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## Justice Minister Says Saakashvili to Be Allowed to Attend Court Trial after Ending Hunger Strike

By THE MESSENGER STAFF

According to the Minister of Justice Rati Bregadze, ending the hunger strike by Mikheil Saakashvili is the reason for the former president to be taken to the courtroom for the next trial.

As the Minister says, they will wait for the conclusion of the doctors on this issue.

"As it is already known to the public, Mikheil Saakashvili has stopped the hunger strike. We will, of course, wait for the doctors' report on his health condition, and the exclusion of this one

factor gives us grounds to present Mikheil Saakashvili in the courtroom," Bregadze said.

According to him, Mikheil Saakashvili was not taken to court for two reasons - safety and health.

The third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, was not allowed to attend his trials. The Penitentiary Service refused to take the third president to the courtroom. The agency named potential 'destruction' as the reason, noting that they may have obstructed Saakashvili's ousting process.



Rati Bregadze

Several cases have been filed in Georgia against the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, some of which have been sentenced, some of which have not.

The case of Sandro Girgvliani - According to the prosecutor's office, the ex-president exceeded his official authority when he pardoned the people convicted in the Girgvliani case. In this case,

on January 5, 2018, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced Saakashvili to 3 years in prison in absentia. However, the former president was banned from working in the public service for 1 year and 6 months.

In addition, the court found Mikheil Saakashvili guilty in the case of beating Valeri Gelashvili.

Saakashvili's name is involved

in the November 7 attack on Imedi. He was charged in July 2014 and remanded in custody in absentia in August. On November 10, according to the court decision, the measure of restraint imposed on Mikheil Saakashvili in the November 7 case was abolished.

Saakashvili has also been charged with illegal border crossing.



Mikheil Saakashvili

## Government to Increase Tax for Online Casinos, Tighten Restriction on Sales of Psychotropic Drugs

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili announced yesterday that the government plans to increase taxes for online gambling businesses, ban advertising, and increase the minimum age limit for gamblers from 18 to 25 years. According to the PM, ₾ 1.5 billion flows out of the country annually due to online casinos as the majority of the gambling companies are foreign. He stated that the country's Finance Ministry will present a bill on new regulations for online casinos shortly.

According to Gharibashvili, gambling and online casinos are a major concern of every citizen of the country and the majority, 99%, of gamblers are socially vulnerable people, who have no

jobs.

The PM stressed that at the first stage higher fees will be imposed for online gambling but eventually the government will completely ban online casinos in Georgia. According to Finance Minister Lasha Khucishvili, banning online gambling is not expected in the next couple of years.

The PM said that gambling is directly linked to drug addiction and highlighted the need to tighten restrictions on the selling of psychotropic drugs at pharmacies.

"Legislation on drug addiction has become quite liberal and our youth are consuming harmful substances instead of being engaged in sports, education, and



According to Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili, ₾ 1.5 billion flows out of the country annually due to online gambling.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.1134; Euro - 3.5135; GBP - 4.1841; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.1938; Swiss Franc - 3.3524

# Government to Increase Tax for Online Casinos, Tighten Restriction on Sales of Psychotropic Drugs

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employment. That is why, psychotropic substances should be banned from sale and I will personally follow-up on the enforcement of the process," stated the PM of Georgia.

At the Executive Government Meeting yesterday, Gharibashvili announced an initiative to offer jobs to socially vulnerable citizens instead of social allowances. According to the Head of Government, almost 600 000 socially vulnerable individuals live in Georgia, half of which are capable of working, but they are not encouraged to find jobs "due to the existing social policy of the country."

"Existing social policy evi-

dence shows that the current trend is alarming in general. Let us say straight that we got our adult and capable citizens used to unemployment, poverty, and idleness under the current social policy," PM asserted.

According to him, socially vulnerable citizens are not motivated to find a new job as they are afraid of losing the allowances provided by the state. The PM stated that in the coming few weeks the government will present a new Social Vision - a Social Policy - on changing the current system with a new, 'healthy' one. The government will create a new program aimed at creating jobs in the public sector and offering employment opportunities to capable citizens.



The government will soon offer a new program aimed at creating jobs in the public sector for the vulnerable population.

## Youth initiatives to revive rural communities

UNDP and Denmark support the ideas of local youth in Georgia's regions

As the pandemic continues to affect lives around the world, local initiatives are vital to countering its economic and social damage. Citizen engagement helps better address local needs, bringing communities together and consolidating resources to overcome the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

With US\$315,000 funding from the government of Denmark, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting dozens of community-based projects focused on social responsibility and civic activism in six regions of Georgia (Guria, Imereti, Kvemo Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti).

In the Kvemo Kartli region only, 29 youth initiatives were implemented in partnership with local civic society organisations—the International Scout Centre 'Rustavi', Orbeliani Georgia and the Rustavi Innovation Hub. This partnership guided young people through the implementation process and helped authors of winning ideas get additional funding to put them into practice.

On November 19, UNDP Head **Nick Beresford** and Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure **Mzia Giorgobiani** visited the Kvemo Kartli region where they met with local authorities and young civil society activists.

In Marneuli, Beresford and Giorgobiani visited Public School no. 2 where a group of young activists arranged an open-air space to safely carry out classes during the pandemic.

The delegation then travelled to the village of Dioknisi to meet with the authors of the idea to

create a greenhouse at the local schoolyard and use it as a fundraising opportunity for local community ideas.

Beresford and Giorgobiani also visited a Georgian-Azerbaijani library and a mobile museum presenting historic contributions made by the ethnic Azerbaijani to Georgia's development.

All these ideas were brought to life by local youth, volunteers and civic activists.

"Young, motivated people who generate fresh ideas are the best agents of positive change in their communities," said **Beresford**. "Even modest support can turn this enthusiasm into very specific results, improving social environments. We encourage youth creativity and innovative thinking; these skills are crucial to tackling new challenges created by the pandemic."

"The government of Georgia joins efforts with international partners to support citizen participation and local community initiatives with a special focus on youth engagement in local development. Such initiatives contribute to crisis recovery and improve the social environment at the local and national levels after the pandemic and beyond," said **Giorgobiani**.

Local youth initiatives were financed by a grant scheme provided by UNDP through a Danish-funded robust project to advance decentralization and local good governance in Georgia.

## Building the Future

UNDP and UNICEF help socially disadvantaged youth to improve their digital skills and job prospects

Socially disadvantaged young people are improving their digital skills and employment prospects by taking part in the 'Real-Time Jobs for Youth' training initiative organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). With funding from the Innovation Global Initiative, this educational programme runs in partnership with Georgian and international organizations, including Business and Technology University, the Future Laboratory and SOS-Kinderdorf.

'Real-Time Jobs for Youth' is tailored to the needs of young people who are about to leave state care and start independent lives. Online training sessions that were carried out in October and November brought together young people from across Georgia to equip them with theoretical knowledge and practical skills in social media, digital marketing and graphic design.

To ensure quality training and sustainable outcomes of the 'Real-Time Jobs for Youth' programme, UNDP and UNICEF invited educational institutions, civil society organizations and private companies on board. Business and Technology University has engaged in shaping and delivering training courses, the Future Laboratory has assisted young people to create a knowledge network and educate their peers, and several private enterprises have committed to offering them internships and job opportunities.

"Education is our best weapon in the battle against poverty, inequality and social exclusion. When people are equipped with knowledge and skills, they have a better chance to overcome economic and social challenges and build their future," said UNDP Head in Georgia **Nick Beresford**.

"There is a considerable segment of unemployed youth in Georgia lacking skills and opportunities. Young people leaving the state care are particularly vulnerable as they start an independent life in the adult world. Our initiative is assisting these young people to enhance their skills and benefit from employment opportunities," said UNICEF Representative in Georgia **Ghassan Khalil**.

UNDP and UNICEF are supporting the 'Real-Time Jobs for Youth' programme as part of their ongoing efforts to promote innovation and technology in Georgia and help the country build a skilled cohort of young people better prepared to contribute to growing economies and prosperous societies.

### Weather

Tuesday, November 23

Day Clear  
High: 17°C  
Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 5°C

Wednesday, November 24

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 15°C  
Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 6°C

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