

POLITICS

The captain of the Georgian basketball team leaves for the Russian team



FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

EU, Sweden and Austria Announce €860,000 for tourism development initiatives in mountainous Georgia



FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Fiscal Year 2021 State and Foreign Operations Funding bill approved by the United States House Appropriations Subcommittee on July 6. It proposes making financial assistance for Georgia conditional on the fulfilment of several requirements. The law states that Georgia will receive at least \$132,025,000 in aid in 2021, although the preconditions for receiving assistance are also set out: \$ 88,025,000 from the European, Eurasian and Central Asian Relief Fund; \$ 5,700,000 to fight drugs; \$ 1,100,000 to fight terrorism; \$ 2,200,000 for military training and retraining; \$ 35,000,000 from the International Military Funding Program.

In particular, the transfer of 15% of this amount to Georgia may be suspended until the US Secretary of State decides that the Georgian government will take appropriate steps to fight corruption, strengthen democratic institutions, uphold the rule of law in the private sector and comply with internationally recognized standards.

According to the document, the transfer of 15% is not mandatory until the Secretary of State determines and submits a report to the committees on the fact that the Georgian government is taking effective steps: (A) for the strengthening of democratic institutions, as set forth in the accompanying report; (B) in the fight against corruption in government, including the application of anti-corruption laws

US may suspend 15% of Georgia's financial assistance



► The budget bill was approved by the subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee on July 6th. This time, the bill, with the criteria added and specified in it, has to be approved by the Assessment Committee.

and regulations; (C) to ensure that the rule of law in the private sector meets internationally recognized standards, including the right of foreign businesses to operate freely and without harassment, in order to fully realize the commercial and financial benefits of investing in Georgia.

The law says that the suspension of aid will not affect programs that promote democracy, the rule of law, civil society, the media, help a vulnerable part of the population and reduce gender-based violence. It is possible that the transfer of this 15% will not be stopped if the Secretary of State decides and tells the committee that this is important for the US state interests.

An explanation was added to the document submitted by the Budget Committee to the House of Representatives of the US Congress. The document was prepared by the chairman of the committee, Nita Lowe, a representative of the Democratic

Party, according to which the US State Department should assess Georgia's progress in complying with the draft law on how successful the election, court and other reforms are in Georgia. Also, how much the Georgian government is taking steps to limit the 'informal influence of the oligarchs on the Georgian government.'

15% of the funds allocated from the European, Eurasian and Central Asian Assistance Fund may not be given to the Georgian government until the Secretary of State determines and reports to the Budget Committee that the government is taking effective steps to strengthen democratic institutions, fight corruption and enforce the rule of law in the private sector in compliance with internationally recognized standards.

The updated version of the draft budget law also mentions the approval of the constitutional changes reflecting the

proportional electoral system by Georgia. Congressmen welcome the fact that most of Georgia's political spectrum supports these changes.

The Secretary of State will determine whether the Georgian government is taking effective steps to implement the electoral reform, release the judiciary from independence and interference, make the necessary reforms for transparency and access to public information, regulate the functioning of civil society, opposition parties and non-governmental media rights in the direction of limiting influence.

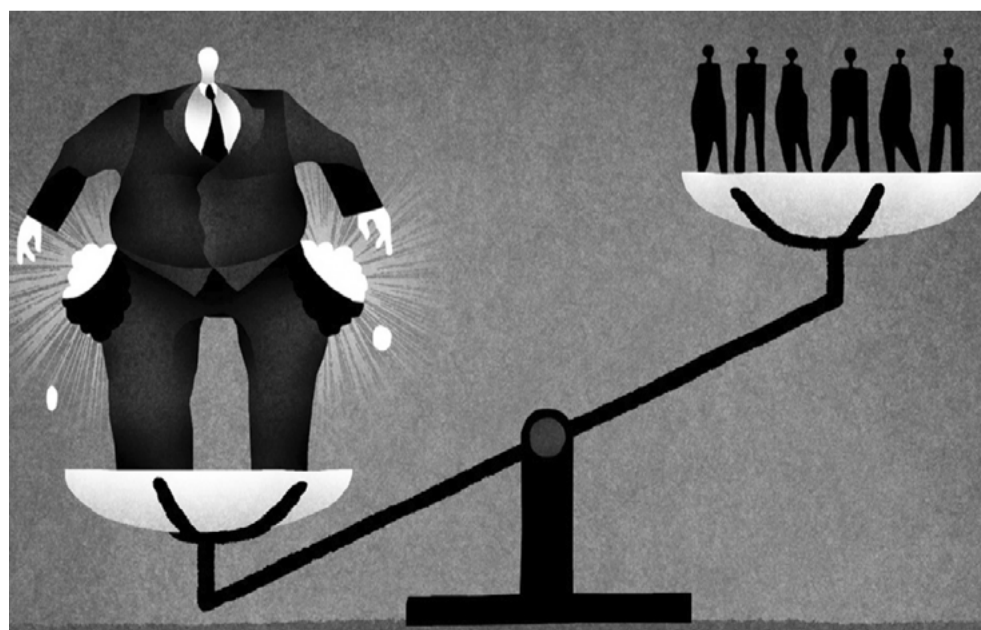
The committee calls on the Secretary of State and the USAID administration to prioritize programs aimed at strengthening the rule of law and strengthening democratic institutions in the country to promote transparent and well-functioning government.

"The threat posed by the Russian government to former communist countries, including Georgia, underscores the continued US support for democracy and the rule of law," reads the document.

The Georgian government says it is too early to discuss the final form of the bill in the House of Representatives. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the procedure is long-term and requires involvement of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The emergence of such sharp records in the most important budget bill for the United States is already a cause for alarm for the opposition, as they have not been able to recall a similar fact in the last three decades. At the same time, it is obvious to the opposition that after the approval of the subcommittee, the text of the bill has become even more difficult for Georgia.

The United States also cut aid to Georgia ahead of the 2003 elections. The reason for this was the slowdown in reforms and the development of the economy.



► Added to the list of criteria are the requirements for limiting the influence of informal governance of oligarchs or for the effective implementation of electoral reform. Photo: Oxfam

The captain of the Georgian basketball team leaves for the Russian team

THE NATIONAL BASKETBALL FEDERATION CONFIRMS THE TRANSFER OF TORNIKE SHENGELIA TO CSKA MOSCOW.

BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

On July 9th, it was officially confirmed that Georgian national basketball team player Tornike Shengelia would continue his career in CSKA Moscow. The information, which was spread a few weeks ago, was officially confirmed yesterday by Moscow.

Regardless of his success, he's being harshly criticized for leaving the Georgian team, but the Georgian Basketball Federation has come to his defense.

Georgian Basketball Federation states that Tornike Shengelia will continue to protect the dignity and interests of his homeland and the team. The federation also responds to the transfer of Tornike Shengelia, the former captain of the Georgian basketball team, to CSKA Moscow on its Facebook page.

"As before, regardless of which club he was in, Tornike has always defended and will defend the dignity and interests of his homeland and the national team. The captain of the Georgian national team will repeatedly cheer us on with his successful sports career and with his leadership the Georgian national team will definitely achieve significant victories! Good luck Toko!" reads the statement.



► The Georgian Basketball Federation approves Shege

Shengelia also made a statement, saying he is happy to join the reigning Euroleague champions and looks forward to playing alongside great players.

"I hope to have great success with CSKA in the Euroleague and VTB League," stated Shengelia.

Despite all the support from his teammates, as well as the federation, he is still receiving criticism. The President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili, criticizes the former captain of the Georgian basketball team for joining the Russian team. The president posted her statement on Facebook.



► The president of Georgia criticized the 28 year-old basketball player for his decision.

"It is unfortunate and unacceptable for me as the President of Georgia that the captain of the Georgian basketball team has decided to move to Moscow's CSKA."

The young player had a contract with Spanish Basconia until 2022, however, the Mus-

covites managed to solve everything. The Georgian legionnaire had been playing for the Basque club since 2014, and most recently, his club won the Spanish title after a 10-year hiatus. Shengelia scored 14 points in the final against Barcelona. e final against Barcelona.

European Investment Bank and Bank of Georgia join forces to support businesses during COVID-19 crisis

The European Investment Bank Group and the Bank of Georgia have signed a guarantee agreement of up to €60 million, backed by the InnovFin SME Guarantee Facility (InnovFin SMEG).

InnovFin SMEG covers 50% of every loan disbursed by the Bank of Georgia and targets small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and mid-caps that require investment and working capital to finance research, development and innovation activities. This operation is covered by the 'EU4Business' initiative.

Furthermore, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the facility also covers 80% of loans provided by the Bank of Georgia to SMEs and mid-caps impacted



by the coronavirus crisis for their working capital needs.

"Small and medium businesses are key to Georgia's economic development, and many of them have been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis," said EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell. "We are very happy that the European Union, via our bank the EIB, has been able to facilitate further access to finance to help them overcome current challenges and to innovate and develop for the future."

FRIDAY		JULY 10	
Day		Rain	
		High: 30°C	
Night		Thunderstorms	
		Low: 21°C	
SATURDAY		JULY 11	
Day		Rain	
		High: 26°C	
Night		Thunderstorms	
		Low: 20°C	

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**
Tamar Gachechiladze
 Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
 E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
<http://www.messenger.com.ge/>

Nino Metreveli
 Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
 Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
 Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
 Design and Layout

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper,

and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR – 3.0594 | EURO – 3.4507 | GBP – 3.8350 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE – 4.3040 | SWISS FRANC – 3.2492 |

EU, Sweden and Austria Announce €860,000 for tourism development initiatives in mountainous Georgia

SUMMER SEASON OPENS IN MOUNTAINOUS GEORGIA



► Gakharia: "Let's discover Georgia and the places we have heard and read about, but we have never seen."

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Tourism Development InitiativeIn the frame of the GRETA project (Green Economy: Sustainable Mountain Tourism and Organic Agriculture), the EU, Sweden and Austria have launched the Tourism Development Initiative (TDI), a call for proposals for grants in the area of tourism development in the municipalities of Mestia, Lentekhi, Tsageri, Oni, Ambrolauri, Sachkhere, Chiatura and Tkibuli.

Tourism Development Initiative (TDI) support per applicant or group of applicants will be granted between €5,000 and €50,000 with the co-financing share at minimum 10% of the total budget. The duration of a project must be at least 6 months and may not exceed 24 months. All TDI activities must be finished by 30th September 2022.

Deadline for submission of the application form and supporting document for this call is August 3rd.

Ambassador of the EU to Georgia Carl Hartzell stated that tourism is a key opportunity for the development of Georgia's mountainous regions. "The EU, together with Sweden and Austria, is launching this call within the framework of the GRETA project to support the recovery of tourism operators and to allow them to develop and expand their services and activities for the future," he said, adding that the focus will be on environmentally friendly, community-based initiatives.



► "We are launching a new program 'Travel for Georgia' in connection with domestic tourism," PM announced.

Ulrik Tidestrom, Ambassador of Sweden to Georgia emphasised: "With this joint Team Europe effort, Sweden is proud to support sustainable tourism development in Georgia. Tourism is a rapidly developing sector which is a significant contributor to Georgia's economy and generates jobs and incomes for people in Georgia."

According to him, with this call for tourism development initiatives, parties aim for empowering and giving more opportunities and hope to entrepreneurs in sustainable mountain tourism in the selected municipalities."

Austrian Ambassador to Georgia Arad Benko underlined that Sustainable Mountain Tourism is the priority sector for Austria in cooperation with Georgia, and in the middle of this crisis 'we see that support to this field has become essential.'

Benko announced that the objective of the TDI is to facilitate an improvement of the business environment and create income-generating opportunities in sustainable mountain tourism for reducing poverty and exclusion in the selected mountain areas of Georgia, namely Racha-Lechkhumi, Svaneti and Upper Imereti.

GRETA, a four-year project of Sustainable Mountain Tourism & Organic Agriculture, focuses on the support of Georgian small and medium enterprises to professionalise and scale up. The project is co-funded by the EU and the two EU member states Sweden and Austria.

Note that Mountain Resorts Development Company of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development will open the summer season in Gudauri, Bakuriani and Svaneti on July 10th. During the summer season all the ski lifts in Bakuriani and Gudauri will be open daily from 11:00 to 17:00. Mestia-Hatsvali connecting and Zuruld ropeways will be operational in Svaneti from 10:00 to 16:30.

In order to develop and popularize mountain resorts, it is necessary for winter resorts to become four-season. In this direction, a 6000 meter international bicycle lane has been arranged in Bakuriani (Didveli). The bicycle lane is also functioning in Gudauri, the length of which is 5000 meters. The trails are designed for both professional and amateur cyclists. For vacationers in Bakuriani (Didveli), the first additional attraction of ski resorts in the South Caucasus, the so-called 'Toboggan,' mountain sledge will work.

In order to popularize the ski resorts of Georgia, a functionally and informatively perfect application has been created, which unites four mountain resorts under one brand: Gudauri, Bakuriani, Goderdzi, Svaneti.

The app is a unique guide, so it provides customers with comprehensive information about mountain resorts, both in winter and summer.

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the mountain resorts of Georgia, the Mountain Resorts Development Company has created relevant regulations, which include: disinfection with a disinfectant solution at the end of the rope day, admission of 4 people with facemasks in gondola (closed rope) on a chess principle. As for the open chair type ropes - 3 people will be allowed on the 6-seater ropeway, and 2 people on the 4-seater ropeway, in case of a family, plus a child. Consumers are required to cover a distance of 2 meters, treat their hands with disinfectant after paying at the cash register, and undergo thermal screening before entering the ropeway.

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia has announced a new state program to promote domestic tourism 'Travel for Georgia.' At the gov't session he urged the public to be actively involved in the program.

"Thanks to the pandemic, we have the opportunity to rediscover our country and prepare to be the best guides for foreign visitors when international tourism is fully open. Therefore, we must actively use this time, we must help the field, tourism," the PM said.

It was also announced that from Monday, the 13th, the ban on cultural events in open spaces will be lifted.