

## Politics

**PM meets with US and EU Ambassadors, asking for maximum support to free Zaza Gakheladze**

Gakheladze was illegally detained by occupation forces

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**Six MEPs condemn breaching of privacy and 'unflattering' attitude towards EU Ambassador to Georgia**

**New leader of UNM Nika Melia may be facing arrest for refusing to pay bail**

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## Few of the restriction to be lifted starting today



The municipal transport in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi will resume operations on February 8

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

A few days ago, the Government Administration published a special statement about opening up the country starting February 8. While some of the restrictions are lifted today for weekdays, whereas others remain in full effect.

According to the decision of the Government of Georgia, municipal transport in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi will resume working on February 8 instead of March 1; markets will open a week earlier than planned. Starting from February 15, schools are allowed to resume teaching in classrooms. Also, restaurants and fast-food chains will be able to operate their outdoor spaces. In addition to easing restrictions, the Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia also stressed the importance of tightening other rules, noting that in case of repeated violation of the rules on wearing face masks, the fine will be doubled and will amount ₾ 40.

According to the government, students will choose how they prefer to continue studies- in classrooms or online.

Also, every school will have to follow different types of protocols, and will be allowed to come up with their own sched-

ule only part of the restrictions, and postponed part of the restrictions until March 1.



Nationwide, the two-month strict restrictions went into effect on November 28

ules according to their infrastructure and needs.

Gakharia stressed that any company that violates the rules, in addition to the fine, will no longer benefit from state assistance and subsidies and will not participate in any state support program in the future.

Nationwide, the two-month strict restrictions went into effect on November 28. The government then promised a gradual easing of restrictions. On February 1, all restrictions, including the curfew, were to be lifted. However, on January 22, the government decided to

The government says the decision was made thanks to the fact that the daily infection results have dropped below 4%. However, the government states that all of the steps should be taken responsibly and with much care to make sure that the virus does not spread faster than expected.

All of the restrictions will remain in force during the weekends.

As of today, there have been a total of 262,024 cases reported in the country. Out of these, 253,614 have recovered, and 3283 have died. In the last 24 hours, 404 new cases were reported.



Schools will reopen on February 15

# PM meets with US and EU Ambassadors, asking for maximum support to free Zaza Gakheladze



Both EU and US Ambassadors discussed the importance of such meetings

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia met with the international partners of the country. The meeting between the Ambassador of the United States of America Kelly Degnan, EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell, and Georgian PM Giorgi Gakharia, aimed at discussing the recent extension of the unlawful detention of Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze in the occupied region of Georgia, Tskhinvali.

The Prime Minister of Georgia asked its international partners for their maximum support in the process of freeing illegally detained Zaza Gakheladze and other citizens of the country. The Prime Minister emphasized the

importance of making use of diplomatic and legal mechanisms on an international level. As for the diplomats, they reiterated their concern over the decision of the de-facto court in Tskhinvali on extending the detention of a Georgian citizen, adding that he must be released immediately.

Kelly Degnan noted that it was extremely important to meet and discuss this situation.

“The United States is very concerned and condemns the recent action taken yesterday against an illegally detained Georgian citizen, who has been detained since last July, on charges that are completely fabricated as far as we can tell. And we hope that there will be serious consideration given to resolv-

ing this quickly and releasing this Georgian citizen as soon as possible,” noted the US Ambassador to Georgia.

Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia Carl Hartzell said that this situation raises a lot of concern. According to him, they have been following this case for months now, and they have been working through various instruments, including IPRM, the hotline, the Geneva Talks and others.

“We are urging for the immediate release from illegal detention. And we will be continuously following up on this issue. I am very grateful for being called to the Prime Minister’s Office to have a chance to discuss the situation. We are in full

agreement on the need to continuously follow this issue very closely, because it is a concern,” added Carl Hartzell.

The meeting’s participants also included the Head of the Administration of the Georgian Government Kakhaber Kemoklidze.

According to the Government of Georgi, they continue active efforts toward the mobilization of the international community. The government of the country once again urges its international partners to provide adequate response to yet another provocation by Russia’s occupation regime and take effective measures toward the immediate release of the illegally detained Georgian citizen.



The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of diplomatic and legal mechanisms

## EaPConnect project to provide cloud resources for better weather forecast in Georgia

The Georgian agency for weather forecast and climate change studies will use Cloud infrastructure that was established with the support of the EU-funded EaPConnect project, according to a new Memorandum of Cooperation.



Photo: European Union

The cooperation between GRENA, the Georgian Research and Educational Networking Association, and the country’s National Environmental Agency will provide the agency with Cloud resources that include 24 core, 64 GB RAM, 10 TB storage and IT support.

The research and education Cloud facility in Georgia is being integrated in the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC).

The EaPConnect project aims to bring together research and education communities from EU and Eastern partner countries and to reduce the digital divide, extending network infrastructure to scale up scientific exchange across borders, offer new services to enhance international R&E cooperation and strengthen national research and education networks.

### Weather

Monday, February 8

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 14°C  
Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

Tuesday, February 9

Day Mostly Cloudy  
High: 16°C  
Night Clear  
Low: 4°C

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## Six MEPs condemn breaching of privacy and ‘unflattering’ attitude towards EU Ambassador to Georgia

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On Saturday, January 6, six members of the European Parliament expressed their concerns over the recent statements from Tea Tsulukiani, MP of the ruling Georgian Dream party. MEPs working on issues such as Viola von Cramon, Michael Grahler, Andrius Kubilius, Sven Mikser, Petras Austrevicius, and Marketa Gregorova sent a joint letter concerning the “unethical incident at the Georgian Parliament” in which Tsulukiani “carelessly breached privacy” by her publicly citing a phone number of the director of opposition-minded TV channel, Mtavari Arkhi during the Parliament’s plenary session. EU Ambassador to Georgia, Carl Hartzell, who was present at the session, referred to the incident as ‘unethical’. In response, Tsulukiani requested a private meeting with Hartzell and later told journalists that his remark expressed his personal opinion and not that of the EU.

The joint letter sent to the



Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze wrote that is “regrettable, very unpleasant, and unethical when the fundamental right of privacy is carelessly breached in the walls of your institution” and “equally regrettable and simply in bad taste when the EU ambassador’s ac-

curate assessment of the events prompts a request of justification from your colleagues”.

“Ambassador Hartzell, who during the last months spared no efforts in making sure that Georgia has a functioning, pluralistic and democratic parliament, does not merely express

‘his personal opinion’ but voices those fundamental EU values that your country also claims to aspire to,” MEPs wrote.

The letter also reminded that when the members of the newly elected Georgian Parliament visited Brussels to present “an ambitious goal of applying for EU

membership in 2024”, they kindly reminded that ambitious political goals require equally ambitious democratic standards, which is why the mitigation of polarizing language was so important amidst the joint efforts to resolve the ongoing political crisis.

Finally, in their joint letter MEPs expressed their hopes to soon be able to see a pluralistic and transparent parliament, “just like the voters intended it to be”. They also called for Talakvadze as the acting chairperson “to ensure a high level of decorum in the plenary hall, which will allow for constructive debates and effective oversight on legislation.”

Nika Gvamaría whose phone number was Tsulukiani revealed, said that it was a pre-thought move against him. He added that he believes that the Georgian Dream intends to scare him, make him fear the court, fear for his life and his family’s well being. Gvamaría added that he refuses to give up.

## New leader of UNM Nika Melia may be facing arrest for refusing to pay bail



By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On February 5, the Office of Chief Prosecutor of Georgia announced that the newly appointed chair of the United National Movement opposition party Nika Melia is facing pre-trial detention for refusing to pay

a bail of ₾ 40,000.

Melia was found guilty of inciting violence during the June 2019 protests in Tbilisi and was released on bail in November 2020. According to the court’s verdict, Melia was supposed to wear a monitoring bracelet, but he took it off publicly in Novem-

ber 2020. The bail was to be posted no later than December 24, 2020.

The UNM party leader announced that he refuses to pay bail and referred to the ongoing investigation against him as ‘absurdity’. He added that his decision is a part of a ‘rightful

struggle’:

“I am not going to pay anything, and they won’t be able to arrest me either. I have a full respect for the governmental institutions, but when the Chief Prosecutor’s Office is owned by Shotadze and Partskhaladze, courts belong to Murusidze and

Chinchaladze and the Parliament represents Kobakhidze and Gavrilo, I have no moral right to participate in this web of lies”, Melia said. The politician refused to answer additional questions the journalists asked him and did not comment on whether or not he is planning to visit the Chief Prosecutor’s Office.

Nika Melia was also involved in a high-profile Cartu Bank case which led to the suspension of his MP status by the Georgian Parliament in December 2019. He was also banned from taking public office for two years and three months and was required to pay a ₾ 25,000 fine for his role in the case as the former head of the State Enforcement Bureau.

The Chief Prosecutor’s Office released a statement, claiming that even though Melia owned real estate sufficient to pay his bail, he refused to pay the bail on time, but would still be given another week to do so. Should he fail to pay the bail within the given week, the Chief Prosecutor’s Office will apply to the court to change the current sentence to pre-trial detention. The statement added that his decision to remove the electronic monitoring bracelet “practically removed any possibility for the proper conduct of his case”.