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Appointment of Supreme Court judges goes against April 19 agreement and EU MFA conditions, EU spokesperson says



► According to the European Commission Spokesperson, Reviewing the selection process of Supreme Court judges in accordance with Venice Commission recommendations is one of the key preconditions for the disbursement of the second tranche of MFA to Georgia.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The EU Commission has reported that failure to postpone the appointment of judges to Georgia's Supreme Court could negatively affect the disbursement of the second tranche of EU's Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) to Georgia. According to the Lead Spokesperson for the External Affairs of the EU Peter Stano, the appointments go against the recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission,

as well as the key provisions of the April 19 Agreement and EU Macro-Financial Assistance conditions.

Georgian parliament appointed six of nine judges to the country's Supreme Court on July 12, despite the calls from local NGOs, opposition parties and the international community to pause the process until fundamental reforms are implemented in the judiciary. The majority of the opposition MPs did not participate in the voting.

"The appointment of Supreme Court judges is a missed opportunity for the Georgian authorities to prove their commitment to genuine and comprehensive reform of the judiciary. These developments carry a risk of damaging judicial independence and public trust," said the European Commission Spokesperson.

He stressed that the EU is ready to further discuss justice reform, especially in the context of the April 19 Agreement and decisions regarding EU macro-

financial assistance to Georgia. Deputy Minister of Finance Giorgi Kakauridze commented on the statement released by the European Commission and said that it is important to properly fulfil all the obligations and receive the grant part of the aid amounting to about €10 million. He noted that it would be unfortunate if Georgia fails to receive the EU-financial tranche as these funds are included in this year's budget as part of the revenue, however, he explained that even in that case, there will not be a problem with the budget expenditures and no direction will be left without funding.

Georgian Dream MP Mikheil Sarjveladze also responded to the statement of the EU commission and stressed that there is no risk of being in any conflict with the prerequisite for the second tranche of budget aid or any of the provisions of the Charles Michel document. "If you pay attention, there is a willingness to negotiate and consult," he noted.

Sarjveladze claims that the election process of judges of the Supreme Court was conducted per the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

In the recent interim report, OSCE/ODIHR expressed concern over the fairness and equality of the nomination process and stressed that the candidates were presented to the Parliament under the circumstances of low public trust in the independence of the judiciary.



► In the recent report, OSCE/ODIHR expressed concern over the fairness and equality of the nomination process of the judges, EU spokesperson said.

Four Georgian TV stations off air for one day in silent protest

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Four government-critical TV channels, Mtavari Arkhi, TV Pirveli, Formula, and Kavkasia went off the air at 07:00 on July 14 for 24 hours, silently protesting violence against journalists on July 5 at the Tbilisi Pride counter-rally, followed by the death of TV Pirveli cameraman Lekso Lashkarava on July 11. TV stations demand the resignation of Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and the prosecution of the perpetrators of the July 5 mob violence. Regional TV channels also went off the air for 10 minutes on July 13 in protest and broadcasted a black screen with the text #forLekso.

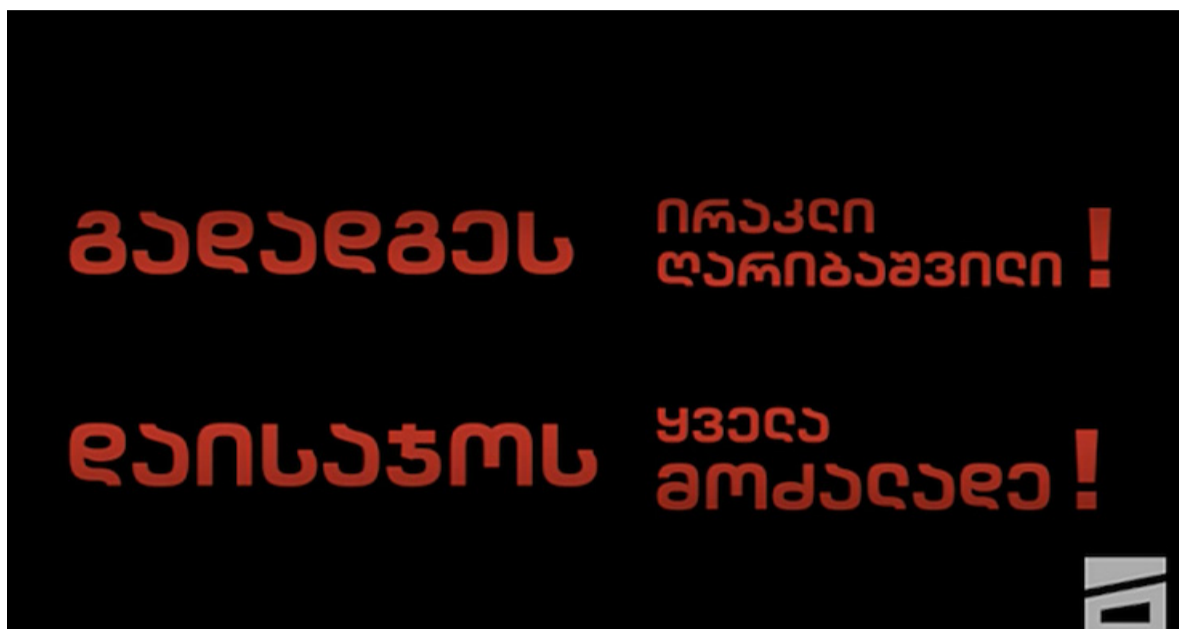
The stations' broadcasts feature titles on a black backdrop detailing the names of the 53 journalists assaulted by far-right extremists, as well as the media outlets they work for and the locations where they were assaulted.

"For the first time in the history of Georgia, four televisions stopped broadcasting at the same time. We are trying to make our voice heard louder to the authorities through our silent protest", said founder and general director of TV Pirveli Vato Tsereteli, adding that a large rally is planned for Saturday on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi which will start at 6 p.m.

On July 11-12, 2 large rallies of media professionals, journalists, civic activists, opposition lawmakers, and people demanded the resignation of the government in response to Lashkarava's murder.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs claims that Lashkarava died of a drug overdose based on an initial chemical expert assessment, but his family, friends, and coworkers are skeptical of the forensic findings. They argue the authorities are seeking to discredit the murdered journalist, and they point out that Lashkarava was prescribed morphine for the extreme pain he was experiencing as a result of his injuries.

The 53 journalists were attacked by far-right extremists while covering a counter-rally to the July 5 Pride March, which was later postponed owing to an outbreak of homophobic violence and a lack of governmental security assurances.



"Irakli Garibashvili must resign! All perpetrators of violence must be punished!" Photo: Screenshot from Mtavari TV.



"We firmly oppose abuses against the LGBTQI+ community and, of course, in this case, the brutal violence against your former colleague, your now deceased colleague."

As of July 14, 21 people have been detained on allegations of assault, persecution, and interfering with the professional duties of journalists. 5 of them were part of the Lashkarava assault.

Following the aforementioned events, the US Department of State has called on Georgian leaders on July 13 to publicly condemn recent violence against journalists and protect their right to freedom of the press.

After extending deepest condolences over the death of Lashkarava, Ned Price, Spokesperson of the Department of State called for calm and an end to the violence that has already caused one tragic loss of life.

"The safety of every Georgian journalist and the credibility of democracy in Georgia requires that every individual who attacked peaceful protesters and journalists on July 5th and 6th or those who incited violence – they must be identified; arrested and prosecuted to the full extent of the law," he said, reminding Georgia's leaders and its law enforcement of their responsibility to protect all of those exercising their constitutional rights.

"We firmly oppose abuses against the LGBTQI+ community and, of course, in this case, the brutal violence against your former colleague, your now deceased colleague. When it comes to the prime minister and his future, that, of course, is a decision for the Georgian people." Price announced.

Asked whether the U.S. is considering sanctions for Georgian officials Price said 'we have a number of tools to hold accountable those responsible in some way for human rights abuses, for violence around the world. Sanctions are indeed one of those tools. "As you know, we don't preview sanctions before we enact them. But we are following the situation very closely, and we are committed to seeing that those responsible for this are held accountable," StateDep spokesperson noted.

THE NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Zaza Gakheladze is free to come home from

"I was not expecting my release today, Zaza Gakheladze, who was released from the illegal detention of the occupation regime, told jour-

nalists in Ergneti."Thanks to God, thanks to our patriarch and standing by our government, everything ended well," Gakheladze said.

For reference, Zaza Gakheladze was illegally detained by the representatives of the occupation regime on July 11, 2020. The de facto Supreme Court in Tskhinvali sentenced him to 12 years and 6 months in prison.

Vakhtang Kaloyan: We are entering the 'fourth wave', the only solution is fast vaccination, otherwise we will have a hard August

"We are entering the 'fourth wave', the only solution is rapid vaccination, otherwise we will have a difficult August," Vakhtang Kaloyan, the secretary of the European Georgia Association for

Health, the founder of the Association of Anesthesiology and Critical Care Medicine, told Palitranius 360. According to him, we are entering the 'fourth wave' due to inconsistent and irresponsible actions of the government. The website for vaccine registration has been down most of the day yesterday, making it impossible for the population to book free time slots for the newly-arrived Pfizer doses.

THURSDAY JULY 15

Day ☀️ Cloudy High: 27°C

Night 🌧️ A few clouds Low: 18°C

FRIDAY JULY 16

Day ☀️ Sunny High: 32°C

Night 🌑 Clear Low: 18°C

published by **The Messenger**

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Georgia receives 28,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine



Overall, vaccination in Georgia is currently available with Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Sinopharm, and Sinovac vaccines, and almost 200 medical facilities are engaged in the nationwide process. No fatality is recorded among fully vaccinated persons, whose infection rates are as low as 0.3%.

As of Wednesday, Georgia reported 1,663 coronavirus cases, 769 recoveries, and 13 deaths. Georgian capital Tbilisi recorded the highest number of 988 Covid-19 cases, followed by the Kakheti region with 122 cases and the Imereti region with 121 cases.

In total, there have been 381,336 coronavirus cases, among them, 361,327 people recovered and 5,492 died.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

► Vaccination will begin on July 16 in seven medical facilities.

As the Head of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Amiran Gamkrelidze announced yesterday, Georgia has received 28,000 doses of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine. At the first stage, only 14,000 people will be able to get both two shots of vaccine, which will be given at 21-28 day intervals. Vaccination begins on July 16 in seven medical facilities, in three cities, Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi.

Georgia's vaccine registration portal has experienced technical issues for several hours due to overloading, however, it is now restored and citizens can book jab appointments until July 16.

Yesterday, Servicemembers of the Georgian Defence Forces received Pfizer jabs at the Gori Military Hospital and the Kutaisi Medical Centre. According to the Ministry of Defence, 17 percent of the ministry staff have received their doses already, adding that family members of troops can also join the vaccination process.

According to the Ministry of Health, under the agreement with Pfizer, Georgia will receive 1,000,350 doses of the vaccine gradually, through 2021. According to Gamkrelidze, the next doses are set to arrive every week in July.



► According to the Ministry of Defence, 17 percent of the ministry staff have already received their vaccine jabs.

Seeking pandemic solutions 'by the people, for the people'

UNDP ACCELERATOR LAB ANNOUNCES ITS SOLUTIONS SAFARI WINNERS!

TBILISI. 14 July 2021 – Over 60 deeply engaged entrepreneurs submitted creative ideas to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Accelerator Lab's 'Solutions Safari', a call for inventions that can ease the pandemic's burden on citizens and businesses. The competition was funded by the governments of Germany and Qatar. Submissions included a dazzling array of simple and effective solutions that were created 'by the people, for the people' to address everyday challenges brought on by the pandemic.

The Accelerator Lab created the Museum of Georgian Inventions website and Facebook page to profile participants and to promote the idea of people-

driven solutions. To find the most standout proposal from among all submitted ideas, UNDP gathered an esteemed jury composed of Accelerator Lab members and representatives from the private sector, civil society and academic institutions. The jury chose two winners: Davit Mizandari and Anna Ghviniashvili. They will each will receive GEL 10,000 equivalent support to improve or upgrade their ideas and to put them into practice.

Davit Mizandari invented and patented the MizMask, a reusable and rechargeable respirator that creates a seal around the face to filter out harmful particles. MizMask is an N99 respirator that provides five levels of protection (including an ultra-

violet diode sterilizer). It will be particularly useful for frontline medical personnel, emergency crews and hospital staff who face an outbreak. A COVID-19 hospital in Tbilisi has successfully tested a MizMask prototype.

Anna Ghviniashvili developed an online model for an inclusive dance class. Her class supports people with disabilities during the pandemic and helps them cope with the isolation, sense of loneliness and other psychological issues stemming from the pandemic. The online teaching methodology is based on findings from Ghviniashvili's research and her earlier practical experience teaching face-to-face inclusive dance classes. The Azdak inclusive theatre and the Youth for



Social Equality organization are already using her model to great success; currently, over 70 people with disabilities participate in online dance classes thanks to Ghviniashvili's innovation model.

"Business as usual does not work during a pandemic. We are experiencing extraordinary times that require innovative approaches," said UNDP Acting Head Anna Chernyshova. "Our competition helps map out and support creative solutions to everyday challenges — solutions that come from people directly."

"Smart use of innovative methods will help Georgia recover from the pandemic crisis," said Head of Cooperation at the Embassy of Germany Lidija Christmann. "Germany is

pleased to partner with UNDP to help unlock people's potential to withstand the crisis."

UNDP Accelerator Labs are now working in 116 countries. Each Accelerator Lab is focused on applying new insights and technologies to solve protracted development challenges. Georgia joined this fast-growing network of innovators and experimenters this year. Georgia's Accelerator Lab initiatives are focused on supporting the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health to overcome vaccine hesitancy in Georgia, transforming public attitudes towards recycling and waste separation and translating climate data into narratives to transform people's behaviours.