

POLITICS

The President of Georgia welcomes the Head of the EU Monitoring Mission, Ambassador Marek Szczygiel



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ECONOMICS

Energy companies won't be able to sell its shares without GNERC

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Russia's official position on Zaza Gakheladze's kidnapping by occupation forces



► Russia says it's 'concerned' by Georgia's 'provocative actions at borders' with occupied Tskhinvali, Abkhazia.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs publishes a statement, in its estimation, about Georgian citizens violating the border. Most of the text is dedicated to Zaza Gakheladze, who was detained by the occupation forces on July 11th. The Russian Foreign Ministry describes the circumstances of the arrest and accuses Tbilisi of staging the play.

The official Russian version of Zaza Gakheladze reads as follows: "He joined a group of Russian border guards operating under an agreement between Russia and the Republic of South Ossetia, which provides for the joint protection of the South Ossetian border since April 30, 2009. He tried to hide and fired about 10 shots at Russian servicemen. He was lightly wounded during the return fire. The offender was given first aid, after which he was placed in a hospital and is still there."

The Russian Foreign Ministry points out that Gakheladze admitted the fact in his testimony and deliberately crossed the border into South Ossetia.

As the ministry notes, sometimes, despite such serious provocative violations and the Russian side's intention to resolve the issue as non-politicized and flexible as possible, "unfortunately, Tbilisi is once again trying to stage a political spectacle by shifting the responsibility to others."

The Russian Foreign Ministry then "urged the Georgian authorities to put an end to provocative actions and statements, use all available dialogue formats with Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia," including the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), Geneva International Discussions and the so-called informal Karasin – Abashidze meetings, "to solve existing problems in a mutually beneficial constructive manner."

Moscow also slammed "the provocative comments of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, which, in the manner that has become traditional for the Americans, without understanding the essence of what is happening, fence off their Georgian protégés and put all the blame on Moscow and Tskhinvali." This, Russian Foreign Ministry maintained, undermines the position of the U.S. as an impartial participant in GID.

Zaza Gakheladze, 33, a resident of Kvemochala, went to Skhvil Castle with a friend from Samtavisi on the morning of July 11 to pick mushrooms. A friend fell behind on the road, while Zaza continued on his way across the castle. It is a long distance from the castle to the occupied village of Akhmaja and the people of Kvemochala have been there many times. Suddenly, representatives of the occupation forces appeared and opened fire in the direction of Gakheladze. His friend, who was behind, managed to escape, but Gakheladze was injured in the leg and could not move. The so-called guards arrested him and took him in the direction of Akhlagori.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia condemns the wounding and illegal detention of a Georgian citizen in the Kaspı municipality by the Russian occupation forces. The agency calls this fact a dangerous act and notes that the aim is to escalate the situation during the pandemic and destabilize it.

"Opening fire towards the local peaceful population by the occupation is yet another example of Russian Federation violating, EU-brokered cease-fire Agreement reached on August 12, 2008," the statement said.

US State Department spokesman Morgan Ortagus responded to the wounding and arrest of Gakheladze, on his Twitter page, writing that the United States



► On July 9th, the Foreign Ministry continued, another Georgian citizen was also detained "on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan, this time deep inside the Russian territory – 9 km away from the border.."

condemns the incident and demands the immediate release of the detainee.

The United States Embassy in Georgia also responded to the fact on July 12th. The embassy assessed the shooting and arrest of a Georgian citizen as a provocative act aimed at aggravating the situation and demanded the immediate release of Gakheladze.

"Such a sharp reaction from Russia is, first of all, a response to our action, to the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which we immediately made about the illegal detention, wounding and transfer of Gakheladze to Tskhinvali," Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani said in response to the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The Minister explains that the issue of Gakheladze's abduction was one of the main topics of all the meetings held in Brussels, both at the NATO-Georgia Commission and the European Commission and

the European Parliament. Official Tbilisi is already waiting for sharp assessments in the format of the OSCE Permanent Council.

According to Zalkaliani, the irritation of the Russian Federation was caused by international mobilization.

"At our initiative, this issue is being discussed in the format of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, where we are also waiting for very harsh statements from the EU and other partner countries," Zalkaliani said, adding that this puts Russia in a position of self-righteousness, and their irritation, aggressive tone and attempt to shift focus to another direction is seen in their statement.

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Russia continues to use all the levers at its disposal even during a pandemic to prevent the peaceful development of Georgia.

The President of Georgia welcomes the Head of the EU Monitoring Mission, Ambassador Marek Szczygiel

ACCORDING TO THE PRESS SERVICE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION, DURING THE MEETING, WHICH WAS HELD TODAY AT THE ORBELIANI PALACE, THE DIFFICULT SITUATION ON THE OCCUPATION LINE WAS DISCUSSED.



BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

The President Salome Zurbishvili made a statement about the necessity to increase the mandate of the monitoring mission so that the mission can control the situation more effectively, which will bring more peace to the administrative line and enable our citizens on both sides of the administrative line to live in more normal conditions.

“We are all witnessing the frequency of kidnappings, we

know how difficult the humanitarian situation is beyond the administrative line.”

On July 11th, Zaza Gakeladze was abducted by the occupants in Kaspi and wounded with a firearm. According to the Acting State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Lia Gigauri, he is in Akhagori hospital and his life is not in danger.

The President of Georgia reaffirmed the support of the new Head of the EUMM for him and the Presidential Administration in order to create all the conditions for the implementation of the mission’s mandate.

The Head of Mission provided the President with comprehensive information on the mission’s activities, noting that the EUMM is the only international observer mission on the ground capable of presenting objective, fact-based assessments and

reports. Szczygiel thanked the president for her appreciation of the mission, for her interest in the operational activities, and for wanting the work to be in line with the original mandate that covers the entire territory of Georgia.

The meeting also focused on future plans, the Geneva talks and other formats that should be activated.

EUMM is an unarmed civilian monitoring mission in Georgia. It was established by the European Union on September 15th 2008. The mission has been conducting 24-hour patrols, paying special attention to the territories adjacent to the administrative borders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The mission’s efforts mainly include monitoring the situation on the ground and reporting on incidents.



FRIDAY JULY 17

Day ☁ Clouds
High: 33°C

Night 🌙 Mostly clear
Low: 22°C

SATURDAY JULY 18

Day ☀ Sunny
High: 36°C

Night 🌙 Clear skies
Low: 24°C

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Energy companies won't be able to sell its shares without GNERC

THE NORM WAS ADOPTED IN THE FIRST HEARING.



when balance is achieved

► Legislative changes authorize the GNERC to prohibit the alienation of more than 5% of stocks to companies operating in the energy and water supply sectors.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

At the plenary session of the parliament, the deputies approved in the first reading the bill, according to which, the companies in the energy sector will be obliged to get the consent of the Energy Regulatory Commission before the sale of the shares. This refers to changing the share of companies by at least 5%. The bill is being considered in an expedited manner in the parliament and 2 more hearings are needed. At the first hearing, 81 MPs supported, none against.

The Chairman of the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission (GNERC), Davit Narmania said that the purpose of the bill is to inform the commission about the change of shares so that the results of the transaction are not reflected on the customer. The company is looking at profits from the imposed tariffs, and according to the

GNERC, such a deal may have burdened the citizens.

According to Narmania, the main essence of the amendments to the Law on Energy and Water Supply is to ensure openness and transparency, when more than 5% of the shares in the energy system are sold.

The opposition suspects that the introduction of such regulations will reduce investment in the market and interfere with property rights.

At the committee meeting, Narmania said the bill should be passed in an expedited manner because small gas distribution companies are going to sell their shares and it is important to meet the law in time.

“Openness and transparency will be ensured on the one hand and the regulatory commission will be informed on the other hand. This will be a certain insurance mechanism to prevent unwanted occupant countries or others from entering the energy

system, which may harm the country's energy security interests. In addition, it will hinder the delivery of quality and normal services,” Narmania said.

Georgian Energy and Water Regulatory Commission is an independent legal entity under public law under Georgian law. The commission is not subject to

anyone and one of its main functions is to set consumer tariffs. It can satisfy or refuse a water, electricity or gas distribution company to increase the fee. The decision of the commission may be appealed in court. “The draft law on energy and water supply is necessary in order to see the management of our criti-

cal infrastructure and make this issue more transparent,” said Natia Turnava, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development.

The Minister is confident that the right balance will be struck between business interests and the interests of the state.



► “The law does not apply to individuals and legal entities of a member state of the European Energy Community,” Narmania explained.

From golden crops to green schools

UNDP AND GEF SUPPORT COMMUNITY PROJECTS FOR GREEN URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

TBILISI. 15 July 2020 – Green urban development, environmental education and sustainable agriculture are in the focus of the local projects supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in different regions of Georgia. Aiming to address the critical environmental issues which have a direct impact on people's lives, civil society and community organizations across the country are working with people directly to protect unique landscapes, promote sustainable farming, restore and preserve biodiversity and engage children in environmental education. These local projects are part of the GEF Small Grants Programme implemented by UNDP in co-

operation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

UNDP Head Louisa Vinton and Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture Nino Tandilashvili visited the village of Asureti today to take part in the harvest of Georgian endemic wheat varieties – Dika and Shavpkha – that are being preserved and cultivated by the Association of Georgian Wheat Growers.

With UNDP and GEF support, the Association regenerated endemic and landrace seeds in nursery plots to grow these unique grains on up to 50 hectares of land. In addition, training and consultation were provided to wheat growers aiming to engage more farmers in reviving and preserving Geor-

gia's agricultural heritage.

Georgia's landrace and endemic wheat, praised for its agricultural resilience, nutritive value and flavour profiles, is attracting growing attention from wheat producers and bread-bakers. Regeneration of these unique grains is listed as a priority in Georgia's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and Agriculture Development Strategy. Some of the endangered wheat varieties were submitted for nomination to the UNESCO Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

“Georgia's agricultural tradition goes back thousands of years,” said Deputy Minister Tandilashvili. “As we are developing 21st-century agriculture, founded on the principles of sustainable farming and modern

technologies, we can breathe new life into endemic wheat varieties to benefit Georgian farmers and preserve our rich biodiversity.”

“The pandemic and the visible destruction caused by climate change offer proof that we have pushed the limits of nature too far,” said UNDP Head Louisa Vinton. “Programs like this show us hands-on ways that we can try to restore balance, building green models of sustainability in partnership with local communities and organizations.”

Earlier in July, Vinton visited school gardens organised in three secondary schools in Tbilisi with UNDP and GEF support. Aiming to promote environmental education and increase urban green spaces,

the “Child and the Environment” association teamed up with school authorities and the administration of the Saburtalo district of Tbilisi. The project provides some 150 school children – 50 of whom are children without parental care – with an opportunity to relax in a green oasis during the school day, learn how to take care of plants and grow their own fruits and vegetables.

Since its launch in Georgia in 2012, the GEF Small Grants Programme has funded 71 environmental initiatives with a total value exceeding USD 1.6 million. Along with the environmental benefits, these local projects contribute to the reduction of rural poverty, improvement of livelihoods, gender equality and education.