

PM refuses EU Aid, latter says Georgia failed court reform condition



► "A Member of the European Parliament is not my boss," Garibashvili commented on MEPs criticizing his government over not asking for the EU loan conditioned on court reform and upholding the April 19 EU-brokered deal.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili announced on 31st of August that Georgia will refuse €75 million, second tranche of the European Union loan, conditioned on the court reform and upholding EU-brokered April 19 deal, citing the government attempts to reduce foreign debt and avoid political insinuations.

"We took part of the loan in 2020. The second part of the €75 million is not a grant and assistance, but a loan. Given that we started reducing our foreign debt this year, it is highly likely that we will no longer need to receive this amount. We are grateful for all the help the EU has given us during the pandemic and in general for everything they do for us," Garibashvili said.

PM Garibashvili accused the opposition of pushing the EU towards using the conditionality mechanism, noting that 'our opponents have moved to the regime of sabotage to somehow hinder our course towards the West.'

"It is a tragedy that Georgian citizens, among them former President Saakashvili, are touring EU institutions, and as you know he is a member of the EU people's party, EPP group and spares no effort to bring sanctions and hindrances towards our direction," the Prime Minister noted.

The PM's words come a day after ruling party chair Irakli Kobakhidze announced the EU's macro-financial assistance lost its economic significance after the economy saw a far bigger growth than initially expected, bringing additional €1 billion to the budget after GDP grew by 12.7% in the first half of 2021.

"As for the political part - everything is up to the EU, but as for the Georgian Dream, it acts, first - in the interests of the country, and second - in the objective



► MEPs Viola von Cramon and Andrius Kubilius slammed the GD gov't's refusal of the loan. MEP Cramon argued that Georgia had not fulfilled the conditions anyway. "You can't decline what you were not eligible for," she tweeted.

interests of our strategic partners. The term sanction would be complete speculation," Kobakhidze said.

Kobakhidze's remarks came as Charles Michel, European Council President recently reminded the Georgian authorities that the court reform and commitment to the April 19 EU-brokered deal was a condition for the disbursement of the second tranche of assistance to Georgia. Michel, who met with Garibashvili earlier this month, stated that the 'deadline for the disbursement of assistance is looming and it is time for the Georgian gov't to demonstrate its commitment to the agreements and notably the reform agenda.' The PM then responded that the gov't remained committed to the agreement and a big portion of the reforms have already been carried out.

The GD chair also reiterated that the Supreme Court appointments were made as per the EU-brokered April 19 deal. The EU and the U.S. said the move contravened

the deal, an assertion the GD government denies. Recall that on July 28, the GD party annulled an April 19 agreement, 'because of the refusal of the main opposition party, the UNM, to join the agreement and consistent violation of the agreement by other opposition parties.'

The EU delegation to Georgia has responded to the refusal to take the second tranche of the EU's loan, stating that they 'respect' the decision, but noting that the country has been unable to completely fulfil preconditions that would have been needed to receive the second instalment. The EU embassy said that the Georgian government has not yet taken genuine steps to improve issues in the country's judiciary, increase its accountability and quality.

At the special briefing on August 31, the Advisor to the Head of the Delegation, Julien Crampes underlined that macro-financial assistance was aimed at helping the population of Georgia to deal with the

epidemic. These funds were to be used for the welfare of the citizens of Georgia.

"We respect the decision of the Georgian authorities, but at the same time note that Georgia has not been able to meet the conditions for macro-financial assistance, in particular, to increase the independence, accountability and quality of the judiciary." He also recalled that the Georgian Parliament selected the Supreme Court justices 'in the absence of legislative changes needed to ensure full compliance of all recommendations made by the Venice Commission. The process also failed to guarantee equal treatment of all candidates.'

"The EU emphasizes support for Georgia's reforms. In accordance with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, EU assistance will continue to depend on the progress made in implementing key reforms," he said.

According to Georgian NGOs, the government's reluctance to take the loan despite the country's poor epidemiological and economic condition" amounted to a deviation from the country's Euro-Atlantic course.

The opposition parties claimed that the EU would not have issued the loan at all because of the ruling party's withdrawal from the April 2021 EU-mediated agreement and that the gov't just made the statement on the refusal to take the loan before the EU announced its denial.' Some opposition politicians even suggested that the GD is drifting the nation towards Russia while turning its back on the EU.

On September 1, Garibashvili responded to recent statements of local and foreign politicians on the connection between EU financial aid and judicial reforms in the country.

According to him, the Georgian Dream government has already carried out 'fundamental reforms' in the judiciary and remains committed to the tenets of the April 2021 EU-mediated agreement to proceed with court reforms.

"Everyone knows what the country's court system was like when the Georgian Dream came to power back in 2012. Since then we carried out several fundamental reforms, including a 4wave court reform which made the system far more transparent and accountable," PM said, adding that Georgian court system is 'far ahead' of the court systems of many EU-member states. He also reminded that the EU-mediated agreement gave time for the reforms until May 2022.

The PM also added that the refusal of EU macro-financial assistance will not prevent Georgia from applying for EU membership. According to him, reforms are needed in Georgia, which are necessary for this process.

The European Parliament and the Council have adopted a €150 million loan package for Georgia in the context of COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020. The 1st disbursement of €75 million was made in November 2020, 60 million of which was a Covid-19 Resilience grant Contract for Georgia to assist in the implementation of the government's Anti-Crisis Economic Plan.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1107 | EURO - 3.6806 | GBP - 4.2841 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.2451 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4064 |

Public Defender releases statement about dismissal of individuals on political grounds



► According to the Public Defender, the majority of individuals who were asked to file applications for resignation were somehow connected to the ex-Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's party.



► The Public Defender's office states that 62 employees were subjected to various forms of pressure ahead of the October 2 municipal elections.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria has released a statement concerning the alleged discriminatory dismissal of dozens of people for their political views during the pre-election period. According to the statement "62 employees were subjected to various forms

of pressure" and most of them explained that the reason for that was their friendship or good relations with members of the party of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

According to the statement, the mentioned individuals were fired from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, municipal services, non-commercial legal entities as well as legal entities under pub-

lic law established by various municipalities, and other public institutions. The statement reads that despite confirming the pressure, several of those people did not allow the Public Defender's Office to examine their cases. The dismissed individuals claim that their superiors told them to file applications for resignation, while some people agreed on the de-

mand, others who refused to do so were later dismissed anyway, on other grounds.

"The above cases contain elements of a crime under the Criminal Code of Georgia – persecution for political views," Public Defender's office reports. According to the statement, On August 31, 2021, the ombudsman sent the cases of 34 persons to the Prosecutor General's Of-

fice of Georgia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia for investigation and response. The Public Defender's Office pledges to keep providing additional information on such incidents to the law enforcement agencies and monitoring their response to the cases. Ombudswoman will also examine individual cases of alleged discrimination and violation of the right to work.

The Public Defender emphasizes that it is unacceptable to persecute people and to dismiss them due to their political views and opinions.

Considering this, the Public Defender calls on the heads of central and local self-government bodies and other public institutions not to dismiss or instruct the dismissal of employees on political grounds and urges the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia to timely investigate the issue of possible persecution of the persons indicated in the letter sent by the Public Defender and to respond accordingly.

Travel time from Tbilisi to Batumi to become 3 hours by 2024, PM Garibashvili says

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

According to the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili, it will be possible to travel from Tbilisi to Batumi in just 3 hours by 2024. Construction work is currently underway on the Ubisa-Shorapani section of the Rikoti Pass and as the PM noted, "the project is unprecedented in Georgia and unique in Europe in terms of intricacy."

The project envisages building a total of about 51.6 kilometres of roads consisting of 96 bridges and 53 tunnels, costing more than €2 billion. After the completion of the Rikoti Highway, which is planned in stages in 2021-2024, traffic speed will increase and instead of 5-6 hours, it will take only 3-3.5 hours to drive from Tbilisi to Batumi. As Ghari-bashvili said, the new road to



► "It is indeed a project of the century, unprecedented in our country and unique in Europe in terms of sophistication," said Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili.

the Rikoti Pass section meets all modern road safety standards. Within the framework of this project, special spaces will be arranged, where people living in the surrounding villages will be able to sell their products, including food, pottery, and

other locally produced goods. Similar shopping spaces will be arranged in Surami, Shrosha and Zestaponi.

According to the official information, a 2-kilometre section of the highway, consisting of 6 bridges and 3 tunnels, is expected



► The project costs more than €2 billion and will be fully completed in 2024.

to open in September. Despite the Covid pandemic, construction works on Rikoti Pass have not been halted. The project employed more than 4000 people, mostly Georgian citizens.

PM emphasized the project's special importance and noted

that the Rikoti Highway, which is a part of the East-West International Freeway and an important section along the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), plays a vital role in transforming Georgia into a logistics and transit hub.

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 2

Day ☁ A few clouds
High: **33°C**

Night 🌧 Windy with rain
Low: **19°C**

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 3

Day ☁ A few clouds
High: **25°C**

Night ☀ Clear
Low: **14°C**

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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

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