

POLITICS

President of Georgia:
Everyone has the right
to freedom of expression

FULL STORY ON Page 2

Team Europe: EIB provides
€106.7 million to Georgia
for major upgrades of
its East-West highway

FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

Minister of Agriculture preses
Environment and Rural
Development 2030 vision



FULL STORY ON Page 3

The first day of Pride Week in Tbilisi

THE PRIDE WEEK IS EXPECTED TO BE CONCLUDED WITH THE MARCH FOR DIGNITY



► Prior to the beginning of the meeting, Georgian activists called on the authorities to protect the rights of people. RFE/RL

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The first day of Pride Week in Tbilisi was held yesterday, in a night club Khidi, near the Vakhushti bridge. LGBTQ+ activists, politicians, and the representatives of the international corps attended the meeting, which was followed by the screening of a documentary.

The first day of Pride Week was held in parallel with far-right, ultra-conservative hate groups gathering outside the screening. The homophobic protesters used force against police as well as attendees of the event.

The head of the patrol police department, Vazha Siradze was also present at the location. As he noted, everyone has the right of freedom of speech and expression. He once again called on both sides to adhere to the police's rightful demands.

Prior to the beginning of the meeting, Georgian activists called on the authorities to protect the rights of people. The director of the Media Development Fund, Tamar Kintsurashvili, talked about the importance of Pride week. She said that no society can develop if every single citizen does not have the same rights.

The Ombudsperson of Georgia, Nino Lomjaria, also called on the authorities to protect the participants of the Pride Week events. She talked about it yesterday. She said that for years, LGBTQ+ activists were not able to use the right of freedom



► The first day of the Pride Week was held in nightclub Khidi. Photo: Tbilisi Pride.

of speech and expression. She said that every single act of peaceful protest is guaranteed by the Georgian constitution and the government is required to protect the rights of the people.

The Public Defender calls on the competent authorities and officials, based on the experience of previous years, to take measures that actually protect the safety, dignity of freedom of expression.

Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakhar-

ia, the founder of the For Georgia party, says the right to freedom of expression is guaranteed by the constitution and that the state owes its protection to its citizens.

"Every citizen of Georgia, and first the government, must abide by the Constitution. When I was with my team in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we did everything possible to protect the health, safety, and peace of our citizens in this

country in any conditions," said the former Prime Minister. The Pride Week will be held in Tbilisi from July 1 to July 5 - the March of Dignity is scheduled for July 5 on Rustaveli avenue. Guram and Alexandre Palavandishvili plan to set up a tent near the Rustaveli metro station from July 4. Representatives of other ultra-conservative groups have also expressed their plans to get in the way of Pride Week, specifically the March of Dignity.

President of Georgia: Everyone has the right to freedom of expression

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

President of Georgia, Salome Zurbashvili has commented on the controversy around the holding of Tbilisi Pride events scheduled for 1-5 July. She stated that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly of the Tbilisi Pride participants are outlined in the country's constitution and everyone has the freedom to express themselves within the country's law:

I believe that everyone has the right to freedom of expression. Our inherent tolerance is part of our identity. This is what our country was built on and this is what its future development will be based on. Therefore, I also believe that everyone has the right to express themselves. They have a right to speak out and exercise their rights outlined in the constitution and within the norms established by the law. This is important for our country and our unity", the president said.

Earlier today, the Ombudsman of Georgia has called for



the law enforcement agents and government authorities to ensure the sufficient protection and security of the Tbilisi Pride participants. The country's Ministry of Internal Affairs has already announced that it will personally take responsibility for it:

"Ministry of Internal Affairs would like to inform the public regarding preventive measures planned by the agency in connection with the scheduled events within the framework of Tbilisi Pride Week.

In order to hold the event scheduled for July 1 in a safe environment, the representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are in constant communication with the organizers of the event."

The leader of the violent and homophobic group Levan Vasadze has already demanded the canceling of the march of dignity and gave the government a 10-day 'deadline', which expired on June 25. In addition, Vasadze urged the Georgian Dream to pass legislation restricting the freedom of expression 'promoting debauchery'.

Team Europe: EIB provides €106.7 million to Georgia for major upgrades of its East-West highway

- The EU bank will finance two sections of the East-West Highway extending the motorway to the borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia
- The investment increases road safety along the 388km-long highway, a key road artery for Georgia and the South Caucasus region
- To date, the EU bank has invested close to €2 billion in Georgia supporting key sectors of the economy and its EU membership ambitions

The European Investment Bank, the bank of the European Union has provided an additional €106.7 million to the Government of Georgia for the upgrades of the East-West (E60) Highway, the country's

main road artery. The loan from the EU bank will finance two upgrades: one, along the 30km-long section between Algeti and Sadakhlo, and the other, the 32 km-long section between Rustavi and the Red Bridge. The two upgrades will extend the highway to the borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively.

The operation improves road safety on the motorway, cuts travel times, reduces vehicle operating and maintenance costs, and increases the economic and territorial cohesion of Georgia. It will also improve connectivity within the South Caucasus region.

Teresa Czerwinska, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank responsible for EIB operations in Georgia, said: "EIB investment in the East-West Highway improves conditions for living and doing business and increases the country's resilience to major crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. With new trade opportunities for the country and

the region alike, the East-West Highway will benefit Georgia for decades to come.

This investment will also expand Team Europe's support for faster recovery of Georgia from the devastating COVID-19 crisis. It comes on top of the €170 million that the EIB invested in the country's SMEs and healthcare system during 2020 alone."

Irakli Karseladze, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, said: "The EIB is actively involved in the modernisation of road infrastructure in Georgia, such as the development of the East-West Highway (E60) project, which connects the country's eastern border to the west, transforming Georgia into the best transport corridor and logistics hub between Asia and Europe and linking us to Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to the EIB team for its continued support for and cooperation with

our regional and infrastructural development agenda."

Carl Hartzell, EU Ambassador to Georgia, said: "The East-West Highway is one of Georgia's main arteries and the European Union is proud to help strengthen it further with this support. This will create additional economic opportunities for Georgians and help firm up Georgia's position as a transit hub in the region."

Safe, quick and modern connection for Georgia and the region

Once completed, the East-West Highway will offer a quicker and safer traffic alternative to existing connections and integrate Georgia with the Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) Network. The TEN-T spans the European Union and strengthens social, economic and territorial cohesion in the Union, while its extended networks, such as the East-West Highway, extend the same benefits to EU partner countries.

The EIB has been supporting the construction of the East-West Highway since 2012, reinforcing Team Europe's support for the social and economic development of Georgia and the country's EU ambitions. To date, the EIB has invested close to €1 billion on the East-West Highway, which represents nearly half of its total investments in the country.

The EIB investments in the East-West Highway form part of the EU commitment to the social and economic development of Georgia, and are guaranteed by the European Union. So far, the European Union has complemented the EIB loans for the East-West Highway with €26 million in grants.

The EIB finances most projects in Georgia under the EU External Lending Mandate. This provides the EIB with a guarantee covered by the EU budget for projects in the fields of social and economic infrastructure, local private sector development and climate action.

FRIDAY		JULY 2	
Day		Sunshine	High: 36°C
Night		Partly cloudy	Low: 22°C
SATURDAY		JULY 3	
Day		Sunny	High: 37°C
Night		Few clouds	Low: 23°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

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper,

and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

EXCHANGE RATES:

US DOLLAR - 3.1619 | EURO - 3.7484 | GBP - 4.3555 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.3347 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4153 |

Minister of Agriculture present Environment and Rural Development 2030 vision

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture, Levan Davitashvili, presented the long-term vision 'Environment and Rural Development 2030' on 1st of July. At the initiative of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, the ministries will present their visions within the framework of the government's 10-year plan. The Ministry of Environment and Agriculture is the first one to present the long-term vision for the development of the sector.

According to Davitashvili, Georgia needs appropriate processing capacities, storage infrastructure, packaging infrastructure and relevant investments to house primary production, because Georgian products must be absolutely competitive and supplied to the market in a way that meets modern standards and requirements.

He emphasized that modern farms and enterprises are functioning in the country within the framework of support measures for the agricultural sector; Cheap cash resources are available to entrepreneurs and farmers involved in agriculture, which makes investing in the sector more attractive.

"The long-term agricultural development plan envisages more support for storing and processing farms; €1.7 billion is planned to be invested in the sector over the next 10 years, of which the state's share is more than 700 million," he said, concluding that as a result of the local production will increase even more in the country.

At present, the current credit portfolio to improve the production processes of primary production, processing and storage of agriculture is up to €1.3 billion, which is 22 times more than the existing credit portfolio in the field of agriculture in 2012 (€57 million). According to the Ministry of Environment



გარემოს დაცვა და სოფლის მეურნეობის განვითარება 2030

ღვინე ღვინოაშვილმა სამინისტროს გრძელვადიანი ხედვა წარაგონა

► South Caucasus Ecosystem Research and Restoration Center will be established in Krtsanisi Forest Park.



► "One of the main tasks is to make our country more self-sufficient, we are not against imports, but we can produce more," announced the PM.

Protection and Agriculture, with the financial support of the state, within the programs of the Rural Development Agency, more than 1000 enterprises have been created/re-equipped and are functioning.

The minister also informed that a total of 13 fully functional agricultural laboratories will create a network throughout Georgia, with national and international standards.

"The State Laboratory of Agriculture has the status of the relevant accreditation status of the national standard SST ISO / IEC 17025: 2017/2018 and has introduced a quality management system in accordance with the requirements of the international standard ISO 9001: 2015," he announced. According to him, new, international standard research methods are being studied, introduced and further accredited in the laboratory every year.

In the next 10 years, the number of studies currently available in the laboratory will increase by 50%. The specialists of the laboratory successfully pass the international qualification tests every year," the Ministry of Environment Protection said in its statement.

The National Agency for Wildlife of the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture is actively working on the Krtsanisi Forest Park development plan. As a result of the implementation of the plan, a center for research and restoration of the South Caucasus ecosystems will be established in the forest park.

It is planned to build a fish farm of Mtkvari species in the forest-park, restore 7 dried -up ponds and arrange up to 50 picnic locations.

After the large-scale work carried out by the Wildlife Agency, the park will regain its most important function and become a recreational space between Tbilisi and Rustavi.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED
BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Police arrest 20 homophobic protest participants

Police arrested a total of 20 participants in a homophobic and violent protest at the first event of the Tbilisi Pride, where a film was screened during the week.

As Formula was told by the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the protesters are detained under Articles 166 and 173 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which stipulate petty hooliganism and

disobedience to the request of the police. Representatives of the diplomatic corps also left the event with the help of the police. The situation on the ground was tense throughout the day as homophobic groups appeared at the site. They wanted to block the road, but the police did not allow it. Shouts of homophobic content were also heard. Violent groups hurled bottles, eggs, and stones at police and activists. The egg also hit a U.S. embassy official.

Homophobic and hate groups plan to set up tents near Metro Rustaveli on the night of July 4 and prevent the March of Honor. On June 28, 28 MEPs issued a statement calling on the Minister of

Internal Affairs and the Government of Georgia to protect the Tbilisi Pride participants effectively and properly, to ensure their universal right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

The Lelos take campaign to end violence against women to the rugby pitch

To support ending violence against women, Georgia national rugby team, the Lelos, will wear the UN Women logo on their jerseys when they play current World Champions South Africa team in July.

The national rugby team of Georgia, the Lelos, will raise awareness on end-

ing violence against women by wearing the UN Women logo on their jerseys as they compete against the reigning World Champion South Africa team on 2 and 9 July. Georgian rugby players have a long-standing partnership with UN Women. The cooperation promotes the participation of men in the fight against violence against women and girls.

"We are honoured to be involved once again in the campaign for supporting gender equality and raising awareness against violence against women and girls. We will take part in the most important games of the summer tests with this message," added the captain of the Georgian team, Mr. Merab Sharikadze.