

OPINION & ANALYSIS

European efforts to settle the Georgian crisis fail



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ECONOMICS/POLITICS

GYLA files 2 new complaints with Strasbourg court over June 20 events



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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian rescuers have found the bodies of four people in the Enguri river, near the villages of Shamgona, and Orsantia, in Zugdidi Municipality. Reportedly, four Georgian citizens living in the occupied Gali district tried to cross from the Russian-occupied region into territory controlled by the central government of Georgia through the Enguri River "to avoid unlawful detentions established by the Russian occupation regime." All four of them died while crossing the river.

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) has called the occupation regime responsible for this tragedy. According to the SSG, this tragic case is another outcome of Russia's illegal occupation and is a demonstration of the inhumane and criminal essence of accompanying processes of occupation. "The mentioned fact represents a result of restrictions unlawfully imposed by the occupation regime over free movement and damaging practice of unlawful detentions," stated SSG.

The SSG states that over the years, unlawful regulations and restrictions on free movement have significantly complicated the lives of the locals, which has resulted in the deaths of many of them. SSG has stated that with the participation of international partners, an issue of the occupation regime's responsibility will be brought up in terms of unlawful restrictions over free movement and

Three drown in Enguri river trying to leave occupied Gali, Georgian authorities hold Russian Federation responsible



► "The Russian Federation holds full responsibility for this tragedy, as well as for violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms in the occupied territories," stated the Georgian Foreign Ministry.

unlawful detentions. "The issue will be discussed in the most acute form possible and within the scope of any existing formats," states SSG. The EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), as well as co-chairs of Geneva International Discussions, have been informed of the tragic case.

Law enforcers have opened an investigation into the case under Articles 143 and 115 of the Georgian Criminal Code implying unlawful deprivation of liberty and incitement to suicide.

President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili has blamed the occupation regime for the incident and remarked that the

restrictions on free movement imposed by the occupation regime are unacceptable as they grossly violate and disregard fundamental human rights. "It is alarming that the lives of innocent and peaceful people are being sacrificed as they try to overcome the difficulties caused by the severe humanitarian crisis in occupied Abkhazia," the president added.

Yesterday, Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani discussed the tragic fact with EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia Toivo Klaar. As the Georgian FM underscored at the meeting, this tragedy once

again shows the real face of the Russian occupation.

Abkhaz authorities closed the Enguri crossing point, which connects Russia-occupied Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia, in March 2020, as reported, to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The residents of the occupied region are allowed to cross onto the Georgia-controlled territory only if they have a special 'pass' obtained (costs €45). When coming to Georgia, residents of Abkhazia have to go into five-day quarantine. Due to these reasons, locals often choose to cross the border through the Enguri River instead of using the bridge.



► According to David Zalkaliani, Georgia will immediately inform the international community of the incident and will raise this issue in all international formats.

European efforts to settle the Georgian crisis fail



BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgia met the 30th anniversary of the independence referendum in a deep crisis. The second round of Council of Europe mediation talks between the government and the opposition ended in vain. The parties blamed each other for the disruption of the talks, and for the further polarization of the Georgian society increased even more. "Georgian Dream" considers itself the winner after the failed talks, while the opposition is preparing for protest rallies. The first mass protest is scheduled for May 15. Authorities claim that the opposition will not be able to bring people to the streets.

30 years ago, on March 31, 1991, a referendum was held in Georgia, where the vast majority of the population supported the restoration of Georgia's independence. Building an independent state in Georgia proved to be extremely difficult. The country's attempt to escape Russian orbit, first from Soviet and then

post-Soviet Russia, was met with fierce resistance from what we now call a "hybrid war" that took the form of a direct military strike in 2008. Georgia also had achievements on the path to independence, mainly reflected in its Western orientation and steps towards democracy.

October 31, 2020, parliamentary elections turned out to be the threshold after which the country found itself in a deep crisis. After the elections, the Georgian Dream announced that it would remain in power for a third term, which no post-Soviet government in Georgia had been able to do, while the opposition unanimously believed that the elections were rigged and that the coalition of opposition parties had won. The parties have not changed their position since then. The case was not helped by the mediation of the Council of Europe, despite the efforts of Mr. Danielson, the representative appointed by the President of the Council of Europe, and two grueling rounds of negotiations.

Part of the opposition also talked about the shortcomings of mediation. Under pressure

from the Georgian Dream, two points that were fundamentally important to the opposition - the early parliamentary elections and the unconditional release of political prisoners - disappeared from the five-point plan previously agreed upon by Charles Michel.

It seems that the final text submitted by Danielson was known in advance to "Dream". That the issue of early elections was no longer in the final text submitted by the mediator to the parties, was especially noted by the authorities after a fruitless round of negotiations. The government was saying the democracy of last year's elections is undeniable for Europe as well. The opposition bloc says the Council of Europe should have been tougher and more demanding on the Georgian Dream, and talks may have been successful.

It is now difficult to say what the president of the Council of Europe will do, whether there will be the third round of talks or not. However, they know for sure that the opposition will not give up its main demands, and another fruitless round of talks will simply discredit the authority of

the leadership of the Council of Europe in the eyes of the Georgian public. Ineffective negotiations have further increased the political polarization of the society. For the government, the opposition that refuses to enter parliament is "unconstructive", "destructive", "anti-state", which must cease to exist.

For the boycotted opposition, the Georgian Dream is a puppet government in Russia's interests in Georgia, which only talks about a Western orientation, Euro-Atlantic integration, and in fact, leads the country to Russia.

Part of the opposition also spoke about the shortcomings of mediation. Under the pressure of the Georgian Dream, two points that were fundamentally important to the opposition disappeared from the five-point plan agreed upon by Charles Michel in the mediation process - early parliamentary elections and the unconditional release of political prisoners.



It was considered symbolic and outrageous by civil activists that the day after Danielson's departure, on March 31, the anniversary of the independence

referendum, a group of 50 Russian journalists were allowed to enter Georgia to pay for Vladimir Posner's birthday in Tbilisi. Posner is Putin's journalist who has always justified Russia's aggression against Georgia or Ukraine.



Posner, for example, said Abkhazia would never be part of Georgia. Their appearance in Tbilisi during a curfew in a restaurant caused a noisy rally. This is another indication that even a small step towards Moscow will be followed by a public outcry. A country with broken mediation and increased polarization is facing serious problems. The GEL exchange rate is falling catastrophically, the country's foreign debt has reached a dangerous level when new debts are already becoming problematic, a new wave of epidemics is approaching, the economy has been in crisis for a long time.

Protests are periodically held in various parts of the country over social and environmental issues. "Georgian Dream" is left alone in power and, as a rule, it will have to deal with these problems that threaten a big explosion of severe social issues.

THURSDAY APRIL 8

Day  Sunshine
High: 26°C
Night  Partly cloudy
Low: 14°C

FRIDAY APRIL 9

Day  Mostly cloudy
High: 23°C
Night  Cloudy
Low: 9°C

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GYLA files 2 new complaints with Strasbourg court over June 20 events

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Young Lawyers' Association, together with its partner organization the European Center for Human Rights (EHRAC), has filed 2 new complaints with the European Court of Human Rights.

As it was mentioned at the briefing held at GYLA, "complaints against the dispersal of the anti-occupation rally on June 20-21, 2019 against 22 people, including 10 protesters, 11 media representatives and one person accidentally found at the epicenter of the incident, an effective investigation by the state it will be about non-compliance."

Complaints referred to the use of extensive force during the

dispersing of an anti-occupation rally against 22 persons, including 10 persons exercising the right to peaceful assembly, 11 members of the media, and 1 person accidentally found in the epicenter of events, as well as lack of effective investigation by the state.

"On June 20-21, 2019, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia decided to disperse the rally, which turned into a large-scale violation of the rights of the protesters. The applicants in the complaints lodged Article 3 (prohibition of torture), Article 10 (freedom of expression - only in the case of media representatives), Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association - only in the case of demonstrators),



► GYLA addressed European Court on behalf of affected protesters and journalists on June 20.



► "The state still has no effective and human rights-oriented management policy for demonstrations," writes the organization.

and Article 13 (right to an effective remedy) violations," GYLA chairman Nikoloz Sonishvili announced.

According to the organization, on June 20-21, the MIA failed to properly manage the tense situation and did not use the resources of communication, negotiation, and dialogue to ensure de-escalation. They used the practice of administratively detaining protesters. According to GYLA, those who were under the effective control of law enforcement officers during/after their arrest were subjected to ill-treatment as a result of their arrest by law enforcement officers and subsequent physical and verbal violence.

As for the obstruction of jour-

nalistic activities, as noted at a press conference, the use of active special means and physical or verbal violence by law enforcement officers resulted in serious violations of the rights of media representatives, including freedom of expression, ill-treatment, and facts of obstruction of journalists' professional activities.

"Despite the passage of more than 21 months, the investigation process is flawed, incomplete, and does not meet the standard of effective investigation. In particular, to date, 20 of the 22 people under GYLA protection are not granted with the status of victims, although the damage caused to these individuals as a result of the crime is evidenced by video footage, medical docu-

ments, and witness testimony is also available to investigators. Although Maia (Mako) Gomuri and Giorgi Sulashvili have the status of victims, the Prosecutor General's Office does not allow them access to the full case file and only provides access to materials which, in the opinion of the investigating authority, are relevant to the applicants.

The organization clarifies that the complaints filed by GYLA present systemic problems that occur during the dissolution by the state through the use of shares. As a result, according to them, it becomes clear that the state still does not have an effective demonstration policy focused on human rights.

Skills for the Green Transition

Green skills is the focus of the ETF's April communication campaign. For the whole month, experts and practitioners at national, regional, and international level will share evidence and opinions on green skills and learning and their importance for jobs and growth in the EU's neighbouring regions. Stay tuned to our various channels with #Skills4change.

Crisis as catalyst

Climate change, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity caused by human activity are among the biggest global challenges of the 21st century. Countries around the world now accept that action is urgently required to address these problems. At the Paris summit in 2015, 196 countries pledged to take action to limit global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels and the European Union has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2050.

The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the process. The radical reduction in international travel and daily commuting to work together with the drop in economic activity has meant many countries have been able to meet and even exceed

their emission targets for the first time. In common with other countries around the world, the European Union has decided to seize this opportunity to make environmental sustainability an integral part of its post-COVID recovery plan building on the EU Green Deal. The drive towards clean, carbon neutral, circular economies and societies also shapes EU external assistance to the countries of the neighbourhood.

Green jobs

The green transition means rethinking the way we design, develop, produce, market and distribute goods and services across all sectors of the economy. It will mean the replacement of fossil fuel technologies and the demise of industries, like coal mining or

petroleum extraction, dependent on them. It will force people to rethink how we live our lives and consider the environmental impact of everything we do.

This will mean the disappearance of some jobs, the creation of others – not necessarily in the same sectors or the same geographical locations – and the transformation of many more. Motor mechanics, for example, will have to learn to repair and service electric vehicles. Construction workers will have to learn to install solar panels and geothermal heating systems. Farmers will have to learn to apply precision agriculture techniques. Environmental awareness will become a requirement of all jobs, and indeed an aspect of 21st century citizenship.



Skills for greening

The green transition will not happen if people do not have the awareness, knowledge and skills to drive it forwards. And that means big changes in education, training and lifelong learning. Environmental awareness will need to be mainstreamed in all curricula. Vocational and higher education will have to adapt to the emergence of environmentally friendly technologies in a wide range of professions. Courses will have to be developed for new professional profiles linked to greening, such as energy auditor or sustainability officer or environmental engineer.

Learning for all

The green transition accentuates the need for education and training systems to transition towards lifelong learning. New mindsets and new skills will be needed not only for people entering the labour market, but people of all ages and stages in life. And this regardless of their social and economic status, educational attainment, abilities or disabilities, or geographical location. Everyone has a stake in sustain-

ability, and the green transition must therefore be inclusive of all members of society.

Ecology of skills

Learning must support the green transition. To do so it must be closely aligned with national, regional, local and sectoral greening strategies. This requires close interaction between education and training systems and their environments to build skills ecosystems in which skills development goes hand in hand with economic, technological and social change.

International conference

These issues will be discussed at a major international conference entitled "Building lifelong learning systems: skills for green and inclusive societies in the digital era" to be held online on 21-25 June 2021. Organised by the ETF and UNESCO with the collaboration of UNICEF, the conference will focus on how education and training systems can adapt to the challenges of global change and green and digital futures and guarantee the right to education for all.