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Economic team meets business sector representatives



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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 23, a preparatory meeting of the 51st round of Geneva International Discussions was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia with co-chairing EU, OSCE, and UN representatives. According to the ministry, the meeting was chaired by the deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Lasha Darsalia.

Preparatory meeting of Geneva International Discussions held at MFA



The meeting was co-chaired by the representatives of the EU, OSCE, and UN.

During the meeting, issues of frequent provocations from the Russian side against the backdrop of the pandemic were sharply raised, including the cases of so-called borderization and unlawful detentions, "which further aggravates safety and humanitarian conditions on the ground."

As the statement published by the ministry reads, the deputy minister expressed concerns over the arrest of Mirian Taziashvili by the occupation regime, on November 20th near the Zardiantakari village. Special attention was also devoted to the cases of Zaza

Gakheladze, Genadi Bestaevi, and Irakli Bebuva, who are being illegally detained.

The Georgian delegation noted that the recent death of Onise Gafrindashvili, a doctor living in the Akhgori region, once again highlights the dire humanitarian condition in Tskhinvali as a result of the closure of the occupation line, including in terms of restricting access to the emergency medical services. It was remarked that due to long-term closure of the so-called crossing-points, people living in the region of occupied Tskhinvali are kept in complete isolation, "which poses a threat to the lives of the local population,"

As Darsalia noted, the Russian Federation and its occupational regimes proceed to manipulate human rights and politicize humanitarian issues. The deputy minister also focused on the regular violations of the 2008 ceasefire agreement by the Russian side, including the ongoing unlawful militarization and military training in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

According to the statement, during the meeting, the issues of restriction on free movement in the occupied territories, a ban on education in the mother tongue, and discrimination towards ethnic Georgians were discussed. The Georgian delegation raised the issues of the need for justice in the cases of the murders of Davit Basharuli, Giga Otkhзорia, and Archil Tatumashvili. In this regard, the meeting focused on the murder of Inal Jabiev in Tskhinvali, "which clearly shows an extremely difficult human rights situation in the occupied regions."

As Darsalia noted at the meeting, the difficult situation on the ground represents the need to achieve progress on the main topics on the agenda of the Geneva International Discussions, which are non-use of force, the establishment of international security mechanism, safe and dignified return of IDPs. The deputy minister of Foreign Affairs emphasized the need for the Russian Federation to fulfill the August 12, 2008 ceasefire agreement.

According to the ministry's statement, in the context of disruption of the round of Geneva talks scheduled for October by Russian representatives, the head of the Georgian delegation stressed the critical need to conduct talks in December. The need to restore Incident and Response Mechanisms (IPRM) meetings in Gali was emphasized as well.



The Georgian delegation stressed the critical need to conduct rounds of Geneva International Discussions in December.

US navy warship USS Donald Cook enters the Black Sea



The United States is funding the equipping of the Georgian Defense Forces with 600 M249 Squad Automatic Weapons (SAW).

BY NATALIA KOCHAISHVILI

For the 7th time since the beginning of this year, a US Navy ship has visited the Black Sea. The last ship to visit the region was USS Roosevelt (DDG 80) in September.

As the US Naval Forces, Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet announced, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) entered into the Black Sea on 23rd of November in support of NATO Allies and partners. According to the press release, the Black Sea is “a critical waterway for maritime commerce and stability throughout Europe.” While in the Black Sea, Donald Cook will conduct routine maritime security operations that support regional stability.

Cmdr. Kelley Jones, commanding officer of Donald Cook announced that operating in the Black Sea signifies US commitment to partners and allies in the region. “It is an important diplomatic mission, and Donald Cook has enjoyed the hospitality of Black Sea countries many times before,” he said.

The ship’s operations in the Black Sea aims to strengthen interoperability among NATO

allies and partners and demonstrate collective resolve to Black Sea security under Operation Atlantic Resolve.

Donald Cook recently began its 11th patrol of the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of responsibility in support of US national security interests in Europe and Africa. The U.S. Navy routinely operates in the Black Sea consistent with international law, including the Montreux Convention to work with NATO Allies and partners, including Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine. It is in the world’s best interest to maintain a stable, prosperous Black Sea region and deter aggressive actors who seek destabilization for their gain.

U.S. 6th Fleet, headquartered in Naples, Italy, conducts the full spectrum of joint and naval operations, often in concert with allied, and interagency partners,



US Sixth Fleet, headquartered in Naples, Italy, conducts the full spectrum of joint and naval operations, often in concert with allied, and interagency partners, to advance US national interests and security and stability in Europe and Africa.

to advance U.S. national interests and security and stability in Europe and Africa.

Notably, as part of the US commitment to Georgia’s defense and territorial integrity through U.S. security assistance, the United States is equipping the Georgian Defense Forces’ (GDF) with 600 M249 portable, gas-operated, light machine guns, or Squad Automatic Weapons (SAW).

As part of the fielding plan, U.S. advisors will conduct a 2 week, “train-the-trainer” course for a team of 15 Georgian soldiers from the GDF’s Training and Military Education Command. Once proficient, the Georgian soldiers will then train teams from GDF’s Eastern and Western Operational Commands.

Ben Hodges, the former commander of the US Army in Europe wrote in an article published in the EUobserver that “We must send Georgia an invitation to join NATO immediately.”

In the context of recent developments around Nagorno-Karabakh and the strengthening of Russia’s role there, the former senior Western military alliance official also considers it necessary to “strengthen NATO’s presence in Georgia,

including US air and naval infrastructure.”

The former commander of the US Army in Europe has previously said that NATO should invite Georgia to the alliance at the next summit. According to Hodge, strengthening Western military positions in the South Caucasus will make Russia aware that the region is of strategic interest to them.

Notably, the New York Times recently reported that Anthony Blinken, 58, will serve in the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden, the defender of global alliances, as Secretary of State.

Blinken began working in the State Department during the presidency of Bill Clinton. In the administration of President Barack Obama, he held the position of Deputy Secretary of State.

“Whatever you give, is yours, whatever you don’t - is lost,” these words of Shota Rustaveli were used by Blinken in November 2015, in Washington, at the 5th plenary session of the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership, when he spoke about Georgia’s significant contribution to global security.

Weather

Tuesday, November 24

Day Clear
High: 8°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

Wednesday, November 25

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 10°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 2°C

Georgia: PACE monitors call on all political parties to take up their seats in parliament

Strasbourg, 23.11.2020 - The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the monitoring of Georgia, Titus Corlatean (Romania, SOC) and Claude Kern (France, ALDE), today called on all political parties to accept the parliamentary seats they won in the recent elections and to enter into the new parliament.

“These elections have resulted in a diverse parliament where

the ruling majority will face a strong opposition, that can ensure proper parliamentary oversight. The only appropriate forum for this, as well as for debating and challenging diverging political views, is the parliament. For the sake of Georgia’s democratic consolidation, we therefore call on all parties to accept the mandates they won in these elections and enter into the new parliament,” said the co-

rapporteurs.

“We fully support the findings and overall assessment of these elections by the International Election Observation Mission, of which PACE was a part. At the same time we also note the significant number of irregularities reported, including persistent allegations of electoral misconduct such as abuse of administrative resources and pressure on voters and party activists.

These allegations are of serious concern and need to be satisfactorily and transparently investigated by the responsible authorities,” they said.

“There can be no perception of impunity for electoral misconduct in Georgia. In addition, the shortcomings noted by the observers need to be fully addressed. The new parliament has an important role to play in this,” added the co-rapporteurs, who intend to follow these proceedings closely in the framework of the ongoing monitoring procedure for the country.

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Economic team meets business sector representatives



Meeting with the representatives of marketplaces.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Economic Team of the Government of Georgia led by the deputy Prime Minister Maia Tskitishvili held meetings yesterday with the private sector under the instructions of PM Giorgi Gakharia. The team met with restaurants, marketplaces, shopping malls, and large chain representatives. The meetings were attended by Finance Minister Ivane Machavariani, and Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava.

According to the information published by the press service of the government, it was noted at the meetings that to avoid further spread of the virus, mobility needs to be reduced. Therefore, based on the recommenda-

tions of the epidemiologists, the government intends to extend the scope of local targeted restrictions in the country, which is planned to be carried out as a result of close communication with businesses and its representatives. It was especially stressed that the main goal of the government is to maximally maintain the existing jobs parallel to this process "to ensure a greater reduction of the impact caused by the global crisis to the economy of the country."

The Finance Minister stressed the importance of developing such measures that, on the one hand, will help curb the spread of the virus, on the other hand, will have minimal impact on the economy.

Attention was focused on the additional events in support of

businesses, which the government will announce shortly, as well as on the responsibilities of businesses to comply with the existing regulations.

Representatives of shopping malls and large chains noted during the meeting that they share the approach of the government regarding the targeted restrictions and expressed readiness to maximally ensure that safety rules are followed at their premises.

According to the Press Service of the Government, during a discussion about the potential restrictions, it was once again

noted that full lockdown is still not on the agenda.

Yesterday, 3958 new coronavirus cases were reported. In terms of raising the number of recovered patients, a positive trend is maintained and namely 3531 patients recovered from the coronavirus yesterday. Unfortunately, there were 36 new fatal cases. Since the first detection of the virus in February, the total number of confirmed cases has reached 108 690. There are 89 170 recovered patients, and unfortunately, 1012 people have died of the virus.



During the meeting sessions, it was noted that full lockdown is still not on the agenda.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hodges noted.

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Ben Hodges: We must invite Georgia to join NATO

Former US Army Commander in Europe Lieutenant General Ben Hodges told EUObserver that he believes, in the light of the events in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is necessary to invite Georgia to join NATO.

Former Lieutenant said the West had failed to fully and consistently compete in all areas of the Greater Black Sea region, including the South Caucasus, leading to a resumption of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"We have given in to the Kremlin's initiative, so today we stand aside and observe the results. Let us build a new, much stronger relationship with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Strengthen our early ties with Turkey and strengthen our presence in Georgia, including with infrastructure for the Air Force and the US Navy. "We also need to send an invitation to Georgia to join NATO immediately," Hodges said.

He said the steps would make the Kremlin aware that the region is of strategic importance to the West.

"The West has to compete in the South Caucasus before if we want to avoid a conflict between the largest states,"

Head of Government Administration resigns



The head of the government administration Natia Mezvrishvili left the public service today. Mezvrishvili hasn't specified the reason for the decision. She posted about her resignation on her official Facebook account:

"After 13 years of extremely interesting and challenging activities, I left the public service today. I would like to thank every public official with whom I have spent many years. Thanks to everyone in government, parliament, politics or beyond politics, international partners, NGOs, journalists, and everyone with whom I have worked during this period. Special thanks to Gakharia for trusting me, a stranger to him back then, and for allowing me to do many good things. I hope that wherever I am, I will be able to contribute to the progress and success of the country."

Energy Community publishes report on energy reforms during COVID-19 pandemic

On November 23, the Energy Community Secretariat published its Annual Implementation Report. The document covers electricity, gas, energy regulators, oil, renewable energy, energy efficiency, environment, climate, infrastructure, competition, statistics and cyber security. The report shows that the average implementation score for the Energy Community contracting parties (which include Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) has increased from 48% to 53%, marking progress in market-oriented and sustainable energy reforms despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Energy Community Secretariat Director Janez Kopac said: "While there is no doubt that more needs to be done in the areas of emissions abatement, energy efficiency, sustainable renewables and genuine market integration if the Energy Community is to succeed in the clean energy transition, I see the glass as half full. In spite of this year's challenging conditions, several Contracting Parties managed to leap forward. This goes in particular for Ukraine, which had successfully unbundled Europe's largest transition system at the end of 2019, and Georgia, which adopted key energy efficiency laws, an overarching energy law and secondary legislation for the power sector."

Overall, the Energy Community is on track to meet its 2020 energy efficiency target, and financing for energy efficiency, especially in building renovation, has increased despite COVID-19. Renewable energy is another area where the report confirms genuine progress, showing a 19% increase in renewable capacities in the whole of the Energy Community, with an emphasis on solar and onshore wind.



Photo: European Union