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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The report of a special group of NATO experts was published yesterday on the future of the Alliance by 2030. According to the NATO website, the expert report will be one of the things that Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg will rely on when he presents his initiatives to the leaders regarding NATO's 2030 program.

It reads that NATO should seek to expand and strengthen its partnership with Ukraine and Georgia as vulnerable democracies that aspire to membership and face constant external and domestic pressure from Russia. The document drafted by the experts also states that the Alliance's open-door policy should be intensified.

According to experts, Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, as well as Russia's military activities in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Baltic region, and the far north, have negatively affected security in the Euro-Atlantic area.

The report of the members of the working group contains the recommendations for the future development of the Alliance. After controversial issues between the alliance and Ankara concerned Turkey's actions in northern Syria, as well as Turkey's acquisition of Russian S-400 missile systems and Ankara's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, experts are taking the initiative to limit the possibility of some NATO members blocking NATO decisions. For example, individual allies should not be able to block a common decision made in the field of security. Also, blocking decisions for political reasons should be prohibited.

Foreign Minister of Georgia, Davit Zalkaliani took part in a 2-day online meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of NATO member states, which started on December 1.

On December 2, the Foreign Ministers of the NATO member states discussed the security of the Black Sea region and the support of Georgia and Ukraine.

The Ministerial also touched upon Georgia's NATO integration process, future activities to promote membership, including the renewal of 'substantial package', the security environment in the region, and Georgia-NATO cooperation in the Black Sea security process. The main

Hodges: There is a precedent of inviting a state to NATO even if part of it is occupied by Russia



► It was underlined that the Alliance provides political and practical support to Georgia and that allies are now doing more together in the maritime field: training the Coast Guard, sharing airspace data and meeting hybrid challenges as well as conducting joint exercises in the Black Sea.



► "We must invite Georgia to NATO now," General Ben Hodges announced.

topics of discussion at the ministerial were NATO adaptation, the development of the Russian military sphere, the growth of China, and the NATO training mission in Afghanistan.

Note that NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and the Kabul government fear that the reduction or withdrawal of troops involved in the ongoing NATO-led Stability Operation will again open the door for international terrorist groups.

NATO currently has an 11,000-strong military force in Afghanistan, where multinational forces assist local security forces with advice and training. The US on which the success of NATO's multinational mission depends largely on the air

and logistical assistance plans to reduce the number of personnel currently in Afghanistan from 8,000 to 2,500 by 2021. NATO defense ministers are expected to make the final decision on the presence of military forces in Afghanistan in February when US President-elect Joe Biden begins work in Washington.

Speaking at an online news conference ahead of the 2-day meeting, Stoltenberg said that in the face of growing Russian military power, NATO should continue to strengthen its position in the Black Sea region, which is of strategic importance.

According to Stoltenberg, NATO is already significantly represented in the Black Sea region, as 3 allies - Turkey, Bul-

garia, and Romania are coastal countries, NATO Allied warships are being trained in the Black Sea, and Romania has a multinational training brigade. NATO is cooperating closely with its partners Ukraine and Georgia, as Russia has violated the territorial integrity and sovereignty of these countries by annexing Crimea and deploying troops on Georgian territory.

Stoltenberg underscored that NATO is increasing its political and practical support, but sees that Russia is strengthening its military presence in the Black Sea region, so it is necessary to further strengthen NATO's presence in the region.

"NATO needs to become more global and cooperation with partners, including Georgia, will be part of that," Stoltenberg said following a discussion with NATO foreign ministers discussing NATO's development strategy.

Stoltenberg also spoke about the significant investments made by China in infrastructure in the Black Sea region and stressed that one of the important functions would also be to protect critical infrastructure and strengthen NATO resilience. Regarding the integration of Georgia, he said: "I will not start speculating on the date of Georgia's accession to NATO, but I will say that the decision made at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 is valid."

According to him one of the tasks of NATO's 2030 strategy is to strengthen NATO's political alliance. This in itself includes strengthening cooperation with partners, including Georgia. "This partnership is good not only for Georgia but also for NATO, as Georgia makes a significant contribution to NATO missions and operations."

New UNICEF-ITU report says 15 % of Georgia's school-age children have no internet access at home



► UNICEF representative in Georgia Ghassan Khalil: "Lack of connectivity prevents children and young people from competing in the modern economy."

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Art of The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UNICEF, 15 percent of school-age children in Georgia do not have internet connection in their homes. The report How Many Children and Youth Have Internet Access at Home? Notes that globally two-third of school-age children do not have access to the internet. Similarly, 759 million (63%) young people between ages 15 and 25, do not have internet access at home.

The press release is published by UNICEF Georgia.

According to the report, the closure of schools in Georgia due to the COVID pandemic has affected about 661 500 children, who had to shift to virtual learning mode. For those who do not have access to the internet, education can be out of reach. The press release reads that yet before the pandemic, there was a growing number of young people in need of learning fundamental, transferable, digital, job-specific, and entrepreneurial skills to be competitive in the 21st-century economy.

"Lack of connectivity prevents children and young people from competing in the modern economy... It isolates them from the world. And in the event of school closures, such as those currently experienced due to COVID-19, it causes them to lose out on education," said UNICEF representative in Georgia Ghassan Khalil.

According to UNICEF, globally, 58 percent of school-age children from the wealthiest households have an internet connection at home, compared with 16 percent of children from the most impoverished countries. A similar disparity exists in terms of the income of the countries. In low-income countries, less than one in twenty school-age children have internet

access at home, compared with data of higher-income countries, where almost 9 in ten children access the internet. The report reads that children and young people from disadvantaged households, villages, and lower-income countries are falling further behind from their peers and are left with very little opportunity to resolve the challenge.



► According to the report, around 661 500 schoolchildren rely on virtual learning in Georgia, as a result of the closure of schools due to the pandemic.

Obligatory quarantine to abolish for Georgians with PCR test at the border

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On December 2nd, Georgia reported 4033 new coronavirus cases, 4061 recoveries, and 39 deaths. The Inter-Agency Coordination Council has decided to alter the procedures of entry to the country for the citizens of Georgia. The government and an epidemiological group are working with the COVAX platform to receive the Coronavirus vaccine in the early spring of 2021.

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► Currently there are 611 available beds for COVID-treating in Georgia.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 3

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 5°C

FRIDAY DECEMBER 4

Day Cloudy
High: 8°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 4°C

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Mobile virtual network operators to be introduced in 2021

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Communication Commission of Georgia is working to introduce mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) in the country in 2021.

At the Internet Governance Forum of Georgia held last week, Veronica Bocarova, principal analyst of independent regulatory intelligence provider, Cullen International said that while the telecommunications market is mature, investments have already been made, the market is fully saturated and competition is not growing, regulatory commissions should make it mandatory to allow the introduction of MVNO. She does not agree with the opinion that MVNOs in Georgia may be a threat in any form.

"In case of switching to MVNO operator, there is no need to change the network, users remain on the old network again and MVNO operators still retain wholesale revenue, while new players use the resources of existing operators, but they will be able to offer better service terms to customers," Bocarova said, thus concluding that the mobile virtual network operators do not threaten the market, on the contrary, according to her the international practice shows that MVNOs bring new opportunities.

According to a competition expert, a good example of MVNO is Virgin Mobile, which first appeared in the UK and a few years later took one of the leading positions in terms of customer satisfaction.

The principal analyst says she studied the Georgian market and can say that "there are niche markets that might better serve new players."



► An MVNO is a wireless communications services provider that does not own the wireless network infrastructure. MVNO enters into a business agreement with a mobile network operator to obtain bulk access to network services at wholesale rates and sets retail prices independently.

The forum was attended by Ekaterine Imedadze, Head of the Telecommunications Market Regulation Department of the Communications Commission, who spoke about the importance and need for access of a virtual operator by the Communications Commission from 2021.

According to Imedadze, MVNO is an effective way to improve the competitive environment in the market. Virtual operators have the best indicators with all the parameters of the quality of customer satisfaction. Companies easily adapt to the constantly changing requirements of customers, because they have the opportunity to make favorable offers to clients, which traditional operators do not focus on.



► "When competition in the telecommunications market is not growing, regulatory commissions should make it mandatory to allow virtual mobile operators on existing networks."

Imedadze recalled that in more than 80 countries around the world, including the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and others there are more than 1,300 virtual operators, whose advantages in the field of technological innovation are obvious. From 2010 to 2018, the number of MVNOs increased by 61%. According to the latest data, MVNO subscribers exceed 220 million, which is 2.46% of the total worldwide subscriber base.

According to the existing forecasts, by 2022, the number of MVNOs will increase by 18% and reach 260 million subscribers, and by 2024, the market value of virtual operators will increase by more than 40%.

Giorgi Shamugia, CEO of GNS said that the decision of the Communications Commission to allow MVNOs is one of the most strategic steps for the development of the country and the telecommunications market. According to him, his company as a potential MVNO needs to remove barriers to network access.

Shamugia spoke about the importance and necessity of allowing mobile virtual network operators to enter the telecommunication market, adding that the decision guarantees that new market players will not have problems accessing the network. Interested companies and potential virtual operators will be able to attract and implement investments more effectively to offer customers effective services. Shamugia also stressed that this decision will be an impetus for the telecom sector to reduce prices, increase quality, and increase competition in the market.

Obligatory quarantine to abolish for Georgians with PCR test at the border

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Out of 4033 confirmed cases yesterday, 1705 cases were reported in Tbilisi, Adjara - 402, Imereti - 624, Kvemo Kartli - 286, Shida Kartli - 281, Guria - 84, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti - 273, Kakheti - 239, Mtskheta-Mtianeti - 62, Samtskhe-Javakheti - 68, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo-Svaneti - 9.

Within the scope of two-month-long COVID-related restrictions, from yesterday for two months, the government is activating an intensive testing program countrywide. The state ensures 20 000 coronavirus tests daily. Large-scale testing will continue till February 1, 2020. At the same time application of antigen-based tests will extend significantly.

According to the coordination council's decision, the proce-



► According to the Georgian epidemiologists, the vaccine will most likely be available in early spring.

dures of entry to the country for the citizens of Georgia will alter. In particular, citizens who arrive with a negative result of PCR test obtained within the past 72 hours, will have to self-isolate for 8 days. As for the citizens who arrive without a negative PCR test, they will no longer be

obliged to stay in quarantine and will get self-isolated for 12 days. Citizens with no means of self-isolation will be provided with accommodation in quarantine hotels by the state.

Yesterday at the briefing, after the meeting of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council,

the Head of the NCDC Amiran Gamkrelidze stated that active work is underway with the COVAX platform regarding vaccination. There are multiple candidate vaccines and 172 countries engaged in the platform, including Georgia. According to Gamkrelidze, Georgia has already made a contribution of \$4 million under the condition that the state will be able to choose a preferable vaccine. Under the instructions of the Prime Minister of Georgia, epidemiologists are also involved in negotiations with individual pharmaceutical companies with an engagement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and overseas diplomatic missions of Georgia.

According to the Ministry of Health of Georgia Ekaterine Tikaradze, currently, there are 611 beds available for coronavirus treatments in Georgia. The Minister noted at the briefing

that the process of mobilizing additional beds is being carried out.

At the PM's instruction, control on enforcement of COVID restrictions imposed under the 2-Month-Long Plan will become tighter, including wearing a mask and a restriction on mobility.

Due to the worsening of an epidemiological situation, the Georgian government has introduced further coronavirus regulations in the country. According to the restrictions, which took effect on November 28, the movement has been restricted both in terms of walking and driving from 21:00 to 05:00. Restaurants and other food facilities are only operating with takeaway services. Fitness clubs, swimming pools have closed down for two months. Regular intercity transport - railway, bus, minibus have been banned, the restriction does not apply to taxis and cars.