

EU partnership and transatlantic affairs discussed at 17th Batumi International Conference



Due to the global pandemic, Batumi International Conference was not held in 2020, this year it is held in a hybrid format.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On July 19, 17th Batumi International Conference was launched in Georgia's Black Sea city of Batumi, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. The event was held in a hybrid format this year due to the pandemic. International experts also participated in the discussion.

David Zalkaliani, Vice Prime-Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia opened the conference. Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia, Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine and Charles Michel, President of the European Council addressed the audience as well.

According to the official information, the main discussion topic at the conference was The New Transatlantic Agenda and Eastern Europe. The focus was made on the Associated Trio, which was recently formed as a result of cooperation between the three EU Associated Partners Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

"The three Partners are determined to accelerate the reforms envisaged by their respective Association Agreements with the European Union that contain provisions on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas and prepare the next stage of their European integration," reads the statement.

Another principal theme of the conference was transatlantic affairs between the Union and the United States.

"The panel will reflect on the emerging defining lines of the renewed transatlantic alliance, discuss if the support to democracy in the world be the part of the new transatlantic agenda and would it cover those Eastern European nations who are outside the EU and NATO," the

official statement reads.

As the PM noted in his opening address, the implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement remains at the top of the Georgian government's agenda. He also thanked the EU for the financial support (€3.9 billion) to Georgia as part of the Economic and Investment Plan for the next 7 years. Emphasizing the crucial role of the EU and US in the security and stability of Georgia, Garibashvili stressed that the EU Monitoring mission has provided the only international presence along the occupation

line and "has greatly contributed to the prevention of provocations by the occupying force since the last Russian aggression in 2008."

Garibashvili also stressed that through the mediation of Georgia and the US, Azerbaijan released 15 Armenian citizens.

"Diplomacy works hand-in-hand with a strong defense and mutual assistance," the PM underscored.

At the conference president's of Moldova and Ukraine stressed the importance of the European Union's ongoing support for

the Eastern Partnership states.

President Zelensky brought up challenges related to the occupation of parts of Ukraine and Georgia by Russia, stressing that difficulties related to the occupation were a 'temporary price' paid by European Partnership states for their aspirations of EU membership.

Georgian, Ukrainian and Moldovan presidents signed a joint declaration on European integration at the Batumi International Conference.

"The Heads of State of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have gathered in Batumi to strengthen trilateral cooperation among our countries on European integration and reiterate our pledge to work together for the peaceful, democratic and prosperous European future for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine," reads the joint declaration.

At the conference President of the European Council underlined three main priorities for the future:

1. Providing an economic investment package for each partner country, which will be supported by €2.3 billion with the potential to mobilise €17 billion in public and private investments for the region.

2. Improving transport links and infrastructure by 2030

3. Implementing reforms- "good governance is the key to unlock the benefits that liberal democracy could bring. This means unhesitatingly promoting the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and fighting corruption".

President Michel stressed that in December the EU will hold the next Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels.

"The EU is your most committed partner for greater democracy, for greater stability, for greater prosperity, and above all, for the benefit of the people of your countries," Michel said.



Leaders of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia signed a joint declaration on European integration yesterday.

European Council President meets Georgian politicians, urges those who have not yet signed the agreement to do so



Charles Michel held his first meeting with President Zurbashvili, who has invited him to the Batumi Conference.



“Minority rights are not a marginal issue - respect for diversity and human dignity is essential to our fundamental values. Constitutional rights to freedom of expression, press, and assembly must be protected.” President Michel wrote.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The President of the European Council arrived in Georgia on July 18 to participate in the 17th Batumi International Conference, a discussion platform involving European Union and Eastern Partnership states. In parallel with that, Michel held political meetings with the President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, and representatives of opposition parties.

At the meeting, Gharibashvili said that Georgia remains a loyal ally of the EU and an important pillar of democracy in a geopolitically difficult region. Michel highlighted the successful mediation of the PM, as a result of which 15 Armenian citi-

zens were released and important maps of the mined territories were handed over to Azerbaijan. Gharibashvili reaffirmed the country's readiness to be involved in the dialogue process and for Georgia to be a platform for negotiations, which will contribute to the peaceful settlement of existing conflicts and peace and stability in the region.

The PM spoke about the importance of the EU involvement in the Caucasus region and stressed the political agreement reached in Georgia through the personal involvement of Charles Michel. The head of the government noted that the management team has fulfilled the provisions of the agreement and the process continues, noting that, unfortunately, to date, a large

part of the opposition has not signed the April 19 agreement, in writing, in spirit, and good faith, is the best guarantee for the democratic order of Georgia in the interests of its citizens,” said the President of European Council.

At the same time, Michel called on those who have already done so to sign the April 19 agreement: “I am pleased that all the signatories of the agreement remain committed to the full implementation of the agreement and the development of a more inclusive, unified path between all political forces in the country. “I urge those who have not yet signed the agreement to do so,” he said.

The agreement, Way for the Future of Georgia, was signed on April 19, 2021, and was considered by the international community as the only way out of Georgia's 6-month political crisis. It was not signed by the parliamentary opposition party United National Movement and the parties in the bloc with it.

According to Michel, judicial reform is a key part of the agreement and a precondition for the allocation of EU macro-financial assistance to Georgia. According to him, the rapid approval of the judges of the Supreme Court does not fully reflect the results of consultations with international and domestic players. “This is a missed opportunity,” he said.

With this document, the parties agreed to resolve the issues named by them, including the appointment of judges of the Supreme Court. Despite this, a majority of the ruling party re-appointed judges to Supreme Court for life - which Georgia's partners and NGOs saw as incompatible with the April agreement. After the majority of the GD recently renewed the appointment of Supreme Court judges, the opposition accused the ruling party of violating the Michel Agreement, which GD denies.

Charles Michel also underscored that minority rights are not an insignificant issue. Respect for diversity and human dignity is essential to our fundamental values, and the constitutional rights to freedom of the media and freedom of expression must be protected.

Recall that after the July 5-6 events in Tbilisi, when violent groups attacked dozens of people, mostly members of the media, and burnt the flag of the EU, the opposition accused the GD of

supporting the groups, deviating from the path of European integration in pursuit of Russia's interests. For its part, the ruling party accuses the opposition of acting in the interests of Russia.

The conversation also focused on the upcoming local elections. The PM underscored the government's motivation to hold the elections in a calm, transparent environment and asked Michel to have as many observers as possible from the EU so that no one can speculate. Georgia has already sent an invitation to all international observer organizations regarding the elections scheduled for October.

One of the topics of the conversation was electoral reform. Gharibashvili noted that the ruling team, with the involvement of the opposition, had developed an almost complete electoral reform. The PM reaffirmed

the government's readiness to continue the ongoing justice reform. According to Irakli Gharibashvili, as a result of years of reforms in the judiciary, significant progress has been made, but it is not enough, the process will continue and will come to an end.

At the meeting with representatives of the parliamentary opposition parties, Michel once again called on all parties to join the document initiated by him, to ensure Georgia's democratic and European future.

Khatia Dekanoidze from the United National Movement that the position of the European Union is appreciated, but “their main concern is that this document is not completed by the Georgian Dream.” Meanwhile, Vakhtang Megrelishvili from Girchi says, the implementation

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Journalists address Michel with a letter: “You should know that as long as this man, Irakli Gharibashvili, is the PM of Georgia, the lives of almost all journalists and citizens are in danger, as well as the dignity and free future of this country.”



Michel's message to all political parties in Georgia is that the full implementation of the April 19 agreement remains the best condition for the development of a democratic agenda in Georgia, in the interests of the citizens of the country. UNM's position remains unchanged.

Weather

Tuesday, July 20

Day Clear
High: 40°C

Night Clear
Low: 24°C

Wednesday, July 21

Day Clear
High: 39°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 24°C

part of the opposition has not signed the April 19 agreement, which is a very big obstacle to stabilizing and calming the political situation.

“My most important message

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Georgia's economic recovery has recently gained impressive momentum, IMF's Staff state



According to the IMF's Staff Concluding Statement, economic growth in 2021 is expected to reach 7.7 percent.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has released a concluding statement that describes the preliminary findings

of IMF staff at the end of an official visit to Georgia. According to the IMF staff, the Covid-19 pandemic has heavily influenced Georgia's economy, however, as they state, supporting measures

have helped protect vulnerable households and businesses and "the economic recovery has gained impressive momentum". As the statement reads, the cautious supervisory approach of the National Bank of Georgia against the COVID-19 crisis and its decisive actions afterwards contributed to the resilience of the financial sector.

As it is noted in the statement, covid restrictions imposed in the country and a slowdown in tourism led to economic shrinkage by 6.2 per cent in 2020 and 4.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2021, the lowest rate observed since 1991. The IMF staff notes that with the donor support, local authorities responded appropriately in terms of strengthening healthcare and providing substantial assistance to vulnerable households and businesses.

The statement reads that economic growth in 2021 is expected to reach 7.7 per cent.

Robust growth in remittances and exports, and early signs of a faster than expected rebound in tourism have supported the recovery and should contribute to a narrowing of the current account deficit compared to its elevated 2020 level," IMF staff

they will have the full support of the European Union that the Charles Michel document will be implemented both in terms of justice and in other areas. According to him, at the meeting, the representatives of the opposition spoke about the fact that

the Georgian Dream has deviated from the path of European integration. As Vashadze noted, they also talked to the President of the European Council about the events of July 5 in Tbilisi, which Michel will discuss with GD behind closed doors.

IMF staff believes that judiciary reform will be an important step to further strengthen the business environment.

of the agreement is being violated by both sides.

Leader of Strategy Builder Giorgi Vashadze said that they have received a guarantee that

News in Brief

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Dream to nominate a candidate for Tbilisi mayor today

The ruling party Georgian Dream will nominate a candidate for Tbilisi mayor tomorrow, July 20. The event will be held in Mtatsminda Park at 20:00. The invitation of the guest was spread on the Internet, the media itself has not invited the party yet, they have not released any official announcement.

The press service of Formula was told that the media will be included in the event and they will be informed about it tomorrow. Georgia will hold self-government elections on October 2.

Bokeria: I do not think that Michelle fully understands how grave the situation is

The leader of European Georgia, Giga Bokeria, thinks that the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, does not fully understand the hazardous situation of the country.

"It lacked the perception of drama about the situation, how risky the situation is in Georgia. The overall sense of normalcy is a self-deception, and I'm sorry that some political forces, he says, are contributing on purpose or involuntarily," Bokeria said on the Formula One program.

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, and the President of Moldova, Maia Sandu, visited Georgia within the framework of the Batumi International Conference.

Restricting convicts from contacting on an Ombudsman's Office declared unconstitutional

The Constitutional Court declared the restriction of the convict / accused's connection to the Public Defender's hotline unconstitutional.

The law used to restrict the possibility of the accused or convict calling to the Public Defender's hotline during the disciplinary sanction, as well as during their solitary confinement.

In particular, the disputed norm restricted telephone communication as a disciplinary sanction, during which the right of the Public Defender to connect to the hotline was automatically restricted.

The Ombudsman notes that the ability to contact the Public Defender via the hotline is one of the most effective and efficient means of detecting human rights violations, and restricting this was inadmissible.

The Constitutional Court agreed with the Public Defender's argument.

notes, adding that High inflation is expected through the end of the year, before declining rapidly in 2022 as these temporary effects fade.

It is also stressed that the vaccination process needs to accelerate in order to vaccinate more than half of the population by the end of the year. The new COVID-19 strains or vaccination delays could hamper the economic recovery by requiring new lockdowns and reducing external demand.

According to the statement, the renewal of structural reforms is crucial to enhancing economic growth and making it

more inclusive. The IMF staff state that unemployment, which is a long-term challenge of Georgia, has been further aggravated by the impact of COVID-19 and believe that education and vocational training should improve to help address skills mismatches in the labour market. The statement also reads that the judiciary reform will be an important step to further strengthen the business environment.

"The views expressed in this statement are those of the IMF staff and do not necessarily represent the views of the IMF's Executive Board."

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the Georgian Dream has deviated from the path of European integration. As Vashadze noted, they also talked to the President of the European Council about the events of July 5 in Tbilisi, which Michel will discuss with GD behind closed doors.

MP Salome Samadashvili said that talks focused on strengthening the mechanisms of pressure on the government. "I am sure we will see a serious discussion on sanctions from the European side," she said.

According to Badri Japaridze,

a representative of Lelo, the EU has all the tools to prevent GD from deviating from this agreement and taking all steps. He reiterated that the implementation of judicial reform is a necessary condition for the allocation of the €75 million assistance.