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EU Ambassador to Georgia welcomes the consensus reached between Georgian political parties on electoral reform

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

The Ambassador of the European Union Carl Hartzell stated that he welcomes the consensus that the Georgian political parties have managed to reach on the subject of the electoral reform:

"It seems that the consensus on the subject of the electoral reform has finally been reached. We are now waiting for the legislation to be sent to the Council of Europe's Venice Commission for final assessment and recommendations as soon as possible."

Hartzell added that the judicial reform is just as important of a component of the EU-mediated agreement of April 19:

"In the nearest future, it will be necessary to focus attention on the process of appointing judges at the Supreme Court, since this process is approaching fast, as well as the appointment of the members of the country's High Council of Justice. Those two organs are very important in establishing people's trust in the country's judicial system. Moreover, this process will determine the stage-by-stage implementation of other reforms, in which the EU and other international partners will participate."

In his statement, ambassador Hartzell also expressed his hope for the United National Movement to join the parliament in the nearest future, saying that it is very



important for the party to participate in the current political discourse, specifically the implementation of electoral, judicial, and other reforms:

"I hope that the United National Movement will soon make a decision to join the parliament as that would be a logical step for them; it is very important for them to participate in the discussions of the electoral, judicial, and other important reforms."

EU representative also noted that the question of Tamar Zhvania's Chairmanship of the Central Election Commission has not been discussed within the frame-

work of the April 19 agreement, and it is up to the parties to decide whether they want to continue discussing the matter:

"I can say that the proposed changes to the country's electoral law look very promising. There have been some discussions with regard to the chairmanship of the Central Election Commission, however, not about the candidacy of Tamar Zhvania in specific. It is, therefore, up to the parties themselves to decide whether they want to discuss it [Zhvania's candidacy on the position of the chairwoman of the Central Election Commission]," noted EU Ambassador Hartzell.

Georgia: EU-funded responsible business awards

On 19 May, the award ceremony of 'Georgia's Responsible Business Awards Meliora 2020' took place online. The focus of Meliora 2020 was Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meliora was organised for the third time with the support of the European Union and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Germany) by the Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia.



"CSR is a future-oriented strategy for businesses. Both employees and consumers are increasingly demanding companies to become more transparent, and take an active role in addressing human rights, social, cultural, and environmental issues," said Carl Hartzell, the Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia. "CSR can facilitate interactions with European markets and help Georgian businesses take advantage of the opportunities possible under our Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area."

The winners were awarded for their support during COVID-19 pandemic in four categories: supporting employees; supporting clients, customers and suppliers; supporting society/communities; and supporting SMEs and most suffered industries.

The award scheme was launched in 2018. It is held in partnership with international and local expert organisations and business platforms. During these three years, different business companies of all size have participated in the project, with over 200 CSR projects.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

NGOs demand suspension of election of members of High Council of Justice

Nine organizations call on judges not to hold an extraordinary conference on May 26 to elect four judges to the High Council of Justice.

They believe that first the rule of staffing of the council should be changed, which implies the reform of the justice system.

"We would like to remind the public that one of the key issues in the agreement signed between the government and the opposition on April 19 is the ambitious reform of the judiciary, which in turn includes the reform of the High Council of Justice and reduces the chances for this institution to be used as an instrument of internal and external influence."

Among other demands, the signatory organizations call on: Judges of the common courts to refrain from electing judges to the High Council of Justice

until the composition of the Council is changed in such a way as to ensure a transparent and fair election of the High Council of Justice.

Government to hold celebrations on May 26

The City Hall has announced that due to the Independence Day celebration, traffic will be restricted. In particular, according to them, Freedom Square will be closed from 00:00 to 27 May on May 22. Accordingly, the government plans to hold celebratory events to mark May 26. In this regard, neither the information nor the decree is known about what specific activities will be carried out to celebrate Independence Day.

However, as we found on the website of the Procurement Agency, several agencies have already announced procurement for various purposes. Among them, the Ministry of Culture has announced a purchase to organize a gala concert on May 26.

The purchase price is €135 768, of which €28 433 is provided for salaries for 8 artists.

Extraordinary Conference scheduled to elect Judicial Council members, NGOs demand suspension of the process

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The 29th Extraordinary Conference of Judges was scheduled for May 26, at which judges will elect four members of the High Council of Justice as the term of office of 4 judges of the Council Dimitri Gvritishvili, Irakli Bondarenko, Irakli Shengelia and Vasil Mshvenieradze expires.

The suspension of the election of judges is supported by non-governmental organizations working on the issue of law, as well as politicians and non-judicial member of the Council of Justice Nazi Janezashvili who advocates a temporary halt to the process and the need for large-scale judicial reform. According to her, the majority of the council members should be non-judicial members and judges should be in the minority. "They used the majority to turn the court system into Chinchaladze Ltd.," said Janezashvili.

On May 20, non-governmental organizations demanded a temporary halt to the process and called on parliament to start reforming the judiciary as soon as possible. According to them, the inclusion of the issue in Charles Michel's document indicates that the Georgian justice system is problematic. They reminded the public that one of



On May 18, Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary called on the Parliament to start working on the reform of the justice system in a timely manner and to ensure that the High Council of Justice is staffed with qualified and credible staff.

the key issues of the agreement signed between the government and the opposition on April 19 is the ambitious reform of the judiciary, which includes the reform of the High Council of Justice. They emphasized that although 9 of the 15 members of the Council (4 judges and 5 non-judges) are to be re-elected during the 2021 spring session, the Parliament has not yet begun work on changing the composition of the Council.

The organizations also issued a joint statement on the issue,

writing that in order to improve the judiciary and the public's trust in it, it is vital to staff the council in a way that will reduce the use of this institution as an instrument of internal and external influence.

The signatory organizations Georgian Democratic Initiative, Partnership for Human Rights, Rights Georgia, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, Open Society Georgia Foundation, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, Transparency International -



"We call on the political parties to start working on this in the parliament as soon as possible, to open the doors for all interested groups, especially those who have been observing this system for years," said Giorgi Guilava, a transparency International representative.

Georgia, Center for Social Justice, European Foundation and Tamar Laliashvili, member of the Independent Lawyers Group recommend the following:

"Judges of the common courts shall refrain from electing judges to the High Council of Justice until the composition of the Council has been changed in such a way as to ensure that the process of electing members of the High Council of Justice takes place in a transparent and fair environment;

The Parliament shall promptly

adopt an amendment to the Organic Law of Georgia on Common Courts and temporarily suspend the election of members of the High Council of Justice by a legislative act until the reservation of the April 19, 2021, agreement stipulates non-transparent and fair environment;

Create a working format in a timely manner, to assess the already implemented waves of justice reform and work on future fundamental reform and ensure the proper involvement of all stakeholders."

Registration for the Chinese Sinovac vaccine starts today

OVER 100,000 PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE JAB

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Today, on May 21, at 12:00 registration on the Chinese Sinovac vaccine will start in Georgia. The vaccination process using Sinovac will begin on May 24.

According to the statement of the Ministry of Health of Georgia, just like Sinopharm, Sinovac is also made according to the traditional, inactivated virus method. The registration for the vaccine will be open for everyone above 18.

Two doses of the vaccine are required with an interval of 21 days. The registration will be possible on a special website, booking.moh.gov.ge, or by calling a special line, 1522.

According to the information of the Ministry, in total, there have been 260 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine delivered to different countries around the



Registration for Sinovac will open on May 21, 12:00

world. The vaccine does not have the WHO's authorization yet.

According to the Georgian Health Ministry, the vaccine was assessed as positive by the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization. Georgia received 100,000 doses of the Sinovac vaccine from China as a gift on April 29.

As for the WHO's approval, the Sinovac vaccine has been waiting for a while. A special expert group of the organization, SAGE, asked

for additional documentation from Sinovac on May 7. Another Chinese vaccine, Sinopharm, has already received WHO authorization. Georgia is expecting to receive additional doses of different vaccines. According to the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, there are very effective talks between Georgia and manufacturers of vaccines.

As PM said, Georgia is expecting additional vaccines from the Covax platform. He also noted



Sinovac is made with the same technology as Sinopharm

that there are talks between the representatives of Pfizer to receive one million doses. "We are talking with manufacturers directly, including Novavax, Moderna, and so on," added PM.

Also, Georgia is awaiting additional 500,000 doses of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine in the second half of June. In addition, according to Amiran Gamkrelidze, Georgia should receive 100,000 doses of Sinopharm with the help of the Red Cross,

however, there is no specific date known yet.

Georgia started vaccination on March 15 with AstraZeneca, which is still available for people over 45. All the Pfizer doses in the country are used up, and registration for Sinopharm is only open for risk groups as of now.

According to the official information, as of yesterday, 101,415 people have received at least one dose of the vaccine, while 15,874 people have received both jabs.

FRIDAY		MAY 21	
Day		Sunny	
		High: 33°C	
Night		Partly cloudy	
		Low: 18°C	
SATURDAY		MAY 22	
Day		Clouds	
		High: 34°C	
Night		Thunderstorms	
		Low: 18°C	

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**

Tamar Gachechiladze Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili Design and Layout

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