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Georgian Parliamentary Delegation participates in 13th session of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly



► The participants of the session of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly discussed the deepening of future economic cooperation within the GUAM and the development of joint projects.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On February 10, the Georgian Parliamentary delegation headed by Giorgi Khelashvili, the first Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, attended the sitting of the 13th session of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM Parliamentary Assembly. The session held online was chaired by the Head of Milli Majlis delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly (PA).

According to the statement released by the Parliament of Georgia, one of the main discussion topics was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The sides emphasized that for the future economic and democratic development of the region, the conflict should be resolved peacefully.

The head of the Georgian delegation raised the difficult situation in the occupied territories of Georgia. As the statement notes, the conversation focused on the case of Zaza Gakhekadze, a Georgian citizen illegally detained by Russian-controlled occupation forces in Tskhinvali. Khelashvili underlined the aggressive actions, such as creeping occupation by the Russian Federation and noted that the mobilization of international support in this process is crucial, as the humanitarian as well as human rights situation

in the occupied territories of Georgia are deteriorating daily.

During the session, the participants discussed the experience gathered in regard to fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. Khelashvili informed the colleagues

about the epidemiological situation in Georgia and stressed that along with effective management of the pandemic, active operations are underway for economic rehabilitation.

According to the statement, members

of the GUAM Observation Mission, who were observing 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia, noted in the report presented to the assembly that the elections were conducted in line with the international democratic standards, in a free and fair environment, and fully reflected the will of Georgian society.

During the session, the parties emphasized sustainable cooperation between the GUAM Member States and highlighted the need to further strengthen and deepen the political, legal, trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural cooperation among the GUAM countries. It was noted that the potential of free trade and transport corridors between the GUAM countries needs to be exploited effectively. The talks also focused on intensifying cooperation with Baltic countries in specific directions.

The session was attended by parliamentary delegations of all GUAM member states (Azerbaijan, Georgia Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine), as well as the President of the Baltic Assembly, the Secretary-General of TURKPA, and the Secretary-General of PABSEC.

Per the decision of the Parliamentary Assembly, On the 1st of January 2021, Georgia took over the Chairmanship in Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM.



► The Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM was established on October 10, 1997 during the Second Council of Europe Summit in Strasbourg and consists of 4 states - Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry warns Saakashvili to refrain from calling for protests in Georgia

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine responded to the statement of the former President of Georgia and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Reform Council of Ukraine Mikheil Saakashvili, writing that the accusations made against the Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia, Igor Dolgov, have no evidence.

The Ukrainian MFA once again called on the citizens of Ukraine, who are public figures, to refrain from calling for actions of disobedience in a friendly state in Georgia.

“Such statements may be seen as interference in the internal affairs of our strategic partner. The Ukrainian state has never addressed and will not resort to such interventions in the future and categorically opposes such actions.”

“The allegations made against the Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia, Igor Dolgov, have no evidence other than the accuser’s emotions. Ukrainian diplomacy will not give in to them and will continue to effectively resist Russian hybrid aggression, mobilize the world to support Ukraine, open new markets for Ukrainian exporters, and successfully protect the rights of our compatriots abroad,” read the statement

Recall that Dolgov commented on the statement of Saakashvili when he announced that the acts of disobedience in Georgia should be carried out on a large scale.

Ambassador said that as an individual, Saakashvili has the right to express himself, but “now that the situation with the parliamentary elections has been more or less settled and the focus is on more important issues, calls for disobedience and illegal demonstrations will not really help to build a trust-based atmosphere for the development of strategic partnership between our countries.”

Saakashvili replied to Dolgov’s statement, accusing the ambassador of being “a corrupt bribe-



▶ “The allegations against the Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia have no evidence, except for the emotions of the accuser, Ukrainian diplomacy will not try”.



▶ “Ukraine’s ambassador to Georgia is a bribe-taker, I will fight to prevent Ukraine from having such ambassadors,” said Saakashvili.

taker” and noting that Dolgov was a “Soviet functionary”.

“The Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia, Mr. Dolgov, who was appointed by Poroshenko 4 years ago with the sole purpose of fighting me, survived the Zelensky era and continues to tarnish Ukraine’s image in Georgia and throughout the post-Soviet space,” Saakashvili said, adding that Dolgov worked in

unison with Poroshenko’s team to prevent Ukrainian MPs from traveling to Georgia as observers in last October’s elections.

He also announced that “for many months now, two Ukrainian captains, Diachenko and Khomich, as well as Mikhail Baturin, a Georgian of Ukrainian descent, have been illegally held captive by a Georgian junta who, like Somali pirates, has

caught them at sea and is trying to extort something.” Saakashvili accused Dolgov of inactivity and corruption, since he thinks that the case of Odessa sailors is linked to corrupt interests of Georgian officials.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine also responded to the case of 2 Ukrainian citizens detained on charges of illegal border crossing in Georgia.

“One of the last resonant cases when Ukrainians needed the help of their state abroad was the seizure of a ship carrying 2 Ukrainian citizens - Vladimir Diachenko and Yuri Khomich, as well as Mikhail Baturin, a citizen of Georgia. Allegations of inaction against the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry in this case are baseless and mislead the public.”

It is stated that this issue is one of the main priorities of the Ukrainian Embassy in Tbilisi. “To secure their release, the embassy held numerous meetings with Georgian government officials and prosecutors. The Consul of our Embassy assisted in securing contact with the relatives of the detained Ukrainians. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and the Embassy of Ukraine in Georgia sent the relevant notes and submitted a petition for the detention of the detained citizens of Ukraine.”

“We take this opportunity to once again call on the Georgian authorities to conduct a swift and impartial review of this case, to change the measure of restraint and to release the citizens of Ukraine,” the MFA stated.

On February 20, Batumi City Court remanded in custody 2 Ukrainian citizens, arrested on charges of illegal border crossing, as well as Mikheil Baturin, Mikheil Saakashvili’s former bodyguard.

Judge Violeta Porchkhidze rejected the motions of the defense to change the measure of restraint and terminate the criminal prosecution at trial, where the evidence was considered.

Prosecutor Vladimir Turmanidze claims that the detainees were bound by boat from Turkey to Batumi, in violation of the rules, they did not come into contact with the Georgian side at all, to which the Coast Guard had a corresponding reaction. The prosecutor alleges that the Coast Guard detained the boat and there was an attempt by the detainees to escape.

The substantive hearing of the case will start on February 24 in Batumi City Court.

In parallel with yesterday’s session, members of the National Movement and their supporters held a rally in front of the Batumi City Court.

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 11

Day ☀️ Mainly sunny
High: 18°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 4°C

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 12

Day ☀️ Sunshine
High: 17°C

Night 🌙 Partly cloudy
Low: 6°C

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Georgian Post to be gradually privatized

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgian Post held a presentation on its activities in 2020, where it was noted that the company served 2,524,201 retail customers and up to 3,000 corporate clients.

Compared to 2019, the number of shipments sent from Georgia increased at the expense of overland parcels, and in 2020 the import of overland parcels amounted to 3,000,000 kg and exports to 286,000 kgs.

At the press conference held after the presentation of the Georgian Post 2020 report, the media asked the General Director of the Georgian Post Levan Chikvaidze what the financial performance of the company was and whether the post was affected by the pandemic this year.

Chikvaidze didn't agree with the opinion that the post office was unprofitable in the past years, because Georgian Post 'provides universal postal services, the cost of which, according to the audited report, is €5 million, thus Georgian Post won this €5 million and financed the universal postal service and, in the case of revenue below \$ 5 million in total, it may have seemed as a loss.

In 2019, the profit of organization was €1.8 million, and in 2020, operating profit is €7 million. "The adjusted financial profit will be known after the audit," Chikvaidze said.



► "Operational profit of Georgian Post in 2020 was €7 million," said Levan Chikvaidze.

According to him, the consumption of postal services increased by 40% in 2020 and Georgian Post was able to overcome the existing challenges in the conditions of air restrictions by land delivery.

Georgian Post is a state company. Founded in 1995, the company now supplies postal and parcel items in Georgia. According to the financial statements of 2017, Georgian Post is a loss-making enterprise.

According to Chikvaidze, the privatization of the national postal operator of state property will be done in stages.

"The issue of privatization of the national operator is not an easy issue, but work is underway and Georgia will be one of the successful countries in this

regard, which will privatize the national operator."

He underscored that there is no example of full privatization of the company in the world and the number of fully privatized national postal operators worldwide is only 3. There are many partially privatized facilities in European countries and Georgia will be one of them. As for the deadlines, everyone wants privatization to start as soon as possible, because these investments should improve the activities of the national operator and the Georgian citizens should receive better services.

Chikvaidze believes that the interests in terms of gradual alienation have already been identified both locally and internationally, although he does



► A meeting regarding Georgian Post was held within the framework of the reform of state enterprises.

not specify what part will be alienated in the first stage and adds that "It is too early to talk about it."

According to the government administration, the Prime Minister of Georgia, within the framework of the reform of state enterprises, held another meeting with the working group on the topic of Georgian Post. At the meeting, the government's administration discussed the current activity of the Georgian Post, as well as possible plans for the reform of state-owned enterprises at the Georgian Post in order to increase its management efficiency and make private investments.

According to the administration, as part of the plan to accelerate the reform and privatization

of state-owned enterprises, the Prime Minister continues to hold similar meetings in an intensive mode.

The founder and owner of 100% of "Georgian Post" is a state, it is managed by the National Agency for State Property. According to the consolidated report, the company operates 82 service centers and employs up to 3,000 people.

The information about possible privatization of Georgian Post became known in November 2018 - former Minister of Economy Giorgi Kobulia spoke in an interview with Bloomberg. At the end of 2020, current Economy Minister Natia Turnava announced that the government would return to the issue of postal privatization in 2021.

LEVERAGING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES KEY TO ASIA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY — ADB

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (10 February 2021) — Digital platforms and other technology-based tools are providing new growth opportunities for businesses of all sizes and across all industries in Asia and the Pacific—a trend which could contribute significantly to the region's sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

A flagship ADB publication, the Asian Economic Integration Report 2021, looks at Asia and the Pacific's progress in regional cooperation and integration, and examines the initial impact of the pandemic on trade, cross-border investment, financial integration, and the movement of people. The latest edition features a special theme chapter on the role and potential of digital technologies in contributing to inclusive and sustainable development, how digital technology can spur post-pandemic recovery in the region, and ways to accelerate digital transformation while managing the risks effectively.

"Countries in Asia and the Pacific have leveraged rapid



technological progress and digitalization to recover and reconnect to the global economy during the pandemic. Technology is helping to forge new global linkages, which offer enormous economic opportunities, but also present new risks and challenges," said ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada. "It is imperative to implement policies and regulations that manage the disruptions and maximize the gains from the burgeoning digital economy, and to lock in

these gains through enhanced regional cooperation."

Business-to-consumer revenues of digital platforms reached \$3.8 trillion in 2019 globally, with Asia and the Pacific accounting for about 48% of the total or \$1.8 trillion, equivalent to 6% of the region's gross domestic product. These figures are expected to have significantly increased in 2020 as more business transactions—such as ride hailing, food delivery, and e-commerce—migrate to the

digital space amid restrictions imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Accelerated digital transformation can potentially boost global output, trade and commerce, and employment. According to the report, a 20% increase in the size of the global digital sector can increase global output by an average of \$4.3 trillion yearly from 2021 to 2025. Similarly, Asia and the Pacific would reap an economic dividend of more than \$1.7 trillion yearly or more than \$8.6 trillion over the 5 years to 2025. There will be about 65 million new jobs created yearly in Asia and the Pacific until 2025 from increased use of digital technologies, with regional trade also expected to increase by \$1 trillion yearly over the next 5 years.

Governments in the region can leverage and reap the benefits of the emerging digital economy through policies and reforms to improve digital infrastructure and connectivity, as well as access to them. These steps include promoting fair competition and improving ease-of-doing business processes, as well as enhancing labor security and social protection measures

to align with digital jobs. The report also emphasized the need to focus on data privacy and security, taxation, partnership between public and private institutions, and regional cooperation.

The report notes that the region's trade performance, while hit hard during the first half of 2020, is expected to recover faster than anticipated. Asia's merchandise trade volume growth hit the bottom at -10.1% year-on-year in May, and has recovered gradually, turning into positive territory since September 2020. Investment flows globally and to the region are estimated to have fallen further in 2020, following a 7.7% slide in foreign direct investment to Asia in 2019 at \$510.5 billion. Nevertheless, recent firm-level activity in mergers and acquisitions in the region shows signs of recovery, as countries start to reopen and ease some pandemic-related restrictions.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members - 49 from the region.