

EU High Representative Josep Borrell And President Zourabichvili Talk Georgia's EU Integration And Security



► High Representative Borrell reaffirmed the EU's unwavering commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell discussed Georgia's accelerated European integration path and security, including the security of the Black Sea. High Representative Borrell reaffirmed the EU's

unwavering commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders.

According to the EU delegation to Georgia, the sides also discussed regional consequences of Russia's illegal and unjustified aggression against Ukraine. In this regard, High Representative Borrell assured President Zourabichvili that the EU stands ready to step up its cooperation

with Georgia to strengthen its resilience.

According to the statement, Borrell appreciated President Zourabichvili's position in support of Ukraine, stressing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created a huge humanitarian disaster, 'gravely undermined European security and is in full violation of international principles and international law'. The sides discussed the effects of these developments on regional security, as well as the negative economic impact provoked by Russia's aggression.

Yesterday NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg talked about stepping up support for NATO partners which are at the risk from Russian aggression. Stoltenberg stated at a news briefing ahead of the NATO Summit on the crisis in Ukraine that NATO, together with the European Union, must help Georgia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to uphold the sovereignty and the right to make independent decisions.



► "I also expect we will agree to step up a tailored support for other partners at risk from a Russian pressure including Georgia and Bosnia-Herzegovina," NATO Secretary-General said.

World Bank Approves \$ 509 Million for Programs in Georgia

NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved the Human Capital Program for Georgia, financing \$400 million which will be the largest cross-sectoral investment ever extended to Georgia by the World Bank over the 30 years of its partnership.

The program aims to improve the quality of life for all citizens of Georgia with fair and equal access to high-quality education,

better targeted social benefits, and strong preventive healthcare with the lowered cost of treatments and medications.

The World Bank's Program for Results (PforR) in Georgia will be the first financing instrument of its kind anywhere to comprehensively improve education, health, and social protection outcomes.

Sebastian Molineus, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus announced that the foundation for inclusive and sustained growth, which provides

better jobs and opportunities for its people in Georgia can only be built by unlocking the full potential of its human capital, by ensuring access to high-quality education for the next generation, and by delivering equal healthcare and social protection services for all citizens.

Lasha Khutsishvili, Minister of Finance of Georgia thanked the World Bank and emphasized the importance of that priority direction and underlined the cruciality of deploying innovative solutions in

the time of Covid-19 "to protect human capital outcomes, close equity gaps, and alleviate negative effects of the pandemic in the more consistent manner."

The health and social protection dimension of the Human Capital Program will contribute to increasing efficiencies of service delivery and promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups in health, social, and employment services.

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► For the first time Georgia will be applying a PforR instrument for World Bank financing for any sector.

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The reforms are expected to improve the social assistance coverage of poor households with children and to better prepare and connect the unemployed to job opportunities. The Program will help the Government to reform health service purchasing and pricing, improve efficiency and equity in the pharmaceutical market, and transform and strengthen primary health as well as hospital care in Georgia.

The main objective of the education reforms supported by the Human Capital Program is to upgrade the skills and competencies of Georgia's children and youth to better tackle increasingly complex problems that face modern societies. From Pre-School through High School to University and beyond, the Program will support the transformation of Georgia's education system from mere knowledge provision to developing capabilities of problem-solving, collaboration, and communication.

The Program will do this through a fundamental reform of the financing and organization of the education system. Students will have access to better facilities and teachers and school authorities will receive better and closer support in all regions of Georgia. The digital

education infrastructure, from Tbilisi through to the most remote mountain-top village, will be made more robust and resilient.

Another direction that the program showcases Georgia's commitment to is the global climate change agenda. Due to its mountainous geography, Georgia is particularly vulnerable to climate change-related crisis events. Together with short-term mitigation actions, like reduced greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficiency in schools, the Program supports the development of concerted climate change action by all individuals. The Program envisages modules on climate change and energy efficiency in environmental education, training teachers, and holding workshops on climate-resilient and energy-efficient schools, as well as promoting access to skill training necessary for green jobs.

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors also approved the Kakheti Connectivity Improvement Project (KCIP), for \$109 million, to help connect Georgia's easternmost winemaking region of Kakheti to the capital and the country's highway network via a construction project of a 17-km, four-lane, access-controlled highway. The program envisions financing the construction of the highway section between the towns of Saga-

rejo and Badiauri, as part of the Tbilisi-Bakurtsikhe-Lagodekhi highway corridor connecting Kakheti with Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia.

Additionally to the KCIP, the Georgian Government will build the first 3 sections of this corridor from Tbilisi to Sagarejo, expected to be operational by 2025, 'using a similar design, construction, fiduciary, and environmental and social safeguard approaches as that of the Bank-financed section'.

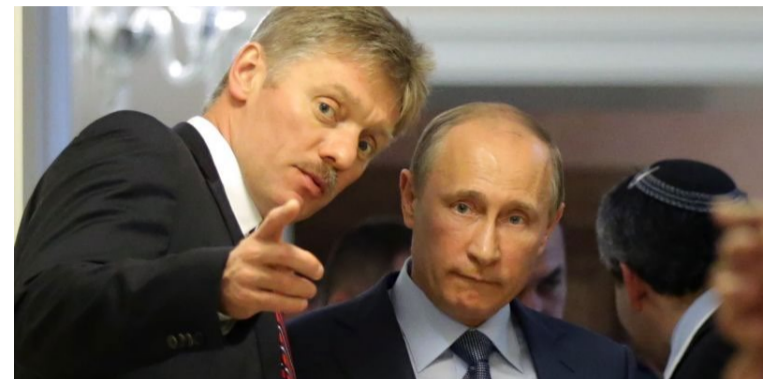
As a major agricultural production center, and the most important wine-producing and exporting region with significant tourism attraction and growth potential, Kakheti will benefit from increased freight traffic, as well as shorter and safer travel to the capital and beyond. The project is also expected to contribute to Georgia's economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, especially in the short term, by generating jobs in construction and by facilitating income generation for local traders.

The bank has allocated \$407 million for rehabilitation of secondary and local roads network, amounting to over \$1 billion investment over the last 16 years. Since 2006 and in partnership with the Georgian Government, it has collectively mobilized \$2 billion for developing the country's national highway network.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Peskov: Russia May Use Nuclear Weapons if Our Country Faces 'Existential Threat'



Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for the Russian president's administration, said Russia had not yet achieved its military goals in Ukraine. In an interview with CNN, he also did not rule out the possibility that Moscow might use nuclear weapons. Peskov has repeatedly stated that he can not rule out discussing this issue.

Asked under what conditions Putin would use Russia's nuclear capabilities, he said: 'If there is going to be an existential threat to our country, then it is possible.'

The spokesman noted that the 'special military operation' in Ukraine is going according to the Kremlin's plan. He reiterated in an interview that Vladimir Putin's demands and the main goals of the 'operation' are to 'eliminate the military potential of Ukraine, neutralize the nationalist battalions' and achieve that neutral country status for Ukraine. The Pentagon has responded to Peskov's statement about the possible use of nuclear weapons calling it 'dangerous', however the United States does not see the need to change its restraining position.

Embassy of Ukraine: A Rally Will be Held in Tbilisi on March 24



Acting Ambassador of Ukraine Andriy Kasyanov announced at a press briefing about the events planned a month after the start of the war in Ukraine. He thanked everyone involved in their support projects.

"Tomorrow marks one month since the start of the war. Various rallies will be held in Tbilisi - on March 24, a rally will be held in front of the Russian Federation's interests section regarding the war against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people..."

On March 25, a marathon will be held in front of the Parliament of Georgia, which is conducted by the Public Broadcasting of Ukraine together with the First TV Channel. Please join these rallies, each vote is important," the acting ambassador said. Rallies in support of Ukraine were held in Tbilisi and other Georgian cities during the first days after the start of the war.

THURSDAY MARCH 24
 Day Snow & Rain High: 2°C
 Night Snow & Rain Low: -1°C

FRIDAY MARCH 25
 Day Partly cloudy High: 9°C
 Night Partly cloudy Low: 0°C

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