

Tbilisi Mayor Presents Urban Development Policy Report

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze presented a report on the projects and measures implemented in the field of urban development of Tbilisi.

Urban policy projects and activities implemented during the last three years include the adoption of the New General Development Plan of Tbilisi, through which the correct and sustainable development of the city became irreversible.

The protection zone of the historical part of Tbilisi has been restored. As the mayor noted at the presentation, the municipality will continue the rehabilitation of historic areas in the coming years and every family who has requested home rehabilitation in such areas will be satisfied, all these remarkable buildings and streets will be maintained and passed to future generations.

According to the report, restoration-rehabilitation works of up to 22 buildings located in Orbeliani Square and adjacent streets as well as Gudishvili Square and about 30 adjacent buildings are being completed; those include historical-cultural heritage monuments as well. Restoration-rehabilitation works of historical buildings were carried out at 27 addresses. Rehabilitation works of the Dedaena Park and March 9 Park are underway and the Rehabilitation of the National Palace of Students and Youth has started; 34 new squares were built instead of the 477 dysfunctional, useless garages.

Kaladze also spoke about the environmental challenges and noted that the maintenance and development of green spaces in the city is one of the main priorities for the municipal government. According to Kaladze, as a result of the efforts made by the government of the



Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, who is also the General Secretary of the Georgian Dream party, has not yet informed the public on whether he will run for a second term in the autumn self-government elections.

capital, the practice of construction at the expense of recreational spaces is a thing of the past.

The Vice-Mayor of the capital Irakli Khmaladze noted that, according to the new general plan adopted in 2019, the area of one million square meters was granted the status of a recreational zone and, 5 large-scale park areas have been created: city park in the Mtkvari floodplains - 135 ha area, Dirsi floodplain park - 11 ha, Vazisubani park - 25 ha, Digomi floodplain park - 15 ha, Marzubani park - 24 ha. The implementation of these projects requires significant funds and further details will be covered at the presentation of the environmental policy.

According to the Vice-Mayor, the area

of 1,400 hectares has been given a historical landscape protection zone, while the 140 million square meter area has been given a forest zone.

Khmaladze stated that City Hall has protected many areas in the capital from chaotic development, since the construction permit is not issued until its detailed planning has taken place. He discussed Digomi Forest Park, where the territories were privatized, however, a significant part of it has already been redeemed. Vice-Mayor also brought the examples of Turtle Lake, area around Sports Palace, vicinity of Vake Park and others, where no building permits were granted. According to him, in recent years, the previously harmful practice of exceeding the con-

struction coefficients as well as construction permits in squares, parks and sports areas were banned.

"We will issue construction permits for uninhabited, unregulated areas throughout the capital in case of detailed planning. Such areas are: areas adjacent to the Tbilisi Sea, Lisi Lake, etc. In total, there are 11 areas, which were defined by the general plan," said Khmaladze.

Tbilisi Municipality has set new, important standards in the field of development plans: transport research, dendrological project development and planning of engineering networks are being developed in practice. In the direction of development plans, the standard for side walks has been established.

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Under the new plan, 4 million sq.m. area in Tbilisi has been granted the status of green space and 5 new park areas have been created.

New Wave of Events in the Georgian Politics

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The big unrest in the Georgian political spectrum at the moment has been recently caused by the formerly boycotted opposition which is divided into two parts - those who enter parliament based on the April 19 agreement and those who remain in the boycott mode. After Nika Melia's release, the UNM must decide whether it will remain in a boycott regime or join the April 19 document.

The opposition seems to find it very difficult to maintain unity. And the Georgian Dream will have to clarify its relations not only with the already known opposition but also with those political parties whose formation was announced by former Prime Minister Gakharia and Levan Vasadze.

Nika Melia, the leader of the main opposition party, is free after 73 days in prison. His bail was paid by one of the non-governmental organizations in the European Union. After his release, Melia received mocking comments from the Georgian Dream, saying "nothing is left of his political authority." How-

ever, his party members and a large part of the opposition consider his release a victory and believe Melia's image hasn't been damaged.

One of the main reasons why Melia agreed to leave on bail was to avoid the amnesty law, which provides amnesty for perpetrators of 'Gavrilov's Night.' Melia is accused of attempting to invade parliament, which was followed by unrest and brutality by the police.

However, Melia and other victims claim that there was no attempted invasion and that it was invented by the authorities to justify the attack on peaceful protesters. Melia demands the case be solved and since he doesn't trust the Georgian Court, he has filed a lawsuit in the Strasbourg Court.

Two draft amnesty laws have been submitted to the parliament - by the government and by the opposition. The Georgian Dream is going to pardon everyone, even those whose guilt has not been revealed. A heated debate is expected in the parliament, but the Georgian Dream has an opportunity to get what

they want by justifying the need to pass an amnesty law with Charles Michel's document.

After the release of Nika Melia, Western friends unanimously called on the "National Movement" to stop the boycott and enter parliament. There is no unity of opinion in the National Movement on this issue. Part of it thinks that it is necessary to stay in the boycott regime and continue the fight with protests for snap elections. They claim that by entering the parliament they will only strengthen the positions of the Georgian Dream.

However, many in the United National Movement believe that it is necessary to enter parliament as it is more diverse now.

Western friends believe that the entry of the opposition into parliament will be the basis for its constructive cooperation with the government to carry out reforms in the electoral law or the judiciary, which are agreed on in the April 19 agreement.

However, many find this unrealistic and believe that the Georgian Dream is imitating a democratic change, deceiving

Georgia's Western friends. Georgian Dream, despite the April 19 agreement, isn't changing its rhetoric and calls Nika Melia and other opposition members 'political criminals'. Opposition members say that this is the style of Bidzina Ivanishvili's rule - to have politicians arrested and use them as trading tools. Clearly, such a situation does not provide a good basis for any constructive dialogue.

One of the main questions is whether the Georgian Dream will be able to gain 43% of votes in the elections this autumn. No one has explained what 43% stands for.

But it is written in the document of April 19 and if the Georgian Dream does not reach this figure, early parliamentary elections should be called in 2022. Georgian Dream says that this will not be a problem for them, and they can get 60% of the votes, but the opposition is also optimistic.

They are not able to agree on how to defeat the Georgian Dream, getting more and more comfortable in the parliament to rule for their third term. Should

it be done with a united force, as Melia says, or by running separately in the elections, which the newly formed parties find attractive in the conditions of a low electoral threshold?

Giorgi Vashadze (Strategy Builder) is especially active in this regard, who considers it necessary to separate from the National Movement and suggests creating a 'third political center'.

Georgian Dream is also in a difficult situation. Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and his party are threatening the ruling party by seizing votes. This is why those who are considered to be on Gakharia's side keep getting fired from the government structures.

Levan Vasadze's new political union is expected to replace the Patriots Alliance and the Georgian March, which were known for their open anti-Western sentiments.

The first confrontation between the government and the parliament will be over the amnesty law. The nature of the debate and the document adopted will show us who benefits the most from the April 19 document.

President of Syria Meets de Facto President of Abkhazia, Reinstates Syria's Support For Republic's Sovereignty

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On May 17, de facto president of Abkhazia Aslan Bzhania arrived in Damascus on an official visit, and earlier today he held a meeting with President of Syria Bashar Assad. During the meeting, President Assad reaffirmed Syria's unwavering support for the sovereignty of Abkhazia and underscored the importance of Bzhania's visit, which, according to him, will provide a new impulse to the partnership between the two countries in various different fields.

In turn, Bzhania thanked President Assad for recognizing the independence of the Republic of Abkhazia and establishing diplomatic ties between the two countries:



"This is our first meeting, which is why I would like to personally thank you for recognizing the independence of the Re-

public of Abkhazia and establish diplomatic ties with it, your decision is of historical significance to us. I am confident that the

relationship between our countries will continue to develop and grow stronger in the future," President Bzhania stated.

The de facto leader of Abkhazia added that he admires the courage of President Assad and the heroism of the Syrian people "in their struggle for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country."

Following the meeting with Assad, Bzhania said that the two leaders discussed the possibility of cooperation in the fields of agriculture, economy, and tourism. Bzhania also emphasized that the sizeable Cherkess and Abkhaz diasporas which currently reside in Syria will facilitate the strengthening of intercultural ties between the countries.

Syria recognized the independence of Abkhazia in 2018, along with Venezuela, Nicaragua, Russia, and Nauru, after the opening of the Abkhazian embassy in Damascus, and Syria's decision was later condemned by the UN General Assembly in May 2018. Bzhania was elected one year ago in early presidential elections held following the political crisis that escalated in the country in 2020.

Weather

Wednesday, May 19

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 26°C

Night Clear

Low: 13°C

Thursday, May 20

Day Clear

High: 30°C

Night Clear

Low: 17°C

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Georgia Begins Vaccination in Prisons, Tourism Sector Employees To Be Jabbed Next Week



On May 18, inmates of the #5 Rustavi Prison Colony, #8 Gldani, and Geguti prisons will be vaccinated. It has also been reported that a total of 240 convicts from the aforementioned prisons have already expressed their desire to get vaccinated:

“The vaccination process is carried out under the supervision of medical staff and in full compliance with the recommendations of the Ministry of Health. Ambulance vehicles and medical staff mobilized at penitentiary institutions in order to respond quickly and effectively to any possible complications and side effects of the vaccine,” the ministry’s official statement reads. The ministry added that the process will gradually be carried out in all penitentiary facilities of Georgia.

Earlier yesterday, Deputy Minister of Health of Georgia Tamar Gabunia announced that the vaccination with Chinese Sinovac vaccine will be available for all individuals over 18 years of age starting from next week. She added that the National Center for Disease Control will announce the exact opening date for the vaccine registration within the next few days. Georgia currently has 100,000 doses of Sinovac, which were gifted to the country by the Chinese government, however, despite positive initial assessments, the vaccine has not yet acquired official authorization from the World Health Organization (WHO).

At yesterday’s briefing, Minister of Economy Natia Turnava stated that the vaccination of the

employees of the tourism sector would begin this week. She explained that although the vaccination will be voluntary, those companies that choose to undergo the process, will be marked as ‘safe’ and will receive the government’s informational support and free marketing of their services:

“It is very important for the world to know that our tourism industry is safe; that’s the most important part of today’s agenda”, Turnava emphasized.

According to the National Center for Disease Control, 4,021 people have been vaccinated against the coronavirus within the last 24 hours, bringing the total number of vaccinated people in Georgia to 93,305.

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

in order to stop the spread of the COVID-19, the government will launch the vaccination process in the country’s penitentiary fa-

The Georgian Ministry of Justice reported yesterday that

International Day of Museums at the Uplistsikhe Cave Complex

Summarizing the USAID/Zrda and National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation joint project results



THE MESSENGER STAFF

On May 18, USAID/Georgia Mission Director Peter Wiebler joined USAID/Zrda Chief of Party Ketevan Tchumburidze, First Deputy Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia Kakha Sikharulidze and Governor of Shida Kartli Mamuka Saghareishvili to celebrate International Day of Museums and discuss the successful conclusion of the partnership between the USAID Zrda Activity in Georgia and the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation to implement joint development projects in Shida Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Since early 2019, USAID Zrda and the National Agency for

Cultural Heritage Preservation have been partners to implement a number of significant projects in Shida Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions of Georgia.

“We are here to celebrate this great day, and also to celebrate the partnership between the USAID, the American people and the people of Georgia. We are here to promote the cultural tourism, which is an important, obviously to highlight tremendous richness that Georgia has in the area of culture, but also supporting cultural tourism for economic reasons,” USAID/Georgia Mission Director Peter Wiebler told *The Messenger* on May 18.

USAID/Zrda assisted the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation in designing

of a Road Map for Management Plan for Vardzia – Khertvisi Cultural Heritage landscape, with the engagement of the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) expert, to support the process of inscription into UNESCO World Heritage Sites list, as well supported the preparation and printing of the project-related information materials. Equipped the Uplistsikhe and Vardzia museums with the high standard First Aid Facility, as well as bar code readers and required software for a ticket management system, provided First Aid and Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) trainings to the museum staff and donated uniforms to them to enhance the traveler experience through im-

proved customer service and security support.

Besides this through the project support Vardzia, Uplistsikhe Museum Reserves, David&Giorgi Eristavi Museum in Odzisi and Borjomi Local Museum staff were offered functional, job-related trainings in strengthening and improving project management skills. Besides this, the project assisted the abovementioned museums in development of the evacuation plan as well as equipped with the items under the evacuation plan.

“Celebrating International Museums Day here in Georgia serves as a tool for the cultural tourism development locally that is crucially important both emotionally and pragmatically. And I’m sure that as soon as COVID pandemic ends, all the cultural sites including Uplistsikhe Cave Reserve will host many tourists again,” First Deputy Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia Kakha Sikharulidze said on Tuesday.

In Vardzia Cave Town the unique virtual museum equipped with modern projection and holographic technology was installed, allowing visitors with disabilities (and those without!) to experience the cave complex

using the technology platform supported through USAID/Zrda. In Tusheti, the appropriate infrastructure for so called pictographs (an ancient, prehistoric drawing on a rock wall) route was completed including installation of information and road signs, as well as pictographs cultural tourist route guidebooks and brochures were printed. David&Giorgi Eristavi Museum in Odzisi was fully equipped with appropriate museum equipment in support of the modernization of the facility. Finally, Zrda assisted in creating video and photo production to support the process of the Georgian Wheat’s inscription into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

“Overall, in 2019-2021 in the framework of the USAID/Zrda and National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation partnership GEL 450, 000 was allocated for the project related activities, as well as Zrda’s additional financial support for 15 museums in its target municipalities of Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, and Tusheti ranged over GEL 500, 000,” USAID/Zrda Chief of Party Ketevan Tchumburidze told the paper.

