

## Seven Arrested for Operating Fraudulent Call Centers, General Prosecutor's Office Reports

By Liza Mchedlidze

On February 3, according to the General Prosecutor's Office, seven members of an organized criminal group were arrested on charges of arranging and organizing fraudulent call centers.

The prosecutor's office is currently investigating a case involving the establishment of fraudulent call centers, in collaboration with their Swiss colleagues. As part of this ongoing investigation, raids were conducted on July 18, 2023, and on February 1 of this year. These operations targeted fraudulent call centers, dozens of individuals, and their residential apartments, cars, and workplaces across different locations in Tbilisi.

Law enforcement authorities have reported that the investigation determined that the members of the organized group created electronic trading platforms under different brand names. They utilized websites to give the impression of reliable investment companies and offered various types of profitable financial deals to the victims. Subsequently, a significant sum of money belonging to the victims was stolen and laundered.



"In this manner, members of the organized crime group fraudulently obtained several million Swiss francs belonging to the citizens of the Swiss Confederation. Subsequently, to legitimize the fraudulently acquired funds, they deposited

them into bank accounts under their control and incorporated them into economic transactions, including real estate purchases.

Hundreds of electronic devices, documents, and a substantial amount of cash were seized. Additionally, electronic information

has been sought from dozens of objects as part of the investigation," the statement reads.

The investigation seized real estate and personal assets valued at up to 5 million GEL owned by the defendants, thereby preventing any further

disposal or concealment.

As per the prosecutor's office, the detainees have been charged with participating in fraud and money laundering as part of an organized group, for which the potential sentence is 9 to 12 years in prison.

## Irakli Kobakhidze Presents Environmental Protection Plans as Prime Minister Candidate

By Liza Mchedlidze

Irakli Kobakhidze, the candidate for Prime Minister of Georgia, recently presented a government program in parliament, with a focus on environmental protection and natural hazard management.

A key feature of the program is the creation of detailed maps showcasing various natural hazards across the country. This initiative aims to improve understanding and preparedness for potential threats.

The government is committed to strengthening early warning systems, with plans to have 245 observational hydrometeorological stations operational nationwide by the year's end. This network will significantly enhance the country's ability to respond to various threats promptly.

To address the vulnerability of certain communities to floods, the government plans to establish early warning systems in these high-risk areas, ensuring better preparedness and resilience.

An upcoming information system will improve weather forecasting, further enhancing the early warning system and the country's ability to manage weather-related risks.

To monitor geological processes, modern systems will be installed at 11 landslide locations, contributing to proactive threat management.

Finally, a comprehensive assessment of threats in glacial valleys will inform tailored recommendations and decisions to address challenges in these unique environments.



სამთავრობო პროგრამა

„ევროპული სახელმწიფოს მშენებლობისთვის“

### The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

#### Pawel Herczyński: Opening of Negotiations Lies in the Hands of Georgian Political Elites



In a recent statement, the EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczyński, highlighted the EU's readiness to expedite the accession process. He emphasized that the next step in the process, the opening of negotiations, is ultimately in the hands of Georgian political elites.

"We have all been celebrating Georgia becoming formally an EU candidate country. Decision has been taken on the 14th of

December at the level of EU heads of state. Together with that very positive decision, heads of state and government of 27 EU member states have endorsed nine steps that Georgia needs to implement in order to move forward on its a path to-

wards EU membership. It is for Georgian political elites to decide how quickly they want to implement those nine steps.

On our side, we are ready to move forward as quickly as possible, so that Georgia moves to the next step already this year. The next step is opening of the accession negotiations. But it is not in our hands. It's not in the hands of the European Union and not in the hands of Brussels. It's in the hands of Georgian po-

litical elites. I can repeat that we sincerely hope that this will be a very inclusive work involving all political forces. That at the same time, the opposition will be constructive, also civil society will be fully involved, and in spite of the elections and it's quite natural that a lot of attention will be devoted to the elections, in parallel the work will continue on the implementation of the nine steps," EU Ambassador stated.

#### Irakli Kobakhidze Reveals Government Program and Cabinet Members at Parliament's Bureau Session

Irakli Kobakhidze, the candidate for Prime Minister, presented the government program and Cabinet composition during the February 2 session of the Parliament's Bureau. The Bureau also approved including the President's final report in the agenda for the first plenary session on February 6.

Changes in the government cabinet will only impact the Minister of Defense. Irakli Chikovani, Vice Speaker of the Parliament and Majority Leader



from Zugdidi, is set to replace Juansher Burchuladze.

The Parliament is scheduled to confirm the Prime Minister and the government composition on February 8.

Before making these changes, Irakli Kobakhidze informed the media that he had discussions within the team about the

government's formation, offering all government members the option to retain their positions.

Kobakhidze revealed that Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze chose not to continue in his role. In his place, Member of Parliament Irakli Chikovani will assume the position.

### New project to enhance election integrity in Georgia



On 1 February, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) presented the 'Supporting Free and Fair Election Cycle in Georgia' project, supported by the European Union.

This initiative comes at a time when Georgia prepares for the 2024 parliamentary elections and 2025 municipal elections.

The main objectives of the project are an active election observation mission, voter infor-

mation campaigns and support for constructive dialogue between political parties and voters. These efforts are aimed at fostering a culture of accountability, transparency and trust in the electoral process.

"Georgia's elections hold the potential to reaffirm the country's commitment to democratic principles and its aspirations to join the European Union," EU Ambassador to Georgia Pawel Herczynski said. "I am convinced that this project, by conducting election observation, providing knowledge and education to voters and fostering dialogue between the political parties and voters, will greatly assist Georgia's democratic process."

The project is a collaborative effort, led by ISFED in partnership with the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) and the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics.

(eunighbourseast.eu)

### Greening the Future: Four-Year Journey Towards Inclusive Green Transition

UNDP and Denmark Launch Regional Initiative in Georgia and Moldova

TBILISI. 2 February 2024 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) joins hands with the Government of Denmark for a transformative regional initiative titled, "Greening the Future, Advancing Rights and Stability: Spurring an Inclusive and Green Transition with Responsive Governance in the Eastern Neighborhood Region," spanning from 2024 to 2027.

With up to US\$10.8 million (DKK 75 million) in funding from Denmark, the project aims to bolster environmental governance and foster a climate-sensitive economy in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Efforts will be directed towards building institutional capacities in these countries, essential for effectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving energy efficiency, and advancing the adoption of renewable energy practices.

Out of the total budget, approximately US\$4.29 million will be allocated to Georgia, US\$4.27 million to Moldova, and US\$2.2 million to fund enhanced regional cooperation efforts between the two countries.

The UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub will lead the initiative, coordinating with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and working closely with UNDP Country Offices in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

#### Greening Local Development in Georgia

In Georgia, the project is designed to boost citizen engagement, raise the standard of municipal services, and empower local governments with the knowledge and technical expertise for efficient governance practices. The focus will be on Khobi and Poti Municipalities, aiming to enhance democratic local governance and foster sustainable development at the local level.

Practical results will include increased professionalism among local civil servants, implementation of sustainable local practices such as energy audits and energy-efficient construction, and the expansion of local entrepreneurship.

Tailoring initiatives to address the specific needs of distinct regions, the project will enhance employment prospects, including for returned migrants, while actively supporting vocational education and training in key areas of local development.

"Denmark is proud to initiate a transformative project in Georgia, aligning with the principles of the Danish Development Cooperation Strategy, 'The World We Share.' Recognizing the extensive opportunities arising from Georgia's EU candidate status, it is crucial to address development challenges defined by territorial, economic,

and social disparities. As Georgia progresses on this journey, Denmark is honoured to stand alongside, committed to supporting the building of a sustainable and prosperous society," said H.E. Anne Toft Sørensen, Ambassador of Denmark to Georgia and Armenia.

"The Green Transition requires a holistic shift towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly society and economy. We need everyone, at both local and central levels, to work together and commit to sustainable practices, technologies, and policies. In partnership with the Danish Government, UNDP will help Georgia make significant progress towards a Green Transition. At the same time, our initiative will strengthen cooperation with Moldova and European countries," noted Douglas Webb, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia.

#### Navigating Progress

The new project, "Greening the Future, Advancing Rights and Stability: Spurring an Inclusive and Green Transition with Responsive Governance in the Eastern Neighborhood Region," kicks off in January 2024 with a six-month inception phase. The project will undergo review by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 2024, with plans to continue until the end of 2027.

#### Weather

Monday, February 5

Day Partly Cloudy High: 7°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 0°C

Tuesday, February 6

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 8°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 4°C

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia  
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze  
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000  
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge  
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli  
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze  
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili  
Layout Designer, Photographer

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.