

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Students Demand Release of Activists Detained at Anti-Eviction Rally

Giorgi Khasaia and Kako Chikobava, activists of the Khma Movement, who were arrested at the protest against eviction on Kekelidze Street, have been imprisoned as a preventive measure. With this decision, Judge Davit Kurtanidze has granted the request submitted by the prosecutor's office.

Students of Tbilisi State University have been demanding the immediate release of Kako Chikobava and other activists arrested on January 23 at the anti-eviction rally and started collecting signatures.

"We stand in solidarity with those who are being evicted from their last refuge, and we stand in solidarity with those who do not sit idly by but instead declare civil disobedience against the horrors of eviction.

If Akaki Chikobava and other detainees from the violent eviction are not released, we cannot avoid large-scale student protests. This means that justice is not served in our country, that everything is permitted, that robbery becomes a rule, and that empathy and solidarity are deemed crimes.

"This will be a lesson for us!" reads the petition signed by more than 150 students.

The representatives of Ilia State University's social and cultural anthropology doctoral program have also issued a



statement demanding the release of another activist Giorgi Khasaia.

"When Giorgi Khasaia successfully fulfilled his obligations under the program and was pre-

paring to present two chapters of his thesis at the colloquium in mid-February, his removal from academic activities will be a significant blow to both his scientific development and the

academic space of our university.

The Doctoral Program of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Ilia State University expresses its solidarity with Giorgi

and calls on the relevant authorities to release him in time so that he can fully return to the academic life of the university," the statement reads.

Environment Minister Otar Shamugia Meets European Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi in Brussels

BY LIA MCHEDLIDZE

The Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia Otar Shamugia met Olivér Várhelyi, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, within the framework of a working visit to Brussels.

According to the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture, it was emphasized in the meeting that with the grant of candidate status, the partnership between Georgia and the European Union is entering a qualitatively new stage. This entails a more ambitious plan and the fulfillment of crucial obligations, for which Georgia expresses its full readiness.

"At the meeting, Otar Shamugia provided the European Commissioner with detailed information about the changes made in the fields of agriculture and environmental protection during the last period, highlighting the achieved progress and outlining future plans.

As Shamugia stated, environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources remain the most important tasks in parallel with economic development in the country. The minister noted that important steps

have been taken to fulfill the obligations.

In accordance with the association agreement, since 2015, Georgia has been successfully aligning its national legislation with the legal acts of the European Union. As of today, out of 200 legal acts of the European Union, Georgian legislation is already close to 133 legal acts," the statement reads.

The Ministry also notes that Georgia has made tangible progress in the priority areas outlined in the analytical report of the European Commission published last year, and therefore this progress has been properly assessed by the European Union.

"We have already started working in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the European Commission's report and created a working group that prepared an action plan. This plan outlines specific steps, responsible agencies, and the necessary resources to implement the recommendations provided in the European Union's report. It should also be emphasized that the candidate status provides an opportunity to start working on giving Georgia the right to access various EU funds



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6769; Euro - 2.9168; GBP - 3.4104; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0141; Swiss Franc - 3.0983

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and support instruments,” Shamugia stated.

The European Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi positively evaluated the implemented reforms and noted that Georgia, as a can-

didate country, continues to make progress on the path to EU expansion.

“At the meeting with Otar Shamugia, we discussed compatibility with the European

Union in terms of agriculture and green economy. These are key areas on Georgia’s path to

the European Union. Our support will continue,” said Várhelyi.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Prime Minister of Georgia Meets with the Newly Appointed Ambassador of Italy to Georgia



The Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili met with the newly appointed Ambassador of Italy to Georgia, Massimiliano D'Antuono.

According to the information provided by the Government of

Georgia, the head of the government congratulated the diplomat on his appointment and wished him success at the introductory meeting.

“Irakli Gharibashvili emphasized that Italy is a reliable partner of Georgia and the two countries are connected by common

European values. Attention was paid to the importance of the historic decision to grant the EU candidate country status to Georgia, and it was noted that the country appreciates the important role of Italy in this pro-

cess. The Prime Minister thanked the diplomat for Italy’s strong support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The conversation touched on the importance of further deepening the existing ties between the two countries in various aspects, including in the economic and trade directions. Also, they discussed the existing cooperation between Georgia and Italy in the fields of defense, education, and culture.

Attention was also focused on the positive indicators of the Georgian economy and the favorable investment environment of the country. Fabiola Albanese, Deputy Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Italy, attended the meeting held in the government administration,” the statement reads.

working meeting with the Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Farid Gayibov, in Baku.

According to the press service

ferred to the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, and in the near future, a number of important projects are planned to support young people.



Education Minister Giorgi Amilakhvari Meets with Azerbaijani Counterpart Farid Gayibov in Baku

The Minister of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia, Giorgi Amilakhvari, held a

of the Ministry of Education, Amilakhvari informed his colleague about the ongoing reforms in the Georgian education system and the planned steps in terms of youth policy development.

As the minister noted, from January 1, 2024, the authority of the Youth Agency was trans-

ferred to the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, and in the near future, a number of important projects are planned to support young people.

According to the Education Minister, at the end of the meeting, the parties agreed to implement future joint youth projects.

Boosting Environmental Protection and Sustainable Economic Activities in Machakhela Protected Landscape

UNDP and the Czech Government Launched a Euro 100,000 Project Benefitting 3,000 Residents of the Machakheli Gorge

TBILISI. 24 January 2024 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Czech Government launched

a new initiative aimed at supporting the Machakhela Protected Landscape, a recently designated protected area in the Ajara Autonomous Republic of Georgia.

The 16-month project, funded with Euro 100,000, seeks to strengthen the administration of the Protected Landscape, formulate a comprehensive management and operational plan, and introduce a functional urban and spatial planning system. This integrated approach is designed to bolster sustainable economic activities in the region while preserving its rich environmental and cultural heritage. The project will continue until March 2025 in close partnership with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and Khelvachauri Municipality.

On 24 January, H.E. Petr Kubernát, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Georgia, and Douglas Webb, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia, discussed the new project and

further steps towards sustainable development and green growth.

Ambassador Kubernát emphasized the Czech Republic’s commitment to supporting Georgia across various critical areas, with a particular focus on environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

“The Czech Republic stands as a steadfast ally for Georgia, dedicated to fostering a sustainable environment and advancing green technology. In partnership with UNDP and local authorities in the Ajara Autonomous Republic, we are delighted to contribute to the enhanced environmental protection of the Machakheli Gorge—a true biodiversity gem in Georgia celebrated for its unique Colchic Forests.”

Douglas Webb, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia, underscored the pivotal role of protected areas in advancing green economic development.

“Protected areas serve to deliver environmental and economic advantages by preserving biodiversity and fostering tour-

ism opportunities. The meticulous management of these areas is crucial to fully harnessing their potential, benefitting both people and the planet.”

The Machakhela Protected Landscape was established in 2022 largely thanks to the collaborative efforts involving UNDP, the Czech Government and the Ajara Autonomous Republic Government. It spans 4,294 hectares encompassing the Machakheli River and its lower tributaries, nine villages of the Khelvachauri municipality, and part of the state forest in the Machakheli Gorge.

Noteworthy for its distinctive forest and river habitats, as well as a rich cultural landscape featuring historical and cultural heritage sites, the Machakhela Protected Landscape has a direct connection with three protected areas safeguarding the UNESCO-protected Colchic Rainforests – Kintrishi, Machakhela, and Mtirala national parks, known as a ‘slice of the Amazon in Eurasia.’

The effective management of the Machakhela Protected Landscape is expected to catalyze the development of environmental tourism, promote sustainable farming, and create environmentally friendly economic opportunities for more than 3,000 residents of the local villages. Significantly, a well-functioning protected area will regulate construction projects in the region, ensuring an environmental perspective in the face of rapid infrastructural development.

UNDP’s support for the Machakhela Protected Landscape follows a series of similar initiatives funded by the Czech Republic, Japan, the European Union, and the Global Environment Facility. These collaborative endeavours extended to assisting in the establishment and growth of the Machakhela National Park and promoting biodiversity monitoring, alongside rural development projects designed to benefit the residents of the villages nestled within the Machakheli Gorge.

Weather

Friday, January 26

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 7°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 0°C

Saturday, January 27

Day Snow

High: 3°C

Night Snow Showers

Low: 1°C

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