

Pro-Russian Parties Sign a Letter, Saying they Support Military Neutrality of Ukraine and Georgia



By **THE MESSENGER STAFF**

The Alliance of Patriots and other pro-Russian parties and groups have sent an open letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The signatories are the Alliance of Patriots, Georgian March, and others.

They want to meet with members of the Russian Duma, but in the letter emphasize that in their view, Georgia and Ukraine should be countries of military neutrality.

Members of the pro-Russian parties that signed the letter referred to Vladimir Putin as 'His Excellency.'

"We would like to inform you that we are strong supporters of building a new international security system based on justice and mutual respect between the parties.

"Military neutrality must be a fundamental approach for Georgia and Ukraine," the statement said.

Pro-Russian parties and groups emphasize that Georgia is not a free coun-

try, which is reflected in the fact that "the Georgian government regularly offers its territory to NATO exercises against the interests of the country, which is nothing but a direct challenge to Russia."

The statement said that opinion polls, which show that a large part of the population supports Georgia's membership in NATO, indicate that Georgia "has long been involved in a network of foreign organizations conducting false polls."

The letter says that the only correct poll was conducted by the Alliance of Pa-

triotis and found that 75.8% of citizens are in favor of dialogue with Russia.

Pro-Russian parties write that without cooperation with Russia, Georgia will not be able to cope with either regional or, moreover, global challenges.

"We are striving for closer cooperation with Russia. We would like to meet with the leadership of the State Duma and the Federation Council to make a small but implemented contribution to the establishment of an effective regional security system," reads the letter.

By **NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI**

Georgian External Trade up 41.1% in January 2022, Geostat Says

The National Statistics Office has released preliminary data for the first month of 2022. According to the preliminary data, in January 2022, the foreign trade turnover of goods in Georgia (excluding undeclared trade) was \$1.1 billion, which is 41.1% higher year on year.

According to Geostat, this export amounted to \$331.3 million, an increase of 47.6%, while imports amounted to \$779.1 mln, 38.7% higher than the same period last year.

Georgia's negative trade balance in January 2022 amounted to \$447.8 million, which is 40.3% of foreign trade turnover. The country's largest trading partners are Turkey with \$168.7 mln, Russia - \$128.6 mln, and Azerbaijan - \$122 mln.

As for foreign trade in January 2022,

the share of the 10 largest exporting countries in the total exports of Georgia amounted to 82.3%. According to the preliminary data on foreign trade, Georgia's top trading partners by exports in January 2022 were Bulgaria (\$49.6 million), Azerbaijan (\$46.8 million), and Russia (\$42.7 million), while the top trading partners by imports were Turkey (\$141.1 million), Russia (\$85.9 million) and China (\$75.2 million).

The top 3 export items were as follows: Copper ores and concentrates - \$66.3 million (+33.5%), Motor cars - \$36.3 million (+46.2%), Ferro-alloys - \$31.4 million (+34.9%).

The top import commodities were Motor cars - \$80.2 million (+46.8%), Petroleum and petroleum oils - \$72.7 million (+97.7%), Petroleum gasses and other gaseous hydrocarbons - \$63.9 million (+37.8%).

Geostat said local exports in the country had accounted for 69.9% of total exports in the reporting period, amounting to \$231.5 million, 39.1% higher compared to January 2021.

The five largest domestic export goods of Georgia are as follows: Copper ores and concentrates - \$66.3 million (+33.5%), Ferro-alloys - \$31.4 million (+34.9%), Nitrogenous fertilizers - \$17.6 million

(+195.1%), Wine from fresh grapes - \$14.7 million (+71.8%), Natural or artificial mineral and carbonated waters - \$11.3 million (+28.8%)

The largest increase in January 2022 was recorded in the export of nitrogenous fertilizers with 195.1% increase and in the export of gold which totaled \$6.7 million, amounting to a 153.1% increase year-on-year.

Export of hazelnuts and other nuts totaled \$7.5 million in January 2022, which is 7% higher year on year.

In January 2022, the producer price

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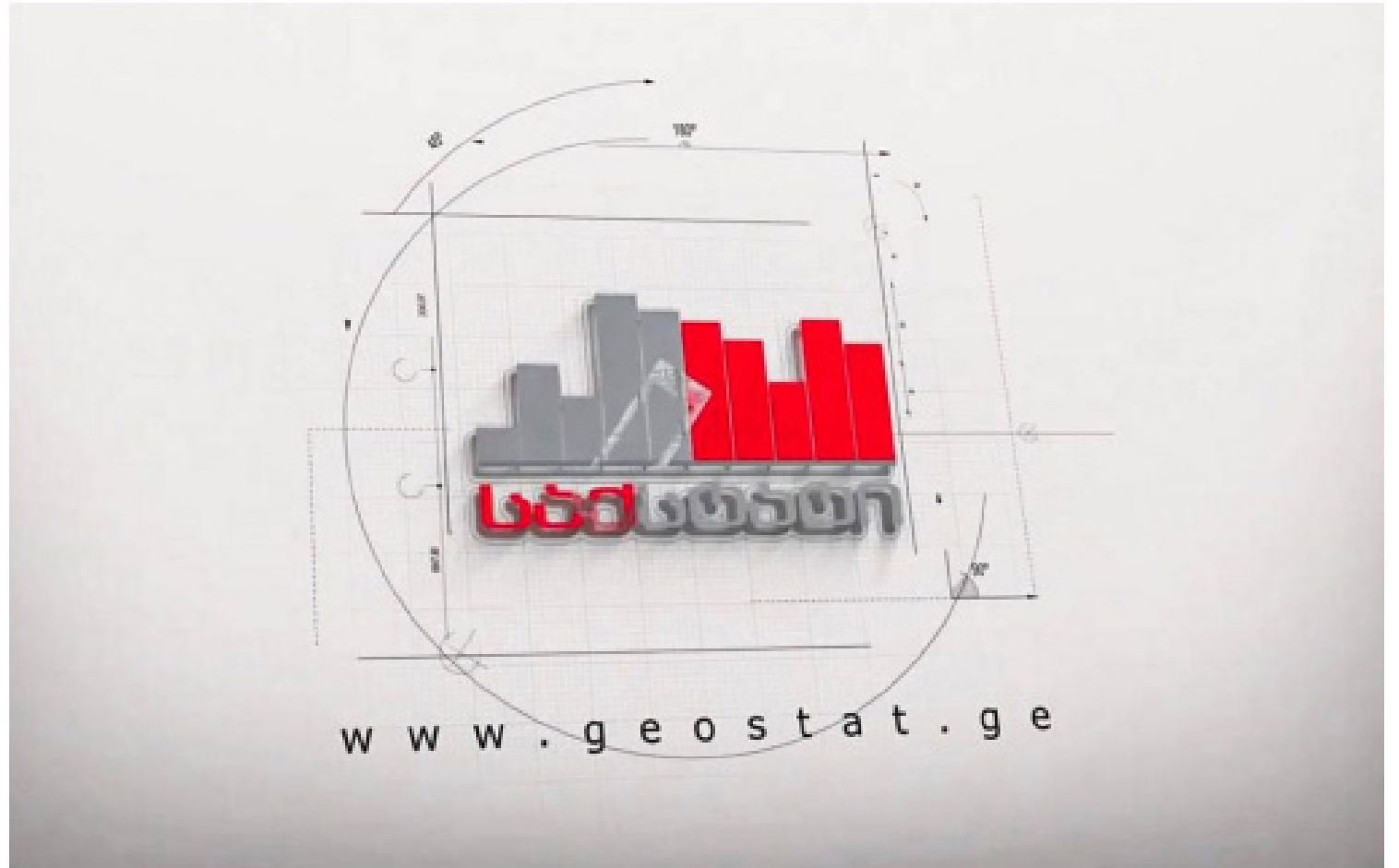
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index of industrial products decreased by 0.7% compared to the previous month, while compared to the corresponding month of the previous year, the index increased by 16.2%.

According to Geostat, the change in prices for the following products had a major impact on the formation of the index over the 12-month period:

Mining and quarrying: Prices rose 3.1%, reflecting a 0.1%age point change in the overall index. The group saw a significant increase in prices for mining and quarrying products (16.1); Manufacturing output: Prices rose 21.9%, boosting overall index growth by 17.19%. Prices increased in the following subgroups: food(12.6%), basic chemicals and chemical products (193.3%) and basic metals (41.3%); Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning: Prices fell by 10.4%, impacting the annual change in the overall index by -1.17%; Water supply, sewerage, waste management, and recycling services: Prices rose by 2.9%, impacting the overall index by 0.08%.



In January 2022, Bulgaria was the largest export country for Georgia, and Turkey was the largest importer

Ambassador Carl Hartzell highlights regional development projects in Kakheti

On 21 February, 2022 Carl Hartzell, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, and Mzia Giorgobiani, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia visited Kakheti to see several projects within the joint regional development programme (PIRDP). Several reconstruction works and new initiatives were visited, which are being implemented within the programme to improve economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the region.

Ambassador Hartzell and Deputy Minister Giorgobani visited project sites in the municipality of Sagarejo, Gurjaani and Signaghi, also met with representatives of small businesses, farmers and exporters. Speaking at Gurjaani TechnoPark, the Ambassador highlighted the importance of integrated regional development approach focusing on sustainable development in Kakheti and the three other fo-

cal regions within the programme.

During the visit, Ambassador Hartzell and Deputy Minister Giorgobiani visited Manavi Fortress in Sagarejo municipality. Thanks to its historical importance, Manavi Fortress has touristic potential. The newly renovated road has made the fortress and surrounding areas more easily accessible for local and international tourists. This creates new opportunities for around 70 small businesses operating in the area, selling traditional Georgian food and wine.

Another stop took place at the cultural and recreational park in Tsnori, Signaghi municipality. Once construction works are completed, local residents will have a new and modern recreational area with over a hectare of space for children and cultural activities, an amphitheatre, a fountain and decorative lights to make use of. The project will also create additional opportunities for the development of local busi-

ness. As part of the joint regional development programme between the Government and the EU, a road connecting the two

villages Chumlaki to Bakurtsikhe is under construction. This new road will shorten travel time, improve access to the Tbilisi market for the surrounding areas, optimising costs for local businesses and residents. After visiting the road construction works, Ambassador Hartzell met with fruit producers from Chumlaki village to hear about their perspective and to discuss the export potential of Georgian products as well as opportunities offered by the DCFTA.

At the end of the day, Ambassador Hartzell, Deputy Minister Giorgobani and Kakheti Governor Irakli Shioshvili presented new opportunities for businesses in Kakheti within the EU's and the Government's joint regional development programme (PIRDP). Three separate grant programmes are now available through the Rural Development Agency, GITA, and Enterprise Georgia.

About Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (PIRDP)

The Pilot Integrated Regional

Development Programme (PIRDP) for Georgia 2020-2022 is a government programme based on EU regional development policy. It aims to create a favourable environment for promoting balanced and sustainable socio-economic development through integrated territorial development initiatives in four pilot regions of Kakheti, Imereti, Guria and Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti. PIRDP has a budget of 220 million GEL, of which 186 million GEL will be provided by the EU.

The programme is implemented by the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (MRDI). The first set of grants with a total financial envelope 5 million GEL were awarded to 11 projects in Vani, Sachkhere, Tkibuli, Samtredia, Baghdati, Tsageri, Sagarejo, Telavi, Akhmeta, Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri municipalities in July 2020. In 2021, 64 projects worth GEL 61 million have already been funded, and in 2022, projects worth more than GEL 100 million are planned to be funded. In addition, grants worth GEL 40 million are

aimed to support micro, small and medium enterprises, as well as innovations.

PIRDP is based on bottom-up and decentralised approach. The relevant municipal council must approve the project ideas developed by the municipality before it is submitted to the regional administration. The funding allows winning municipalities to realise important projects covering support to SMEs, improvement of key infrastructure and municipal services, improvement of human capital, education and research institutions, increase the quality and effectiveness of institutions, etc. These initiatives, in line with ongoing sectoral EU-funded programmes and projects, will boost investment and employment in targeted regions.

Regional development in Georgia is an important policy area of the EU-Georgia cooperation under the Association Agreement. The Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme 2020-2022, co-financed through the budget support scheme by the EU, was approved by the Government in December 2019.

Weather

Tuesday, February 22

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 15°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

Wednesday, February 23

Day Clear
High: 17°C

Night Clear
Low: 5°C

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