

## 2 years pass since June 20-21 events

People gathered on Rustaveli Avenue on Sunday

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Two years have passed since the dispersal of the anti-occupation rally on Rustaveli Avenue in front of the Parliament, which, according to official data, injured 275 people. Among them, several received severe bodily injuries, lost their eyes and vision.

To remember the events that took place in front of the Parliament building in 2019, people gathered on Rustaveli Avenue. With a slogan of "No to the Amnesty of the Occupiers," activists protested the dispersal of 2019 protests and the amnesty bill passed by the parliament of Georgia, according to which, all persons who committed crimes in connection with the events of June 20-21, 2019, are exempted from criminal liability and punishment.

Protesters said the planned amnesty is a continuation of the occupation and collaborationism.

On June 20, 2019, the anti-occupation rally was held on Rustaveli Avenue. The rally followed the 26 sessions of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Orthodox Church in the Georgian Parliament.

During the session, the chair of the Parliament's speaker was occupied by



The slogan of Sunday's rally was 'No to the Amnesty of Occupiers'



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Sergei Gavrilov, who is a Communist member of the Russian Duma. Gavrilov was the chairman of the session, which attended representatives from 25 countries and was initiated by the former member of the Parliamentary majority, Zakaria Kutsnashvili.

Because of the chairman of the session, many regard the protests as "Gavrilov's night". Gavrilov taking a seat on the Parliament's chairperson's place was followed by a massive outrage and protest of the parliamentary opposition and society. The assembly was canceled and Gavrilov was taken to the Tbilisi International Airport by the security guards in a few hours.

The situation became tense in front of the parliament by 22 o'clock. Some protesters moved to the stairs of the parliament. Special forces appeared on

Rustaveli Avenue, and soon the law enforcers released tear gas and started dispersal of the rally. Following the protests, on June 21, then Chairman of the Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze resigned.

The representatives of the Georgian Dream say that the protesters tried to enter the building of the parliament. According to one of the members of the ruling party Sozar Subari, "it was an attack on the parliament, we all saw how the police officers were beaten with various objects, while protesters tried to invade the parliament."

Yesterday, activists focused on the Amnesty Bill passed in the Georgian Parliament. Releasing people arrested during the June 20-21 is part of the Charles Michel document, which was signed by the government and part of the opposition on April 19.

### Politics

**Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili visits the Vatican, meets with Pope**  
President started her visit on June 16



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### Politics/Economics

**ADB Invests \$20 Million in Georgian Railway Green Bonds to Modernize Rail Network**

**Georgia Election Code Reforms: Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR call for "more holistic approach"**

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# Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili visits the Vatican, meets with Pope

By Nika Gamtsemlidze

During her official visit to the Vatican, the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili held a meeting with Pope Francis.

According to the Georgian president, a new phase of cooperation with the Vatican begins with the visit. The meeting highlighted the deepening of relations between the states. As it was noted during the meeting, it is of great importance for Georgia to deepen and strengthen relations with the Vatican in the field of Georgian culture, education, as well as science.

During the meeting with the Pope, the Georgian president talked about the ongoing events in the region, the general situation, as well as Georgia's role in the developments in the region. The meeting also touched upon the importance of Georgian mediation in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The President of Georgia also noted that without dialogue, overcoming any conflict is impossible.

Zourabichvili also discussed the situation in Georgia's occupied territories and talked about the severe humanitarian situation near the occupation line. While discussing the problems facing Georgia, Zourabichvili also discussed the Georgian Orthodox Churches and their situation in the occupied regions. She also underlined the meeting held in the Vatican and how it can help further develop the relations between the states.

The President of Georgia spoke with the Pope on climate



Zourabichvili and Pope Francis discussed the importance of deepening relations between the two states



change and environmental issues, emphasizing the role of small countries and the importance of strengthening them.

Also, according to the Administration of the President of Georgia, during her visit, a memorandum of cooperation between the states was signed for the first time.

The memorandums of cooperation in the field of culture and education were signed by the President of the Vatican Catholic Education Congregation, Cardinal Giuseppe Versailles, and the President of the Vatican Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi.

From the Georgian side, the memorandum was signed by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Nunu Mitskevich, and the First Deputy Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia, Kakha Sikharulidze.

According to Zourabichvili, education and culture are very important and priority directions for the future development of Georgia.

According to the administration, the President of Georgia came up with several initiatives during the meeting, including the establishment of the Georgia-Vatican Permanent Scientific Council, which translates old Georgian Christian literature. Georgian president started her visit on June 16.

**During Zourabichvili's visit to the Vatican, a memorandum of cooperation between the states was signed for the first time**

## NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY  
THE MESSENGER STAFF

**US gifts \$4 million worth of Remdesivir to Georgia**

According to Tengiz

## Weather

Monday, June 21

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 35°C

Night 🌙 Clear  
Low: 21°C

Tuesday, June 22

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 36°C

Night 🌙 Clear  
Low: 20°C

Tsertsvadze, director of the Tbilisi Infectious Diseases Hospital, the American pharmaceutical company Gilead has donated 10,000 vials of Remdesivir worth \$ 4 million to Georgia.

"The American pharmaceutical company Gilead has gifted Georgia and COVID patients approximately 10,000 million bottles of COVID-19 antiviral drug Remdesivir free of charge and branded medicine (Veklury) instead of the generic one, which will help us in the successful management of COVID patients.

"Under the current law, Gilead has the right to supply branded medicines mainly to the United States, the European Union, and a few other countries, while all other countries are remitted to India, Pakistan, and Egypt, which produce generic drugs under Gilead's license," stated Tsertsvadze.

**Gamkrelidze: It is summer, we want more freedom, but not at the expense of health**

"This would be playing with fire, you know? We have not yet defeated the coronavirus infection. There were 521 cases in the country today, 12 people died in the last 24 hours; these are serious numbers for a small country like Georgia.

I understand that it is difficult, it is summer, we all want more freedom, but it should not be at the expense of human health and life."

**Tsertsvadze: Restrictions on movement at night will probably be lifted**

"I think, the restrictions should be lifted. Most of them already have. The only one left is on movement, and that too for a minimum period of time. However, this is not the case everywhere in the world. Unlike Georgia, the easing of lockdowns in leading European countries has only just begun."

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## ADB Invests \$20 Million in Georgian Railway Green Bonds to Modernize Rail Network



Georgia lies at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and serves as an important trade and transport corridor, these green bonds will enable Georgian Railway to modernize its rail network, which is vital to the country's economy. Photo by: Georgian Railway JSC

**T**BILISI, GEORGIA (18 June 2021) — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has invested \$20 million in green bonds, issued by Georgian Railway JSC, with proceeds to be used primarily to roll over maturing Eurobonds that it had issued to improve existing railway lines as a part of an ongoing modernization project.

The investment forms part of a \$500 million issuance by Georgian Railway of 7-year green bonds—the first green bond issuance by a state-owned entity and a transport company from Georgia and the South Caucasus—that will be listed on the London Stock Exchange.

“Georgia lies at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and serves as an important trade and transport corridor,” said ADB Private Sector Operations Department

Director of Infrastructure Finance for South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia Shantanu Chakraborty. “The issuance of these green bonds will enable Georgian Railway to modernize its rail network, which is vital to the country's economy, as well as to the region, to ensure faster and safer rail transport.”

“ADB's support for this bond issuance complements ongoing technical assistance to Georgian Railway to strengthen its planning for passenger services,” said ADB Country Director for Georgia Shane Rosenthal.

“I am delighted to announce that Georgian Railway has issued the first green bonds by a Georgian transport entity. The transaction received considerable interest from investors, helping Georgian Railway to access the capital market even

during the current unprecedented times. We are thankful to ADB for playing a key role by acting as an anchor investor for the notes,” Georgian Railway's Chief Executive Officer David Peradze said.

Georgian Railway is wholly owned by the Partnership Fund, Georgia's state-owned investment fund. It provides freight services, transshipping a variety of cargo principally from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia in the east to the Black Sea in the west. It also provides domestic and international passenger services.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

## Czech Government Scholarship Awarded to 30 Georgian Students



**O**n June 18, the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tbilisi hosted a networking event of the Czech Government Scholarship 2021/2022 Recipients.

Georgia is among six eligible partner countries whose students are offered the opportunity to study at established institutes of public universities in the Czech Republic, which provide a high level of professional knowledge and skills, and at the same time allow beneficiaries to gain experience with institutional and socio-economic background of the Czech Republic.

Czech Government Scholarship program covers three types of study:

- Master study programmes plus a one-year-long preparatory course of the Czech language (which is combined with other field-specific training).
- Master study programmes in English language.
- Doctoral study programmes.

The scholarship covers the necessary costs related to staying and studying in the Czech Republic.

From the late 1950s to the present day over 20 000 foreign nationals have completed their studies at Czech universities with a scholarship of the Government of the Czech Republic.

30 students (13 women, 17 men) from Georgia have obtained scholarship for the academic year 2021/2022. Nine of the 30 will continue their Master education in Czech Language, three students will continue their doctorate studies in English and others will take English language master programs on various fields of studies, such as ICT, economic data analysis, finance, engineering, environmental studies and rural development. The quota for students in Georgia has exceeded 20 compared to initial 7 students that were awarded in the first year of the scholarship.

## Georgia Election Code Reforms: Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR call for “more holistic approach”

**S**trasbourg – In a joint urgent opinion issued on June 18, the Venice Commission and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (“ODIHR”) acknowledged that revised draft amendments to the Election Code of Georgia have been prepared in close cooperation between the ruling party and several opposition parties. This is “particularly noteworthy” against the background of the parliamentary boycott by all elected opposition parties after the parliamentary elections of October 2020 and of the fact that most of the opposition

parties had therefore not participated in the preparation of the initial draft amendments assessed in the first Joint Urgent Opinion of 30 April 2021.

The political agreement of 19 April 2021, the return to Parliament by several opposition parties and the revision of the draft amendments to the Election Code on the basis of the agreement, with a view to bringing the national legislation into line with international standards and recommendations, are “clearly to be welcomed”, the urgent opinion states, even though not all

elected opposition parties have as yet signed the agreement and taken up their parliamentary mandates.

The opinion – as requested by Kakha Kuchava, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia – however contains several recommendations for further amending the bill, including with regard to the composition of election administration. It also stresses that the practice in Georgia of “frequently amending electoral legislation risks undermining the integrity of the electoral process and ongoing efforts to consolidate democracy”.

The opinion thus calls for “more comprehensive and systemic reform of Georgian electoral law” with advice that “care should be taken to address the remaining concerns and outstanding recommendations in such a future reform, in order to prevent frequent changes and to achieve stability.”

Furthermore, the opinion advises that any future reform not be limited to “micro-management, but follow a more holistic approach”. Moreover, the Venice Commission and ODIHR stress again that “ownership of the process”

can only take place by dialogue amongst all the stakeholders driven by a genuine desire to safeguard and enhance Georgian democracy. Legal opinions can facilitate this process taking place on the ground but are no substitute for it.

This urgent opinion has been prepared under the Quick response Mechanism in the framework of the EU/CoE joint programme Partnership for Good Governance, co-funded by the Council of Europe and the European Union and implemented by the Council of Europe.