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## European Council President meets PM in Tbilisi



**"EU and our team support Georgia's €1.5 billion package to address socio-economic issues. We are a major player in this process to give you access to vaccines. I personally assure you that Georgia will have access to vaccines in the near future," said Charles Michel.**

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

**G**eorgian Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili met with the Presi-

dent of the European Council Charles Michel in Tbilisi yesterday. According to the PM, Michel's visit "is a clear reiteration that our region has a strategic im-

portance for the EU."

Gharibashvili and Michel have stated that it is important for Georgian politicians to settle issues via a constructive

dialogue. He stated that Georgia and the EU should further strengthen ties and that Georgia should carry out additional reforms.

The severe humanitarian situation in Georgia's Russian-occupied regions were discussed at the meeting as well. After meeting with Georgian officials, Michel visited the occupation line in the village of Khurvaleti, central Georgia, between Georgia and its Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region.

At a press conference Michel said that polarization in Georgia should end and invited political leaders to a meeting through his mediation.

"I am worried about the political crisis and polarization in Georgia. Georgia has gained democracy over the years and has made progress. The polarization and the crisis during your term as Prime Minister, the efforts of your colleagues and the efforts of the opposition leaders must be corrected, the polarization must end."

According to the European Council President, the government of any country must show leadership qualities and ignore the existing challenges, and act in the interests of Georgia. He called on all parties to join forces for political dialogue.

"I invite you all to meet me tonight. It is time to move from facilitation to mediation, and I repeat, it is time for political dialogue."



**"The administrative boundary lines are still a harsh reality for citizens following the 2008 war. This needs to change. The EU supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Charles Michel wrote.**

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# Gabunia: Vaccination may begin by the end of March with AstraZeneca vaccine

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Despite the repeated promises of health officials, Georgia did not receive the first doses of vaccine via the Covax platform in February. The platform released a statement in which it explained that only the countries that were able to meet all the requirements managed to receive the first doses of vaccine last month:

“The national regulator of all participating countries must authorize the vaccine to be imported; Also, all participants must sign a compensation contract with the vaccine manufacturers in order to be able to receive doses from the Covax platform”, reads the statement.

In response to the Covax statement, Deputy Health Minister of Georgia Tamar Gabunia explained that the delay in receiving vaccines was caused by the additional requirements put forward by the Covax platform, and which Georgia did not manage to meet. She clarified that the additional requirements are not related to the technical capacity of Georgia to store and initiate vaccines, but rather the financial reinsurance of the country’s liability, put forward by the vaccine manufacturer, Pfizer:

“We have already made an



Deputy Health Minister of Georgia Tamar Gabunia

inquiry to the Covax platform, and the answer we received states that the reason for the delay is related to Pfizer’s additional requirements”, said Gabunia.

In her statement, the Deputy Health Minister also reminded that Georgia is currently negotiating the purchase of AstraZeneca vaccines, which may be delivered to the country by the end of this month, and, in the meantime, the Pfizer vaccine may “also appear in the country.”

Earlier last month, it was announced that the first stage of the anti-coronavirus vaccination program was expected to begin in mid-February. The first batch of the Pfizer vaccine, which was supposed to be acquired via the Covax platform, was to be administered to health workers. The Georgian government has already announced that it plans to vaccinate approximately 3.7 million people or 60% of the Georgian population by the end of 2021.

As of the last 24 hours, 160 new cases of COVID-19 were detected in Georgia, 409 patients recovered, and 10 died. A total of 270, 918 cases have been detected in Georgia since February 2020; 265,523 have recovered and 3,520 have died of the virus.

## European Council President meets PM in Tbilisi

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According to him, the dialogue would solve several issues, including the controversy over the judiciary reform. “An independent and accountable judiciary is a key component of our cooperation. Georgian citizens should be able to express and trust the Court, this is an important aspect and we all know

that a number of cases need to be resolved.”

Michel urged Georgian authorities to carry out reforms with even more effort and more ambition and that “this would require your leadership position, the involvement of all parties and compromise.”

President Salome Zourabichvili hosted a meeting between the President of the European Council at the Orbeliani Palace between the government and the opposition last night.

“We are moving to a com-

pletely different plane of negotiations and, consequently, the EU involvement will be at a completely different political level. The pressure on the government from the EU will be firmer and much more coordinated,” said Salome Samadashvili, a member of the United National Movement before the meeting.

As PM Gharibashvili announced after the meeting, the meeting organized by Charles Michel took place in a very constructive atmosphere, adding that parties agreed that the dialogue will continue. “I will con-

sult with the party’s political council and we will plan next steps together.”

“I would like to tell you that the recommendation of the President of the Council of Europe to everyone - opposition, and the government should find a common ground that best serves the interests of our country and people in the shortest time possible,” he added.

The President of the European Council visited Georgia on February 28. Michel’s visit is taking place against the background of the political tension in

Georgia after the last parliamentary elections, which was further aggravated by the arrest of the leader of the United National Movement Nika Melia.

Michel met with the President, the Prime Minister, representatives of the opposition and the Speaker of Parliament. He also visited the occupation line. Michel is to meet with Georgian, Ukrainian and Moldovan leaders during his regional trip.

Georgian PM is visiting Brussels in two weeks to attend the meeting of the Association Council.

### Weather

Tuesday, March 2

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 10°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: -1°C

Wednesday, March 3

Day Clear

High: 9°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 3°C

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## Georgia to replace Russian wheat import with the Kazakh one



Russia, one of the world's largest wheat exporters, increased wheat export tax to €50 per ton, starting from March 1 to June 30.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

As Executive Director of the Georgian Flour Producers Association Levan Silagava announced yesterday, Russian wheat import to Georgia will be partially replaced with Kazakh wheat due to the doubling of Russian wheat export tax. Silagava said that the import of Ukrainian and Romanian wheat is also being considered.

Starting March 1, Russia's wheat duty on shipments rose from €25 to €50 a ton.

According to the executive director of the Georgian Flour Producers Association, Russia doubling its wheat export tax has made the situation in the world market quite tense "As Russia is one of the biggest players in the field." Silagava stated that at this stage, Kazakhstan will only partially replace Russian wheat import, because quantitatively, the potential of Kazakh wheat is not enough to cover Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and other countries.

Silagava stated that Georgia constantly

has at least two months of wheat supply, thus facing a wheat shortage is not expected.

As for the increase of bread price, Silagava noted that after the price for one bag of flour went up to 68 in Georgia, state subsidy increased from 10 to 15 Lari per 50 kilograms of wheat to avoid an increase in bread prices during the pandemic, however, the program ends on March 31 and if the state does not implement another subsidy, bread price might

increase by 15-20 tetri. According to the official statistics, Russia was the main importer of wheat for Georgia last year as up to 90% of the wheat imported to Georgia came from Russia. In 2020, grain was imported to Georgia from nine countries: Russia - 488 279.33 tons, US - 2 500.00 tons, Turkey - 55.0 tons, Ukraine - 48.1 tons, Austria - 38.6 tons, Greece - 22.5 tons, France - 0.65 tons, Denmark - 0.30 tons, Germany - 0.29 tons.

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## EIB president meets with Finance Minister of Georgia



The meeting with EIB President Werner Hoyer and the Minister of Finance of Georgia, Ivane Matchavariani was also attended by the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava, and the Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Irakli Karseladze.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Within the framework of the visit of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, President of the European Investment Bank (EIB) Werner Hoyer visited Georgia for the first time and met with the Vice Prime Minister of Georgia, Minister of Finance, Ivane

Matchavariani. The meeting was also attended by the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava and the Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Irakli Karseladze. According to the statement released by the ministry, the sides praised the positive dynamics of cooperation between Georgia and the Euro-

pean Investment Bank.

In 2024 Georgia is preparing to apply for full membership in the European Union. During the meeting, the minister reaffirmed the country's unwavering efforts to continue European integration. The Vice Prime Minister thanked the President of the EIB for the support towards Georgia in terms of the development and

promotion of Georgia's strategic transport infrastructure.

According to the statement, the sides underlined the importance of the €100 million assistance provided to Georgia by the European Investment Bank during the Covid-19 pandemic to finance the improvement and modernization of medical facilities and the purchase of necessary medical equipment for the healthcare system. The bank has invested 1.48 billion euros in the public sector so far. In total, EIB has provided €2 billion financial assistance to Georgia, including both private and public sectors. The statement reads that Georgia is one of the largest beneficiaries of EIB invest-

ments in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood.

The conversation also focused on EIB's involvement in supporting the private sector. The ministry notes that EIB's programs supporting medium and small businesses were positively evaluated during the meeting.

The President of the European Investment Bank expressed readiness to continue the active partnership with Georgia in the current and especially in the post-pandemic period. The Finance Minister expressed hope that the visit of the EIB President to Georgia would further strengthen the country's cooperation with the European Investment Bank.



In total, EIB has provided 2 billion euros of financial assistance to Georgia's private and public sectors so far.