can assure you that at this stage the landslide management plan is done properly. So, though I agree that the landslide areas are dangerous and risky I disagree with the idea that the project doesn't correspond to the higher standards needed. Trust me, among all experts we had at the latest meeting not a single one declared it a flaw.

***But I know that the local experts' assumptions concerning a number of burning issues radically differ from those of BTC Co. Did you have a chance to listen to***

***them and in case the answer is positive, how heavy do you think their argumentations are against the whole Borjomi issue including the Kodiana area?***

This is the most painful issue for us at the ministry; but at the same time we haven't heard of any solid counter arguments against the landslide area management plan. Of course, there are some details here and there to be worked on but in general even the opponents agree that the project is performed properly. But with that I must add that this fact doesn't eliminate the risk factors at all.

***It seems to me that explaining to the broader public the benefits of the pipeline turned out to be much easier than explaining the possible risks in the case of a spill; do you think that the Georgian government and BTC Co. did a good job of informing the public about the possible threats?***



Kodiana pass, WWF Caucasus PO Photo library / K. Tolordava

Unfortunately not... I think that there were numerous mistakes made by sides /government and BTC/. You mentioned that they succeeded in informing the general

public about the benefits of the pipeline but with that I'd like to say that it raised the expectations of the population too high. Without doubt, the project is of utmost importance for the country but when we start thinking about the economical benefits for Georgia, it is definitely overblown. To declare that the pipeline will "build Georgia," means that you are misleading your own population; it's just an overestimation. It is not true and when the pipeline is in place and it turns out that not only Georgian population but also those living in the pipeline area won't get rich then it is logical to expect some vehement reactions. It was a serious mistake from the very beginning. In addition the expectations regarding the locals' employment during the pipeline construction phase was raised far too high and that also turned out not to be justified. I think it was very important for both, BTC Co. and Georgian government to make this process as transparent as possible but unfortunately it didn't happen like this. Of course, there were some attempts to work with the population but I can't say that it was done on a professional level. Hence the results... Locals are dissatisfied and mostly rightly so and sometimes not rightly so but as far as nobody told them clearly what to expect a source of disappointment will unavoidably be there. In case they were informed correctly about the project we wouldn't have had to deal with the reactions we are having now. Again, I would like to say that the whole process wasn't done properly and I especially blame BTC Co. for that because as you might know this process requires a lot of money and professionals and Georgia had neither.



Tskhratskaro pass, WWF Caucasus PO Photo library / K. Tolordava

***Many think that the word "incompetence" has nothing to do with BP but it's been used a lot lately in connection with the first coating scandal and now the welding problems...What is the Georgian government's position in this case?***

In the first place I'll say that at this stage the project is on a high level and corresponds to international standards but we would like to demand from BTC Co. more than this because in fully developed countries there are no pipelines going through areas like Borjomi or in the rare cases it does, then they go through tunnels and all sorts of protective work to ensure all is perfect. That's why we aspire for more than international standards. Of course problems arise during the construction phase but again it is a part of the game. As for the welding and coating the first thing that BTC Co. were obliged to do was to inform the Georgian government about it. According to the signed treaty between Georgia and BP, let alone the transparency issues, it was its obligation to let the government know about the problems. Sadly, the Georgian government first heard about it from the media and NGOs. The present situation is as follows: we asked for the experts' accounts, and according to the World Bank experts and others, the technical problems are all dealt with. BTC Co. had to unearth the pipes, take care of the problems and bury them again though I think that it must be very hard to trace the defects of the buried pipes, plus we don't know which pipes have been removed and which have not. The same applies to the welding; at this stage all technical problems are supposedly solved. Saying this I must also note that the incident triggered the trust problem between the government and BTC Co. Lately, the attitude of the BTC Co. management towards the government of Georgia has changed a lot; I imagine that they didn't expect that the government would have created so many problems for them. Sadly, despite the fact that the BTC Co. top management has changed and there are new people in the company we are going through the trust deficit generated by BTC Co. Consequently, it obligates us to be more alert when it comes to the facts. I mean there two sides to it: technical and non-technical; technically the problem is solved but on a trust level BTC Co. faces a grave image problem indeed.

**Prepared by WWF Caucasus Programme Office**

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