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## President Zurabishvili Pays Official Visit to Austria

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili has paid the first official visit to Austria, where she met with Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen and members of the Georgian diaspora in Vienna.

During the meeting with the Georgian diaspora yesterday, which included leading Georgian cultural and medical figures working in Austria, the president stressed that culture is one of Georgia's key resources that need to be popularized abroad.

The meeting focused on the creation and financing of new student exchange programs and equalizing tuition fees of Georgian students in EU countries with tuition fees of EU citizens.

The Austrian President hosted Zurabishvili at the Hofburg Palace and later gave a joint press conference for the media, where Zurabishvili thanked the Austrian president for the opportunity to be the first Georgian president to visit Austria after 100 years.

President Alexander Van der Bellen focused on the political situation in Georgia and stressed that the Georgian president has 'a very difficult' task in terms of weakening the polarization and in terms of mediation. He also stressed the importance of the sustainable development of



Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili and Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen.

democratic institutions and the rule of law.

"Georgia has recently held local elections. The international observer mission assessed the elections as generally good, but they want to end political polarization and we join that hope," he noted.

As Zurabishvili stressed at the conference, it is the duty and role of the president to be non-partisan and to try in every way to overcome polarization. According to her, the tension between the parties creates a problem of governance, "therefore a coalition government may be

needed in some form."

The Austrian president also touched upon Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, noting that the inter-party consensus in this direction is very important in Georgia. According to Zurabishvili, European integration along with de-occupation are

the very directions on which all political parties in Georgia agree. She noted that relations with the European Union are moving forward and stressed the importance of Charles Michel's involvement in overcoming Georgia's political crisis, which, as she assesses, "is the sign of 'EU's interest in maintaining stability in this country."

"We need to move more actively in the direction of reforms that we know are necessary. Judicial reform is one of the areas in which our progress is inevitable," she said.

The Austrian president reaffirmed his support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He stressed that Austria is a member of the EU Monitoring Mission, which is the only on-site international mission that is not able to operate in the territories occupied by the Russian Federation, and urged Russia to allow the EU Monitoring Mission to work in both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

To celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries next year, Zurabishvili invited the Austrian President to Georgia.

Within the framework of the Georgian president's visit to Austria, she opened the Austria-Georgia business forum and met with OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid and OSCE female Ambassadors to promote women's involvement in peaceful conflict resolution.



Georgian President met with leading Georgian cultural and medical figures working for years in Austria.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.1329; Euro - 3.6204; GBP - 4.2661; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.3688; Swiss Franc - 3.3765

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

## NATO PA Resolution Mentions Georgia's Occupied Territories

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) resolutions adopted on October 11 say that PA reaffirmed support to Georgia's territorial integrity and its Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and is concerned over grave human rights violations and ethnic discrimination against Georgians in the country's occupied territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia).

Resolution 470 stressed the 'necessity of the implementation of the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement' by the Russian Federation and underscores the right of internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees 'to return to their homes.' The NATO PA condemns Russia's 'ongoing violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.' The document condemned "Russia's ongoing violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova," and Moscow's "persistent ef-



NATO PA 67<sup>th</sup> session in Lisbon, Portugal.

orts to destabilize these countries, to derail their European and/or Euro-Atlantic integration, and to incite reckless and irresponsible escalations."

PA resolution urged member governments and parliaments to step up NATO's support for the efforts of Georgia and Ukraine to accelerate their process of Euro-Atlantic integration, to signal solidarity with Georgia and Ukraine through increased joint exercises and practical support to their ability to defend themselves, and to continue to denounce Russia's temporary occupation and illegal annexation of parts of Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, including in the NATO-Russia Council.

Resolution 471 called on governments and legislatures of the Allied states 'to reaffirm their commitment to NATO's Open Door policy and to step up support for Ukraine, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and to help them accelerate their Euro-Atlantic integration.'

## Gov't Writes off Financial Obligations of up to ₾ 6 Million



The government has made another decision to support the citizens, businesses, and entrepreneurs affected by the pandemic.



Back in March Turnava announced that the government would provide benefits to the companies that bought state property on various terms and were unable to pay fees and fulfill investment conditions due to the pandemic, as well as those who leased state property and accumulated rent taxes.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The government has decided that the business sector and citizens will be forgiven for a 1-year tax on state property leases. Business entities and individuals who use state property lease, rent, or management rights and have transferred state property from March 21, 2020, to March 21, 2021, will be forgiven rent

and rent taxes, as well as fines, sanctions, or penalties due for non-payment or late payment, accrued during this period. The decision was made at Monday's government session, after which the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia Natia Turnava informed about it.

As Turnava noted, we are talking about more than ₾ 5 million, and an additional ₾ 1 million consisting of the fines on non-payment or delay. In particular, a total of 1 652 entities were required to pay ₾ 5 071 875 in the mentioned period and \$100 608 for the

use of state property.

Benefits apply to legal entities and individuals who use state property lease, lease, or management rights to state-owned property, as well as those who have a contract with the Property Management Agency. The Parliament of Georgia discussed this issue and adopted relevant amendments to the Law on State Property. Based on these changes, the government has prepared this special rule.

The economy minister explained that the decision comes amidst the current difficulties faced by the country, businesses, and people, which is reflected in

their solvency. This hindered the ability of the tenants to use the same state property, to pay the rent levied in favor of the state on time and the fines were imposed. The reason for that was pandemic-related regulations and a closed economy.

"Already in the spring of this year, after March, we decided to open the economy, after which similar problems were eliminated. It would be quite fair that due to the pandemic, when businesses were limited, it was the most difficult period, we gave relief and opportunity to people, companies who used to rent - forgive them this unpaid amount,"

Turnava said.

She added that to ensure equal distribution of the benefit, entities who have already paid the taxes in full or in part will enjoy new tax breaks during the next payment period, "which is fair because everyone suffered from the Covid-19 crisis equally."

Asked whether the launch of the Business Facilitation Mechanism 2 weeks before the second tour of local elections is related to the elections, the minister explained that the law was adopted by the Parliament on June 9, 2021, and the law instructed the Ministry of Economy to develop this rule.

### Weather

Wednesday, October 13

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 21°C

Night Clear

Low: 12°C

Thursday, October 14

Day Clear

High: 25°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 13°C

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