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## The ruling party and opposition issue a joint statement urging NATO to continue close cooperation with Georgia



BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Earlier today, Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party and the country's opposition signed a joint statement urging NATO and its member states to continue close cooperation with Georgia ahead of the NATO Summit:

"We call on NATO and its member states to continue to work closely with Georgia as the country prepares to pursue ambitious reforms aimed at consolidating democracy, jointly agreed upon by parliamentary political parties, as well

as to provide stronger assistance and share the experience in the fight against growing and hybrid threats," the joint statement reads.

Both the opposition and the ruling party MPs have also thanked NATO for its "substantial political and practical support" and reinstated that for Georgia, NATO membership is "a fundamental national security concern of Georgia and is based on undisputed, broad political and public support":

"We underscore the importance of political decision-making in bringing Geor-

gia closer to membership in the Alliance. The accession of Georgia and other Eastern European countries to NATO will strengthen the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area, stop potential aggressors and bring us closer to a 'united, free and peaceful Europe'.

The statement also called for a deeper cooperation in the security of the Black Sea:

"We emphasize the importance of deepening cooperation for Black Sea security. The security environment in the wider Black Sea region has deteriorated signifi-

cantly in recent years. Russia's actions threaten regional security and the democracies of the region. Given the current situation, NATO involvement in the Black Sea region, as an important deterrent and stabilizing factor, is gaining much more importance than before."

Finally, in their joint statement, opposition and ruling party MPs have expressed Georgia's "common commitment to a stronger NATO that works to protect freedom-loving nations, including Georgia, in peace, democracy, and prosperity."

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# Self-government elections to work as a referendum

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The parties have already started preparations for the autumn self-government elections, but the main thing will be to find out whether new parliamentary elections will be held in 2022.

This will happen if the Georgian Dream fails to get 43% of the votes. According to experts, the ruling party created by former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia is the biggest threat to the ruling party.

On May 30, the decision of the largest opposition party, the National Movement, to enter parliament was announced. They currently hold 33 seats in parliament.

This decision was preceded by Nika Melia's lengthy consultations with other party leaders and activists. The continuation of the boycott had supporters in the party, and there was also talk that the discussion of the issue of entering or not entering the parliament might lead to the dissolution of the party.

10 MPs from the list of those who passed the legislature were in favor of continuing the boycott. However, as Giorgi Baramidze noted, the supporters of the boycott will obey the decision of the majority and will enter the parliament on the condition that the party will not sign the Charles Michel document.

As the party leader Nika Melia explained, the document is not signed because the party members do not agree with one of its points. He did not name which one, but as noted, the case concerns the amnesty law. Meanwhile, the Georgian Dream has already managed to pass an amnesty law on June 20, 2019, in the first reading in parliament, despite the opposition bloc's being against it.

The amnesty should apply to everyone, including those who ordered the brutal crackdown on protesters. In addition, Nika Melia does not plead guilty to the charges, as if calling on the protesters to invade parliament.

The EU Delegation to Georgia and the US Embassy issued a joint statement welcoming the UNM entry into parliament, but expressed concern that the party would not join the April 19 document. Georgian Dream posed an ultimatum to the National Movement. According to Irakli Kobakhidze, those who do not sign the document of Charles Michel will not benefit from the benefits provided by this document. In particular, the National Movement will not be represented in the groups working on electoral reform and judicial reform, nor will they be able to participate in the redistribution of parliamentary power provided for in the document.

Participation in all these

groups is a big responsibility for the opposition in the parliament, because the Georgian Dream will try to make changes that will not really change much, and the opposition signatories will be responsible for these documents.

The Georgian Dream also hopes that friends of the West will force the UNM to sign the Charles Michel document, which will be another reason for the Dream to ridicule the UNM, as well as the decision to enter the parliament, which has been the subject of ridiculous comments.

The entry of the "National Movement" into the parliament, in fact, ended the process of entering the parliament of the opposition, which is in a boycott mode. Because of the parties that still consider the boycott to be valid, it is the only Labor Party that has 1 MP in the parliament, and Bokeria's European Georgia continues to boycott, but the MPs who left its list left the party and entered the parliament.

As for Nino Burjanadze's party, according to official data, it did not cross the 1% threshold and, consequently, did not have a potential representative in parliament.

The entry of the opposition into parliament and the formation of a multi-party parliament has fulfilled one of the main advice-demands of the Western

friends, although the constructive cooperation of these parties in the parliament, which the Western friends expect, is less than expected. Their parliamentary coexistence will end in a state of fierce and mutually abusive confrontation.

The main expectation of a large part of the opposition in the parliament is the achievement of early parliamentary elections. For the most part, it is unlikely that Elisashvili's party or Girchi parties would like to hold snap elections. Whether they will retain their seats in the new parliament is a matter of debate.

New parliamentary elections in 2022, according to a document by Charles Michel, will be called if the Georgian Dream fails to get 43% of the proportional list in this year's local elections.

The ruling party has already started preparing for this election and will traditionally start implementing various social projects in the remaining time, but one serious headache came with the return of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia to politics.

On May 29, Gakharia's party was also presented with the name 'for Georgia', adding one more to the rather extensive list of parties featuring the word 'Georgia' in their names. Gakharia said that his party is not against anyone, but his most probable electorate is Georgian

Dream voters. Gakharia is not going to criticize Bidzina Ivanishvili, which increases his votes. Otherwise, in the former prime minister's party, Ivanishvili's supporters would see his new political team. It was also reported that Gakharia is expected to have 10% support, which drastically reduces the Georgian Dream's chances of gaining the 43% needed for a 'quiet life' by 2024.

Of course, the opposition will not rely on Gakharia, and will make their main task in the upcoming local elections to defeat the Georgian Dream. This time, their unity is less than expected. Part of the opposition, for example, Vashadze's Strategy Builder opposes not only the Georgian Dream but also the National Movement and offers the opposition to form a third force. Opposes the support of Nika Melia, a possible candidate of the United National Movement for Tbilisi mayor.

In order for the opposition parties not to oppose each other in the Tbilisi mayoral election, Lelo came up with the idea of jointly supporting a person not associated with any parties - a company CEO or a "respectable person from abroad." However, it is still unknown whether this proposal would be acceptable to the rest of the opposition, or who would be considered as such a candidate for mayor.

## Opposition United National Movement joins its first Parliament session after six-month boycott

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

One of Georgia's largest opposition parties, the United National Movement joined the Parliament session today after a six-month boycott. The party MPs did not, however, join the plenary session of the 10<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Georgian Parliament, as they have only arrived during the break. Besides, upon their arrival, the party members learned that the discussion of the controversial amnesty bill had been postponed:

"If they postpone it tomorrow,

I will come again the day after, and if it is postponed again, I will come again the next day," said the leader of the United National Movement party Nika Melia.

On May 30, the United National Movement announced its decision to enter the Parliament after the six-month stand-off but refused to sign the EU-brokered agreement of April 19.

Members of the UNM have stated, on numerous occasions, that the reason why the party refuses to sign the agreement proposed by the President of the European Council Charles Michel is because of the amnesty that it extended upon the party's leader



Nika Melia, stating that amnesty implies the responsibility to be laid on Nika Melia, while he was just a political prisoner.

The ruling Georgian Dream

party has commented on the UNM's decision to enter the Parliament as follows:

"Radical United National Movement, having effectively

admitted defeat of their destructive political agenda, takes up seats in Georgian Parliament. UNM, however, refuses to sign the EU-mediated political agreement, which is the basis for consensus for ending the political crisis."

The boycott of the seats in Parliament by the country's opposition has begun shortly after the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections, which the opposition believed to be rigged. The crisis ended with the signing of the EU-mediated agreement between the government authorities and members of the opposition on April 19.

### Weather

Wednesday, June 9

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 25°C

Night Showers

Low: 16°C

Thursday, June 10

Day Rain

High: 25°C

Night Showers

Low: 16°C

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# World Bank to allocate additional \$34.5 million for vaccination process in Georgia

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

World Bank Executive Board has made a decision to allocate additional funding of \$34.5 million to Georgia. The main objectives of the funding are to ensure equal access to COVID-19 vaccines, strengthen the Georgian vaccination system to facilitate effective use of the vaccine, and strengthen COVID-19 response measures.

Within a week, the Ministry of Health of Georgia should develop a plan for organizing intensive vaccination and mass vaccination centers. According to the government administration, more than 3.6 million vaccines will be mobilized in Georgia by the end of the year, so active preparations for mass vaccination should begin.

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Director of the National Center for Disease Control, said at a briefing after a meeting of the Coordination Council that at least 3-4 large vaccine centers will be created in Tbilisi and each in Kutaisi, Batumi and Rustavi. The negotiation process is underway with the exhibition center Expo-Georgia in Tbilisi, to use its pavilions, as well as with the healing center, several sports facilities, and malls.

According to Gamkrelidze, large dispatch centers will work with both pre-booking and 'live queuing' systems, since especially in rural areas, citizens have difficulty registering online. It is also planned to use mobile brigades in the villages far from the municipal centers.

Currently vaccination against COVID-19 is being carried out in 132 medical institutions, with 250 brigades. The number of brigades should increase to 400 by the end of June. 6,000 vaccines a day are needed to fully utilize the stock of vaccines available by July. Currently, an average of 5,000 vaccinations is given.

NCDC head says in order to



World Bank will contribute to the Government's plan to vaccinate 60% of the adult population in 2021.



NCDC head informs that at least 3-4 large vaccine centers will be created in Tbilisi and each in Kutaisi, Batumi, and Rustavi.

reach the target, it will be necessary to do 20-25 thousand vaccinations a day from July. According to him, from July to October, Georgia expects more than 3 million doses of vaccines and the country will be able to launch mass vaccinations, so work is underway on regional readiness.

After the coordination meeting, the Deputy Minister of Health, Tamar Gabunia, said that by the end of June, 43,000 doses of AstraZeneca and half a million Sinopharm will enter the country.

As for other vaccines, including Pfizer, the first phase of negotiations has been completed, and it will be clear in the near future when the country will receive the first doses of the vaccine.

178,738 vaccinations have been given in Georgia since March 15.

The World Bank also allocated \$80 million to Georgia in March 2020 for the Rapid Response Project against COVID-19.

According to the Georgian government, the project has provided the Ministry of Health with vital medical equipment - more than 4 million PCR and antigen-based rapid tests and DNA extraction kits, more than 1 000 oxygen therapy equipment, resuscitation, and emergency room beds as well as artificial respiration equipment and 11 million personal protective equipment. The project has played an important role in developing the diagnostic and treatment capabilities of healthcare facilities by equipping them with modern technologies.

This project funded a social assistance package under which 80,000 families received monthly assistance; additional financial assistance was provided to about 25,000 families with more than 3 children. 370,000 self-employed individuals received one-time assistance, and more than 160,000 received temporary unemployment assistance.

# Caritas Czech Republic has supplied Georgian municipalities with modern standard garbage trucks

Caritas Czech Republic in Georgia (CCRG) handed over a 14-cubic-meter garbage truck of modern standard worth 100,000 Euros, and fourteen 1110-liter metal garbage bins to the municipality of Dusheti as part of a project supported by the Slovak government, "Supporting Green Activities through Waste Management Infrastructure".

In addition to Dusheti Municipality, Caritas Czech Republic has handed over to Oni Mu-



nicipality 4WD seven-cubic meter waste collection truck, as well as one hundred and thirty-five 240-liter waste containers for separated waste and sixty 1110-liter metal waste containers.

In addition, based on the Slovakia's experience, a solid waste separation and recycling model was developed for Oni Municipality in the Racha-Lechkhumi region, together with an action plan. Focus was also placed on actions focused on introducing biodegradable waste management practices. Several campaigns have been conducted to raise public awareness on waste recycling.