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UK Minister for European Neighborhood and the Americas pays 1st official visit to Georgia



UK Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton and Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, the UK Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas at the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office Wendy Morton paid her first official visit to Georgia. During her stay, Morton met with Georgian high-ranking officials, including Georgian Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze, Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani, and

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia. The meeting with FM Zalkaliani paid special attention to the importance of the UK-Georgia Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which came into force on January 1st, 2021. According to Morton, this agreement creates the basis for a long-term relationship and underlines the significance of the UK's strong ties with Georgia. The Minister noted that there are multiple fields where

closer ties can be established and stressed the importance of intensifying the political and trade relations between the two countries. According to the Georgian Foreign Ministry (MFA), the sides underscored the existing cooperation in the areas of defense and security and outlined the dimension of cybersecurity. The importance of Georgia's engagement in strategic discussions regarding the issue of

Black Sea security was emphasized as well. As MFA reports, the parties focused on the security environment and ongoing processes in the region. British guest stated on her Twitter account that the UK would support the country to introduce reforms during a difficult time following the recent Parliamentary elections. Morton noted that she talked to the Georgian Foreign Minister about the need for all parties to reach a compromise.

"I am delighted to be here today with the Georgian Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani to reaffirm the strong relationship between our two countries. We pronounce our unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, as well as for the stability and resilience of the wider region," Morton told the reporters after meeting Georgian FM. At a meeting with Georgian PM, regional development, Georgia's role in a wider Black Sea region, and occupation-related issues were discussed. Gakharia briefed the British guest on the harsh humanitarian situation occurring in the occupied regions of Georgia. The PM discussed 'provocative actions' demonstrated by the occupying power, including the detention of locals by the Russian-controlled occupying forces. The illegal detention of Zaza Gakheladze, a citizen of Georgia by occupation forces, and his unlawful sentencing by the de-facto court of Tskhinvali was underlined in this regard. According to the press office of the government, the sides positively assessed the cooperation of Georgia and the UK in fields such as cybersecurity and the fight against hybrid threats. The focus was



British Minister Morton and Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

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Georgia-made products containing Turkish inputs to be exported to the EU under FTA



Agreement on Diagonal Cumulation was signed between Georgia, EU, and Turkey on March 20, 2018, and will be entering into force soon.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On February 10, 2021, the Turkish Grand National Assembly decided on the ratification of the Agreement on Diagonal Cumulation between Georgia and Turkey. The agreement was signed between Georgia, the EU, and Turkey on March 20, 2018. Natia Turnava, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development has welcomed the decision and stated that the agreement would contribute to the growth of the exports from Georgia and, in particular, products from

industrial raw materials imported from Turkey to Georgia will be exported to the EU in a wider range and volume. The minister stressed that the agreement would also encourage investments from Turkey in the Georgian economy, promote the establishment of joint projects, and creation of new jobs.

According to the Ministry of Economy, the diagonal cumulation between Georgia, the EU, and Turkey will be fully activated after the relevant information is published in the official journal of the European Commission based on the noti-

fication from Georgia and Turkey. Once the agreement enters into force, Georgia-made products that include Turkish raw inputs will be exported to the EU under the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The ministry notes that along with other sectors, this agreement is particularly important for the further development of the textile industry in Georgia and for attracting new foreign investments in this sector.

As Turnava stated, in 2020, \$75 million worth of textile products were imported to Turkey and most of that textile was later exported to the EU. Diagonal

Cumulation allows importing these products directly to the EU within the Free Trade Regime, which, according to the minister, will be much more profitable for local producers in Georgia. Diagonal Cumulation will support the further development of such sectors like the production of furniture, construction products, plastic products, steel products, and paper and cardboard products, however, the agreement will not apply to the agricultural products, as the customs union between the EU and Turkey does not cover agricultural products.



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also made on the pandemic related challenges. The Prime Minister of Georgia highlighted the role of the UK in ensuring the global accessibility to the vaccines.

The minister also met with Parliament Speaker Talakvadze. As the press office states, the speaker informed the British Minister about the foreign priorities of Georgia stipulated under the Resolution and the Parliamentary agenda. According to Morton, they “agreed that a strong Parliament is the cornerstone of a thriving democracy.” It was also noted that Georgia is a reliable partner and highly

contributes to global security.

Morton toured Georgia’s National Crisis Management Centre, which was built with UK support, and met with Georgian Education Minister Mikheil Chkhenkeli. Within the framework of meeting with the British minister, a cooperation agreement was signed with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, the British Council, and the National Center for Teacher Professional Development. Based on the agreement, an online platform will be created to provide teachers with a variety of resources for continuing professional growth.

Following the agenda, Morton also visited the village of Odzisi, located near the occupation line. She announced on the site that the UK condemns the effective control and destabilization exercised by Russia over the occupied territories of Georgia.



Minister Morton at the meeting with the Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia Archil Talakvadze.

Weather

Tuesday, February 16

Day Light Rain
High: 7°C

Night Light Rain
Low: 3°C

Wednesday, February 17

Day Light Rain
High: 5°C

Night Rain / Snow
Low: -1°C

published by
The Messenger

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All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.2898; Euro - 3.9912; GBP - 4.5758; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4865; Swiss Franc - 3.6935

Negotiations regarding construction at Vake Park at a standstill between City Hall and Budapest investors



“A hotel cannot be built in Vake Park as we could not agree on anything at the meeting,” said Tbilisi Vice-Mayor.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The meeting between the Vice-Mayor and the investor in the Vake Park in Tbilisi City Hall ended in vain - the City Hall maintains the position that no hotel will be built in the recreation area and refuses the proposition to build a restaurant of the same size as well.

According to the Vice-Mayor of Tbilisi, Irakli Khmaladze, the optimal way to solve the issue is for the owner to accept the offer of the municipality regarding the relocation of the land.

“This is unacceptable for us,” Khmaladze told the media, recalling that two years ago when negotiations started, talks referred to the restoration of the restaurant Budapest, which stood for decades in Vake Park, and “not the placement of some huge building with hotel settings.”

According to him, the investor was once again offered an alternative place, but it was rejected and the meeting ended without finding common ground. He emphasized that the reason investors didn't agree to the relocation is that they hope to build a hotel in the Park.

“Sooner or later, we will get to the point where they are convinced that they can not build a hotel in Vake Park by any action,” he said, referring to the fact that on the morning of February 15, the investor brought heavy equipment to Vake Park. The works were stopped for a short time at the request of the City Hall.

Giorgi Zakaidze, the owner of the area, says that the City Hall agrees to pay him ₾ 20 million, but in the future. According to him, a refund is acceptable only if it is given soon and not in up-

coming years, as City Hall has suggested, explaining that the amount of money will be put in next year's budget. He also added that no new places for relocation were suggested at the meeting.

The multi-year litigation ended with the investor winning in 2019, although he does not have a construction permit under the 2015 ordinance.

On July 24, 2013, by the decree of the Mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugulava, on I. Chavchavadze Ave. the land plot # 68, in the territory of Vake Park, the urban development parameters have been increased and a special (zonal) agreement has been approved for the location of the hotel. The same year, the Architecture Service of Tbilisi City Hall issued a construction permit. However, the construction permit expired on September 21, 2016.

Representatives of non-governmental organizations, activists, and the population have

been protesting against the issuance of a construction permit for the Budapest Hotel in Vake Park for years. Construction was halted following public demands.

Two years ago, on January 25, 2019, Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze said, “Vake Park has won and nothing will be built on this particular site.” According to the then statement of the Tbilisi Mayor, an agreement was reached with the investor. He said they agreed on the relocation issue.

One year after this announcement, investors in the construction of the Budapest Hotel said that the state did not want to exchange or buy the territory. He said if the City Hall does not respond adequately, they will start construction works on the land.

Tbilisi City Hall has started complete rehabilitation-renovation of the Vake Park area. Kaladze explained that Vake Park will be renovated but will preserve the cultural heritage sites located there.



Hotel Budapest investor George Zakaidze said that the company is ready to build the restaurant instead of the hotel in the park, but City Hall has refused it as well.

Schools reopen, vaccination to begin by the end of February

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

According to the statement made by Deputy Minister of Health Tamar Gabunia, the vaccination program is expected to begin at the end of the month. Gabunia noted the relevant staff is already undergoing the necessary training.

The Deputy Minister stated that Georgia will receive 400,000 doses of vaccines via the COVID-19 Global Access Facility (Covax) platform.

“The first quarter is the hardest as the volumes of vaccine manufacture will soon increase gradually and it will be easier to acquire vaccines directly from the manufacturers in the third and fourth quarters. The Covax platform can only offer about 400,000 doses; the remaining 2,5 million should be acquired elsewhere.”

The minister explained that the country will gain the remaining 2,5 million doses through negotiations with the EU



countries as well as from vaccine manufacturers. Gabunia noted that the first batch of Pfizer vaccines are expected to arrive by late February and will be provided to health workers first. Earlier last month, representatives of the thirteen states of the EU called for the creation of a support mechanism for the Eastern Partnership countries to ensure that they receive a vaccine against the COVID-19 as soon as possible.

A number of healthcare-related restrictions have been removed in Georgia today. Schools have reopened in Tbilisi, Rustavi, and Kutaisi; food facilities are now permitted to offer their services in the outdoor spaces. The government-imposed curfew lasting from 21.00 to 05.00 remains in place until the 1st of March, and public transport, food facilities (except for delivery services), and open markets are prohibited over weekends.

As of the last 24 hours, 165 new cases of coronavirus have been reported, as well as 639 recoveries and 11 deaths. 3, 601 individuals remain infected. The total number of COVID-19 cases confirmed since February last year has reached 265,722.