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Parties sign new EU proposal, presidents pardon Mtavari Arkhi shareholder Giorgi Rurua



Charles Michel's compromise paper was signed by Davit Bakradze, Aleko Elisashvili, Badri Japaridze, Zurab Japaridze, Mamuka Khazaradze, Vakhtang Megrelishvili, Shalva Papuashvili, Salome Samadashvili, Khatuna Samnidze, Archil Talakvadze, and Giorgi Vashadze.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia Carl Hartzell has introduced several changes to the European Union-backed compromise and, according to him, this is a document that President of the Eu-

ropean Council Charles Michel 'views as balanced and realistic'. The renewed document now also refers to snap elections and reads that "early parliamentary elections shall be called in 2022 if the Georgian Dream party receives less than 43% of valid proportional votes in the October

2021 local self-government elections." The parties pointed out that the submitted 5-point document is not perfect but it is acceptable.

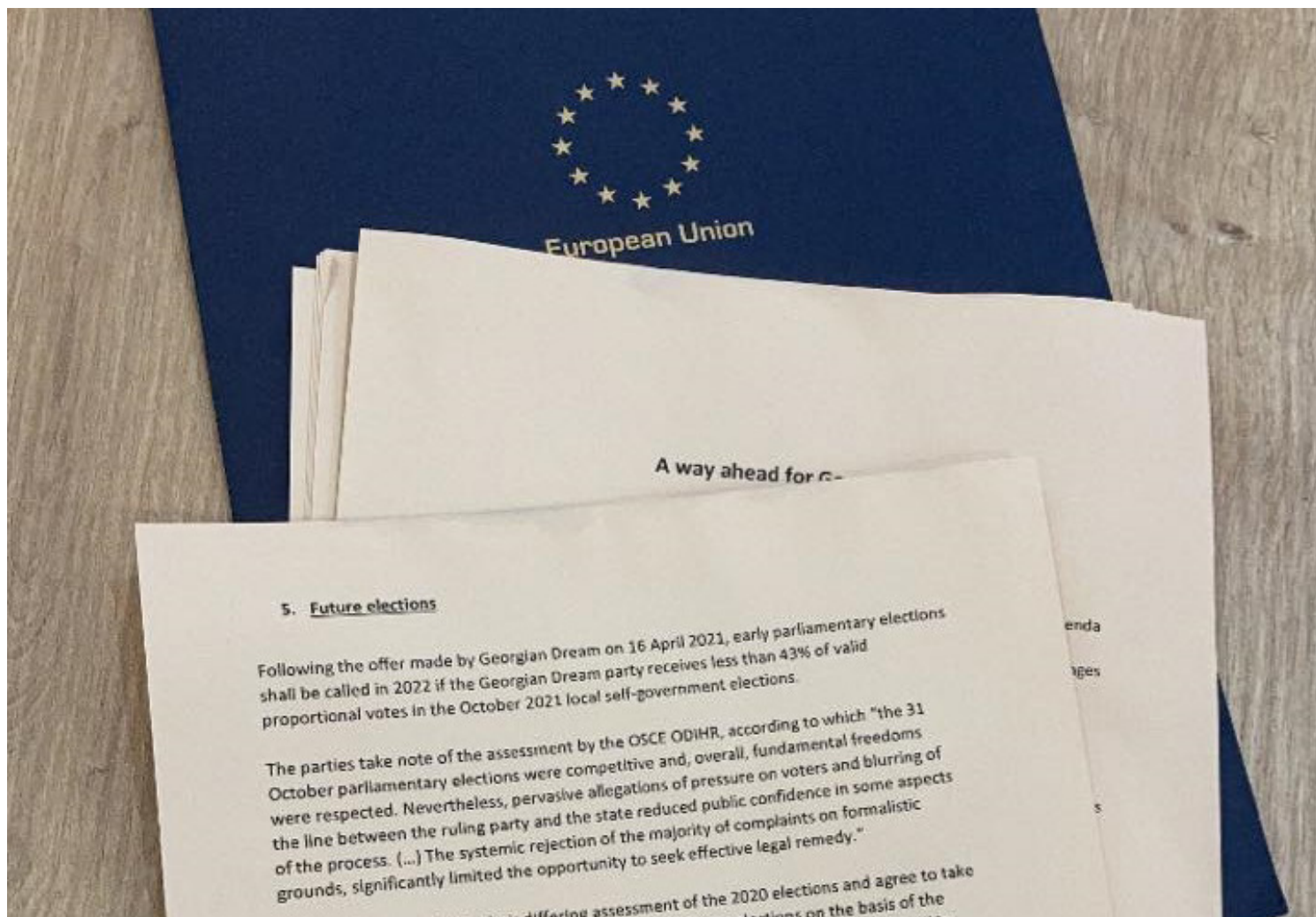
United National Movement has refused to sign the document citing that the political prisoners' issue is unclear and that

linking local election results to early elections is wrong. According to UNM party member Akaki Minashvili, there are other weak points in the document as well such as not containing the issue of the new judges and the fact that the CEC chairman will hold the post for another two years and the Prosecutor General for five years. Another UNM member Salome Samadashvili believes that opposition parties should sign the document as otherwise "it will badly affect opposition's relationship with the western partners." According to her, the UNM will hold consultations to consider the renewed proposal.

Zura Japaridze, the leader of the Girchi-More-Freedom political party, stated that even though he does not believe the document will de-escalation the situation or get the country out of the crisis, he is ready to sign the document.

The ruling Georgian Dream party has expressed readiness to sign the renewed proposal as well. According to the ruling party, they were ready to accept the conduct of repeal elections if they received at least 40 percent of votes in municipal elections and they are ready to accept the 43 percent as well. However, the party states that after signing the new proposal, they would not agree to any further substantive changes. The ruling party also mentioned Giorgi Rurua's release and stated that enclosing the condition in the agreement is "a gross example of political interference in the judiciary" as "Rurua is neither a politician nor a person who can make fundamental changes in the political process." However, the ruling party stressed that it would abstain from being critical if the president pardoned him.

Yesterday, the president of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili announced she would pardon Giorgi Rurua, a co-founder of the



Strategy Agmashenebeli leader Giorgi Vashadze stated that the new EU-proposed document 'is not ideal', however, he believes the opposition should use this opportunity and sign the document.

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Radio Liberty Georgia: Two testing tents set up near the Enguri bridge passing point



By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Georgian service of the Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty reported yesterday that two COVID-19 testing tents have been set up near the Enguri bridge pass between Abkhazia and Georgia. RFE/RL's local correspondent noted that other than the testing station, a medical facility has been set up to host individuals who test positive for COVID-19 or those who exhibit symptoms similar to those of the virus.

Head of Zugdidi Public Health Centre, Nana Odisharia told RFE/RL that the individuals who test negative would be able to pass freely, while those

who test positive would either have to move to self-isolation or be transferred to a COVID clinic.

Earlier last week, the Georgian authorities announced that residents of Abkhazia would no longer need to undergo the mandatory 14-day quarantine. They are now able to take a PCR test at the Enguri pass instead.

Besides, residents of Abkhazia will now be able to voluntarily participate in Georgia's nationwide vaccination program and travel to Georgia freely upon receiving two shots of the anti-coronavirus vaccine. It was later stated that the decision came shortly after discovering the bodies of four individuals who

drowned while trying to cross the Enguri river to travel to Georgia-controlled territories.

As of now, the Enguri bridge, which has been closed from March 14, 2020, to February 11, 2021, amidst the outbreak of the global pandemic, is the only pass that can be used to travel from Abkhazia to Georgia and back.

According to the residents of Abkhazia, it is mostly to let through the retirees and persons with medical conditions that require them to travel to Georgia. In order to cross the Enguri bridge, one needs to obtain a pass costing ₾ 45 (approximately \$13) and undergo a mandatory five-day quarantine upon returning back to Abkhazia.

Parties sign new EU proposal, presidents pardon Mtavari Arkhi shareholder Giorgi Rurua

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opposition-minded Mtavari Arkhi if the political parties sign the new proposal. According to Zurabishvili, even though she does not think Rurua deserves pardoning, she is ready to make the 'scandalous decision' to serve the state interests. The president stated that her decision needs to be the last chord to end the political crisis. Zurabishvili underscored that she would implement her decision only when the political parties sign the document.

enter the parliament, and when EU and US representatives announce that an agreement has been reached. "I will sign the pardon act within a week after this announcement," said the president.

Later yesterday, party members gathered at Orbeliani Palace to sign the compromise document. The document was signed by Davit Bakradze, Aleko Elisashvili, Badri Japaridze, Zurab Japaridze, Mamuka Khazaradze, Vakhtang Megrelishvili, Shalva Papuashvili, Salome Samadashvili, Khatuna Samnidze, Archil Talakvadze, and Giorgi Vashadze. The signing ceremony was attended by the EU and US Ambassadors Carl Hartzell and Kelly Degnan and virtually by European Council President Charles Michel.

Khatuna Samnidze, Davit Bakradze, and Salome Samadashvili have signed individually, as the bloc National Movement – Strength in Unity and European Georgia have not joined the document yet. However, the majority of the UNM members consider it possible to sign the document and enter the discussions.

Charles Michel has congratulated political leaders on signing the deal. "You put the people's interests first and let democracy prevail," he stated. European Council President will arrive in Georgia today. According to him, he will meet with the parties to discuss how to take more steps towards strengthening ties between Georgia and the European Union.

Weather

Tuesday, April 20

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 26°C
Night Showers
Low: 14°C

Wednesday, April 21

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 23°C
Night Light Rain
Low: 11°C

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Georgian soldier dies in Ukraine



David Shartava joined the Georgian Legion in 2016.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

A Georgian soldier was killed late at night by the Russian occupation forces in Donbas, Ukraine. According to Ukrainian media, 44-year-old David Shartava, who was a senior soldier of the 128th Mountain Assault Brigade, died in the fire opened by Russian occupation forces on April 18.

Reportedly, in the area of responsibility of the operative-tactical group East, the armed formations of the Russian Federation once again violated the ceasefire regime and opened fire on positions of Ukrainian soldiers with grenade launchers.

The 128th Separate Mountain Zakarpattia Brigade said in the statement published on Facebook that Shartava died because of "the treacherous actions of illegal military forces supported by the Russian Federation." "The enemy, once again, broke all agreements and failed to comply with the silence regime. Such actions led to irreparable consequences," reads the statement.

Shartava served as a staff sergeant in the Georgian army from 2003 to 2006. He joined the Georgian Legion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2016. According to his son, he was an experienced soldier and had been fighting since 2004. "He decided to go to Ukraine and continue fighting against the enemy there. He wanted to contribute to the protection of Georgia's sovereignty," Shartava's son told TV Pirveli.

Shartava is the 11th Georgian soldier who died in the military conflict between Ukraine and Russia.



In April, demonstrations by pro-Russian groups in the Donbas area of Ukraine escalated into a war between the Ukrainian government and the Russian-backed separatist forces of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.

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Turkey is Georgia's top trade partner in first quarter of 2021



In January-March, the share of EU in Georgian Exports was 19.1%, the share of CIS countries - 44.7%.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat) has released the foreign trade report. According to the document, in the first quarter of 2021, the foreign trade turnover of goods in Georgia amounted to \$2 773.2 million, which is 0.3% less than the corresponding period of the previous year. According to a report released by Geostat, exports amounted to \$ 820.6 million (up 5.2%) and imports to \$ 1,952.6 million (down 2.4%). Georgia's negative trade balance in January-March amounted to \$1 131.9 million, which is 40.8% of foreign trade turnover.

The share of groups of countries in exports is interesting: in January-March,

the share of EU countries exports in Georgia's was 19.1%, the share of CIS countries - 44.7%, and the share of other countries was 36.2%.

As for the share of the 10 largest exporting countries in the total exports of Georgia in January-March, the top three were as follows: China (\$109.8 million), Russia (\$109.5 million) and Azerbaijan (4104.6 million), and their share is 76.7%. Compared to the beginning of the last year, exports to the largest exporting countries increased the most in the US, Turkey and Ukraine, while decreased in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Armenia and Switzerland.

In the first quarter of 2021, copper ores and concentrates ranked first in the top 10 exports of commodity groups with \$



In the first quarter of 2021, Georgia purchased goods worth \$ 1.9 billion from around the world.

158.8 million, accounting for 19.4% of total exports. Light vehicles are in second place with \$86.6 million (10.5% of total exports), and the third place is taken by ferroalloys with \$83.7 million (10.2%). The largest increase among the TOP-10 exported products comes in exports of nuts, packaged medicines and ferroalloys.

As for the imports in January-March, the share of EU countries was 22.6%, the share of CIS countries - 31.2%, the share of other countries was 46.2%.

In the first quarter of 2021, Georgia purchased goods worth \$ 1.9 billion from around the world. During this period, imports decreased by 2.4% compared to January-March last year.

According to a foreign trade report, 70.4% of Georgia's trade turnover fall (by

0.3% / \$2.7 billion) in the first three months came from imports.

The share of the 10 largest import partner countries in the first three months of the year was 71.5%. The top 3 include: Turkey (\$ 343.3 million), Russia (\$ 220.4 million) and China (\$ 182.8 million), while imports from Azerbaijan, Turkey, Ukraine and Germany are down.

The largest import commodity group was represented in January-March 2021 in the form of cars, imports amounted to \$168.5 million and accounted for 8.6% of total imports. The second place was copper ores and concentrates with \$145.8 million (7.5% of imports), while the third place was taken by oil and oil products with \$141.9 million (7.3% of imports).

European Union provide 30 vehicles to Georgian Border Police

Vehicles with a total value of 693,000 EUR (GEL 2,700,000) will further develop abilities of the Georgian Government to combat irregular migration and cross-border crime.

At an event hosted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the EU together with project implementer Inter-

national Organization for Migration (IOM) have donated 30 all-terrain vehicles to the MIA Border Police. The vehicles are part of a larger package of 40 vehicles, 10 of which were donated in November 2020. This transport will contribute to improving detection of illegal activities at the borders and enhance patrolling, as well as response capabilities of border guards.

According to Sanja Celebic Lukovac, IOM Georgia Chief of Mission "today's

donation does not stand alone. It follows up on comprehensive procurement operations implemented by IOM with the support of the EU in the last decade, dedicated to strengthening Georgia's border management capacities".

"Improving border security is an important area of cooperation between the EU and Georgia. The vehicles handed over today will contribute to making the Georgian authorities more effective in fighting irregular migration and crime.

This is part of the EU's wider support to ensure modern and efficient border management in Georgia – and, in the end, the safety and security of Georgians", said Carl Hartzell, EU Ambassador to Georgia.

This action with a total budget of EUR 6 million is part of a wider EU funded programme - EU4 Security, Accountability and Fight against Crime in Georgia (SAFE). Over the past years, the EU support to Georgia in the areas of migration and border management has been significant and this donation will be also followed by comprehensive procurement and training activities that will ensure strengthening of Georgia's border protection capacities.

