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BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Leaders of the European Union and the United States once again showed their support towards Georgia and Ukraine.

On March 24, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security and Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell and the Secretary of State of the United States Antony Blinken met in Brussels to discuss ways to strengthen the EU-US relations.

At the meeting, the sides discussed foreign policy and security, among other issues. They noted that the United States and the European Union are determined to keep addressing Russia's behavior. As the joint statement reads, this includes ongoing aggression against Ukraine and Georgia, hybrid threats, including disinformation, and many others. The sides also noted that they would continue close

US and EU to jointly respond to Russian aggression against Ukraine and Georgia

THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO SIDES TALKED ABOUT IT AT A SPECIAL MEETING



The sides discussed foreign policy and security among other issues



Representatives of the EU and US committed to cooperate in the face of global challenges

cooperation to encourage comprehensive reforms in the EU Eastern neighborhood, including South Caucasus countries.

At the meeting with the US Secretary of State and High Representative for Security Policy, the parties noted that they are ready to cooperate with Russia upon mutual interests. Representatives of the European Union and the United States also called on Russia to refrain from confrontation.

"Both sides decided to coordinate their response to the shrinking space in Russia

for independent political voices, civil society, and media freedom and the dwindling respect for human rights and the rule of law," read the statement.

The joint statement, issued after the meeting, underscored the strong interest in a stable and prosperous Western Balkans region. They once again reaffirmed their commitment to work together to support reconciliation and improve governance, build resilience and push forward key reforms for their integration in the EU.

They also showed their support towards the continuation of NATO-EU cooperation. Borrell and Blinken agreed that NATO and the EU need new ways of working together and a new level of ambition.

The EU and the US have shown their support to both Georgia and Ukraine many times. In 2008, Russia and Georgia fought a war that resulted in the occupation of part of Georgia by Russia. In 2014, Russia occupied Crimea.

PM Garibashvili: Opposition can either listen to our foreign partners and take up their mandates or continue their marginal actions

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili stated earlier that the country's opposition bloc has only two choices – listen to Georgia's partners in the EU and the US and take up their seats in the Parliament or continue their destructive actions. He added that recently, both the EU and the US officials reiterated that the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections were "free and competitive." Garibashvili added that the reason why the opposition scheduled a large-scale rally to take place in two months is because it lacks support from people.

The US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan, in her interview with TV Pirveli, expressed her hope that all parties in Georgia will have enough political will to reach a compromise. Ambassador Degnan also participated in the last week's negotiations between the ruling party and the opposing bloc, mediated by the EU specially appointed representative, Christian Danielsson:

"Although the parties could not come to a compromise, they spared no efforts in trying to do that. I am still very optimistic about the parties having enough political will to come to a brave compromise. I fully support an immediate resolution of the crisis, because I believe that Georgia is now faced with far



more serious problems that need to be addressed. Nevertheless, we fully recognize the fact that the Georgian society is divided at the moment, and the United States reiterates that the only appropriate place for conflict resolution is the country's Parliament. Members of the Parlia-

ment have an opportunity to discuss issues and adopt legislation for the important reforms that Georgia needs so much at this stage of the country's democratic development. A parliament almost exclusively represented by a single political party is not healthy, and it is not what the

Georgian people voted for in October", Ambassador Degnan said.

Yesterday, one of the leaders of the opposition Lelo party, Mamuka Khazaradze said that the country is desperate for a "restart" and that the only way to do it is by holding repeat elections:

"The country is currently in a state of political, economic, and pandemic-induced crisis. Even the vaccination program has failed because they have little trust in the [government's] programs. We need a restart, and in any given country a restart is achieved through holding early elections."

European Committee of Social Rights' Conclusions 2020 on employment, training and equal opportunities

Strasbourg, 24.03.2021 – The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) today published its Conclusions 2020 on the provisions of the European Social Charter relating to employment, training and equal opportunities:

- the right to work (Article 1);
- the right to vocational guidance (Article 9);

- the right to vocational training (Article 10);
- the right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community (Article 15);
- the right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of other States Parties (Article 18);
- the right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation without discrimination on the grounds of sex (Article 20);

- the right to protection in cases of termination of employment (Article 24);
- the right of workers to the protection of their claims in the event of the insolvency of their employer (Article 25).

In the framework of the reporting procedure, the Committee adopted 349 conclusions in respect of 33 States, including 152 conclusions of non-conformity and 97 conclusions of conformity. In 100 cases, the Committee was unable to assess the situation due to lack of information ("deferrals").

The following 33 countries were examined:

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, the Netherlands in respect of Curacao, the Netherlands in respect of Sint Maarten, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine

and the United Kingdom.

The Committee emphasised that the prevalence of poverty amongst people with disabilities is an important indicator of the success or failure of state efforts to ensure their right to enjoy independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community.

The duty of states to take measures to promote the full social integration and participation of persons with disabilities

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FRIDAY	MARCH 26
Day	Partly sunny High: 13°C
Night	Rain Low: 4°C
SATURDAY	MARCH 27
Day	Wind & rain High: 9°C
Night	Rain Low: 4°C

published by **The Messenger**
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Over 29K doses of Pfizer arrive in Georgia

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

29,250 doses of the US-German Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine arrived in Georgia late Wednesday. This number, as officials say, is a sufficient dose for 14,750 people. Yesterday, the registration opened for people over 65 years of age who will now be allowed to choose between Pfizer and British AstraZeneca vaccines. Registration is available on booking.moh.gov.ge.

Vaccination with Pfizer will be available in Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi and will start on Tuesday, March 30. Pfizer vaccine is available at 4 clinics of Tbilisi: Republican Hospital, Bokeria clinic, Caucasus Medical Centre, and Amtel hospital, in two clinics of Kutaisi and Batumi Republican Hospital in the Adjara region.

Based on evidence from clinical trials, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is 95% effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 illness in people without evidence of the previous infection.

Vaccination is taking place only at clinics with intensive care units (ICUs) in Georgia. After the vaccination, all individuals will now have to stay at clinics for 45 minutes, instead of 30 minutes to be observed if there are any adverse effects. The decision to extend the period was made after the death of a nurse on March 19, which, according to preliminary estimates, was caused by anaphylactic shock after receiving the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine. The Minister of Health says that the Regulatory Agency should publish the initial conclusion of the investigation this week. This tragic fact has partly hampered the vaccination process in Georgia.

43,200 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine entered the country on March 13, while the vaccination of health workers started on March 15. As announced by Deputy Health Minister of Georgia Tamar Gabunia, Georgia will likely receive Chinese coronavirus vaccines Sinopharm next month. Gabunia said that besides, negotiations are underway to receive additional doses of the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines.

According to a new rating by the British-Swedish concern AstraZeneca, the effectiveness of the coronavirus vaccine has been determined at 76%. According to



► Registration for vaccine appointments is available on booking.moh.gov.ge

the previous rating, the vaccine efficiency rate was 79%.

The reason for the redefinition of effectiveness, according to the company, became the conclusion of one of the independent American research organizations. In a statement released on March 3, the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) said AstraZeneca may have published outdated information about its vaccine test, which gives an "incomplete" picture of its effectiveness. The vaccine is not yet approved in the United States. The company AstraZeneca says it intends to apply in the coming weeks for a permit to use the US vaccine urgently.

However, the company reiterated that the vaccine, developed jointly with Oxford University, is 100% effective against severe and critical forms of the disease. In patients 65 years of age and older, the AstraZeneca vaccine was 85% effective against the coronavirus.

As for the topic of mass vaccination, Deputy Health Minister says universal registration for the coronavirus vaccine will begin in April. According to her, this does not mean that vaccination will start during this period.



► Chinese coronavirus vaccine Sinopharm to arrive in Georgia next month.

"Massive, large-scale vaccination phases are planned in the 3rd-4th quarter, but before that, 30% of the population is the most active recipient of these vaccines," Gabunia said.

However, as mentioned before, the process was hampered and the attitudes towards vaccination vary among the public. As a recent NDI poll showed, 53% of the respondents do not plan to receive it. Health officials say it'll be a shame if Georgia can't use

the limited amount of vaccines that the country has managed to acquire, repeating that mild complications are no reason for panic.

"Mild complications are characteristic of all vaccines against covid", said Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control, at a briefing at the Ministry of Health, and listed the possible complications that can be detected after immunization.

"It is a temperature of up to 38.5 degrees, it can rarely be up

to 40 degrees, as well as joint pain, muscle pain, redness at the injection site, hyperemia and pain, general weakness and fatigue for a day or two. This is mentioned in 40 to 60% of cases," Gamkrelidze said.

According to him, to avoid various side effects, there is a questionnaire, which consists of more than 10 questions, and based on the answers given, the doctor decides whether the patient needs additional examination for immunization or not.

As for the most recent data as of March 25, Georgia has reported 399 new cases of coronavirus, 356 recoveries, and 10 deaths in the past 24 hours. Overall, 25,638 tests have been conducted around the country in this period. According to the data published on the government website stopcov.ge, the indicator of positivity is: daily - 1.56%; last 7 days - 1.92%; Last 14 days - 1.58%.

The country has had 279,027 cases of coronavirus since February 26, 2020. 271,278 patients have recovered, while 3,732 have died of the virus. Currently, 3,991 individuals remain infected with Covid-19.

European Committee of Social Rights' Conclusions 2020 on employment, training and equal opportunities

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in the life of the community is strongly linked to measures directed towards the amelioration and eradication of poverty amongst them.

The Committee also identified several recurrent shortcom-

ings in terms of countries' efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of labour rights for all. It highlighted problems such as insufficient protection against discrimination in employment and a failure of some states to guarantee equal rights to men and women - in particular as regards equal pay. The Committee also flagged

a lack of legislation providing for a shift in the burden of proof in gender pay discrimination cases.

The Committee also found situations where states have failed to fulfil their positive obligations to prevent forced labour and labour exploitation, to protect victims, to effectively investigate the offences commit-

ted, and to punish those responsible for forced labour offences.

Another issue identified, particularly relevant in the current pandemic situation, was the lack in certain countries of special measures for the retraining and reintegration of long-term unemployed persons. In some cases, the efforts to combat unemploy-

ment and encourage job creation remained inadequate.

Furthermore, the Committee made public its Findings 2020 in respect of Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal concerning follow-up to decisions (in the framework of collective complaints).