

## Girchi and Citizens hold consultations



► "We have not changed the conditions for entering the Parliament, our task is to find out what prevents the agreement for 60 oppositionists to enter the parliament" Khvichia announced.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Citizens and Girchi political parties held a meeting for the first time on 14th of January to discuss the current political issues of entering the Parliament and the elections.

Iago Khvichia, Chairman of Girchi, says their task is to find out what is hindering the agreement between the politicians to allow all 60 opposition lawmakers to enter parliament and continue their activities there. Khvichia says he wants to talk to both opposition parties and the Georgian Dream.

As for Girchi's offer - the party has stated from the outset that their goal is proportional elections with a natural threshold. According to Khvichia, the reform of the CEC administration is also important for Girchi. He proposes to use



► "All parties want to enter the parliament, now they are looking for how to get out of the captivity of their words and rhetoric," Elisashvili said.

the autumn 2021 self-government elections as a plebiscite:

"We want proportional elections with a natural threshold and we think to use the local elections as a kind of plebiscite demanded by the opposition regarding the date of the new elections. If the opposition wins, new elections will be called, if it fails to win, then we will stop worrying about early elections, because it will turn out that this was not the case at all," Khvichia said.

As reported after the meeting, 2 parties have very close positions on resolving the crisis and have agreed on a joint action plan. "We agreed to go, we and the leaders of Girchi will talk to the other opposition parties, all those who have crossed the threshold and in the coming days we will have a meeting with Giorgi Vashadze, when he returns from abroad, then with Lelo, then with others," Elisashvili, leader of Citizens announced. He does not rule out a meeting with the National Movement.

"The only thing is that we do not understand the point of talking to Bokeria, or what we should talk about, neither he nor Gigi Ugulava have a mandate, we know the position of other members of their party that they want to stir the water," he said, adding that they will meet the Georgian Dream only in the presence of ambassadors.

The opposition, which is in a boycott mode due to the falsification of the results of the parliamentary elections, appealed to the parliament to terminate the powers of the deputy. The exceptions were the party Citizens with 2 seats and Girchi with 3 seats. Citizens say they are ready to enter parliament if radical electoral changes take place through negotiations with the ruling party.

The 4 deputies from the list of the Patriot Alliance entered the parliament, who left the party and formed a new party European Socialists.

The 5th round of talks between the opposition and the government, with the participation of facilitating ambassadors, is expected to take place by the end of this month. The main demands of the opposition are early elections, release of political prisoners and reform of the election administration.

### POLITICS

**Georgia celebrates National Flag Day, PM Gakharia hopes that flag will fly among other EU flags soon.**

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**Georgia's foreign trade decreased by 14.8%**

**Experts say increased customs duty on wheat by Russia might cause flour price fluctuations in Georgia**

FULL STORY ON Page 3

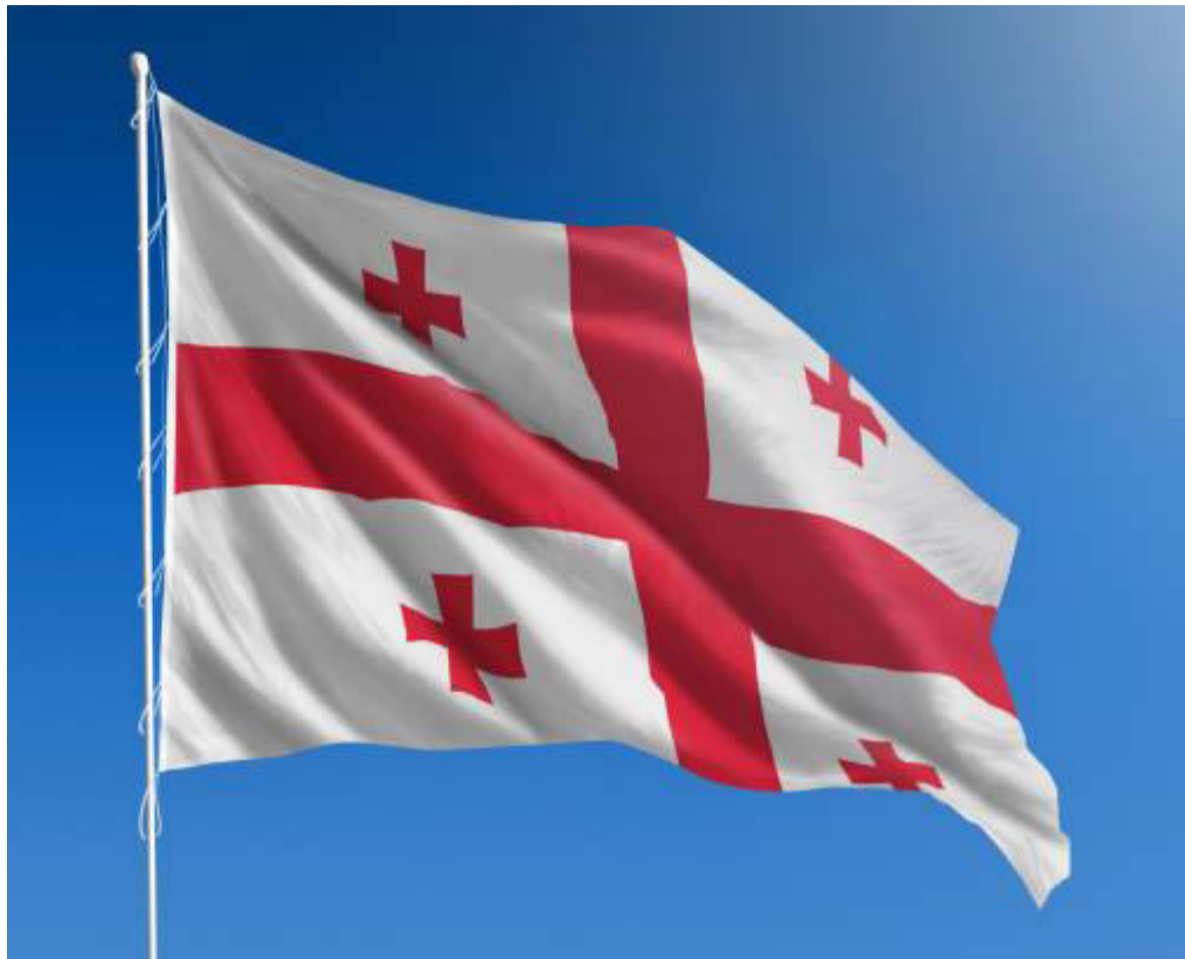
# Georgia celebrates National Flag Day, PM Gakharia hopes that flag will fly among other EU flags soon

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On the 14th of January, Georgia celebrates the National Flag Day. To mark the celebrations, Prime Minister Gakharia addressed the country with a speech. PM Gakharia expressed his hope for the Georgian flag to be raised among the flags of the EU member states in the nearest future.

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has also congratulated everyone who has been living under the national flag for the last 30 years. She also stated that those Georgians who do not remember the flag of another country flying over Georgia cannot understand the happiness of having the symbol of Georgian independence and freedom being raised instead.

The State Council of Heraldry has called upon Georgians to use this opportunity to commemorate the warriors, heroes, and prominent national figures. The current flag of Georgia was adopted by the former President Mikhail Saakashvili on January 14, 2004.



The national flag of Georgia consists of a white rectangle with a large red cross in the middle and four smaller crosses on each side of the larger cross. White rectangles and four small crosses have often been used to symbolize Christ the Savior and his four evangelists. The large cross in the center of the Georgian flag is the cross of St. George, and the four smaller crosses on the sides are called the Bolnisi crosses. The white color of the flag symbolizes innocence, purity of thoughts, chastity, and wisdom, while the red- masculinity, courage, justice, and love. The flag that was used before the existing one was a three-colored red, black and white flag that was adopted for the First Democratic Republic of Georgia of 1918-1921.

In order to mark the National Flag Day, the flag of Georgia was raised at all military bases of Georgian military bases, including the Vaziani Military Base and the country's Ministry of Defence.

The EU Action Against Drugs and Organised Crime (EU-ACT) project will launch a rehabilitation pilot programme for drug dependent inmates in prisons of Georgia this spring.

To prepare for the programme, the EU-ACT Project Georgia has developed evaluation instruments and tools, which will assist specialists to measure the success of inmates' rehabilitation.

The project has been developed in an online format, and involved several consultations, discussions and workshops with the team of specialists (psychologists) of the Special Penitentiary Service and the National Agency for Crime Prevention and Probation under the Ministry of Justice.

## EU Action Against Drugs and Organised Crime to launch rehabilitation programme for drug dependent inmates in Georgian prisons



Prior to this activity, the EU-ACT project supported the Special Penitentiary Service of Georgia to design a new rehabilitation programme for drug dependant inmates in prisons and implemented several inter-related activities to build the capacity of specialists, mainly psychologists, who later authored the programme.


EU-ACT aims at building capacities to increase regional and trans-regional law enforcement cooperation and coordination in the fight against organised crime and trafficking activities along the heroin route from Afghanistan, as well as supporting the development of drugs policy and drug demand reduction activities.


FRIDAY JANUARY 15

Day  Rain  
High: 7°C

Night  Partly cloudy  
Low: 1°C

SATURDAY JANUARY 16

Day  Cloudy  
High: 5°C

Night  Partly cloudy  
Low: 2°C

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## Georgia's foreign trade decreased by 14.8%



► According to express data, exports fell by 12% and imports by 15.9%.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI  
The National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) released express data yesterday on foreign trade. According to the document, due to the economic crisis created by CO-

VID-19 - the import of foreign goods decreased by 15.9% (\$ 1.5 billion), which in 2020 amounted to \$ 8 billion.

Exports of goods from Georgia were \$ 3.34 billion, which is reduced by 12% annually.

"The negative trade balance

was \$ 4.66 billion in 2020 and accounted for 41.1% of foreign trade turnover," the report said.

According to Geostat, exports in December were \$ 325.7 million, down 17.7% (\$ 70 million). Imports totaled \$ 799 million, down 17.9% (\$ 174 million).

On the other hand, exports of goods from Georgia decreased by 12% by 2020 and amounted to \$ 3.34 billion.

Thus, in 2020, the foreign trade turnover of goods in Georgia (excluding undeclared trade) amounted to \$ 11 347.7 million

which is 14.8% less than the corresponding figure of the previous year. Detailed data on Georgia's foreign trade will be published on January 20 this year - accordingly, it will be clear what exports and imports of goods are reduced.

## Experts say increased customs duty on wheat by Russia might cause flour price fluctuations in Georgia

FROM JULY TO JANUARY GEORGIA HAS BOUGHT \$49 MILLION WORTH OF WHEAT FROM RUSSIA



► There are several reasons that influence increasing wheat price in Georgia and around the world as well

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE  
According to the statement of Leval Silagava, Chairman of the Georgian Wheat and Flour Producers Association, the increased customs duty on wheat by Russian can cause price fluctuations of flour in Georgia.

As Silagava noted, Russia intends to impose a special type

of customs quotas on countries that are not members of the Customs Union. The customs quotas will be imposed starting from today, January 15.

Silagava also said that Russia announced two months ago that the duty for these countries would be set at 25 euros per ton of wheat. However, as of today, Russia is discussing a further increase of the tax.

The Chairman of the Association said that the price of wheat has increased by about 70 US dollars in the last 4 months. As Russia intends to introduce the new tax, the price will further increase.

"The price of the wheat per ton in September was \$200, today, it is \$270. Once Russia introduces the new laws, the effect of it can increase the price

up to \$300. This will cause a lot of problems for local businesses in Georgia," said Silagava.

Silagava said that there are also other reasons contributing to the increased price of wheat. He said that one of the major factors is the increased price of electricity. Although the government of the country has introduced different types of stimulus packages for business, they still are not enough to guarantee stability.

Another reason is the exchange rate of the Georgian Lari, which has been devaluat-

ing for a while now, which Covid-19 exacerbated even more.

Earlier, the government of Georgia announced a new decision, saying that 50% of the electricity tariff increase will be subsidized for certain categories of food producers. According to the Minister of Economy, Natia Turnava, the decision will ease the pressure on important parts of the business sector. In 2020, from January to July, Georgia has bought wheat exclusively from Russia. Country has purchased as much as 223,000 tons of wheat, worth more than \$49 million.



► The rising prices of wheat can lead to increased bread prices in Georgia