

Politics

The UNM head Vashadze leaves the party



FULL STORY ON Page 2

Economics

Team Europe: EIB and Bank of Georgia expand credit line for SMEs and mid-caps with €25 million to aid recovery from COVID-19 pandemic

FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Tbilisi Municipal Inspection has started dismantling 12 illegally constructed residential buildings in the Africa settlement in Tbilisi, which has led to a confrontation between the local population and law enforcers.

As a general inspection claims, the reason for the dismantling is building on the state-owned territory without the permission of construction. The people whose building is being dismantled say they have applied to the City Hall for legalization, but the inspection started the dismantling process without any warning

Tbilisi City Hall puts the residents of Africa district on the verge of homelessness, dismantles illegally built houses



Several days ago, the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Centre called on Tbilisi City Hall not to start the deconstruction of the illegally constructed buildings as the locals living there will be left without shelter.

before the end of the review.

The situation on the ground became tense several times. Residents of nearby buildings confronted the law enforcers. Police arrested 8 people during the confrontation. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, they were arrested on charges of petty hooliganism and disobeying a lawful request of the police.

Residents of Africa have been protesting against the dismantling of the buildings. According to them, most of the buildings' residents are socially vulnerable and their houses have been built without permission, and in some cases, the City Hall has decided to legalize it.

Regarding the Africa settlement, Mayor Kakha Kaladze announced that no one lives in the houses that were dismantled:

"These are the people who have houses, these are the people who have lands, and so on. This is a deliberate seizure of land. I do not rule out that there may be some forces behind this that are benefiting from such decisions."

Kaladze assures that as long as he is in charge, he will in no way allow the misappropriation of state property. "And for those who do not have a home, there is a shelter, half of which is empty."

"We provide everything. The second option is that people who have a certain problem, are having their house demolished or so on, the boards will allocate money for them, we can rent these families houses so that they do not stay on the street," he said.

The mayor emphasized that although the municipal inspectorate had warned the offenders several times, both verbally and in writing, unfortunately, there was no response to the warning.

"The principled position of the state is that land grabbing and illegal constructions should not be allowed and if such

an action is carried out anywhere, it should be prevented," Kaladze said at a briefing yesterday.

Hereby, Kaladze emphasized the decision that 350 million will be the 2021 budget precisely in the direction of social and healthcare.

It was also noted that in recent years, citizens who have real estate in the regions, as well as some others in the name of others, have started illegal construction on state lands in Tbilisi.

"We have a reasonable suspicion that we are dealing with a fraudulent scheme backed by certain individuals who are pushing citizens to break the law in order to obtain economic benefits," the mayor said.

According to Kaladze, Tbilisi City Hall will provide all the materials to the relevant agency to start the investigation of the case.

Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria responded to the dismantling of a residential building in the African settlement of Samgori district.

As Lomjaria noted in her Facebook post, the demolition of the house is related to the risks of homelessness, which raises the need for the state to assess the method. If necessary, they should take supportive measures and provide appropriate shelter. She spoke of the challenges that shelters are facing and emphasized that the implementation of dismantling



"We declare with full responsibility that not a single building that was subject to dismantling was completed and no one lived in it," said Mayor Kaladze.

CONTINUED ON Page 2

The UNM head Vashadze leaves the party



“I disagree with the recent tactics or the UNM leaders that have been chosen without consultations with party members, as well as the absence of a party strategy. There are odious figures in and around the party who are the part of the past and will never be able to regain the public truth.”

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Grigol Vashadze, Chairman of the United National Movement, Georgia’s largest opposition party, announced on December 15 about leaving the party as well as stepping down from all held positions.

He wrote in his Facebook post that there are aspects to the party that he would categorically not tolerate. Vashadze said he does not agree with tactics chosen by the majority of the UNM leadership without consulting party members, and that the absence of a future strategy is even more unacceptable to him.

Vashadze expressed concerns over ‘the campaign of attacks and insults’ against the chiefs of diplomatic missions of strategic partner countries that were launched ‘unclear by whom and why’. Vashadze considers such moves as damaging to Georgia’s relations with the western partners. According to him, it creates impressions that creators of this campaign have never heard that attacking an ambassador equals attacking a state they represent. “This is the state which has been guarding Georgia state and its territorial integrity since the day it regained independence.” Hereby,

Weather

Wednesday, December 16

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 12°C
Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 6°C

Thursday, December 17

Day Showers
High: 10°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 4°C

Vashadze apologized to Georgia’s partners.

Before this announcement, Nika Gvaramia, the director of Mtavari Arkhi TV criticized western diplomats, including facilitators of the recent post-election talks between the opposition, that boycott election, and the ruling Georgian Dream party.

On December 15, the night before Vashadze’s decision was known, the UNM leader and former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili criticized German Ambassador Hubert Knirsch over his opposition-critical remarks, questioning his qualification.

Politicians from both the ruling party and the opposition reacted to Vashadze’s decision. UNM members Roman Gotziridze and Salome Samadashvili have praised Vashadze’s chairmanship of the party, stating that he has made the party stronger in the past 3 years. On the other hand, UNM member Khatia Dekanoidze said that Vashadze’s claim on attacks on the diplomatic corps was wrong, as well as his decision to leave the party without consulting with its members first. She criticized the chairman for quitting with a sole statement and disagreed with Vashadze’s concerns. “Generals do not disapprove of the army’s strategy,” she emphasized.

Levan Ioseliani, from the Citizens party, noted that the deci-

sion proved that “there are differing opinions in the opposition,” including varying views over the current opposition tactics.

MP Irakli Kobakhidze, executive secretary of the ruling Georgian Dream party also commented on the announcement, saying that political processes unfold ‘in the right direction.’ He noted that the “so-called odious figures” are dissolving [United] National Movement and European Georgia.

Parliament Speaker from the ruling Georgian Dream party Archil Talakvadze stated that the ‘reasons named by Vashadze behind his resignation are a deadly diagnosis for the UNM.’

MP Mamuka Mdinardze assessed Vashadze’s decision as to

the sign for UNM’s dissolution: “When the chairman of the party leaves the party for specific, declared or hidden reasons, it is one of the preconditions for the party’s dissolution.”

The leader of the Georgian Dream Tea Tsulukiani described Grigol Vashadze as a positive figure after leaving the National Movement and said that he was acting in the interests of the country. According to Tsulukiani, she met Vashadze for the first time during the signing of the March 8 agreement with the opposition. According to the leader of the European Georgia, Giga Bokeria, it is noteworthy that Tsulukiani praised Grigol Vashadze. “It seems that a good opposition for her is an opposition member who leaves politics.”

The US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan commented on Vashadze’s resignation as well, saying he is an outstanding person with a long and impressive career in the service of his country.

The UNM Chairman first confronted his party soon after

the elections, when he called for moving street protests to the negotiations table, implying a possible end of boycott that was announced by all major opposition parties following legitimacy concerns of the parliamentary polls. Other members of the UNM said that “the statement is Vashadze’s personal opinion which was not agreed upon with” them. While the members of other opposition parties who took to the street following the October 31 parliamentary elections, said that Vashadze’s statement was ‘unexpected and confusing.’

Grigol Vashadze, a former Soviet diplomat, served as a Foreign Minister under the UNM government. He was the 2018 Presidential candidate and was elected as the party chairman in March of 2019, replacing Saakashvili. In the October 31 parliamentary elections, Vashadze ran as a majoritarian MP candidate for the Kutaisi constituency. The UNM garnered 27,18% of votes and 36 MP mandates which the party intends to reject.



UNM criticizes Vashadze: “We can not share the pathos and content.”

Tbilisi City Hall puts the residents of Africa district on the verge of homelessness, dismantles illegally built houses

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

measures during the winter period poses risks of inhuman and degrading treatment. “The dangers posed by the pandemic are an additional issue. Based on the above, I call on the Tbilisi City Hall to make an official state-

ment, which will provide comprehensive information on what measures have been taken and will be taken to protect the homeless families whose homes have been dismantled.”

As for the legality of the dismantling itself, Lomjaria wrote that the government has the

right to dismantle the unauthorized constructions, but it is inadmissible for these processes to be carried out at the expense of human rights violations. The Office of the Public Defender will study the issue of the legitimacy of the process.

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia’s English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.2905; Euro - 4.0006; GBP - 4.3846; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4868; Swiss Franc - 3.7105

Team Europe: EIB and Bank of Georgia expand credit line for SMEs and mid-caps with €25 million to aid recovery from COVID-19 pandemic



The EIB will top up its existing credit line at the Bank of Georgia €25 million to a total of €75 million to support the recovery of Georgian SMEs from the pandemic, extending coverage to include mid-caps.

The operation is part of the Team Europe's COVID-19 emergency response to help sustain jobs, maintain liquidity and operations, and fuel the economic recovery of Georgia.

Since 2007, the EU bank has invested close to €2 billion in all key sectors of the Georgian economy, including connectivity, healthcare and SMEs.

The European Investment Bank (EIB), the lending arm of the European Union, will invest €25 million to expand a credit line for Georgian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and mid-caps available at the Bank of Georgia, helping to accelerate the recovery of the national economy from the COVID-19 pandemic. The credit line can be disbursed in multiple currencies, including in lari, Georgia's national currency.

The EIB loan will inject fresh capital into the national economy at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is burdening SMEs with liquidity issues and restricting their ability to access finance and maintain daily operations or fund expansion plans.

The investment from the EU bank will reinforce SMEs and mid-caps, which are the backbone of the Georgian economy and major employers in the country, and the country's financial sector, boosting their ability to drive the economic recovery from the pandemic.

EIB Vice-President Teresa Czerwicka, who is in charge of operations in Georgia, said: "As the bank of the European Union, we are proud to be bolstering Georgia and its economy in this hour of

need, no matter how difficult the situation is. The EIB financing will support both Georgian SMEs and the country's financial sector so that they can continue to operate despite the pandemic and drive the Georgian economy forward. This means we will save jobs, incomes and revenues. Together with our partners in the country's public and private sector, we look forward to building a prosperous and sustainable future for Georgia."

EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell said: The EU stands by Georgia during the pandemic. The EU has mobilised an unprecedented GEL 1.5 billion COVID-19 support package for Georgia, of which economic recovery of businesses is a fundamental part. This top-up by the EU bank strengthens this component by providing more assistance via local Georgian banks. Thanks to this agreement, an additional number of Georgian small and medium businesses will be able to access finance to get them through these challenging times.

Bank of Georgia CEO Archil Gachechiladze commented: "I am very glad to see that our very successful partnership with the EIB is continuing. The multi-currency long-term facility gives us flexibility to utilise the funds according to the currency and maturity needs of our SME and mid-cap clients. Such facilities are key for the private sector, especially during these challenging times, and this further strengthens our position as a leading provider of long-term financial resources on the market. I would like to thank the EIB for its cooperation with us and look forward to many more successful deals in the future."

Team Europe adds value for Georgian companies

Covered by a guarantee from the European Union, the loan from the EU bank will enable the Bank of Georgia to increase its

lending activities without jeopardising the long-term stability of the country's financial sector or its ability to support the economic recovery from the pandemic in the long term.

The credit line is even more attractive due to the more flexible terms enabled by the EIB's COVID-19 emergency measures, extended as part of the Team Europe's efforts to support partner countries such as Georgia during the pandemic.

This is the third operation between the EIB and the Bank of Georgia supporting the country's SMEs and mid-caps. To date, the EU bank has invested more than €330 million in credit lines for Georgian SMEs and mid-caps, sustaining more than 54 000 jobs in the country.

Background information

About the EIB:

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the long-term lending institution of the European Union owned by its Member States. It makes long-term finance available for sound investment in order to contribute towards EU policy goals.

The EIB in Georgia:

Since the beginning of operations in Georgia in 2007, the EIB has invested close to €2 billion in 23 projects in infrastructure, the private sector and climate action. The EIB stepped up its support for the country with the 2014 Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Georgia and the European Union, making it the main EIB lending beneficiary per capita in the EU Eastern Neighbourhood.

The EIB finances most projects in Georgia under the EU External Lending Mandate. This provides the EIB with a guarantee covered by the EU budget for projects in the fields of social and economic infrastructure, local private sector development and climate action. For more information on the EIB's activities in Georgia please follow this link:

www.eib.org/en/publications/the-european-investment-bank-in-georgia

Five opposition parties had their party lists annulled by the Central Election Commission today

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM



Following the memorandum and official request of Georgia's five opposition parties, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has annulled their respective party lists. This means that the candidates of European Georgia, United National Movement (UNM), Lelo for Georgia, Strategy Agmashenebeli, and the Labour party will not be able to replace the MPs who refused to claim their mandates after the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections. Opposition parties refuse to recognize the election results on the grounds of alleged falsification and demand for the elections to be repeated.

The memorandum was not signed by Girchi and Alliance of Patriots, which each won a total of 4 seats, as well as Aleko Eliashvili's Citizens (two seats) and the Republican bloc of the UNM. Moreover, 8 out of 14 parties that won at least 1% of the votes during the October Elections, have already requested the annual state funding.

The 10th Parliament Session was held on December 11, and no opposition parties attended. The International Society for Fair Elec-



tions and Democracy (ISFED) has adjusted its parallel vote tabulation (PVT). According to the new figures, the United Opposition bloc received 1% more votes and the ruling Georgian Dream party received 1.8% more votes. The ruling party responded by pointing out another severe mistake in the NGO's data, namely the initially reported imbalance between the number of ballot papers and registered voters.

The country remains in a de facto one-party state, and the political crisis is yet to be resolved, despite the significant efforts of the diplomatic corps to hold negotiations between the ruling party and the opposition bloc. On top of calling for the new elections, the opposition demands large-scale electoral reform (including the country's Central Election Commission), as well as the immediate release of the political prisoners: Iveri Melashvili, Giorgi Rurua, and Natalia Ilichova.

In turn, the ruling Georgian Dream party stated that they will be willing to repeat the elections if the temporary investigative committee, created by the 10th convocation of the Georgian Parliament finds any evidence of the violation of the proper conduct of the October elections. Georgian Dream's Executive Secretary, Irakli Kobakhidze went as far as to claim that he is so confident that not even 0.1% of the ruling party's votes were rigged, that, if the opposite turns out to be true, he will be willing to quit politics altogether.

The current political crisis is unfolding amidst the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which leaves the country especially vulnerable to both external and internal threats.