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Fitch Ratings is an American credit rating agency

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BY NIKA GANTSEMLIDZE

On February 14, representatives of several opposition parties responded individually to UNM leader Nika Melia's possible arrest, describing it as 'revenge of Russia and the failure of the Georgian Dream'.

On the other hand, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia Vakhtang Gomelauri said that everyone is equal before Law and will be treated equally.

Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of European Georgia, wrote on Facebook that "Nika Melia's bail is actually a tribute to Gavrilov". Roman Gotsiridze, one

Opposition representatives respond to Nika Melia's possible arrest



The representatives of the opposition parties plan to meet on February 15 and discuss the ongoing events together

of the leaders of the United National Movement, also sees Russia's traces in this case, and notes that 'he is Gavrilov's prisoner.'

Sergo Chikhladze, one of the leaders of Strategy Aghmashenebeli, called the possible arrest of the MP 'a great injustice' and a 'big mistake of the Georgian Dream'.

The representatives of the opposition parties plan to meet on February 15 and discuss the ongoing events together. According to some of the news agencies, the Parliamentary Bureau will discuss the issue of lifting the parliamentary immunity for Nika Melia today, on February 15. The vote is planned to take place at the plenary session on February 16.

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia ap-

pealed to the Parliament of Georgia on February 12 to obtain the prior consent to detain Nika Melia. The prosecutor's office needs such consent because although Melia requested to terminate his mandate, he still remains to be an MP.

The deadline for Nika Melia to pay bail expired on February 12. He did not pay the bail, ₾ 40,000, within the time limit set by the court, which initially was due to December 24, 2020, and did not secure the bail with any property. The prosecution gave him an extra week on February 5th.

Nika Melia is accused of attempting to break into the parliament building on June 20-21, 2019 during an anti-occupation protest rally, under the article of leadership of gang violence and partici-

pation in it.

According to the decision of June 27, 2019, Melia was sentenced to ₾ 30,000 bail and electronic monitoring as a measure of restraint. On November 1, 2020, at a protest rally in front of the parliament, Melia publicly removed his electronic monitoring bracelet.

After that, the Prosecutor's Office appealed to the Court to increase the bail to ₾ 100,000. According to the ruling of the Tbilisi City Court of November 3, 2020, the bail previously imposed on Nika Melia was increased to ₾ 40,000 and he was given 50 days to pay the bail. Melia was also banned from crossing the state border without the prior notice and consent of the prosecution.



The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia appealed to the Parliament of Georgia on February 12



Internal Affairs Minister says everyone is equal before Law

Ukraine and Georgia pledge to join efforts to counter Russian aggression

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announcement on February 10, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Vasiliy Bodnar, and Deputy Head of Georgia's Diplomatic Mission to Ukraine David Bochorishvili, agreed to join the countries' efforts in countering Russian aggression.

Bodnar noted that it is very important to facilitate the development of the bilateral partnership between the countries, especially in the areas which benefit both Ukraine and Georgia. He noted that the bilateral ties should also facilitate the countries' Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations:

"Ukraine and Georgia are both suffering from Russian military aggression, which is why it is necessary for us to maintain our ties in order to be able to counter the Kremlin's threats. Together we should move forward towards NATO membership, and that alone will make us resilient to any external efforts aimed at damaging our partnership", Bodnar said



and added that Georgia is Ukraine's strategic partner.

On February 13, the Spokesperson of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry Oleg Nikolenko stated that Ukraine condemns the sentencing of an illegally detained

Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze in the occupied region of Tskhinvali. Nikolenko stated that this action grossly violated international law, as well as Russian obligations under the ceasefire agreement

achieved in 2008. He went on to say that the sentencing of Gakheladze showed that Russia aims to destabilize the security within the occupied territories and the region as a whole.

Nikolenko called for Russia to

"immediately stop the destabilizing activities" and release the illegally detained Georgian citizen. In his statement, Nikolenko underlined Ukraine's continuous support for Georgia's sovereignty and integrity of its internationally recognized borders and called for the international community to increase pressure on Russia to stop its aggression against Georgia and Ukraine and demand the de-occupation of their respective sovereign territories.

Zaza Gakheladze, a citizen of Georgia, was shot and illegally detained by Russian occupation forces in 2020. In a trial that took place earlier this month, Gakheladze was sentenced to 12 years and 6 months in prison. The international community condemned the court's verdict on Gakheladze's case and called for Russia to immediately release him. PM Gakharia promised to spare no efforts in ensuring that Gakheladze is released to go back home as soon as possible, and stated that the negotiations with the strategic partners on the matter are already in full motion.

Co-founder of opposition Girchi party Zurab Japaridze fined for operating a night bar

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

One of the founders of the libertarian-minded opposition Girchi party, Zurab Japaridze, was fined for operating a night bar despite the existing COVID-19 induced regulations. During a live stream on his Facebook page on Friday, Japaridze announced that he would open a bar to deliberately violate the existing government-imposed restrictions on the commercial activity in the country. He added that by managing to operate despite restrictions, the bar would encourage other businesses to do so as well. The Facebook page invites guests to a bar called 'Japarastan' reads 'to everyone who is sick of living like a hamster in a cage'.

The Health Ministry of Georgia's Labour Department

fined Japaridze € 2,000 for running a bar, however, the opposition politician announced that he has no intention of paying this fine. He said that he is currently under the protection of the immunity of the MP mandate, and is planning to not only reopen the bar but to even celebrate the birthday of one of his fellow party members there.

One more facility and two individuals were fined yesterday for similar violations. As of Monday, February 15, food facilities and restaurants will be able to operate their outdoor terraces amidst the decrease in the numbers of persons infected with the coronavirus.

Zurab Japaridze, co-founder of the Girchi party has recently left it to start a Girchi party of his own, called More Freedom – Girchi. His decision to leave came shortly after the controversies rising around his fellow party members. Japaridze explained that he envisions for Girchi to be a more open platform, able to support young politicians. Japaridze also explained that he would not cooperate with

the other co-founders of the Girchi party for "many reasons".

During the Parliamentary

Elections of 2020, Girchi managed to overcome the 1% threshold, however, the MPs refused to claim the four seats in the Par-

liament. Girchi believes that October 2020 was fabricated and demands repeat elections to be held.



Weather

Monday, February 15

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 14°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 4°C

Tuesday, February 16

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 6°C

Night Rain / Snow
Low: 1°C

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Fitch ratings affirms Georgia at BB



PM Gakharia wrote about the Fitch Ratings' statement on his personal Twitter account

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Georgia's rating at BB with a negative outlook. According to the decision of the company, the rating of the country was supported by strong structural indicators, governance and business environment.

As the statement reads, a consistent and credible policy framework makes the country

relatively resilient to different types of shocks. As for the negative outlook, it largely reflects the significant impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy of the country.

The ongoing pandemic had a huge impact on the small open economy of the country, which largely relied on the tourism sector. The company also forecasts real GDP growth of about 4.3% in 2021, and 5.8% in 2022.

Fitch Ratings also projected faster economic recovery in the country especially compared to the medial growth rates of its BB peers, which is on average 4.0% in 2021, and 3.7% in 2022.

The Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia commented on the statement of Fitch Ratings, noting that the decision asserts that the re-election of Georgian Dream "reinforced Economic policy continuity with no interrup-

tion, despite high political tensions given the current boycott of parliament by opposition," tweeted the Prime Minister.

According to the statement, the current account deficit of Georgia is estimated to have widened to 12% of GDP in 2020 from 5.5% in 2019. The statement also noted that the exports fell less than expected, which was helped by a relatively well diversified base of trading partners.

As for the services exports, it was largely affected by the halt to inward tourism. For 2021, Fitch forecasts that the account deficit of the country will widen up to 12.5% in 2021 and will narrow to 7.9% in 2022.

The Fitch Ratings noted that the re-election of the Georgian Dream reinforces the expectations of economic policy continuity and the company does not see this being disrupted.

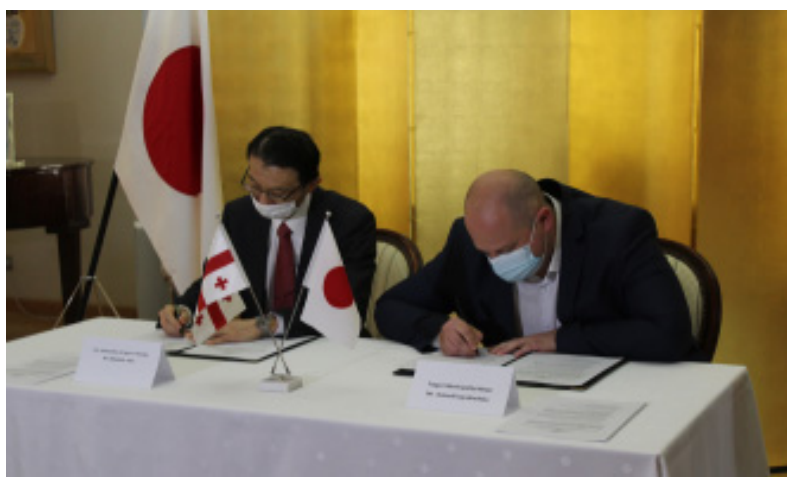
"Georgia's governance and ease of doing business indicators outperform the median percentile of its BB peers."

Fitch Ratings is an American credit rating agency and is one of the three biggest credit rating agencies, the other two being Moody's and Standard & Poor's. It is one of the three nationally recognized statistical rating organizations designated by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in 1975.



The statement reads that a consistent and credible policy framework makes the country relatively resilient to different types of shock

Signing Ceremony of the Two Projects Within the GGP Grassroots Human Security Grant Program of the Embassy of Japan in Georgia



Since the independence of Georgia, Japan has provided 180 grants within the GGP Grassroots Human Security Program, totaling over 19 million USD, in addition to other grant

schemes. The GGP program aims to support human security in Georgia in the following priority fields: environment protection, agriculture, infrastructure, healthcare and education. The

major principles behind the GGP program are overcoming poverty, sustainable development, inclusiveness and participatory growth.

On February 12, the Signing Ceremony was held for two projects, funded by the Government of Japan, based on the goodwill of the Japanese people. The Signing Ceremony was attended by the Ambassador of Japan, H.E. Mr. **Imamura Akira** and representatives of the regional and municipal governments of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region. The projects are funded within the GGP Grassroots Human Security Grant Program of the Embassy of Japan and aim to provide heavy equipment for disaster response and disaster risk re-

duction in **Tsageri** and **Oni Municipalities**.

Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region belongs to risk zones and is prone to single or multiple natural hazards (earthquake, landslides, flood, mudflow, rock fall, snow avalanches). Within these projects, heavy machinery will be purchased to clear roads to reduce the vulnerability of the local community to natural disaster and to strengthen preparedness and coping capabilities of the local governments. Grant amount for these two projects: 70,500 and 56,584 USD.

