

President of Georgia, International partners condemn violent acts at anti-Tbilisi Pride rally

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, right-wing activists gathered on Rustaveli Avenue to protest the Tbilisi Pride march. The ultranationalism groups attacked media representatives and injured dozens of journalists and cameramen. Following yesterday's events, 21 embassies to Georgia have released a joint statement condemning violent acts against civic activists, community members, and journalists during the pride. The statement is published by the embassies of Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, the European Union Monitoring Mission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, UN system in Georgia, the United States and the EU Delegation to Georgia.

The international partners expressed concern about "the failure of the government leaders and religious



International community calls on the Georgian government to hold the attackers accountable for their actions.



"Violence is unacceptable. I condemn today's events and any form of violence over the difference of ideas or gender identity. Everyone has the constitutional right to express their opinion," Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili stated.

officials to condemn violence." According to the statement, participation in peaceful gatherings is a right guaranteed by Georgia's Constitution. "Those who incite or threaten violence or commit violent acts... should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law," the statement reads.

Embassies call on Georgian leaders and law enforcement to protect those exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and assembly, to protect journalists, and to publicly condemn violence.

The United Nations Human Rights Office has also reacted to the events and condemned threats and assaults on journalists and organizers.

"We call on Georgia to protect participants in peaceful assemblies and to investigate violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. Those responsible must be held accountable," reads the statement published by UN Human Rights Office on Twitter.

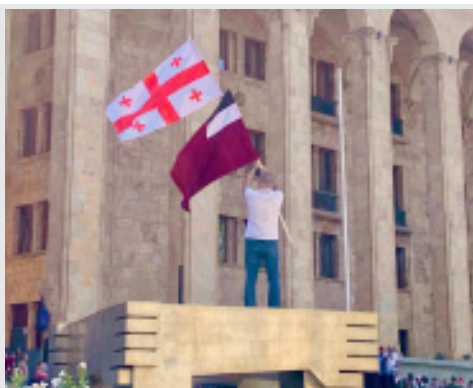
According to the British Embassy to Georgia, "violence, threats towards the

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When Shame replaces Pride: Far-right rally disrupts Tbilisi Pride's March of Solidarity

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Tbilisi Pride began on July 1 and was supposed to last for 5 days. July 5 is when the final event was scheduled for – the March of Solidarity gathering various social activists who would walk down the main street of the city – Rustaveli Avenue to protest against discrimination and call for peace and equality for all. However, it seems that the Georgian government and part of the society, despite the Georgian Euro-Atlantic aspirations, is not yet ready to be tolerant.

Earlier this morning, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili gave a speech at the government meeting, condemning the Pride's initiative and stated that this event was arranged by the country's opposition and the former president Mikheil Saakashvili with a clear aim to 'destabilize society', which the government of Georgia 'would not allow'. What unraveled after Garibashvili's speech will forever go down in the country's history as a 'shame' that replaced the Pride.

Members of radical ultra-right groups, including the Union of Orthodox Parents and Unity, Essence, Hope civic movement founded recently by Levan Vasadze, an ultra-nationalist politician and businessman known for his homophobic statements, gathered in front of the Parliament building. Here, they began to dismantle the tents put up by the opposition politicians several months ago as a protest against the results of the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

When the journalists arrived at the scene, they became a target for verbal abuse and violent attacks, often while reporting live. As a result, several



journalists had to be hospitalized with serious injuries, many had their equipment destroyed.

Police were mobilized in front of the Parliament, where the far-right rally was taking place, however, they failed to prevent the attacks, or make any

arrests. Such inaction of the law enforcement agents is what made many believe that the government silently encouraged the violent disruption of the scheduled march.

As the situation escalated, and when far-right groups went out in the city

chasing down anyone with LGBT+ symbols, beating them up, and even stabbing one of the tourists for wearing an earring, Tbilisi Pride was forced to cancel its event out of security concerns. Many news outlets made the decision not to cover the events in order to protect their journalists when the police couldn't.

The rally went on until the late evening - with hate speech being transmitted from the microphones, interrupted only by fireworks, folk music, a child reciting poems, and the symbolic burning of the LGBT flag. The smokes were flying high, and people's chanting 'Sakartvelos Gaumarjos' (long live, Georgia) was piercing the air.

Thirty MEPs sent an open letter to the Georgian government demanding to ensure the safety of the Pride participants, the Prime Minister responded with his controversial statement that ultimately led to the far-right rally on the steps of Georgia's Parliament. It is, therefore, hard to believe that the European integration, that Georgia is striving for so, is possible at all in the near future.

Journalists were targeted and attacked in front of the main legislative body of the country, with police unable to protect them. Tbilisi Pride's main event ended up being a screening of a documentary movie, that seems was only highly protected by the police cordons since various diplomatic corps were attending it.

President Zurabishvili visited the injured at the hospital and condemned violence against minorities in her interview with media representatives.

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LGBTQI+ community and attacks on journalists damage reputation as a tolerant,

Weather

Tuesday, July 6

Day Clear
High: 36°C

Night Showers
Low: 21°C

Wednesday, July 7

Day T-storm
High: 31°C

Night T-storm
Low: 20°C

hospitable country.”

Human Rights House Foundation stressed the failure of Georgian authorities “to prevent mass violence perpetrated against journalists and other human rights defenders, as well as civil society organizations.”

President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili also made a statement following yesterday's

events, in which she condemns violence based on the difference of opinions and gender identity. The President claims everyone has a right to freedom of expression. Zurabishvili called on everyone to show restraint and the relevant authorities to ensure public order.

“What we saw today was a violation of the core fabric of Georgia. We have yet to

understand that we achieve nothing with confrontation,” the president stated on Twitter.

Zurabishvili visited injured media representatives in the hospital and expressed her solidarity towards them. According to her, out of four journalists that had been transported to the hospital, one has already been discharged

and one has undergone surgery.

According to the information available at the time of writing, 47 representatives of 16 media outlets were injured. Some of them received medical treatment on the spot, while others were taken to hospitals. Police are investigating the incident.

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Austria donates 5,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Georgia, mass Covid-19 vaccination launches



On Monday, 5,000 doses of AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccines granted by Austria landed in Tbilisi.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgia started mass COVID-19 vaccination yesterday. On July 2, the country received additional one million doses of Chinese Sinopharm and Sinovac. Also, Austria has gifted 5,000 doses of AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to Georgia, which arrived at Tbilisi airport yesterday. "Austria demonstrated true friendship and solidarity! Many thanks to Austrian counterparts Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria, every person involved," said Georgian Ambassador to

Austria Ketevan Tsikhelashvili. According to the government of Georgia, the country will receive another one million doses of coronavirus vaccine in the coming weeks.

As the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia reports, up to 350 COVID-19 vaccination teams across the country are ready to start the immunization process, each capable of vaccinating 60 patients on an 8-hour schedule. Citizens are now able to register for the Chinese vaccines as the

registration page, which had been shut down after a cyberattack on Saturday, has been restored. So far, 20,000 individuals have already registered for Sinopharm vaccines.

As Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia announced, vaccination teams can vaccinate a total of 20,000- 25,000 citizens daily. Gabunia also noted that a new vaccination center has been opened on Lilo market territory, where up to 7

brigades will be able to operate. Large vaccination site also operates in the Hualing Shopping Mall in Tbilisi.

On Monday, Georgia reported 1026 new cases, 381 recoveries and 12 deaths. As of July 5, there are a total of 369,886 confirmed cases, among them, 355,127 people recovered and 5,373 died. So far, 267,727 people have received coronavirus jab in Georgia.



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Ministry of Finance raises GDP forecast to 7.7% in 2021

By NATALIA KOCHASHVILI

The Minister of Finance, Lasha Khutsishvili, presented the amendments to the current budget at the government session on 5th of July. According to the amendments to the 2021 budget, the state budget revenues will increase by ₾ 1,175 million, while taxes will increase by ₾ 1, 114.3 million.

The main financial document of the country envisions the increase in healthcare expenditures in the management of COVID-19 increase by ₾446 million; ₾ 75 million will be allocated for doubling social assistance for children; ₾ 35 million will be additionally allocated for the provision of IDP houses; Funding for agricultural support programs will increase by ₾ 177 million; In addition, ₾ 55million is provided to support the productive sectors of the economy; ₾ 220 million will be allocated for the improvement of municipal infrastructure; Education funding will increase by ₾ 40 million, while sports funding will increase by ₾ 30 million; ₾ 30 million more will be provided to the Ministry of Defense, which

is necessary for the 'smooth implementation of the commenced projects.'

On the background of increased May and June figures and positive economic expectations given the lift of covid-related regulations, Khutsishvili

presented the updated forecast for real economic growth in 2021 which is 7.7%, and the nominal GDP - ₾ 57.2 billion.

As he noted, the budget changes are aimed at achieving 3 main goals:reducing the deficit, promoting economic recovery

and managing COVID-19 and related health care measures.

The Finance Minister said that according to the draft amendments, the budget deficit rate will be reduced to 6.9% of GDP, while the government debt ratio will be reduced to 54.6% of GDP.

"Given that the initial budget for 2021 was mainly focused on financing anti-crisis measures, the proposed changes provide for increased funding for programs to help rebuild the economy. The budget changes envisage an increase in funding for infrastructure projects, as well as funding for programs supporting the agricultural sector and the productive sector of the economy," Khutsishvili clarified, noting that amendments provide additional funds to finance the costs of treatment, vaccination and pandemic management in general.

The Minister also informed that these parameters are based on the baseline scenario of economic development (GDP growth of 7.7%), but along with the budget, there is an optimistic scenario, the probability of which is quite high. In such case, economic growth will exceed 10% and will reach ₾ 58.8 billion in nominal terms, while the budget deficit and debt ratio to GDP will be further reduced to 6.2% of GDP and 53.1% of GDP, accordingly.



Draft amendments to the current budget will be discussed at the parliament this week.