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Negotiations with political parties held at the residence of the US Ambassador



► According to opposition leaders, closed-door talks with US and EU ambassadors served the purpose to approximate the position of the ruling and opposition parties for the third round of talks.



► Opposition demands reaching an agreement with strong guarantees on holding new elections.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 25, individual meetings were held with leaders of opposition parties at the residence of the US Ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degnan. EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell also attended the meetings. According to political leaders, the meetings which were conducted behind closed doors served the purpose of bringing positions closer for the third round of talks between representatives of the ruling party and opposition.

As Zurab Japaridze, the leader of the Girchi Party said after leaving the ambassador's residence, there are attempts from the facilitator Ambassadors to find crossing lines and somehow approximate positions between opposition parties and the government. Japaridze did not reveal the details of the meeting but stated that the negotiations served as a preparation for the possible third round of talks.

According to European Georgia member David Bakradze, a substantive discussion was held with the diplomats. He stated that the position of

opposition parties is solid, which is a re-conduct of the elections, and added that there is a desire on the part of the ambassadors for an agreement to be reached and the country to overcome the crisis. Bakradze stated that even though the opposition parties do not recognize the legitimacy of electing the current parliament, they express readiness to cooperate with the government without entering the parliament, within the framework of the working group to change the legislation and schedule new elections in spring.

After the meeting with the ambassadors, the leader of the Alliance of Patriots Irma Inashvili stated that she appreciates the involvement and efforts of the EU and US ambassadors in this process. Inashvili stressed that her party is not going to enter the parliament. She believes that an agreement similar to the March 8 one should be reached with very strong guarantees from international partners that new elections will be called. Otherwise, unless such a clear agreement is reached, street protests will proceed.

Tbilisi condemns creation of 'common social-economic space' between Russia and occupied Abkhazia

TOWARDS DE FACTO ANNEXATION OF ABKHAZIA APPROVAL OF COMMON ECONOMIC SPACE PROGRAM



► On November 12, Russian President Vladimir Putin met the de facto president of Abkhazia Aslan Bzhania in Moscow.

a law on an investment partnership.

The program also envisages simplification of the law procedures for the Russian investors in terms of obtaining a residence permit and registering work activities, harmonization of tax legislation with the Russian model, adoption of a law on the education system, and other important components gradually transforming Abkhaz 'laws' into an analog to the Russian legislation.

"The program aims to create the necessary conditions to ensure the full involvement of Abkhazia in the integration processes initiated and

implemented by the Russian Federation," reports Bzhania's administration, adding that the deadline for the implementation is 2-3 years.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia assesses the program as another illegal step towards de facto annexation. According to the statement, the program serves the gradual integration of the integral regions of Georgia into the Russian military, political, economic, and social systems.

The ministry said that the so-called agreement on Alliance and Strategic Partnership between Russia and occupied Abkhazia signed back in 2014 and all documents and programs made per the agreement are unlawful and contradict international law.

"With such provocative steps and the tools of hybrid warfare, the Russian Federation grossly violates the fundamental norms and principles of international law, violates Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and poses a serious threat to peace and security in the region," announced MFA.

The agency calls on the Russian Federation to stop destructive actions, fulfill its obligations under the EU-brokered ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008, withdraw its troops from Georgian territory, and not interfere in international security.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The de-facto presidential administration of Occupied Abkhazia stated on November 23 about the approval of a program to form a common social and economic space between Russia and occupied Abkhazia.

The statement issued by the administration of the unrecognized president of the occupied territories reads that the program was approved during the meeting of Russian President Putin and de-facto president of Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania on November 12 and it aims to harmonize Abkhazian legislation with the Russian in fields of economy and finance, customs law, energy, and social issues.

Occupied Abkhazia says it's 'logical extension of the Alliance and Strategic Partnership Agreement (2014) with Russia.

Program obliges Abkhaz side to make legislative and administrative amendments such as regulation of dual citizenship between occupied Sokhumi and Moscow, enactment of legal act on regular medicine services, provision of energy security of the region, and development of



► De-facto president's press-service reported that the program was approved based on the harmonization of the legislation of the 'Republic of Abkhazia' and the Russian Federation.

EU supports online education for rural youth in Georgia

In November, the EU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a Weekend Virtual School for secondary school students in Georgia.

The online school offers classes on European integration and sustainable development along with extracurricular activities featuring music and art.

Over 330 participants from eight municipalities – Lagodekhi, Dedoplistskaro, Kazbegi, Borjomi, Akhalkalaki, Tetrtskaro, Keda and Khulo attended the first online classes on 21 and 22 November. More students are expected to engage



in the next four sessions, which will be held every weekend until 20 December.

Supported by the EU and the UNDP under their broader programme for agriculture and rural development (ENPARD-3), the weekend school is run in partnership with Georgia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. The school is also supported by a team of national youth agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the Local Action Groups which have been established in these municipalities with support from the EU and the UNDP.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 26

Day Mostly sunny
High: 10°C

Night A few Clouds
Low: 1°C

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 27

Day Sunshine
High: 9°C

Night Mostly cloudy
Low: 2°C

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EU disburses €100 million in macro-financial assistance to Georgia



► “We are proud to allocate these funds, which will ensure the macroeconomic stability of the country so that the government can focus on providing the best support to its citizens and companies.”

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The European Union transferred €100 million under its macro-financial assistance (MFA) programs to Georgia, helping its balance of payments and alleviating its budgetary financing needs. The MFA aims to restore a stable external financial position and is co-financed by the International Monetary Fund. Since 2008, the EU has conducted four macro-financial assistance operations in Georgia.

The support is composed of €75 million from a new MFA program announced in April

2020 aimed at mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic; the other €25 million is the last disbursement from a previous macro-financial assistance program approved in April 2018. A total of € 95 million in soft loans at favorable rates and the remaining € 5 million in non-reimbursable grants.

The second part of the disbursement of €25 million comes from the MFA program agreed in April 2018, and is composed of €20 million of loans and a grant of €5 million. The policy conditions agreed and fulfilled for this



► This disbursement was part of a wider € 400 million EU package of disbursements to Georgia, Jordan, and Moldova.

second tranche enabled reforms on public finance management, financial sector, social and labor market policies, and business environment.

The EU Ambassador Carl Hartzel reaffirmed the EU's support to Georgia in its fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. According to him, this is part of the larger 1.5 billion GEL aid package for Georgia to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

“We also believe that the agreed reforms related to this special assistance will contribute to the long-term perspective of Georgia's further approximation to European standards and will be of particular benefit to Georgian citizens in areas such as justice, occupational safety, and pensions,” Hartzell noted.

The disbursement of €75 million from the COVID-19 MFA program follows the EU's

agreement with the Government of Georgia to conduct reforms in the areas of public finance management, governance (notably to increase the independence, accountability, and quality of the judicial system), energy sector and labor market policies. If these agreed reforms are achieved by the Government, a further € 75 million could be disbursed under the MFA program in early 2021.

Person accused of attacking microfinance organization pretrial custody for two months

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The court has left Levan Zurabashvili, a man accused of attacking a microfinance organization on November 20, in pretrial detention for two months. The Prosecutor's Office demanded the detaining of Zurabashvili, while the defense asked for Zurabashvili's release on €1,000 bail.

According to the official information, on November 20, Zurabashvili, armed with what looked like a grenade and a firearm, entered the office of MBC microfinance company in central Tsereteli avenue in Tbilisi and took 19 hostages. Later via Facebook, he voiced his three demands, urging MPs to pass the following laws: to prohibit all kinds of gambling throughout Georgia, make banks limit the annual interest rate to 7 percent, and reduce medication prices. He stated that pensioners do not receive pensions high enough to afford medicines. After negotiations with the attacker, all the hostages were freed gradually.

According to Zurabashvili's lawyer Giorgi Chochua, it was not a robbery as a person under his defense demanded no



► Zurabashvili had three demands: Banning gambling throughout Georgia, reducing the interest rate for banks to seven percent, and decreasing prices on medications.

money and did not pose threat to anyone. He announced that Zurabashvili had been holding a grenade-shaped lighter to draw the attention of journalists, and he was not behaving violently or threatening anyone. The lawyer said that his client had not restricted anyone's freedom of movement and recalled Zurabashvili's words – “I remember at first there were more of them (‘hostages’), I freed everyone

who asked me to leave,” said Zurabashvili.

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia accuses Zurabashvili of hostage-taking, which refers to Article 144, Part 2, Subparagraph c of the Criminal Code of Georgia and is punishable for 9-14 years.

The lawyer asked for his client's release on €1,000 bail as “Zurabashvili did not intend to commit a crime and his action



► The defense side plans to appeal the sentence.

was a form of protest,” however the prosecution believes that the detainee must be left in custody.

Tbilisi City Court denied the request of bail and has sentenced Levan Zurabashvili to imprisonment as a measure of restraint. As a result of the ballistic examination, Zurabashvili was acquitted in the part of illegal purchase and carrying of weapons.

According to the Prosecutor's Office, Levan Zurabashvili's psy-

chiatric examination has been scheduled, which will determine his state of mental health at the time of committing the crime. As the prosecutor of the case stated, the investigation proceeds, several investigative and procedural actions will be carried out as a result of which the final decision will be announced.

According to Zurabashvili's lawyer, the defense side plans to appeal the sentence.