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Georgia Supports Ukraine's Day of Unity



► Citizens unfurled a 200-meter-long state flag at the Kiev Olympic Stadium on Unity Day.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

On February 14, the President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky issued an address in which he noted that there were reports that Russia would attack Ukraine on February 16. President Zelensky declared February 16 the Day of Unity of Ukraine amid the Russian military buildup at the Ukrainian border.

Various events like peace marches were held in the whole country. Across the country, the state flag of Ukraine was hoisted everywhere.

"A united Ukraine will always win. Today we celebrate our unity both in Ukraine and abroad. We also note the unity of Ukraine with its trusted partners, as evidenced by the crisis created by Russia. We thank our friends who stand by us, both in word and deed," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba wrote on Twitter.

"For Georgia, as a country whose territories are occupied, the Day of National Unity of Ukraine is especially important in the light of the current difficult challenges," said the President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili on the Day of Unity of Ukraine. "We stand with Ukraine," she wrote in a tweet. The President of Ukraine shared the post and thanked her for her support.

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has condemned the Russian State Duma's appeal to the country's President Vladimir Putin to recognise the independence of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, saying the move would "further aggravate the already difficult situation and jeopardize international agreements."

Delivering his speech at an event mar-

king the Day of Unity of Ukraine at the country's embassy in Tbilisi, Zalkaliani emphasized the ongoing practice of the Russian Federation in neglecting fundamental principles of international law, pointing out Georgia had experienced Russian aggression back in 2008 "which was followed by the occupation and recognition of a large part of Georgian territory by Russia."

He underscored that Ukraine faced a similar threat, highlighting "it is concerning to see a large-scale military mobilization taking place along the borders of Ukraine in the 21st century."

"We always stand by you because we

know the value of freedom and the struggle for it. Therefore, I believe that this should be a day of unity for both Ukraine and the whole progressive society," Zalkaliani said, emphasizing the importance of the freedom of choice for states to choose their security alliances. "No one has the right to question the aspirations of our countries to be full members of the European and Euro-Atlantic family," he added.

The Vice-Speaker of the Parliament, the Head of the Georgia-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, Archil Talakvadze also attended the Unity Day event at the Embassy of Ukraine.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of

Ukraine, Dmitry Kuleba, thanked the Minister Zalkaliani, for his support. He noted that it is important that Georgia and Ukraine supported each other in the common struggle.

"Ukraine feels and appreciates the solidarity of our Georgian friends. We, two brave nations, know that freedom is not free. It is important that Ukraine and Georgia support each other in this common struggle," read the tweet.

The Georgian parliament adopted a resolution in support of Ukraine on February 1, condemning "any military intention" aimed against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.



► President Zurbishvili, along with Polish President Andrzej Duda, expressed her solidarity with the Ukrainian people at a joint press point on February 3. Photo:Archive.

NATO Defense Ministers Joint Statement on Ukraine



► "We reaffirm our support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. As we have already mentioned, any further Russian aggression against Ukraine will have large-scale consequences and will be costly."

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

A cyberattack hit the websites of Ukraine's defense ministry and armed forces, and the websites of two Ukrainian banks on Tuesday, according to Ukrainian government agencies' statements. It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the hacking incident. A separate cyberattack hit Ukrainian government websites last month. Ukrainian officials suggested Russian and Belarusian involvement, but investigators have not formally blamed those countries for the cyberattack.

The incident comes as Russia has massed an estimated 150,000 troops close to Ukraine's border, according to United States President Joe Biden, and as US officials warn that a fresh Russian invasion could come at any time. Russia has denied it is planning to invade Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that Russia was sending some troops back to base after completing drills and that while he is open to further negotiations on the Ukraine crisis, Moscow's security demands were an 'unconditional priority.'

Later that day Zelensky told BBC that when the withdrawal of the armed forces begins, everyone will see it, although so far these are just statements. "We do not see the withdrawal of the Russian armed forces yet."

"To tell you the truth, we are reacting to the existing reality and we do not see the withdrawal of the armed forces yet. All normal people are waiting for de-escalation. As for the threats, I have repeatedly stated that we will respond calmly to any threat because we remember that it all did not start yesterday. It has been happening for several years

now," the Ukrainian president said. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told a news conference after a meeting with NATO defense ministers on the situation in Ukraine that 'the situation shows that we are facing a European security crisis'.

"Moscow has made it very clear that it is ready to oppose the fundamental principles that have underpinned our security for decades and to do so by force," Stoltenberg said, adding that Russia's review of European security principles has become a new norm in Europe.

As a result, the defense ministers decided to work out options for retaining NATO and further strengthening defense. Among them is the deployment of new NATO combat groups in Central and Eastern Europe.

According to the Secretary General, NATO commanders have been instructed to figure

out how to deploy new combat groups in south-eastern Europe. According to Jens Stoltenberg, no decision has been made yet, although there may be a combat group deployed in Romania, led by France.

NATO defense ministers have issued a joint statement according to which Russia is strongly urged to choose the path of diplomacy, to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukraine in accordance with international obligations.

"We are deeply concerned about Russia's very large-scale, unprovoked and baseless military formation around Ukraine and Belarus. We strongly urge Russia to choose the path of diplomacy, to immediately cease hostilities and to withdraw its forces from Ukraine in accordance with its international obligations. We remain committed to a two-pronged approach

to Russia: strong restraint and defense combined with openness to dialogue.

Russia's actions pose a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security. As a result, and to ensure the defense of all Allies, we will deploy additional ground forces in the eastern part of the Alliance, as well as additional naval and air resources, as the Allies have stated, and increase the readiness of our forces. Our measures are and remain preventive, proportionate and non-escalating. We are ready to further strengthen our defensive and restraining position to respond to all contingencies.

Our commitment to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is unshakable. We are united to protect each other. NATO remains committed to the fundamental principles of European security. Including the fact that each country has the right to choose its own security mechanisms."

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 17

Day ☁️ Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night ☁️ Partly cloudy
Low: -1°C

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 18

Day ☀️ Sunshine
High: 12°C

Night ☁️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

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Night Clubs to Reopen in Georgia Beginning March

► Nightclubs have remained closed since March 2020, besides several exceptions for holidays.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Georgian government announced yesterday that nightclubs would resume working from March 5-6 with 60% of the maximum possible number of guests allowed in.

The Inter-agency Coordination Council made the decision considering the current epidemiological situation, as the number of new Covid-19 cases started to come down following the Omicron peak.

“As commonly known, the peak of the Omicron strain has entered a downward phase. Therefore, it was considered possible to restore the operation of nightclubs by taking into consideration the stabilizing situation in the country,” reads the statement of government administration.

Nightclubs in Georgia were closed in March 2020, following the declaration of a state of



► Georgia reported 15,315 coronavirus cases, 10,894 recoveries, and 55 deaths on February 16.

emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though the state of emergency has been lifted since and restrictions on public gatherings have been eased, the nightclubs remained

closed to date, besides several exceptions for holidays.

Georgian Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia has stated that the daily coronavirus data in Georgia indicates

a downward trend, noting that the epidemiological situation is ‘somewhat promising’. Amiran Gamkrelidze, Head of the National Center for Diseases Control and Public Health

(NCDC), emphasized the importance of wearing face masks and stated that this rule would stay compulsory for a long time both indoors and outdoors. He also stressed the importance of vaccination, mainly the booster dose to avoid infection, hospitalization, and fatal outcome.

NCDC head noted that there is a viewpoint that coronavirus may turn into an endemic seasonal infection. He also mentioned particular research, according to which, Omicron does not have long-term immunity. According to NCDC Deputy Head, Paata Imnadze, there are many reinfection cases among those who previously contracted the Delta variant and even though Georgia has not recorded any laboratory-confirmed Omicron reinfection cases so far, there is a probability that Omicron-recovered people may get other sub-variant of Omicron.

UNM to Nominate no Candidate in By-Elections, Supporting Badri Japaridze

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

The United National Movement will not nominate a majoritarian candidate in the by-elections in Rustavi and will support Badri Japaridze.

Khatia Dekanoidze, one of the leaders of the United Na-

tional Movement, told the media before entering Lelo's office.

According to Khatia Dekanoidze, "it will be a very difficult battle" because the government will "try to mobilize all its resources", but the maximum will be done through joint efforts.

“We talked to Mr. Badri yesterday and agreed that we

would have consultations today. As for his candidacy in Rustavi, Badri Japaridze was unjustly deprived of his mandate, it was a political theft of the mandate so that the opposition would not be strongly represented in the parliament.

Do not have the opportunity to set up commissions of inquiry. Therefore, in this phase of

the struggle, which is quite difficult, including the by-elections due to his character being very principled, an important decision was made by Mr. Badri.

As for his support in Rustavi, of course, we discussed this issue, the UNM will not nominate a candidate and will support Badri Japaridze in Rustavi. We share that it should be a

common platform, it should be a united effort.

We also think that it will be a very difficult fight, because the government will try to mobilize all its resources, but Mr. Badri's decision is really appreciated. We will do our best through joint efforts,” Khatia Dekanoidze said.