

Finland and Sweden Apply for NATO Membership



► Ambassadors of Finland and Sweden to NATO hand in letters expressing their countries' interest to apply for membership.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Finland and Sweden officially applied for NATO membership on May 18. Alliance General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg called this fact historic. Finland shares a 130 km-long border with Russia. The country has declared neutrality since World War II, while Sweden has not joined military alliances for the past 2 centuries. Both countries saw the pros-

pect of NATO membership as an unnecessary provocation for Russia.

The decision was called good news for the EU by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell. He said in Brussels on May 17 that it would be against what President Putin wanted to achieve, trying to stop NATO's rapprochement with Russia's bordering countries, but today, the exact

opposite is happening. Russian President Putin said on May 16 that NATO enlargement at the expense of Finland and Sweden does not pose an immediate threat to Russia, as Moscow has no problem with those countries, however, a Russian response will follow the expansion of NATO infrastructure.

After Russia's war in Ukraine, Sweden and Finland decided to join the alliance.

Stoltenberg has repeatedly said that the Alliance welcomes the membership of these countries. However, the application for membership of Sweden and Finland must be supported by all 30 members of NATO, and at this stage, Turkey opposes their membership. President Erdogan is dissatisfied with the policy of those countries towards Kurdish paramilitary groups, which Ankara considers terrorists.

Amnesty International on Gvaramia's Arrest

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

International human rights NGO Amnesty International's Director Marie Struthers responded to the news of Mtavari Arkhi Director Gvaramia's sentencing in prison for 3.5 years.

"The sentencing of Gvaramia is a blatant act of politically motivated prosecution in retaliation of his dissenting views and criticism of the authorities. He now faces years behind bars as the government ramps up efforts to silence

dissenting voices. Gvaramia must be immediately released."

According to her statement, Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the political motivation behind this case, which was designed to stifle freedom of expression. The organization is concerned that the criminal threshold was not met, as has been confirmed by Transparency International and the Georgian Ombudsperson who monitored the trial. As this case proceeds to appeal these issues must be addressed.

"Gvaramia's conviction highlights mounting concerns over declining media freedom in Georgia and exposes the government's growing influence over the courts in a number of cases aimed at muzzling their critics and opponents."

On May 16, Tbilisi City Court Judge Lasha Chkhikvadze sentenced Gvaramia, General Director of the Main Channel, to 3.5 years in prison. He was found guilty under Article 220 of the Criminal Code of abuse of power.



EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 2.9654 | EURO - 3.1181 | GBP - 3.6961 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.5924 | SWISS FRANC - 2.9779 |

NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Canada Bans Putin and his Entourage from Entering the Country

Canada has banned up to 1,000 people, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and his entourage, from entering the country. The information was published on the official website of the Government of Canada.

The list of the banned names also includes Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Ukrainian separatists, and citizens of Belarus.

“Against the backdrop of a brutal attack by the Putin regime, Canada stands by Ukraine. Forbidding Putin’s supporters and key supporters, including those responsible for unprovoked aggression, to enter our country is one of the ways in which we hold Russia accountable for its crimes. We continue to use all options to protect freedom and democracy and support Ukraine,” said the Canadian Minister of Public Safety.

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 and began bombing several cities simultaneously, including Kyiv. Thousands of civilians, including 229 children, were killed in the Russian aggression.

In parallel with the invasion of Ukraine, various sanctions were imposed on Russia by a number of states, including Canada.

Russia expels French and Italian Diplomats

Russia expels French and Italian diplomats. The information is spread by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country. The Russian side informed the ambassadors of France and Italy summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the decision.

According to foreign sources, 34 employees of the French embassy and 30 employees of the Italian embassy were declared persona non grata.

Russia made this decision in response to these countries’ expulsion of Russian diplomats. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, France expelled 41 Russian diplomats and Italy expelled 30.

Georgian National Competition Agency Publishes Annual Report on Fuel Import in January-April 2022



► According to Georgian National Competition Agency’s interim report, the share of the three largest fuel importing companies in total amounts to 69 percent.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian National Competition Agency has published an interim report on the fuel market which shows that in the first four months of the year, the largest fuel importer in Georgia was Romania with 31.2 percent of the share, followed by Bulgaria with 24.1 percent and Russia with 17.8 percent.

The report has revealed that In January-April 2022, 385 678 thousand liters

of gasoline and diesel were imported into Georgia by 22 companies, with the share of the three largest importing companies in total imports amounting to 69 percent. Diesel fuel accounted for 35.9 percent of the total imports, while for gasoline the figure was 64.1 percent.

According to the agency, the first half of January-April 2022 was characterized by an upward trend in oil prices on global markets and a depreciation of the lari exchange rate, while in the

second half a trend of strengthening of the Georgian currency and the decrease in the price of oil was observed. The statement reads that as of April 30, prices in Lari were showing an 18 percent reduction on Platts (a leading supplier of information and analytics to global markets), however, the agency says that a relatively high price is still observed, marking a 41 percent average increase compared to January.

The Agency also notes that the fuel imported from the Russian Federation has a significantly lower cost compared to that imported from European countries, although in the case of large companies on the retail market, the Russian- originated fuel was available at an “identical price” to the fuel imported from European countries.

The report has also revealed that 55% of the country’s imported fuel is European, while 45% is imported from the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan.



► The report has revealed that 55% of the country’s imported fuel is European, while 45% is imported from the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan.

THURSDAY		MAY 19	
Day		Sunshine	High: 25°C
Night		Windy	Low: 10°C
FRIDAY		MAY 20	
Day		Partly cloudy	High: 16°C
Night		Windy	Low: 10°C

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**

Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail. The Messenger Georgia’s English language daily is an independent newspaper,

and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements. The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.