Government exacerbates the sanctions on poaching

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“The government is working on exacerbation of the legislative regulations about poaching to ensure safety of rangers, forest guards and environment monitoring department officers. The Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources Gigla Agulashvili made a statement about it. He said the court is sometimes very loyal towards the violators and even returns the crime weapon to them.

“Recently, we buried a forest guard, who was killed by a poacher. During an accident in Lagodekhi, our employee was injured when he tried to combat illegal hunting; his life and health was under risk. We had similar incidents in the protected territories of Borjom-Kharagauli national park, Borjomi municipality forest. At the last government session we decided to draft legislative initiatives to ensure more safety of our rangers, forest guards, environment monitoring department officers and make the law more sever for better support of our employees. Here we will need everybody’s support on the levels of both legislative and executive governments. We will also need support from the judiciary authority, which is very loyal towards violators. The convicted persons manage to escape punishment through verbal rebuke, or 2 000 GEL fine and moreover, there are cases when the courts return the illegally hunted animals or wood. It is astonishing that sometimes they even return the guns to the violators,” Gigla Agulashvili said.

The Minister said their office will publish the names of the poachers even if they are government officials.

“We will keep that promise; we will be impartial, critical and will say everything honestly.

Whoever the poacher is – an official from municipal administration, regional administration, executive government or my friends, if somebody hunts illegally, their names will be published,” the Minister said.

He said in 2016, total amount of sanctions imposed on the law violators amounted to 4 500 000 GEL though the damage to the environment cost 8 000 000 GEL.

The environmental issues were discussed in Telavi. Senior officials of hunting farms from Kakheti region and representatives of local governments participated in the discussion.

According to the Association Green Alternative, for the past 10 years the poachers killed 3 rangers in Georgia; 6 environment monitoring officers died during implementing their professional duties. The Green Alternative requests to fix social benefits for the families of the late environment monitoring officers, who died during their professional activities.
Recently, several facts of poaching became public.

Bukhuti Metreveli killed a calf with unregistered hunting gun in Likheti village, Ambrolauri municipality.

In February, 2017 environment monitoring department officers arrested 6-member group of hunters near Chargali village, Dusheti municipality, who had already cut the killed calf.

Poacher Aleksandre Oganov, 32, who was convicted for the killing of a calf, said he heard an animal voice in the forest, thought it was a wolf and shot; finally, it turned up a calf.

Several days before, one more poaching fact was observed in Borjom-Kharagauli National Park, where doctors could not save the wounded calf.

In August, 2016, masked poachers, armed with Karabins, attacked rangers, who tried to arrest them. One of the rangers, Giorgi Gelashvili was wounded in the head. He needed operation in hospital. Police has not yet arrested the harassers. Moreover, the investigation has not yet questioned the rangers, who participated in the anti-poaching operation.

Until now, Bakur Bakashvili, 29, is working as an investigator in the Lagodekhi municipal police department, who was identified when poaching in the Lagodekhi reserved territory and even intimidated the rangers.

“...In near future, I am going hunting a pig together with my 7-years-old daughter. I warn all respective services in Georgia do not try to stop me. My daughter will be there … I will shoot anybody immediately and then let them investigate who protects me. I will finish everybody; let them forget their professional ambitions, bonuses and awards. I will send anybody to a coffin.”

The detective-investigator Bakashvili posted the above-written message on his facebook page on January 8, 2016 and soon deleted it after the ICK reported about it. After the publication, Minister of Internal Affairs Giorgi Mgebrishvili just rebuked Bakur Bakashvili; he was not even fired.

Not only investigators are poaching in the protected territories. On November 30, 2015, ICK published photos which show that Lagodekhi, Kvareli and Gurjaani district prosecutor Levan Gvedashvili hunted a bear, which is on the red list of endangered animals. Two months later, the prosecutor was ordered to write a resignation application. Investigation did not start against him. After a while, Gvedashvili got a job in the investigative service of the Ministry of Finances.

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