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Family and supporters of illegally detained Zaza Gakheladze hold a rally



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US senators call on Georgian political parties to promptly implement April 19 agreement



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By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

After the welcoming ceremony at the Presidential Palace of Ukraine, a face-to-face meeting between President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili and President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky was held, followed by an extended meeting. The state delegation accompanying the President of Georgia included representatives of her administration and the government.

According to the President of Ukraine, the visit of the President of Georgia to Ukraine is important for strengthening the strategic partnership between the two countries, adding the political dialogue between Kiev and Tbilisi is gaining new momentum.

"I reaffirm Ukraine's support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," the Ukrainian President said at a joint news conference with. He also thanked Georgia for supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemning Russian aggression, and expressed hope for active cooperation with the Georgian side within the framework of the Crimean platform to protect the rights of Crimeans and de-occupy the peninsula.

On her part, Zurbishvili promised to start working regarding this issue after her arrival and choose representatives of Georgia in the establishment of this platform. According to her, today, Georgia and Ukraine are united not only by centuries-old friendship, but also by parallel tasks and common goals.

"This is the de-occupation of our countries and territories, the path to the EU

Georgian and Ukrainian Presidents meet in Kiev



► President Zurbishvili invited Ukrainian President to Georgia and expressed hope that next year, the 30th anniversary of Georgian-Ukrainian relations would be especially celebrated.



► "Political dialogue between Kiev and Tbilisi is gaining new momentum, our task is to fill the format with strategic partnership with concrete projects."

and NATO, the increase of bilateral and regional cooperation," she said, reiterating the harsh situation in occupied territories of Georgia and mentioning the case of Georgian citizen Gakheladze, who has been detained by occupation forces.

She also mentioned the importance of taking bilateral relations to a new level, recalling the institutional framework in every direction - the Supreme Strategic Council, which covers economy, politics, security and culture.

As Georgian President announced, a number of declarations have been signed on investment protection or in the field of culture. "Tourism was growing before the pandemic, and we have hopes that this trend will be even stronger. Also, the trade turnover should be strengthened, it should

reflect the friendly relations between us." Zelensky emphasized that Georgia is an important trade partner for Ukraine in the South Caucasus region.

According to him, Ukraine and Georgia have joint European aspirations and both countries should take care of energy security.

"I believe that the friendly relations between our countries will traditionally continue in the future, will develop in the interests of Georgia and Ukraine, as well as in the interests of peace and security in the United Europe," he said.

Zurbishvili stated that the upcoming Batumi conference is a very important part of the progress of the Eastern Partnership program, on which important topics will be discussed. Georgian President also

recalled the NATO Summit on June 14th which reaffirmed the open door policy towards Georgia and Ukraine.

"Our task is to strengthen the areas of cooperation on the path of integration. This refers to cybersecurity and Black Sea security, which will be discussed within NATO. We are always welcome when ships from our NATO partners arrive at our ports. These are also very important steps in terms of security," Zurbishvili stated.

As Zelensky informed, the meeting also touched upon the return to the homeland of the citizens who are in prisons in Georgia and Ukraine - "the legal procedures are already underway and these people will return home in the near future."

During her visit to Kiev, Zurbishvili will also meet with Prime Minister Denis Shmigel and Parliament Speaker Dmitry Razumkov.

This is the first official visit of the President of Georgia to Ukraine in the last 15 years. Relations between Georgian and Ukrainian governments soured in May 2020, after Zelensky appointed Georgia's third president Mikheil Saakashvili as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Reform Council. The Georgian government then said that the appointment of convict Saakashvili to office raised questions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Ambassador Sharashenidze from Kiev to Tbilisi for consultations, who returned to Ukraine in April 2021 after almost a year.

Family and supporters of illegally detained Zaza Gakheladze hold a rally



► Rally participants held a peaceful protest and marched from Kvemo Chala, Gakheladze's hometown, to Samtavisi Monastery.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The family of Zaza Gakheladze, a Georgian citizen illegally detained and sentenced by the Russia-occupied Tskhinvali region, has given the Georgian government one month to ensure his release. Yesterday, on the detainee's 34th birthday, Gakheladze's family held a peaceful protest in the village of Kvemo Chala, near the occupation line.

Rally participants marched from Kvemo Chala to Samtavisi Monastery. The family of the unlawfully detained stated that the rally intended to attract further attention to this issue and to push the government to actively work to release Gakheladze.

Gakheladze's family initially stated that if the government failed to free Gakheladze by his

birthday, they would cross the line into the occupied territory; however, his father, Mikheil Gakheladze, announced later that they would refrain from entering the occupied territory per the request of Georgian Patriarch Ilia II.

According to Gakheladze's father, he is giving the government one month to release his son, or else, he says he will enter Tskhinvali.

Georgian opposition members and civic activists also joined the rally, accusing the government of inactivity.

Georgian Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri, as well as Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze, stated yesterday that the government has done its utmost to ensure the release of Gakheladze as soon as possible.

According to Gomelauri, the international community, as well as the Church, are involved in the process.

Gakheladze was shot and illegally detained by Russian-controlled occupation forces in



► Patriarch Ilia II has sent a letter to the Russian Patriarch asking him to conciliate the release of Gakheladze.

July 2020. On February 5, 2021, he was sentenced to 12 years and six months in prison by the de facto Supreme Court of the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region. The court found him guilty of "illegally crossing the border

and attempted murder" of a so-called border guard.

On June 22, the de facto government of Georgia's Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region responded to the launching of the protest and stated that the

rally participants were likely to stage provocations. According to them, if anyone tried to cross into Tskhinvali, the de facto authorities would respond in line with the law.

THURSDAY		JUNE 24
Day		Sunny High: 37°C
Night		Partly cloudy Low: 20°C
FRIDAY		JUNE 25
Day		Sunny High: 37°C
Night		Clear Low: 20°C

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US senators call on Georgian political parties to promptly implement April 19 agreement



► The US senate reaffirmed support for Georgia's territorial integrity and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

US Senators Ronald Johnson, Jeanne Shaheen, and Jim Risch submitted a resolution to the Senate calling on all parties in Georgia to promptly implement the agreement signed on April 19. The senators reaffirm the support

of the Senate for Georgia's territorial integrity and the Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The resolution calls on the Georgian Dream, the United National Movement, and the other parties elected to the Parliament to fully implement the EU-mediated agreement. The senators urge all MPs to take

up their seats in parliament and begin addressing the challenges facing Georgia, including in terms of COVID-19 pandemic, a weakened economy, and challenging regional dynamics.

The resolution also calls on the Government of Georgia to implement systemic reforms, developed through an inclusive and



► The US senate reaffirmed support for Georgia's territorial integrity and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

transparent consultation process with all parties, to ensure an impartial and independent judiciary that does not serve political or partisan purposes. It also urges the government to inclusively and transparently developed systemic electoral reforms in order to address the causes of the political impasse and prevent the recurrence of such a crisis.

"The Senate recognizes that the political situation in Georgia has been exacerbated by the efforts of the Russian Federation to sow chaos throughout Georgia, including the illegally occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," reads the resolution.

As the document notes, the senate expresses concern that the obstacles on the way to strengthening Georgia's democratic institutions and processes will slow the progress toward Euro-Atlantic integration "and could result in conditions placed on United States assistance to Georgia." The document also reads that the United States supports a stronger democracy in Georgia "with governing institutions that demonstrate integrity, checks and balances, transparency, the capacity to counter Russian and other malign influence, and the ability to achieve the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the people of Georgia."

EU grants for youth projects to promote social entrepreneurship in Georgia

Twelve youth start-up projects have been selected for EU grant awards under the EU4Youth project "Social Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia (SEAG)".

The 12 projects were selected from a total of 68 young startups, who took part in the grant competition of the SEAG project launched in December 2020.

The winners operate in the sectors of tourism, HORECA, handicrafts, toy production, education, fashion, and agricultural mechanisation. These enterprises uphold social missions such as environmental protection, cultural heritage protection, employment, re-socialization of young ex-of-



fenders, education, integration of ethnic minorities, social space, and the involvement of persons with disabilities.

The grant signing ceremony with the first seven winning young social entrepreneurs took place on 16 June at the venue of one of the winning projects, the Cafune social café in Rustavi. Contracts will soon be signed with the remaining five. With the contracts signed, implementation of the projects will begin, in line with the business plans submitted by the grant winners.

The EU-funded project "Social Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia (SEAG)" has been implemented since January 2020,

as part of the EU4Youth initiative, by Mercy Corps Europe in partnership with the Association of Business Consulting Organisations of Georgia (ABCO) and the Armenian NGO Development Principles (DP). The main goal of the SEAG project is to strengthen the social entrepreneurial potential of young people aged 18-29 in Armenia and Georgia. The project provides creative young people from Armenia and Georgia with the necessary knowledge and skills to establish sustainable social enterprises, and supports the development of a favourable ecosystem for social enterprises to develop and prosper in both countries.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Wearing masks outside no longer mandatory, curfew to be lifted

According to the decision of the Coordinating Council, wearing a mask in the open is no longer be mandatory.

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili made the statement at a briefing held at the government administration.

Wearing masks will still be mandatory indoors, on public transport, and at bus stops.

In addition, by the decision of the Coordinating Council, the curfew in the country will be lifted beginning July 1st.

Despite the removal of the curfew, restaurants will only be open until 00:00

According to Giorgi Ghibradze, Chief of the Operational Staff at the Inter-agency Coordination Council, despite the lifting of the curfew from July 1st, the restaurants will be open only until 00:00.

As Ghibradze noted, the restriction

will also apply to nightclubs and other public catering establishments, including hotels with have restaurant spaces.

US Ambassador Degnan calls on political parties to implement Michel agreement

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan once again calls on political parties to implement the April 19 agreement and emphasizes the need to improve and strengthen the independent justice system in Georgia.

The ambassador spoke about this after the meeting with the Minister of Justice.

As Kelly Degnan points out, the post-election period of negotiations has shown how important a strong and independent judiciary is.

We explicitly call on all parties, both ruling and opposition parties, to abide by the April 19 agreement in its full spirit. The aim is to improve and strengthen the independent justice system.

"This is a job that we must all do and that serves the best interests of Georgia," said Degnan.