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NATO Secretary-General says Alliance door remains open for Georgia



NATO Sec-Gen Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO remains committed to supporting Georgia's aspirations to join the Alliance.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated at a virtual press conference ahead of the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels that the Alliance door remains open, and

Russia has no right to block Georgia from joining NATO. Stoltenberg stressed that NATO supports Georgia's aspirations to join the Alliance.

NATO Secretary-General mentioned at the press conference that he had recently met with Georgian Prime Minis-

ter Irakli Garibashvili and conveyed the same message to him.

"NATO supports Georgia's efforts to join NATO. We support Georgia in different ways, including by supporting reforms, strengthening democratic institutions and we will continue to do so," noted

Stoltenberg.

NATO Sec-Gen announced that he would meet Secretary Blinken at the NATO Foreign Ministerial meeting, where one of the things discussed will be Russia. In this regard, Stoltenberg stressed the fact that Russia has often expressed that they have some kind of 'right to try to deny countries to join NATO,' the latest example of which is Bosnia and Herzegovina. He underscored that it is only up to NATO and the aspirant country to decide whether a country becomes a member of NATO or not. According to Stoltenberg, It is a sovereign right of every nation, including Georgia, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to choose their path, and no one 'from the outside' is eligible to interfere in that process.

According to NATO Secretary-General, Russia is violating international law and is acting aggressively towards its neighbors, Georgia and Ukraine. Stoltenberg stressed that the relationship between NATO and Russia has been difficult for some time now, which is a result of "Russia's behavior, violating international law, using military force against neighbors – Georgia and Ukraine." He emphasized that Russia and the Russian president are responsible for the aggressive actions against NATO-allied member states through cyber interference in NATO's domestic political processes.



"Russia is responsible for aggressive actions against NATO-allied member states through cyber, interference in our domestic political processes, and so on," said NATO Secretary-General.

Georgia expects 29500 Pfizer doses, 3,818 medical workers vaccinated

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On March 22, Minister of Health Ekaterine Tikaradze announced that Georgia is expecting to receive 29500 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, and added that once they arrive, Georgians will be able to choose the vaccine with which they wish to be administered:

“The principle of equality and solidarity is one of the core values of the healthcare sector and is shared by the world. Therefore, all vaccines will be available to all our citizens. 29500 doses of Pfizer vaccines will be delivered to Georgia, but we are currently waiting to receive further details to announce to the public the exact date of the vaccine arrival to Georgia”, Tsikaradze said.

The Health Minister also announced that citizens aged 65 or older will be able to register to receive a vaccine starting from March 25 and that as of right now, the registration for vaccination via the Ministry of Health’s official website is open to Georgia’s medical workers.

As of today, 3,818 medical workers have already been vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine, 43,200 doses of which arrived in Georgia on March 15. Since the vaccine’s arrival, a 27-year-old Georgian nurse, Megi Bakradze went into an anaphylactic shock and died a day after receiving a shot of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the town of Akhaltsikhe. The exact cause of death is yet to be determined. Following the nurse’s death, Georgia refused to stop using the purchased doses of the AstraZeneca vaccines. Vaccination can only be carried out in clinics with intensive care units (ICUs).

In her yesterday’s statement,



Tikaradze noted that the State Regulation Agency for Medical Activities would publish an interim report on the death of 27-year-old Megi Bakradze. The minister added that although the medical facility where Megi Bakradze received a shot of vaccine did have an intensive care unit, it is the Ministry of Health’s goal to “improve the quality of each clinic in the regions”.

As of the last 24 hours, 170 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed in Georgia, as well as 396 recoveries and 10 deaths. Since February last year, a total of 277,650 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed in Georgia, with 277,650 recovering and 3,710 dying of the COVID-19. As of today, 3,545 individuals remain infected with coronavirus in Georgia.



Data Vanishvili - symbol of Georgia’s perseverance against occupation dies

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On March 19, Georgian local Data Vanishvili, also known as Data Papa, who had lived for about eight years on the

other side of the occupation line, died after a long illness, aged 88.

In 2011, barbed wires installed by the Russian occupational forces in Khurvaleti village near occupied Tskhinvali

divided Vanishvili’s house and agricultural lands into two parts, leaving him isolated from the rest of Georgia. However, Data Papa and his wife refused to leave the house. Data Papa was well-known for his activities against the occupation. He refused to obtain the so-called south Ossetian citizenship and to receive a pension there as he did not recognize the de facto republic and stated that he was a citizen of Georgia. Data Papa actively met with representa-

tives of the Diplomatic Corps and talked about the situation in the occupied village from the other side of the wires. He was arrested several times for contacting visitors at the dividing line and for crossing the so-called border and moving to an occupied part of Khurvaleti.

The President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili expressed grief over Vanishvili’s death and stated that he was an example

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Weather

Tuesday, March 23

Day Light Rain
High: 16°C

Night Light Rain
Low: 10°C

Wednesday, March 24

Day Light Rain
High: 18°C

Night Light Rain
Low: 5°C

published by
The Messenger

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3299; Euro - 3.9636; GBP - 4.6089; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4696; Swiss Franc - 3.5933

Georgia's GDP declined by 6.2% in 2020



According to the official exchange rate, against the background of NBG's intervention, the lari strengthened by 0.27 tetri against the US dollar and the value of 1\$ became ₾ 3.3299.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) published the preliminary data, according to which the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to ₾ 49.40 billion in 2020, up by 0.3% year-on-year, while the real growth of GDP reduced by 6.2%. A new Geostat estimate shows a higher economic downturn than the preliminary report, which showed last year's economic decline of 6.1%. Note that in January 2021, the economic decline was 11.5%.

The Georgian economy has not experienced such a sharp decline since 1994, including after the August 2008 war. The main reasons for this decline were the economic shock of

Covid-19 and the lockdowns in the country.

The Geostat also reported that real GDP in the fourth quarter of 2020 contracted by 6.8%, while nominal GDP stood at ₾ 13.9 billion (\$ 4.3 billion).

The largest shares of GDP by activity were held by: Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (14.5%), Real estate activities (11.7%), Manufacturing (10.8%), Construction (8.9%), Agriculture, forestry and fishing (8.4%), Public administration and defence; compulsory social security (7.4%), Transportation and storage (5.9%), Financial and insurance activities (4.9%).

Real growth was registered in: Human health and social work activities (7.9%), Agriculture,

forestry and fishing (3.6%), Education (3.1%), Public adminis-

tration and defence; compulsory social security (1.8%), Other service activities (7.1%).

A decrease in the real value-added was recorded in: Accommodation and food service activities (-37.9%), Transportation and storage (-22.3%), Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (-5.6%), Arts, entertainment and recreation (-18.9%), Administrative and support service activities (-37.9%), Professional, scientific and technical activities (-18.4%), Construction (-4.7%), Financial and insurance activities (-5%).

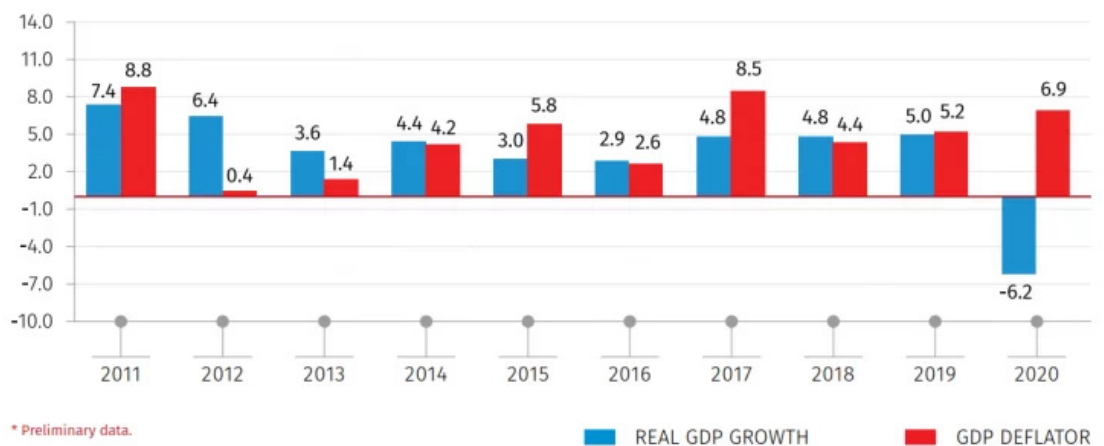
The economic situation is no better this year either. Yesterday, the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) sold \$ 40 million at a foreign exchange auction - this decision was made by the NBG after the value of one dollar in the trading system exceeded ₾ 3.3368. According to the Central Bank, the exchange rate at the foreign exchange auction was

3.3293. This was the fourth currency auction in 2021. This year, the NBG sold a total of \$ 160 million.

The increase in the lari exchange rate yesterday was most likely due to the depreciation of the Turkish lira, which has reached 15% in the last 24 hours. As a result, the value of one dollar became 7.94 Liras. For its part, the drop in the Turkish national currency exchange rate is linked to the release of central bank chairman Naji Agbal by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's.

Last Thursday, Turkey's central bank raised its refinancing rate from 17% to 19% against Erdogan's will, in a way the bank planned to contain rising inflation in the country. Erdogan is demanding a reduction in refinancing rates despite high inflation, which the central bank opposes, prompting the bank's president to step down.

REAL GDP GROWTH RATE AND DEFLATOR PERCENTAGE CHANGE COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS YEAR (PERCENT)



Geostat.

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of strength and braveness.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili stated that "he is saddened by the death of the prominent Georgian citizen Data Vanishvili."

"Vanishvili refused to leave his house and lived in unbearable conditions, behind barbed wire fences. He guarded his land for years and never tolerated occupation," said PM.

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has stated that

Data Papa is "a bold example of the fight against suppression through Russia's creeping occupation and a symbol of devotion to the homeland."

State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality Tea Akhvlediani also emphasized that Data Papa is a symbol of the ongoing occupation in Georgia. As the minister said Vanishvili embodies the harsh situation that many people living in the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia experience.

The US Embassy to Georgia

published a statement saying that Vanishvili's "resilience in the face of Russian occupation will remain an inspiration until Russia fulfills its commitments."

Many people, including offi-

cial, politicians, and local government representatives have offered condolences to Vanishvili's wife from the other side of the barbed wire fence. Data Papa was buried yesterday

in the cemetery which is currently under illegal Russian occupation. Only several relatives were allowed to cross the occupation line to attend Data Papa's burial ceremony.

Data Vanishvili - symbol of Georgia's perseverance against occupation dies



After living almost eight years behind the barbed wires, on March 19, Data Vanishvili died at the age of 88.



Only several relatives were allowed by the occupation forces to cross the occupation line and attend the burial of Data Papa.