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Nodar Meladze questioned at SSG



► Nodar Meladze, The main producer of the channel TV1

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The main producer of channel TV1, Nodar Meladze was summoned to the state security service of Georgia over the story about the case of Vasambeg Bokov, who was detained during the special operation. The Director-General of Mtavari Arkhi, Nika Gvaramia said, Ingush ethnicity detained during a special operation on Kavtaradze Street planned to assassinate Giorgi Gabunia following the orders of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Head of the Chechen Republic.

The State Security Service of Georgia stated that the Counterterrorism Center of the State Security Service detained a citizen of the Russian Federation on charges of purchase and storage of forged documents envisaged by article 362, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

However, according to the exclusive interview of Vasambeg Bokov's brother given to Nodar Meladze, even though he watched the tape of 'his brother's' arrest a couple of times, he could not identify Bokov as his physical appearance did not match the person's appearance on the tape.

After releasing an episode of journalistic investigation on his programme-Nodar Meladze's Saturday, Meladze as well as the author of the investigative report- Maka Chikhladze were summoned to SSG to be interrogated.

According to Meladze, he had standard answers to all the questions due to his right as a journalist not to name the sources. "We are here to answer the questions, but the State Security Service is well aware of the fact that journal-

ists are protected by the law allowing us to refuse to disclose or testify about confidential information, including the identity of sources," he said.

As Meladze reported to the journalist after the interrogation, SSG was interested in whether the journalistic investigation was conducted by the initiation of the media or if it was ordered or asked by someone else. According to Meladze, they also wondered what kind of documentation the journalistic team owned or if they had any additional information that had not been released yet and whether they planned to conduct any further investigations. As he explained the answer to all these questions was that 50th article of the Criminal Procedure Code of

Georgia enables journalist not be obliged to be interrogated as witnesses, and to transfer an item, a document, substance or other object that contains information essential to the case with regard to the information obtained in the course of his/her professional activities.

Meladze clarified that his team works to air the second part of the journalistic investigation this Friday 'with many important details,' however, he does not feel obliged to share what information they possess and what they are about to gain. As he stated, the next episode of his journalistic investigation will expose whether the person arrested with the charge of Gabunia's liquidation is really Vasambeg Bokov or not.



► According to Meladze, he got the impression that investigators of SSG found out some new details from his reportage that they did not know before.

DRI's report on far-right groups in social media

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Research Institute summarized the results of 11-month long monitoring of far-right groups' discourse on social platforms and online media. During the monitoring process DRI media researcher studied and analyzed 20 235 posts on 12 far-right group leaders' and 15 far-right groups' Facebook pages, as well as 2 317 articles by 9 online media platforms' webpages.

The narrative of far-right leaders and groups was divided into 5 categories according to the main characteristics: xenophobic, homophobic, anti-liberal, anti-western, and nationalistic, DRI reports. Analysis of interactions with the posts revealed that nationalistic and anti-liberal discourse were especially popular. Nationalistic discourse is particularly characteristic for the following Facebook pages: 'Turkey is an Occupier', 'Silenced Georgians' and 'Kardhu', while anti-liberal discourse was characteristic for 'Anti-Liberal League', 'Alt-Club' and 'Geo Pepe.'

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Public Defender's Statement on Intimidation of University Entrants by De Facto Security Service of Occupied Akhagori



Public Defender of Georgia

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Public defender of Georgia (Ombudsman), Nino Lomjaria released a statement where it is said that on June 18, 2020, reports were spread by the media about the intimidation of university entrants by the de facto Security Committee of the occupied district of Akhagori.

'Unfortunately, the above information is another clear example of the challenges faced by our fellow citizens living in the occupied territories in terms of their access to education in their

mother tongue.'

Public Defender stated that violating children's universally recognised rights and persecution of schoolchildren and teachers on ethnic grounds and psychological pressure on them still continue.

According to the statement, since 2017, teaching in Georgian language has been completely prohibited in all primary schools in the occupied district of Akhagori and now Georgian is taught as a foreign language only in some schools. As Ombudsman reports, this fact negatively affects students' knowledge of Georgian language as well as the quality of education. As a result of a ban on education in the mother tongue, the number of schoolchildren is decreasing every year in Akhagori.

According to the statement, Public Defender has been talking about the right of education in mother tongue in her annual reports for years.

Currently, Georgian is taught only in 6 out of 7 schools of Akhagori and only from the 7th to 11th grade. In other cases,

only 5 hours is devoted to the Georgian language in a week. In 2019, 4 schools did not have 1st graders at all.

'The right to education is a right guaranteed by inter-

national human rights law. It is enshrined in binding agreements of both the UN and the Council of Europe. According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural

Rights, "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms," reads the statement.

Public Defender calls on the Georgian authorities to continue taking proactive actions to protect the rights of students and entrants living in the occupied territories and offering educational programmes to the students and teachers of occupied Akhagori according to their needs since the current situation irreparably damages the education and development opportunities of the young people.

As the statement reads, engagement of international organisations in this process is also important, in order to ensure that attention is permanently focused on protecting the right of education in the occupied regions, 'However, the latter is impossible without the restoration of human rights missions in the occupied territories and the support of local NGOs.'



Occupied Akhagori

DRI's report on far-right groups in social media

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Media monitoring revealed that far-right rhetoric of online platforms comes in two ways: openly pro-Russian (Sakinform, Georgia and the World, Sputnik Georgia, News front Georgia) and aggressively anti-liberal (Politcano, Alt-Info, Zneoba). Far-right groups and leaders use online platforms to 1) stir up anti-liberal sentiments among Georgian citizens; 2) portray Russia as a counterweight for 'depraved west'.

Social platforms are one of the main tools for far-right groups' to attract followers and spread their messages. DRI writes that media monitoring revealed 3 main characteristics

of Georgian far-right rhetoric: 1) arousing anti-western sentiments among the Georgian population and, thus, discrediting western institutions; 2) supporting Kremlin politics and spreading pro-Russian messages; 3) spreading irrational fears and hatred throughout society using false information and manipulation.

The key findings revealed during the monitoring, include: Far-right groups active in Geor-



Democracy Research Institut says nationalistic, anti-liberal content is especially popular among far-right groups in Georgia.



Social platforms are one of the main tools for far-right groups' to attract followers.

gia are tightly connected with each other through the action plans or strategy development processes; Such groups are attempting to demonize the U.S.A. and send anti-liberal messages; The far-right discourse on social platforms and online media is characterized, on the one hand, by ethnonationalism and, on the other hand, by distinctly pro-Russian messages; Local and international non-governmental organizations are actively demonized; George Soros is presented as the main instigator of depravity;

Study finds that the most

popular targets for far-right aggression are: feminists, immigrants, LGBT+ community, muslims, and liberals. The most popular guests in online media outlets are those politicians and leaders, who are creating the far-right agenda in Georgia.

As the organization reports, the monitoring was possible with the financial support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in the framework of the project "Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultrnationalism in Georgia."

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|----------|---------------|---------|------|
| THURSDAY | | JUNE 25 | |
| Day | Mostly sunny | High: | 32°C |
| Night | Wind | Low: | 20°C |
| FRIDAY | | JUNE 26 | |
| Day | Partly Cloudy | High: | 30°C |
| Night | Thunderstorms | Low: | 18°C |

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Refinancing rate reduced by 0.25%

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

According to the decision of the National Bank of Georgia (NBG), the interest rate on loans in Georgia has been reduced by several tens of thousands. The Monetary Policy Committee discussed the reduction of the refinancing rate by 0.25% at the meeting of 24th of June. The monetary policy rate was set at 8.25%.

In May, annual inflation was 6.5 percent. The NBG predicts that inflation will continue to decline for the rest of the year and will reach its target level in the first half of 2021. This has led to an increase in the cost of providing services. However, this has only a short-term effect on inflation. Maintaining inflation above the target for a long time carries risks of increasing inflationary expectations and that's why abovementioned decision was taken.

"Despite the decline, monetary policy remains tight, which will bring inflation back to target in the medium term. The pace of further normalization of monetary policy will depend on how quickly inflation expectations are reduced," NBG said in a statement.

Information on loans related to refinancing rates is in the loan agreement. Citizens can also get information about this detail by communicating with the bank.

In explaining the reasons for this decision, the National Bank focuses on the current and forecast inflation indicators.

Preliminary indicators give mixed signals regarding the expected reduction in aggregate demand. According to current estimates, economic activity in April fell by 16.6% year on year. At the same time, the volume of transactions with payment cards increased by 21% in May compared to the previous month, although the annual growth rate is still nega-



► NBG says planned loan subsidies are equivalent to further softening monetary policy.

tive. On the other hand, there is a high annual growth of cash in circulation, which indicates the intensification of economic activity. At the same time, in the wake of the gradual lifting of restrictions, some improvement in credit activity has been observed.

Overall, NBG's statement explains that these factors mean that there is considerable uncertainty about the scale of the expected decline in aggregate demand. In addition, significant fiscal stimulus is expected to have a positive effect on aggregate demand for the remainder of the year. Among them, the planned partial subsidy of the interest rate on mortgage loans. The latter is tantamount to further softening monetary policy.

Recall that Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia presented the real estate support program on 28th of May. The budget for the mortgage subsidy program will be ₾70 million and the co-financing of loans under it will last for 5 years.

The state will subsidize 4% interest rate on mortgage loans, subsidies are issued on loans not exceeding ₾200,000 and lasts for 5 years after taking the loan; the state stops subsidy if the refinancing rate falls below 5% (refreshes or exceeds); Program



► Banks and Society respond to the reduction of the monetary policy rate, write sharper decline desirable.

applies only to those who will take out a mortgage loan from June 2020 till January 2021 to buy a newly built apartment;

The state will also issue a loan guarantee in the amount of 20% of the loan for 5 years after taking the loan; All borrowers who receive a loan (June 2020-January 2021) of no more than ₾200,000 to purchase a newly built apartment will receive a guarantee, which will be extended to loans where the share is at least 10%. Budget of this program is ₾14 million.

According to forecasts, as a result of the economic downturn in trading partner countries, foreign demand will remain significantly weakened throughout the year. According to preliminary data, exports of goods in May decreased by 31% annually, while revenues from international travelers decreased by 97%. With the decline in export revenues,

imports in May fell by 34% year on year.

Recall that at the beginning of this year, the refinancing rate was 9% and it was reduced to 8.5%, and this time to 8.25%.

The NBG claims it will monitor the current economic processes and financial markets in the future and will use all the tools at its disposal to ensure price stability.

The next meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee will be held on August 5, 2020.

"Society and Banks" reviewed loans related to variable interest rates. According to them, as of

loan tied to the refinancing rate. A total of 800 contracts were signed. ₾15.882 thousand was borrowed by banks at an average of 16%. Also, 3,000 variable interest rate loans have been issued, the specific purpose of which is unknown. The total volume of these loans is ₾81.25 million.

Loans at variable interest rates as of May 1 accounted for 42.83% of the total loan portfolio issued in Lari. Most of them are business loans, while the lowest interest rates are on mortgages.

"As of May 1, both the loan portfolio and the number of contracts have been reduced. The interest rate has been increased from 12.88 to 13.49 on consumer loans and from 12.32 to 16 on car loans," the organization explains.

According to the Society and Banks, the decision of the National Bank's Monetary Policy Committee is cautious, since, as NBG also noted, inflationary pressures have eased and will return to target levels early next year. "One of the important factors in the decline may be the further softening of monetary policy. In the post-pandemic period, economic activity has declined significantly and the timeliness of monetary stimulus plays an important role in the rapid recovery of the economy," says the organisation.

As for the discussion of fiscal incentives (partial subsidies for mortgage loans) in the role of monetary policy, Society and Banks consider it to be wrong and 'it cannot have a large-scale impact on aggregate demand because it concerns a particular narrow segment and its lag time is unclear.'

"It is desirable for the NBG to reduce the monetary policy rate more sharply in the next sessions, which on the one hand will directly affect lending and on the other hand will raise positive expectations, as reducing the monetary policy rate is a signal of reduced investment risks," they said.

ADB RETAINS TOP SPOT IN AID TRANSPARENCY INDEX OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (24 June 2020) – The Asian Development Bank (ADB) retained its first place ranking in the 2020 Aid Transparency Index (ATI), an independent measurement of aid transparency released today at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. In the index, spearheaded by British nongovernment organization Publish What You Fund, ADB's sovereign portfolio is ranked in the "very good" transparency category of the ATI with the top score of 98.

"I take great pride in ADB's first position in an index that is playing a key role in helping to

promote greater transparency and openness among international agencies," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "ADB has continuously worked to improve the disclosure of its aid data in terms of quality and scope. Our top ranking reflects the dedication of staff, across the organization, to ensure adherence to aid transparency standards."

This is the second time that ADB ranked No. 1 in the ATI, which had its pilot run in 2011. The 2020 Index is the seventh full Index report to monitor and encourage progress toward aid transparency. Data collection

was carried out from December 2019 to April 2020, and focused on 35 indicators, grouped into five components: finance and budgets, joining up development data, organizational planning and commitments, project attributes and performance. The Index groups donors into five categories based on their overall scores (out of 100).

Ten other organizations among the 47 ranked were this year classified in the "very good" category with a score of at least 80% - the World Bank-International Development Association, the United Nations Development

Programme, the African Development Bank-Sovereign portfolio, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, the US Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Global Fund, UK Department for International Development, the Canada Global Affairs, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization.

The 2020 Aid Transparency Index reveals an improvement in overall transparency among the world's major aid agencies. Donors are publishing more, better quality data in the International Aid Transparency Initiative

(IATI) Standard, according to the publishers. All of the donors, except those in the "very poor" category, are publishing IATI data about their activities and policies, meaning their information is open, timely, comparable and centralized, meeting the international standard for aid transparency.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members - 49 from the region.