

## POLITICS

Viktor Dolidze holds a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg



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## ECONOMICS

Annual inflation rate stood at 4.8% in August

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## MIA: Foreign cyber-attack carried out to obtain information from Lugar laboratory databases



► According to the MIA, as a result of a cyber attack from abroad, the attackers obtained and disseminated medical documents and important information related to the management of the pandemic.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has issued a statement on a cyber attack from a foreign country, as a result of which the attackers obtained and disseminated important medical documents and pandemic related medical records stored in the databases of the Richard Lugar Laboratory Research Center. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the cyber attack was carried out on September 1st, 2020, on the computer system of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia by one of the foreign special services.

"Part of the authentic documentation obtained as a result of illegal access to the computer system is currently uploaded on one of the foreign websites and is available to the mass user. Also, the website uploads falsified documents, which are deliberately falsified to intimidate, confuse, and distrust the public."

According to the evidence obtained at this stage, the cyber attack was carried out by one of the foreign special services. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia will appeal to the relevant services of the partner countries to provide effective assistance in the rapid and effective investigation of this complex and specific crime.

The Cybercrime Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched an investigation into the unauthorized access of the computer system of the Ministry under Article 284 of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

Shvitkin told RIA Novosti that Novichok is a group of poisonous substances that Russia doesn't produce, however similar labs in Georgia and the United States produce it. On September 2nd, the German government announced that a neural-paralytic substance had been found

in the blood of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

"We do not release such chemicals on our territory, as far as information is concerned, such weapons, such poisonous substances are on the territory of Georgia from the US, laboratories and the United States," Shvitkin told RIA Novosti.

He said Russia was ready to intervene in the investigation if necessary, adding that the Russian Prosecutor General's Office had asked Germany to provide expert answers.

"The allegations against us are absurd and do not contain any arguments, no evidence. Once again, our country is being attacked, as if to continue the accusations of Skripal poisoning, as if Navalny and responsibility were being transferred to us," said the Russian Duma deputy.

Alexei Navalny fell ill on a plane while flying from Tomsk to Moscow on August 20th. The plane made an emergency landing in Omsk, where the politician was taken to hospital. He was later transferred to Berlin. Navalny, 44, is in a coma in a hospital in Berlin.

Commenting on the allegations made by Duma deputy Yuri Shvitkin, Irakli Sesiashvili, chairman of the Georgian parliament's defense and security committee, said the attack on Lugar's lab was part of a Russian hybrid war that discredited relations between Georgia and the United States.

"Lugar Laboratory is unique not only in Georgia but in the whole Transcaucasia and it only serves public health," Sesiashvili commented.

According to him, we periodically see targeted attacks by Russian officials on this laboratory. These are disinformation statements aimed at discrediting the relations between Georgia and the US on the one hand, and the existence of certain biological threats in Georgia on the other



► Deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Yuri Shvitkin told RIA Novosti that Georgia might be involved in the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny by Novichok and said that toxic substances from the Novichok group are manufactured in Georgia and the USA, not in Russia.

hand, which is complete absurdity and nonsense.

"This is part of a hybrid war, about which we always have a very sharp statement, as the US embassy has repeatedly stated," said Sesiashvili.

According to the First Vice-Speaker of the Parliament Giorgi Volski, the statement of the Deputy Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Russian Duma, "is an obvious political demarche, threats, as well as borderization and kidnapping of people."

Note, that Novichok was created in the Soviet Union and its research continued in Russia. Its use as a substance of nervous action for combat purposes is prohibited.

As for Lugar Laboratory, the US-funded Lugar Public Health Center in Tbilisi has been the target of disinformation by the Kremlin and its affiliates or media outlets in Tbilisi for years. Russian propaganda at various times claimed that Americans were conducting experiments on Georgian citizens; Biological weapons

are made; Zika virus-infected mosquitoes or Asian pheasants are spread in Abkhazia; In the Tskhinvali region - swine flu.

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Director General of the NCDC suggests that the purpose of the cyber-attack on Lugar's laboratory was not to obtain information, since it's public.

He recalled the accusation of Shvitkin. "Because Lugar is a Georgian-American project, they want to stir up with Novichok. I am directly saying that this is another nonsense, another gossip, another very cheap 'trick' that they want you to somehow discuss," said Gamkrelidze.

Paata Imnadze, Deputy General Director of the Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, responded to the cyber attack on Lugar's laboratory in a conversation with Rustavi 2.

"I'm not afraid of anything, because we have no secret experiments...We have no time for this, we have work to do. We are fighting COVID, that's our business now," Imnadze commented.

# Ambassador Dolidze meets with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg

GEORGIA'S REPRESENTATIVE TO NATO VIKTOR DOLIDZE SPOKE WITH NATO SECRETARY-GENERAL JENS STOLTENBERG ABOUT GEORGIA-NATO RELATIONS AND THE NEAR FUTURE.



► The Secretary-General and Dolidze discussed the Importance of NATO 2030.

BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

At a meeting on September 3rd, the Ambassador of Georgia thanked the Secretary-General for the strong support of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process and the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Ambassador of Georgia reviewed the ongoing democratic reforms in the country,

preparations for the parliamentary elections, practical aspects of Georgia's membership in NATO, cooperation in the field of Black Sea security, and the possibility of official visits in the near future.

Victor Dolidze handed over to the NATO Secretary-General the letter of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Davit Zalkaliani, in which the Georgian side officially expressed its desire to

be involved in the NATO 2030 process aimed at strengthening the Alliance.

According to the Ministry of foreign affairs of Georgia, in turn, the NATO Secretary-General thanked the Georgian side for its significant contribution to NATO missions and operations. Jens Stoltenberg noted that Georgia is an outstanding partner country of the Alliance, with which intensive

political and practical cooperation is underway, and pledged further support to Georgia on its path to NATO integration.

He also spoke about the importance of the NATO 2030 process and plans. General Ben Hodges, the former Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces in Europe, also spoke up about Georgia and NATO.

"Georgia should be a Member

of NATO now. Black Sea should be the top regional priority for NATO now. The Kremlin uses the Black Sea and its illegally annexed Crimean bases as the 'launching pad' for its malign efforts in Syria (which put 4 million refugees into TUR/Europe) and Libya," said Hodges.

Hodges made this statement on Twitter, saying that Georgia has to become a part of NATO.



► The NATO Secretary-General thanked the Georgian side for its significant contribution to NATO.

## Georgia successfully adopts legislation on path to energy-efficient future

After six years of work, Georgia now has energy efficiency legislation that will help the country transition to a green economy. The new legal acts will allow the country to make energy savings of 14% by 2025, helping it to meet its international obligations in fighting climate change, increase its energy security and strengthen its energy links with the EU. The new legislation will also help Georgia to improve the energy performance of new constructions and building retrofits in line with EU standards.



The Law on Energy Efficiency and the Law on Energy Performance of Buildings were developed by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia in collaboration with the Energy Community Secretariat. Georgia also received technical assistance by the EU-supported initiative 'EU4Energy' and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The two legal acts transpose the EU directives in this field.

As a result of the new legislation, Georgia has gained popularity amongst investors and is currently expecting an investment of €40 million from the EBRD to provide 250 public buildings in Georgia with energy-efficient retrofitting.

**FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 4**

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 31°C

Night Clear  
Low: 19°C

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**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 5**

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 32°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 20°C

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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

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## Annual inflation rate at 4.8% in August

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office (Geostat) released its annual inflation figures for August 2020. According to the document, the annual inflation rate in Georgia last month was 4.8%. At the same time, the most significant impact on the rise in prices was the rise in food and non-alcoholic beverage prices.

**Food & Non-Alcoholic Beverages:** Prices in the group rose 9.2%, which was reflected in annual inflation at 2.88% points. Prices increased for the following subgroups: fruit and grapes (18%), coffee, tea and cocoa (14.9%), fish (13.5%), oil and fat (11.9%), milk, cheese and eggs (11.7%), mineral and source Water, non-alcoholic beverages and natural juices (9%), bread and bakery products (9%), meat and meat products (8.8%), sugar, jam and other sweets (4.5%);

**Alcoholic beverages, tobacco:** 8.9% increase in prices was observed in the group. Accordingly, the group's contribution to the annual index was 0.6 percentage points. Prices increased for both tobacco products (13.4%) and alcoholic beverages (5.2%);

**Furniture, household items, home care:** prices in the group increased by 9.7% which was reflected in the overall index by 0.58 percentage points. Prices increased for subgroups: heating and cooking appliances, refrigerators, freezers, washing machines, and other household appliances, including installation and repair (11.3%), glassware, tableware, and household utensils (9.5%).

According to the report published by Geostat, in the second quarter of this year, compared to the same period last year, the



► The most significant impact on the rise in prices was the rise in food and non-alcoholic beverage prices.

output of the business sector decreased by 18.3% and amounted to €9.2 billion.

The trend of decreasing output of the business sector was divided in the first quarter of 2020 when its volume decreased to €10.3 billion.

According to Geostat, the output of the business sector grew the largest volume, by 46.9% in the mining and quarrying sector. Production volume increased by 35.8% in the rural, forestry, and fish farming sectors. Also, growth was observed in the education sector, where output increased by 6.8% to 126.0 million. As for the decrease in output, the sectors with the provision of accommodation (decrease - 55.7%) and the sectors of administrative and support services (decrease - 54.4%) decreased the most.

According to the data of the second quarter of 2020, the struc-

ture of production output of the business sector by sectors is as follows: Manufacturing industry - €2.2 billion (share in total output - 23.5%); Wholesale and retail trade - €1.6 billion (17.7%); Construction - €1.5 billion (16.2%); Transport and warehousing - €0.5 billion (9.9%); Other sectors - €3.0 billion (share in total output - 32.8%)

The volume of total salaries issued by the private sector in Georgia has decreased. According to a report, private sector labor expenditures in the second quarter of 2020 amounted to €2.15 billion, which is €304 million, or 12.4% less than in 2019.

At the same time, the report on the activities of enterprises published by Geostat shows that 631.8 000 people were employed in the business sector in the second quarter, which is 8.1% less than in the same period last

year. Among them, the number of employees (the number of employees who receive a contract salary) amounted to 599.5 thousand, which is 7.2% less than the previous year.

According to Geostat, the average monthly salary in the business sector in the second quarter of 2020 was €1,175, which is €65.5 less than the previous year

Geostat has released a report on the results of enterprises, which shows that in the second quarter of 2020, the turnover of the business sector decreased by 11.5% compared to the same period last year and amounted to €22.3 billion.

It should be noted that the turnover of the business sector in 2019 was characterized by an upward trend and reached a maximum of €31.4 billion in the fourth quarter. As for 2020, this figure decreased to €26.0 billion

for the first quarter and to €22.3 billion in the second quarter.

Turnover increased the most, by 47.2% in the mining and quarrying sector. Also, the volume of turnover increased by 37.1% in the rural, forestry, and fisheries sectors. As for the downward trend, the administrative and support service sector decreased the most (decrease of 66.7%) and the accommodation sector (decrease of 65.7%).

According to Geostat, 76.8% of the total turnover of the business sector comes from the capital, Kvemo Kartli - 5.2%, Adjara - 4.6%, Imereti - 3.7%, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti - 3.3%, and the total share of all other regions - 6.4%.

According to the data of the second quarter of the current year, 58.8% of the total turnover of the business sector falls on large businesses, 17.8% on medium-sized enterprises, and 23.4% on small businesses.

It's noteworthy that the government will subsidize part of the loan interest for hotels for a year - the Prime Minister of Georgia said before the government session.

Gakharia said that the tourism sector received first aid from the government, but it was not enough for the industry.

"Today we have to decide to extend the loan co-financing subsidy interest rate program for 6 to 12 months," Gakharia said, explaining that it is the only way to stand by the sector because, despite the cautious economic indicators, there is an optimistic outlook.

PM noted that the companies that have not used this program before will be able to participate in the program and they will be given a period of 1 month - from September 10 to October 10 and all companies will have the opportunity to participate in the additional 6 months, even if they have not participated in this component. Small hotels have become beneficiaries of this program as well.

For reference, according to Produce in Georgia, as of August 30<sup>th</sup>, 907 hotels benefited from the co-financing of the state loan interest, for which €10.7 million was spent from the budget.

### NOTE:

*In the article "Georgia receives €33 million grant from Green Climate Fund" written by Khatia Bzhalava, it was said that the presentation of the project was attended by the ambassadors of Germany and Sweden to Georgia. In fact, the event was attended by the Swiss ambassador to Georgia, Patric Franzen, not by the ambassador of Sweden. The same error has been detected in the caption of a picture.*



► "The tourism sector is a sector that is still under serious pressure, so we must do everything we can to help this sector," he said.