

## Opinion & Analysis

The government refuses to compromise, opposition bloc relies on protests and sanctions from western partners

FULL STORY ON Page 2

## Politics

US ambassador Degnan meets PM Garibashvili

FULL STORY ON Page 2

Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into covert audio recordings involving PM



FULL STORY ON Page 3

# President of the European Council appoints Christian Danielsson to mediate the crisis



Christian Danielsson

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On March 9, President of the European Council Charles Michel announced that Christian Danielsson would take on the role of an official mediator of the EU-backed negotiations between the Georgian government and

the opposition bloc.

The official statement released by the European Council states that Christian Danielsson will be traveling to Georgia in the nearest future in order to "mediate the relaunched dialogue" between Georgia's political parties, in close cooperation with the Ambassador of the Eu-

ropean Union to Georgia, Carl Hartzel:

"Mr. Danielsson will mediate the relaunched dialogue among Georgia's political parties, working closely with the Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, Carl Hartzel, with the aim to overcome the current political tensions in Georgia.

Mr. Danielsson will be traveling to Georgia in the coming days to engage with all stakeholders to the process".

The press release also notes that President Michel and High Representative Borrell encourage all parties to fully commit to the dialogue for the sake of the country's Democratic and European integration aspirations:

"President Michel and the High Representative Borrell encourage all political actors in Georgia to commit fully to the dialogue in a constructive spirit and with a view to pursuing mutually agreeable outcomes, in the interest of a stable, democratic, and reform-oriented Georgia, able to successfully advance on its pro-European path."

The appointment of Christian Danielsson came shortly after President Charles Michel's visit to Georgia earlier this month. Upon his arrival on March 1, President Michel arranged the first round of dialogue between the representatives of the Georgian government and the members of the opposition bloc. The meeting ended with the drawing of a draft agenda for further negotiations, as well as six main issues that need to be addressed in order to solve the ongoing crisis.

Christian Danielsson has previously worked as a permanent representative for Sweden, after which he was appointed as secretary-general of the European Commission in 2011. He then took the role of the Director-General for Enlargement in 2013, before taking on the office of the Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. As of today, Christian Danielsson is serving as the Head of the European Commission's Representation in Sweden.



The Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, Carl Hartzel

# The government refuses to compromise, opposition bloc relies on protests and sanctions from western partners

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On March 1, a meeting between the authorities and the opposition bloc, mediated by the President of the Council of Europe Charles Michel, was held aiming at reaching an agreement. However, the next day the government returned to confrontational rhetoric, which virtually precludes the possibility of finding any common ground.

The protracted political crisis in Georgia since the October 31, 2020 elections has long been a concern for Georgia's western partners. The arrest of UNM's Nika Melia, with the incursion of police forces into the party's headquarters, was a milestone to which the western partners responded with serious criticism.

The EU has taken on the task of resolving the conflict between the government and the opposition. The visit of the President of the Council of Europe Charles Michel to Georgia on March 1-2 was an attempt to do so. He managed to get the government and the opposition to meet and get their consent to resume the dialogue and reach an agreement with tangible progress by March 13, when Georgian Prime Min-

ister Irakli Gharibashvili is due to submit a report on the Association Agreement to Brussels.

A 6-point plan was drawn up during a meeting with Charles Michel. It lists the issues that were discussed during the meeting and which should be continued. These points have been made public in the media: 1. Electoral reform; 2. Rule of law and judicial reform, including the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court, elections to the High Council of Justice, and the strengthening of the fight against corruption; 3) Political justice, in particular, resolving the issue of prisoners; 4) Redistribution of forces in the Parliament, which includes a fair distribution of responsibilities and roles and responsibilities in the Parliament; 5. Consider the possibility of early parliamentary elections and prepare for local elections; 6. Continuation of mediation and verification of the achieved progress at the meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Council.

The issues to be addressed by the government and the opposition mean the recognition of serious shortcomings in the democratic functioning of the current

political system of Georgia. Once again it becomes clear why Georgia is included in the category of countries with a hybrid regime in various international rankings. It is also clear that the implementation of some of these points takes time. However, some can be done as soon as possible as a sign that the dialogue has successfully launched. Such points are, firstly, the release of political prisoners appointed by the opposition, in particular Nika Melia and Giorgi Rurua, and secondly, the start of negotiations on early parliamentary elections. If these two points are met, the boycotted opposition vows to enter parliament.

During the meeting, mediated by Charles Michel, attention was paid to the softened tone of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, Gharibashvili had toned down his aggressive tone regarding "criminal" and "destructive" opposition, which had previously made the dialogue impossible. However, on the second day of Charles Michel's departure from Georgia, Gharibashvili returned to the old rhetoric and spoke again about the "red lines", one of which is the opposition's demand for early parliamentary

elections. Opponents of the government explained the tightening of Gharibashvili's tone by Bidzina Ivanishvili's intervention who demanded the continuation of the "strict" policy.

After Charles Michel's departure, the opposition also made a mistake by staging a picket by the parliament building. The government immediately blamed the opposition for not being constructive after which the opposition bloc immediately changed the format of the protests so that the ruling team would not use it as a reason to disrupt the talks.

The main responsibility for the successful start of the negotiations lies with the government, which must show that it wants to reach an agreement. However, the opposition bloc should also take responsibility.

According to experts, the government will have to release Nika Melia, which will be seen as a defeat for the government's image. As for the opposition's main demand on holding early elections, the government's position today is to set up a parliamentary commission of inquiry to study the CEC documents, and "if at least 1% will be found

to be falsified, early elections will be called." The opposition believes that "suspicious" documents will have already been corrected, noting there is no use in creating such a commission.

A compromise on the part of the opposition on the issue of early elections is to hold a plebiscite during the local self-government elections. The plebiscite would find the people's opinion on whether they want snap elections or not. The government considers the idea of a plebiscite unfounded and rules it out.

So far, there are no signs of a constructive dialogue promised to Charles Michel. The opposition intends to continue the protests in a way that will give the government no reason to accuse the opposition bloc of being destructive.

According to the opposition, if the agreement is not reached, the Georgian authorities and Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is behind it, will be subjected to sanctions. The opposition bloc believes that protests and possible sanctions from the west will be decisive in reaching an agreement.

*(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)*

## US ambassador Degnan meets PM Gharibashvili



"We want the political crisis to subside quickly," said US Ambassador Kelly Degnan, who was facilitating the election talks between the parties along with the EU ambassador.

Gharibashvili and the Georgian Dream stated earlier that Melia violated the law and that everyone is equal before Law.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Ambassador of the United States of America to Georgia Kelly Degnan held a

### Weather

Wednesday, March 10

Day Clear  
High: 11°C  
Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

Thursday, March 11

Day Rain / Snow  
High: 5°C  
Night Rain / Snow  
Low: 2°C

meeting with the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili on March 9.

At the meeting, the officials discussed issues on the agenda of Georgia-US bilateral cooperation. They also covered the political processes in the country, emphasizing that in the light of the challenges in the world and in the region, the parties should make efforts to conduct the on-

going political processes in Georgia in a constructive way via dialogues.

The meeting also focused on the security situation in the region and the harsh humanitarian situation in the Russia-occupied territories of Georgia. The American diplomat once again reaffirmed her strong support of the United States for the territorial integrity and sovereignty

of the country. According to her, the discussion was very productive. Degnan emphasized that the United States and Georgia have a comprehensive agenda and that it is important for both countries to continue working on these initiatives under the leadership of the new PM.

"We want the political crisis to subside quickly so that Georgia can return to other impor-

tant challenges it faces, including restoring economic status. The United States will continue to support Georgia so that the country can launch an economy, respond to the new coronavirus pandemic, and, of course, maintain a strong level of security," The US Ambassador said after the meeting.

CONTINUED ON Page 3

published by

**The Messenger**

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All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

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The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3242; Euro - 3.9565; GBP - 4.6107; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4918; Swiss Franc - 3.5687

# Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into covert audio recordings involving PM



Anzor Chubinidze says it was his 'direct duty' to respond to threats against Bera.

**By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI**  
 The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia has launched an investigation into the case of the leaked covert recording which includes a conversation between Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, the son of the Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, Bera Ivanishvili, and Anzor Chubinidze, who currently serves as the Head of the Special State Protection Service. The agency said in a statement that based on secret recordings made public by a local TV station, an investigation had

been launched into allegations of unauthorized recording, illegal use, and dissemination of private conversation. "As part of the investigation, all necessary investigative and procedural actions will be carried out to determine the legality of obtaining and disseminating the recordings. Appropriate examinations will be scheduled to determine the authenticity of the leaked recordings," reads the statement of the Prosecutor's Office. On March 6, TV Pirveli aired audio conversations in which Bera Ivanishvili seems to be

tasking Chubinidze to humiliate and punish youngsters for their online posts insulting the Ivanishvili family. The authenticity of the recording has not been established, but TV journalists state they have seized 4 audio recordings which reveal that Bera Ivanishvili is allegedly instructing top officials to harass his critics, including a minor. For their part, the current prime minister and head of state defense, according to the record, are talking about carrying out these tasks. The ruling Georgian Dream party released a statement the next day, stating that the recordings are fabricated. Anzor Chubinidze, the head of the State Security Service, said in an interview with Imedi that the secret audio recording re-

leased by TV Pirveli was modeled. As Chubinidze recalls, in 2010-2011, before Bidzina Ivanishvili announced his intention to enter politics, there were frequent threats against his family members, more specifically against Bera Ivanishvili. At the time, Chubinidze was in charge of Bidzina Ivanishvili's family protection service, and it was his direct responsibility to get involved in the case and check how real the threat was. According to him, he then identified users that were the authors of provocative statements against Bera Ivanishvili. Chubinidze recalled that he got in touch with their parents, who understood the basis of concern and even took on the role of mediators.



TV Pirveli aired audio conversations in which Bera Ivanishvili seems to be tasking Chubinidze to humiliate and punish minors for their comments and posts on social media insulting the Ivanishvili family. Photo: Publika.ge

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



On March 9, the Signing Ceremony was held for three 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, and the parliament of Georgia. The projects are funded within the GGP Grassroots Human Security Grant Program of the Embassy of Japan and aim to boost development potential of the regions and create economic

and social opportunities for local communities. Also, to ensure that more diverse municipal services are delivered to the population in an efficient, effective and sustainable way. The three projects are:  
 1. Providing Garbage Collection Truck in Akhalkalaki Municipality to improve the waste management. Implementer: Akhalkalaki Municipality. Budget: 56,000 USD  
 2. Construct Greenhouse in IDP Settlement of Mtskheta Municipality to facilitate the sustainable agriculture and overcome poverty. Implementer: NGO Environment and Development. Budget: 71,249USD  
 3. Establish Laboratory for Honey Testing in Ambrolauri Municipality to increase the production of high-quality products by local farmers. Implementer: NGO Agro Service Consulting (ASC). Budget: 82,252 USD  
 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 pri-

ority fields: environment protection, agriculture, infrastructure, healthcare and education. The major principles behind the GGP program are overcoming poverty, sustainable development, inclusiveness and participatory growth.

## US ambassador Degnan meets PM Garibashvili

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

The same day, friends of Georgia, representatives of various international institutions, and ex-diplomats have published an extensive letter regarding the ongoing political process in the country and called on the gov-

ernment to take constructive measures, to make the first step and offer a way out of the current crisis. According to 23 former foreign ministers, this step should be the release of the new head of the UNM opposition party Nika Melia.