

## Politics

Government considers easing COVID-19 restrictions for New Year, Georgia starts 12-day mandatory quarantine for UK arrivals



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## Regional Director of WHO for Europe visits Georgia



Dr. Hans Kluge, Regional Director of the WHO for Europe and The Prime Minister of Georgia.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On December 18-22, Dr. Hans Kluge, Regional Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) is visiting Georgia. Dr. Kluge has met

with the Prime Minister, the Parliament Speaker, and the Health Minister. According to Kluge, his visit focused on working with the government and healthcare system on the response to the virus. Dr. Kluge stated

that his incentive is to strengthen the collaboration of the WHO Georgia office.

As the press office of the government's administration informs, the COVID vaccine was a topic raised

at the meeting, adding that Dr. Kluge highly approved of the steps taken by the government in the fight with COVID-19 and stressed the crucial role of clinical hotels and online clinics. Dr. Kluge also emphasized the strategic importance of the Lugar Lab both on local and international levels.

The discussions focused on the vaccination process as well. It was noted that a designated task force has been created with the instruction of the Prime Minister of Georgia, which ensures timely supply of the vaccine as well as infrastructural and logistical readiness for the uninterrupted vaccination process. It was once again mentioned that in parallel with the COVAX platform, there are also ongoing negotiations with international partners and pharmaceutical companies with the engagement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and overseas diplomatic missions of the country. The focus was placed on the significance of the intensive testing program, implemented by the government of Georgia in December.

The PM noted that the country highly respects the recommendations



Dr. Hans Kluge and The Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakbadze.

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# Government considers easing COVID-19 restrictions for New Year, Georgia starts 12-day mandatory quarantine for UK arrivals



At the time of writing, there are 22 628 active coronavirus cases, out of which, 6 627 individuals are treated at hospitals, 2 903 in Tbilisi, 747 - in Adjara, and 1 347 - in Imereti.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, the Ministry of Internal Affairs revealed 950 facts of breaching regulations imposed against the spread of COVID-19 across the country. Police fined 73 physical persons for violating the restriction of movement from 9 pm to 5 am. 877 persons were fined for not wearing face masks. According to recent statistics, the epidemiological situation in the country has started to stabilize. Regardless, the government and health officials

insistently call on the citizens to demonstrate high public responsibility and adhere to the imposed restrictions.

The Inter-Agency Coordination Council, led by the PM Giorgi Gakharia, is actively working with experts, specialists, epidemiologists, and business owners to ease the imposed COVID restrictions from December 24. Berdia Sichinava, Deputy Head of the Task Force operating at the Inter-Agency Coordination Council, stressed that COVID restrictions imposed on November 28 directly influenced

decreasing the daily reported cases. As Sichinava stated, it is each citizen's responsibility to maintain the achieved results, adding that the decision on easing the restrictions will be made with utmost caution and will be announced in the nearest future.

Considering the new variant of the coronavirus identified in the United Kingdom, the coordination council has decided that everyone in

Georgia with a UK travel history in the last 14 days will undergo 12-day mandatory quarantine.

"There are no direct flights with the UK at the moment," stated Sichinava after the council meeting.

According to the statistics from yesterday, there were 824 new cases, 4 227 recoveries, and the death of 46 individuals reported in Georgia.



The new rule on 12-day mandatory quarantine applies to Georgian citizens, business visitors, and citizens/residents of the 18 European countries who traveled in the UK in the past two weeks.

## Regional Director of WHO for Europe visits Georgia

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issued by the WHO not only in terms of COVID management but also for the implementa-

tion of future reforms. Gakharia stressed the importance of the WHO representatives' visits in the occupied region of Abkhazia twice this year with a special mission to assess the current situation.

During the meeting of Regional Director of WHO for Europe with the Speaker of the

Parliament of Georgia Archil Talakvadze, the conversation focused on the disinformation campaign against Richard Lugar laboratory. According to the official statement, the parties touched upon the tobacco control reform, universal medical insurance, Hepatitis C elimination program, TB

prevention and control, initial healthcare, and reforms concerning mental health. They underlined the importance of humanitarian support for the residents of occupied Abkhazia during the pandemic. Emphasis was also placed on the vaccination in Georgia.

On December 18, the Minister of Health of Georgia Ekaterine Tikaradze hosted the Regional Director of WHO for Europe. Dr. Kluge and his delegation had an opportunity to visit clinical hotels and hospitals and were introduced in detail to the role and operations of Primary Healthcare.

### Weather

Tuesday, December 22

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 5°C  
Night Rain / Snow  
Low: 1°C

Wednesday, December 23

Day Rain / Snow  
High: 4°C  
Night Rain / Snow  
Low: 2°C

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## External merchandise trade in Georgia: January-November

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office (Geostat) released preliminary data on December 21, according to which, Georgia's foreign trade turnover in the first 11 months of 2020 decreased by 14.6% compared to the same period last year, amounting to \$ 10.2 billion.

Exports decreased by 11.3% year-on-year to \$3.02 billion, while imports were down by 15.9%, reaching \$7.19 billion. Meanwhile, the trade deficit equaled \$4.17 billion, constituting 40.9% of the trade turnover during January-November 2020.

Turkey remained Georgia's largest trading partner with \$1.43 billion in

January-November 2020, followed by Russia, China, Azerbaijan, and the United States with \$1.19 billion, \$1.09 billion, \$831.3 million, and \$568.4 million, respectively.

China tops the list of largest trading partners by exports with \$445.9 million, followed by Azerbaijan (\$399.6 million), Russia (\$396.6 million), Bulgaria (\$282.9 million), and Ukraine with \$190 million.

Turkey, Russia, China, the United States, and Azerbaijan are the top trading partners of Georgia in terms of imports with \$1.26 billion, \$789.1 million, \$646.3 million, \$490.5 million, and \$431.7 million, respectively.

Copper ores and concentrates are on top

of the list of export commodities with \$677.2 million, followed by motor cars with \$364.8 million; Ferro-alloys - \$231.6 million; wine or fresh grapes - \$186.2 million; spirituous beverages - \$115.9 million; waters, natural or artificial mineral and aerated waters - \$105.3 million; precious metal ores and concentrates - \$87.6 million; medicaments put up in measured doses - \$86.9 million; gold - \$86.2 million; hazelnuts and other nuts - \$81.3 million; other commodities - \$993.5 million.

Amid the economic crisis in Georgia, imports fell by \$ 1.36 billion, down 15.9%. The Geostat report shows that such a drop in imports was reflected in a fairly wide range of products, resulting in a decrease

in imports of 9 out of the top 10 imported goods. Among them, the largest decrease was in cars, which is reduced by \$ 327 million (32.4%). As global consumption declined, world oil prices fell by \$ 235 million (34.3%) and natural gas imports fell by \$ 42 million (11.4%) as world oil prices fell.

Motor cars are on top of the list of import commodities in Georgia's foreign trade with \$680.7 million, followed by copper ores and concentrates - \$494.2 million; petroleum and petroleum oils - \$451 million; medicaments put up in measured doses - \$280.7 million; petroleum gases and other gaseous hydrocarbons - \$248.1 million; telephone sets - \$149.4 million; wheat and meslin - \$97.7 million; cigars, cheroots, cigarillos, and cigarettes - \$75 million; new pneumatic rubber tires - \$61 million; precious metal ores and concentrates - \$54.1 million; other commodities - \$4.57 billion.



The most imported product to Georgia in January-November 2020 was cars - \$ 680.7 million, a decrease of -32.4% over the previous year.

GENERAL DATA ON EXTERNAL TRADE OF GEORGIA IN JANUARY-NOVEMBER 2015-2020 (MILLION US DOLLARS)

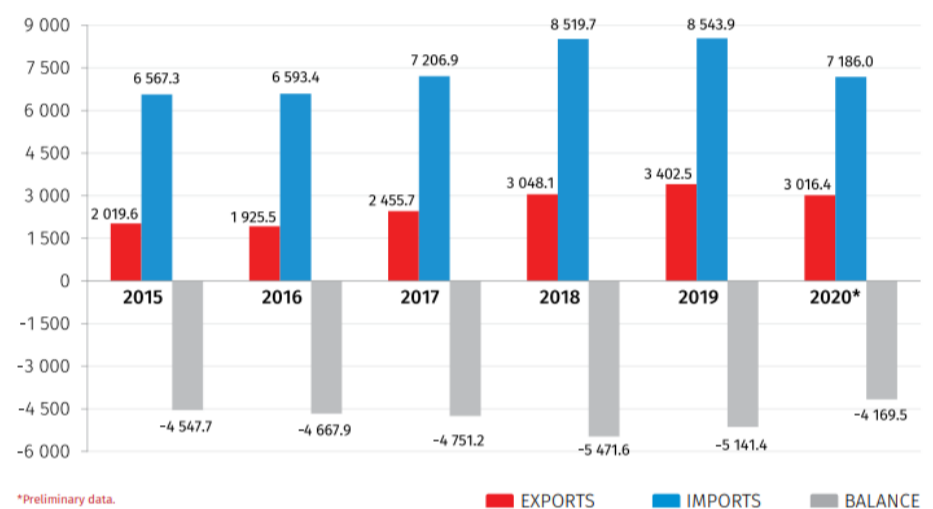


Photo: Geostat Report

## Team Europe: EIB to invest Euro25 million to aid recovery of Georgian enterprises from COVID-19 pandemic and expand a credit line with TBC Bank JSC

The EU bank will top up its existing credit line at the TBC Bank to a total of Euro81 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 Euro2 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 Euro25 million to expand a credit line for Georgian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and mid-caps available at TBC Bank JSC; the operation will help 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 Czerwińska, 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 pan-

demic 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.

Vakhtang Butskhrikidze, CEO, TBC Bank, commented: "We are proud to have an impressive track record of successful cooperation with EIB spanning

more than eight years, which is a testament to our truly efficient working relationship. EIB continued to stand by our side during these difficult times and extended much needed support to Georgian SMEs, which were affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic."

Team Europe adds value for Georgian companies

Covered by a guarantee from the European Union, the loan from the EU bank will enable TBC Bank 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, which has now been extended to cover also mid-caps besides local SMEs, is even more attractive thanks to the more flexible terms enabled by the EIB's COVID-19 emergency measures. These emergency measures are a part of Team Europe's efforts to support partner countries such as Georgia during the pandemic.

This is the fourth loan operation between the EIB and the TBC Bank JSC, who is also participating in 2 guarantee programs offered by EIB group. To date, the EU bank has invested more than Euro330 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 Euro2 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: <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/the-european-investment-bank-in-georgia>