

POLITICS

Biden's nominee for Secretary of State supports Georgia's membership in NATO



FULL STORY ON Page 2

Zurab Pololikashvili re-elected as Secretary-General of UNWTO



FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

13 associations address gov't with 6 point anti-crisis plan



FULL STORY ON Page 3

Public Defender publishes special statement on situation in penitentiary establishments

THE STATEMENT TALKS ABOUT PROBLEMS FACED BY OMBUDSMAN'S REPRESENTATIVES



► Ombudsman's Office says that the penitentiary establishments in Georgia were managed by an 'informal hierarchy of prisoners'.

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Yesterday, on January 20, the Public Defender's Office of Georgia published a special statement, talking about the problems faced by the representatives of the office while visiting and monitoring the penitentiary establishments.

Last year, in 2020, after several months of researching the situation in penitentiary establishments, the Public Defender published a special report saying that the penitentiary establishments in Georgia were managed by an 'informal hierarchy of prisoners'.

According to the Public Defender, the so-called 'prison-watchers' provided orders to prisoners, aimed at silencing them and preventing them from providing the Public Defender's representatives with accurate information.

After the special report, according to Georgian Ombudsman, public attacks were carried out on the Public Defender's office and its representatives.

"Illegal actions were taken by the Minister of Justice and Penitentiary Service, as a result of which, it has become not only difficult but also dangerous, for the representatives of the Office to carry out visits and monitoring at the penitentiary establishments," reads the statement of the Public Defender.

The statement continues by saying that in recent months, a certain group of prisoners managed by the administration of the establishments and the so-called 'prison watchers' has been systematically carrying out verbal attacks, threats, and aggression against the representatives of the Ombudsman.

According to the Ombudsman's office, on October 31, 2020, and on January 14, 2021, a specific group of prisoners did not allow the representatives of the Public Defender to observe the situation in the facility. In particular, the representative of the Ombudsman of Georgia was not able to interview the doctor of Ksani Establishment No. 15.

On December 4, 2020, and January 13, 2021, one of the prisoners in the Gldani Establishment No. 8 threatened the representatives of the Public Defender's Office and requested that they stop their visits.

The Office of Ombudsman also notes that this establishment is a closed facility, however, this prisoner always manages to move around a specific area of the establishment when representatives of the Public Defender's office visit the facility. The statement also talks about the Rustavi Establishment No. 17, where a specific group of prisoners behaved aggressively towards the Public Defender representatives, telling them to stop visiting the prison.

On the other hand, the representatives of the penitentiary establishments call the statements of the Ombudsman 'groundless'. They also said that they are doing everything to support the representatives of the Public Defender to carry out their job.



► According to the Public Defender, the so-called 'prison-watchers' provided orders to prisoners

The Public Defender of Georgia calls on the Government of the country to take immediate measures to change the model of managing the criminal situation in Georgian prisons. The office also calls on the Parliament of Georgia to study the illegal model of management of semi-open establishments, by using parliamentary oversight mechanisms.

Biden's nominee for Secretary of State supports Georgia's membership in NATO

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Joe Biden was inaugurated as the 46th President of the United States. His nominee for the post of the country's first diplomat, Antony Blinken, appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday and spoke about his top priorities. To be appointed Secretary of State, Blinken needs to have his candidacy approved by the Senate. In his speech, Blinken spoke about the priorities of the next administration and answered questions from senators.

During the hearing Blinken said that he remains committed to NATO enlargement and Georgia's accession.

Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, who has been opposing NATO's open door policy for years, also asked Blinken about Georgia's membership in NATO. Secretary candidate said he would support Georgia's



► The diplomat named the strengthening of the State Department among his priorities and spoke about the role of public servants and diplomats employed in the field of foreign affairs.

membership if "the country meets the membership criteria and contributes to our common security."

"If you [Georgia's accession to NATO] were successful, then we would be at war with Russia now," Rand Paul told the secretary-general as he responded.

"On the contrary, Senator. In terms of NATO membership, I think, in fact, there is a reason why Russia is aggressive towards countries that are not in

NATO and under the umbrella of NATO, and there is a reason why Russia does not attack countries that are members of NATO," Blinken replied to Republican Senator.

Skeptical of NATO's open door policy and opposed to irritating Russia, the senator went on to say that if Georgia were to join the alliance, Russian occupation would trigger NATO Article 5 and send American troops to defend Georgia.



► "We need to revitalize our fundamental ties and alliances ... Together, we have better positions against the threats posed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea, and in order to protect democracy and human rights."

"We have seen in the past that countries that have joined NATO are no longer Russia's target," Blinken said.

Anthony Blinken has long been a confidant of US President-elect Joe Biden. They worked closely with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 2002-2008 and then during Biden's vice presidency with the Obama

administration, when the next secretary of state was the vice president's national security adviser. From the beginning of 2015 until January 2017, he held the position of Deputy Secretary of State. Blinken is a 58-year-old experienced diplomat. He has held various leading positions during several administrations.

Zurab Pololikashvili re-elected as Secretary-General of UNWTO

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgia's Zurab Pololikashvili has been re-elected Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) for the second term (2022-2025). The following decision was made during the 113th session of the UNWTO Executive Council, held in Madrid. Zurab Pololikashvili was elected for the first term in May 2017, which was the first time, Georgian candidate has been selected as the head of the international organization.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the newly-elected Secretary-General will be approved at the General Assembly session in the second half of 2021.

The Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sanchez, as well as the candidate for the UN Secretary-General for the UNWTO Zurab Pololikashvili, addressed the participants of the session. Ac-



► "The UNWTO Executive Council has voted for Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili to lead UNWTO for four more years, with members backing his vision for the 'restart and rethink' of tourism," reads the statement published on Facebook by UNWTO.

According to the UNWTO, public and private sector leaders gathered at the first Global Tourism Crisis Committee in 2021 to advance concrete plans to ensure the safe restart of tourism.

Pololikashvili has published a statement on Twitter, where he thanks the members of the Executive Board of the World

Tourism Organization for their support and trust.

"Together we highlighted our sector's relevance during the most challenging times and together, with the strongest determination, we will get tourism back on track for all!" stated Pololikashvili.

The Minister of Foreign Af-

fairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, the Chairman of the Committee on Sectoral Economics of the Parliament of Georgia, David Songhulashvili, and members of the Georgian delegation attended the meeting held in Madrid. The FM minister of Georgia congratulated Pololikashvili on his election as UNWTO Secretary-General for the second term. Zalkaliani expressed certainty

that Pololikashvili's hard work would contribute to the development of the tourism sector and empowering of people employed in this field.

Before becoming the Secretary-General of the UNWTO, Pololikashvili had served as Resident Representative of Georgia at UNWTO and Ambassador of Georgia to Spain.



► During the meeting of the Executive Board of the UNWTO, the Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sanchez, as well as the candidate for the UN Secretary-General for World Tourism Zurab Pololikashvili addressed the attendants of the session.

THURSDAY JANUARY 21

Day Mostly sunny
High: 3°C
Night A few clouds
Low: -4°C

FRIDAY JANUARY 22

Day Sunny
High: 3°C
Night Clear skies
Low: -4°C

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

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 - 3.2994 | EURO - 3.9801 | GBP - 4.4674 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.4446 | SWISS FRANC - 3.7014 |

13 associations address gov't with 6 point anti-crisis plan

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

After the second lockdown by the Government of Georgia on November 28, the restrictions were not phased out at the time initially announced. Some private sector sectors are expected to open on February 1. However, which sectors will be allowed to open from that time is yet unknown.

Due to the severe economic situation in the country, the large business associations of different economic activities, presented a 6-point plan to pull the country out of the crisis to the government yesterday.

According to the authors of the cross-sectoral plan, businesses see the threat of a further extension of the restrictions by the state from February 1 and call on the government to let the private sector start operating.

"Although we are well aware of the difficult situation in the field of healthcare in Georgia, we want to reaffirm our position - the country is on the verge of survival or total extinction! Many sectors are bankrupt, which is why the tax system and even the banking sector are in a deplorable state. Total unemployment reigns (except for state agencies)," reads the statement.

According to them, the only guarantee for the fulfillment of the country's financial obligations is the activation of all business sectors, which requires the immediate lifting of restrictions and



► According to Davit Meskhishvili, head of the Georgian Transport and Roads Association, traffic restrictions have left up to 50,000 people unemployed.



► The business sector of the mountain-ski resorts demands the opening of the ski lifts from February 1.

the resumption of flights.

"The country's economy and budget are in the worst situation, which puts into question the future development prospects of the country. For the last 11 months since the pandemic that began in March, the lockdown and economic stagnation has been going on for 5 months now, which is an inadmissible luxury for our rather poor country, the equivalent of a death sentence for the economy. The country has undertaken numerous international financial commitments that need to be fulfilled. The only guarantee of this is the activated business sector.

While there is still a way to save our country and a small way out of the current situation, it is necessary to take into account all the regulations established by epidemiologists and the experience of the world's leading countries in the shortest possible time!

According to the intersectoral initiative it is necessary to:

1. Urgently operate transport, both urban and interurban, road, metro and rail (taking into account the minimization of concentration). Stopped transport is the cause of increased unemployment today and is discrimination against the lowest income groups;

2. Restoration of international aviation communication as a number of countries do - take the example of neighboring countries (domestic flights fly to the EU, Turkey, Dubai, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Czech Republic, Armenia), which have not stopped

the international tourism business and at the same time successfully cope with the epidemic.

3. Start operating a restaurant business which is one of the most mobilized businesses in terms of meeting the demands of epidemiologists. The closure of this business leads to absolutely uncontrolled shadow activities and 'closed' parties.

4. To operate hotels, taking into account the requirements of domestic and foreign tourism; There are quite a few hotels operating today. By the same token, all hotels should be allowed to resume operations.

5. Restore the operation of malls and non-grocery stores; We have a successful result of such processing during the New Year. As we have seen, such work has not led to an increase in the number of patients of any kind.

6. Start operating winter resorts, both hotels and cable lifts. According to the association, keeping the social distance there is a technical issue, which is simple to solve and the prospect of developing entire regions shouldn't be sacrificed. The head of the mountain resorts business association emphasized that mountain resorts will not be able to withstand the closing of the second season and will go bankrupt.

All 13 Associations are committed to complying with the recommendations and advocating for mass testing, but refrain from incurring costs associated with the process.

Restriction on regular flights might be lifted from February, business associations demand re-opening of economy

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, Georgia reported 469 new cases, 1792 recoveries, and 14 deaths. In total, since the first outbreak of the virus, the country has had a total of 249 934 confirmed cases, 236, 922 recoveries, and 2987 fatalities.

The country is actively engaged in the process of obtaining coronavirus vaccines, authorized by stringent regulatory authorities. According to the Minister of Health Ekaterine Tikaradze, the first target group of vaccination will be the staff of the medical sector, followed by the elderly people. She has stated that the process will be implemented in the step-to-step method, although consistently.

Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava mentioned in an interview with TV channel Imedi that Georgia may lift restrictions on international flights in February. According to her, this does not mean that chaotic and unorganized entry in the country will be allowed. International travel-



► If the restriction on international flights is lifted from February, visitors will be required to present negative test results, vaccination documents, or other appropriate documents to enter the country.

ers will be required to present a vaccination document or other appropriate documents. "Resumption of flights is the first hope for the revival of the tourist season," Turnava stated. The government representatives have announced that some restrictions, which are currently imposed in the country, will be lifted from February 1st, including restrictions on the functioning of public transport, malls, and markets.

Yesterday, fifteen business

associations in Georgia sent an open letter to the government, where they highlight the possibility of postponing the removal of the lockdown. They call on the government to lift coronavirus-related restrictions step-by-step. According to the joint letter, the recent statement from the government agency representatives and epidemiologists point to another lockdown, because of the possible so-called third wave. The business associations state that hotels,



► Georgian business associations call on the government to lift restrictions gradually, as they believe the restoration of business activities is the only way to overcome the economic crisis.

restaurants, and shopping malls should be opened in Georgia, also, transport and air traffic should be restored in accordance with the coronavirus regulations. Business representatives demand the opening of cable cars and hotels in winter resorts as well.

Signatory business associations express readiness to engage in and coordinate the process of massive testing, however, they state that some businesses, which are in unfavorable condition due to

the financial loss, will not be able to conduct testing at their own expense and will require support from the government.

According to the business associations, many business areas have gone bankrupt, which has severely affected the tax system as well as the banking sector. They state that Georgia has made a lot of international financial commitments, which is why the only way out of the crisis is to restore business activities.