

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Legal Affairs Committee of Parliament of Georgia Supports Deoligarchization Bill

The Legal Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Georgia reviewed the draft law on Deoligarchization, which reflects the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

According to the draft law, a person is considered an oligarch if they participate in political life, influences media services and possesses significant economic resources.

The definition of all three criteria is written in the project.

According to the amendments, the anti-corruption bureau will have the authority to recognize a person as an oligarch, instead of the Georgian government.

The anti-corruption bureau will be obliged to conduct a thorough investigation to find out whether a person is an oligarch or not.

The decision of the anti-corruption bureau to recognize or not to recognize a person as an oligarch is subject to judicial control, which can be appealed and there will be two instances of appeal.

The decision to recognize a person as an oligarch will not enter into force until the proceedings are completed.

According to the project, the person who will be considered as an oligarch will have procedural and legal guarantees. According to Anri Okhanashvili, the speaker, the chairman of the legal issues committee, the Venice Commission recommended that the right to privacy, personal data, including special categories,



should be protected as much as possible.

Therefore, the following information will be included in the register of oligarchs: the decision of the anti-corruption bureau on the recognition of a person as an oligarch, the name and surname

of a person known as an oligarch, a declaration of contact and reference to the fact that recognition of a person as an oligarch and entry into the register does not in itself prove that this person is a criminal or another type of violator of the law.

According to Okhanashvili, based on the recommendation of the Venice Commission, the ban defined for a person known as an oligarch on financing a political party, election entity, election campaign, assembly and manifestation has been removed from

the bill.

As the chairman of the committee stated, taking into account the recommendation of the Venice Commission, the article related to impeccable business reputation was removed from the draft law.

US Embassy Releases Statement Supporting 'Professional' Judges who Benefit Georgian Democracy

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The US Embassy in Georgia released a statement regarding Georgian judges, which reads that the US is proud to support Georgia's professional judges who are 'committed to upholding the law' and thus benefiting the people of Georgia.

"The United States is proud to support hard-working, honest, professional judges from Georgia who are committed to upholding the law for the benefit of Georgia's people. The U.S. Embassy supports opportunities for judges to share expertise and uphold fundamental human rights and rule of law in their courtrooms. This ultimately contributes to more prosperous, democratic, and equitable societies.

In partnership with USAID, 10 civil and administrative law judges had a working trip to the U.S. to share expertise related to freedom of expression. They attended court hearings and met

U.S. judicial experts. They visited the Institute of Free Speech and met with The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press to learn about defending free speech and how journalists face legal challenges. They met representatives from the New York Times to discuss legal issues related to the media and observed a federal appellate argument at the U.S. Court of Appeals to gain valuable insights into the appellate process.

Selecting judges to participate in the visit was highly competitive: 60 applicants were reviewed in an open competition. Those selected represent seven different courts in Georgia.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a pillar of prosperous democracies everywhere. It fuels innovation and learning, keeps people informed, and is crucial for the protection of other human rights. It is the courts that often must protect this freedom. The United States stands with judges and other legal professionals everywhere who strive to make reasoned, independent decisions, free from pressure and external influence," the statement reads.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

BBC's Investigative Report Alleges Georgia's Former Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili's Involvement in Global Fraud Scheme

the global fraud scheme with the alleged involvement of Georgia's former Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili and his business partners.

The journalistic investigation concerns the case of so-called call centers, Milton Group and the connection of this company with Kezerashvili. The call centers and scams themselves have been

According to the BBC, the Milton Group, which was used by fraudsters, was investigated by the police and closed in 2020. Journalists identified 152 brands, including well-known platforms, which were actually part of this network.

Kezerashvili responded to the allegations and denied his involvement, saying he has never been involved in the so-called call centers who scam people into investing their money.



Public Defender Levan Ioseliani Meets with Parliament of Georgia Chairman Shalva Papuashvili

After the procedure for accreditation of media representatives was approved in the Parliament, Public Defender Levan Ioseliani met with the chairman of Parliament of Georgia.

According to the newly adopted procedure, the two types of accreditation will be issued to media representatives: a parliamentary journalist, which will have a term of one year, and a special (one-time) accreditation.

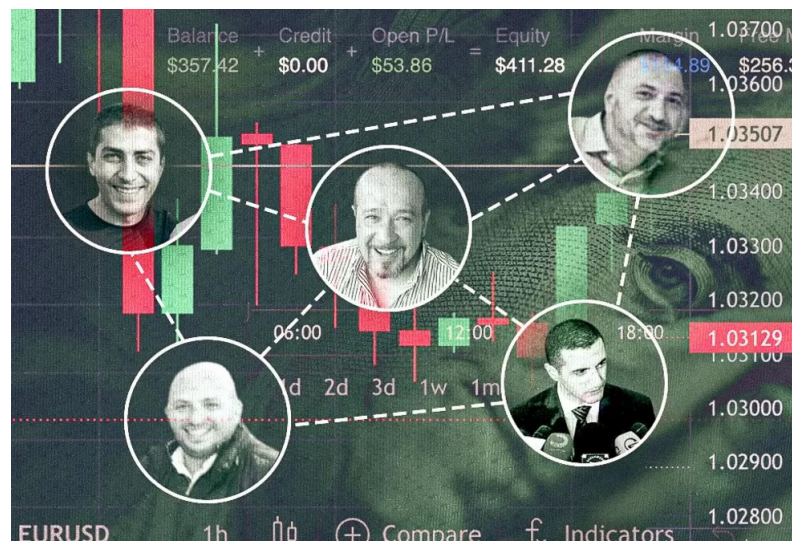
Levan Ioseliani told reporters that the public defender will be

involved in the format of a friend of the court regarding media restrictions, and said that they will present a 'substantiated' opinion on the validity of the proportionality of the restrictions.

"An important part of the Public Defender's recommendations, among them, is addressed to the Parliament. Therefore, it is important for me that the Parliament pays attention to these recommendations and their implementation. We were talking about defining this work format. Implementation of the recommendations given to the Parliament by the Public De-

fender significantly improves the human rights situation. Therefore, this issue is a priority for me.

We also talked about media restrictions. This issue has been appealed in court and the public defender will be involved as a friend of the court. Media organizations have appealed to us and we will submit our reasoned opinion on the proportionality of these restrictions to the court. I received the appropriate approval that the cooperation with the Parliament will be continued more actively," stated Ioseliani.



BBC has published an investigative piece on a billion-dollar scam titled "the scammers who will steal your life savings" about

reported by Western media before, but the BBC reports that they have now tracked down the people behind the scheme and their connections.

The construction works for the rehabilitation, reconstruction and expansion of the water supply and infrastructure in the city of Khashuri were officially launched on 11 April 2023. The first phase of the works will ensure better access to drinking water and sanitation services for the inhabitants of the region. The project is implemented by the United Water Supply Company of Georgia (UWSCG) and co-financed by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Union (EU).

In Khashuri and the neighboring settlements, water is currently only supplied a few hours per day and wastewater is discharged without treatment into a transboundary river, affecting negatively the environment, the local livelihood and the health of populations.

Thanks to the European Union providing a Euro7.15 million grant through AFD (Euro7.15 million) and an AFD credit line (Euro65 million), the state-owned

Water and Sanitation Systems Construction is starting in Khashuri - funded by AFD and the EU

operator of water and wastewater infrastructure UWSCG will manage the rehabilitation works from April 2023 and develop its capacities to manage water and sanitation sustainably.

The next phases are also under preparation and Khashuri will have a 24/7 drinking water supply and access to sanitation services. The construction of the Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) will mitigate the impact on the environment and ensure the discharge of treated wastewater into the river.

"Khashuri Water Supply Project has entered an active phase. Today, we discussed the progress of the project and the measures planned. It is important that active construction works related to the project will start soon. It has to be noted that in the history of independent Georgia, a project of this scale in terms of water supply and drainage has not been implemented in Khashuri, which will solve a huge problem for the population of Khashuri and nearby villages. I would like to thank the French Development Agency and the European Union

for their contribution to the implementation of this large-scale project," said Mzia Giorgobiani, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia.

"We are pleased to be present on the launch of the rehabilitation works of Water and Sanitation Systems in Khashuri municipality. France within Team

Europe is mobilized to share our know-how and water management expertise to Georgia that will serve to better accessibility for the population of Khashuri to the key resource - water in the region, as well as the improvement of health and sanitary conditions and protection of the natural environment, including climate change and biodiversity.

This collaboration between Georgia and France and more generally, European partners will insure a sustainable and shared growth and bring the country closer to the European standards of water resource management. " stated Sheraz Gasri, HE Ambassador of France to Georgia.

"Clean water is essential for both the people living in Khashuri and the nature surrounding the town. The European Union is proud to invest into technology and infrastructure that will provide reliable access to drinking water and en-

sure wastewater treatment. As a result, we will improve the day-to-day lives of many people in Khashuri and protect their health. I would like to thank all partners for their Team Europe efforts and wish all success for the construction", stated Dominik Papenheim, Team Leader for Economic Development at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.

Cécile Couprie, Regional Director for AFD EURASIA stated: "Today is a historical day. The Khashuri Water and Sanitation project officially begins and will support the development of this city. The challenge of having access to clean and high-quality drinking water and sanitation services is now being addressed, and I am pleased that AFD, in cooperation with the European Union, is participating in this project. I would like to thank each organization whose efforts made it possible to start the construction of this phase."

The Construction works will be carried out by the Turkish company "YDA" and will be supervised by the international engineering company "Eptisa".



Weather

Thursday, April 13

Day Light Rain High: 12°C

Night Light Rain Low: 7°C

Friday, April 14

Day Partly Cloudy High: 16°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 8°C

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