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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Georgian opposition claims that the issue of releasing political prisoners had been one of the preconditions for the agreement on the electoral system reform, which was signed on 8th of March between the ruling party and united opposition after a long process of negotiations by mediation of diplomats. In a joint statement opposition called on the Georgian President and all state institutions to help resolve the dispute promptly 'by using [all] legitimate tools at their disposal.'

Archil Talakvadze, the speaker of the parliament of Georgia, has repudiated allegations over the ruling party's non-compliance with the agreement on electoral reform, asserting that contrary to opposition politicians' speculations, Georgian Dream had not committed itself to releasing 'political prisoners.'

On 11th of May, he said in a news briefing that "the radical opposition" is taking advantage of the fact that the negotiations on the agreement were not public and that 'diplomatic protocol obliges ambassadors to exercise utmost restraint with regard to disclosing the content of closed-door meetings.' Talakvadze appealed to the ambassadors, who facilitated the talks, to shed light on the content of the agreement in order 'to bring all speculations to a halt.'

Talakvadze called on the diplomatic corps to advertise the content of the closed meeting and confirm its own truth:

"Specifically, we ask them to affirm

Issue of political prisoners - part of the agreement?

Political dialogue facilitators release joint statement over March 8 agreement.



The United National Movement and European Georgia are not going to support this agreement unless the government does the other part - which is related to political justice. Photo: Video grab from Imedi TV

that we have not assumed the obligation to give illegal instructions to the President, the court, and the Prosecutor's Office - in order to secure release of Gigi Ugulava, Irakli Okruashvili, and Giorgi Rurua under the agreement. We also appeal to them to provide an objective assessment of the role of each signatory in putting into practice the agreement," the Parliament Speaker stated.

Talakvadze emphasised that for the first time, it will be possible to conduct elections in Georgia in accordance with a system based on a complete consensus of political parties and expressed his concerns that this aftermath may be put at risk by radical opposition's irresponsible behavior.

He explained oppositions concerns as fear of elections, given 'rock-bottom level of public support,' seeking radical scenarios and foreign support, that are doomed to fail again. "This is evidenced by the appropriate response of the Geor-

gian public to the letter by MEP Andrius Kubilius who, without any hesitation, demanded that the ruling party meddle in the affairs of the court," Talakvadze said.

The Parliament Speaker noted that although the ruling party was 'thoroughly' fulfilling all obligations envisaged by the March 8 agreement, the opposition had doubled down on 'improper' politicisation of justice since the day the agreement was signed, such as demand to release Gigi Ugulava, Irakli Okruashvili and Giorgi Rurua, stressing that the ruling party made it clear that their release could in no way become a topic of political horse trading.

Talakvadze said that the opposition is threatening the public with the scuttling adoption of the constitutional amendment and such responsibility will lie solely with the radical opposition.

The opposition parties claim that the issue of releasing political prisoners had

been one of the preconditions for the March 8th Agreement.

The position of the US Embassy and other facilitators is clear - the 2 parts of the March 8th agreement must be fulfilled, including a joint statement on the politicization of justice. A joint statement issued by the government and the opposition on March 8th said, "It is necessary to respond to actions that may be perceived as improper politicization of the judiciary and the electoral process, and that such actions should be avoided in the future."

Facilitators released a joint statement responding to raised discussions. They called upon all sides to uphold the letter and spirit of both parts of the agreement with a view to its successful implementation.

The facilitators stated that the March 8th agreement was "a historic achievement by the political forces of Georgia, intended to depolarise Georgia's political system and create a better environment for the October parliamentary elections," following the failure of promised constitutional amendments to move to fully proportional parliamentary elections in 2020.

Joint statement underlined that as facilitators to the dialogue, ambassadors assisted in creating a forum to build trust and allow for participants to make difficult compromises. "It is not our role to make the content of those discussions public or to interpret the agreement," statement reads,

Ambassadors noted that the resulting agreement is well-known to the public and was welcomed by Georgians and the international community, and stressed: "We note that this agreement is composed of 2 parts - one focused on the election system and the other on addressing the appearance of political interference in the judicial system."

The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jim Risch has posted on his Twitter account that he expects political parties in Georgia to 'fully implement the March agreement, including the release of political prisoners and progress towards a new electoral system.'

The US Congressman Adam Kinzinger welcomed a statement from facilitators of ongoing talks between the opposition and the government on twitter,

"It simply came to our notice then. It is important that the agreement is implemented and that the process continues," Kinzinger wrote.

On March 8th, the ruling GD and the united opposition reached an agreement to hold the upcoming parliamentary elections this October with 120 seats in the legislative body to be distributed via a proportional vote and the remaining 30 via the majoritarian system. The agreement also foresees a fair composition of election districts, a 1% entry threshold, and a cap recognising that no single party that wins less than 40% of the votes should be able to form a majority in the next parliament.



Senator Jim Risch: 'I expect Georgia's political parties to fully implement the March 8th deal.'

OSCE reports on human trafficking in Georgia



Human trafficking is a gross violation of human rights, fundamental freedoms and human dignity, and is often a form of violence against women and children. It is also a serious transnational threat to security in the OSCE region and beyond.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The report on human trafficking in Georgia was prepared by the Special Representative and Coordinator of the OSCE for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey after his visit to Georgia on 17th-19th of June, 2019.

The document outlines the main conclusions and recommendations of the Special Representative, as well as identifies potential sources of trafficking and focuses on the best practices of the OSCE.

Based on the information gathered during the visit, Richey said that Georgia is a source of human trafficking.

As for the investigation of trafficking cases and criminal prosecution OSCE Special Representative welcomed the cooperation of the Georgian law enforcement agencies with the international partner states,

meanwhile stressing the need for 'closer and stronger' cooperation between the relevant structures to identify online sexual exploitation markets and to identify online platforms that attract people for labor exploitation.

A special envoy noted that often the investigation of human trafficking cases is hampered by the fact that the victims do not want to self-identify, thus stressing the importance of finding a strategy and tactics that will help gather evidence beyond the testimony of those involved. He called on police involved in the fight against trafficking to step up efforts to proactively launch an investigation into all areas of exploitation, against all those who used the services of victims of trafficking and called for the sexual exploitation of vulnerable people to be met.

Women, children and labor migrants have been identified as the most vulnerable group. Re-

port reads, that in terms of human trafficking and forced labor, the highest risk sectors are the tourism and hospitality sectors, noting that 'commercial sex industry' is closely linked to the tourism industry. In these terms, the document discusses the growing number of entertainment establishments in Adjara, where the sexual exploitation of women victims of trafficking from Azerbaijan and Central Asia (especially from Uzbekistan) is taking place.

The special envoy wrote that these women are deceived by the promise of employment in the hospitality sector in Georgia, and they are often victims of sexual exploitation in saunas, nightclubs, motels and private homes in tourist areas on the border with Adjara and Turkey. As for Georgian women, they are likely to be transferred to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates for sexual exploitation.

According to the report, child trafficking is also a problem in Georgia. "In addition to parents forcing children to beg on the street, there is a high risk that they will be trafficked for sexual exploitation, including prostitution," document read. The OSCE Special Representative noted that 'despite the efforts of the Georgian authorities', child trafficking and exploitation remain a problem, which requires 'urgent action' to prevent border trafficking between Georgia and Azerbaijan, as well as to conduct research across the country.

According to the report, Georgian men are being trafficked to Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Cyprus for operational purposes. At the same time, Poland is a new destination, where Georgian men are also trafficked for forced labor.

The document states that the activities of private employment agencies that offer Georgians employment abroad and bring migrant workers to Georgia have a risk factor.

The representative positively assessed the strong legislative base of Georgia, which serves to prevent human trafficking and fight against it. He praised the country for its membership in international conventions on combating all forms of human trafficking and welcomed the changes in the Criminal Code of Georgia, which further expanded the list of 'exploitation goals and means' related to trafficking.

However, he also called on the Georgian authorities to address the issue of trafficking women for prostitution abroad, as well as for the trafficking of minors for prostitution, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Criminal Code and trafficking.

Report notes that the Georgian government, chaired by the Minister of Justice, established the Inter-Agency Coordinating Council in 2006 to harmonize anti-trafficking efforts.

Welcoming the activities of the mentioned structure, he stressed the importance of independent monitoring and evaluation of anti-trafficking mea-

sures, noting that lack of human resources in institutions set up by the government often hampered regular and active monitoring and detailed assessment of the situation and the lack of comprehensive data has made it difficult to determine the exact scale of human trafficking in Georgia

The OSCE Special Representative has recommended that the following legal acts be signed and ratified in order to double the fight against human trafficking: International Labor Organization Convention 189 on the Decent Work of Local Workers; The 2014 Protocol to the 1930 Convention on Forced Labor; and the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families.

He also called on the Georgian government to set up an independent national rapporteur's office to investigate various forms of human trafficking, including sex workers, as well as trafficking in migrant workers, construction, hospitality and agriculture. Richey reiterated the OSCE's recommendation to Georgia to consider how well business and government structures address the risks of trafficking in the relevant supply chains.



"It is necessary to discuss the creation of special working groups to study the role of technology in human trafficking and to prevent trafficking in supply chains and state procurement," said the OSCE representative.
Photo: USOSCE/Gower

Representative of UNDP finds Georgia's approach in terms of fighting against pandemic exemplary

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) will technically guide the UN's effort in terms of converting and recovering the economics of the countries. The UN considers



United Nations Development Program.

Covid-19 not only as a healthcare crisis but as a development crisis as well. According to this, the UN elaborated plan, which intends to support countries' attempts to protect the community from the social-economic results of Pandemic.

Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Achim Steiner highlighted Georgia's approach in handling the epidemic.

According to the UN Pandemic made it clear that traditional economic models are vulnerable and unsustainable.

Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antynio Guterres clarified that we should not revert back to where we were prior to the pandemic, where the

communities were vulnerable to the crisis. As he stated, "we ought to build a better world."

Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Achim Steiner highlighted that alongside lifting economic restrictions, Georgia also pays attention to the post-crisis development agenda.

"The PM of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia stated that in parallel with protecting the well-being of the community, economical survival and swift recovery represents one of the main purposes of the government. We are ready to learn from this experience and actively operate to assure that our community overcomes the

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Weather

Wednesday, May 13

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 23°C
Night Clear
Low: 13°C

Thursday, May 14

Day Clear
High: 24°C
Night Clear
Low: 13°C

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Gov't presents agriculture anti-crisis plan with budget of ₾ 300 million



Ministry of Agriculture launches new program 'stimulating agricultural land owners' that will benefit up to 200,000 farmers, the budget is ₾ 37 million.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The anti-crisis plan for agriculture was presented during the meeting on 12th of May within the framework of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council headed by the Prime Minister. According to the PM, during the crisis, food security, agro-production and domestic production were especially acute and thus, agrarian processes can't be suspended in the country for even a single day.

The PM presented support programs under 'Caring of Village and Farmers', according to which each farmer who has a registered land will receive a subsidy of ₾200 per hectare from the state. According to the Agriculture Minister, Levan Davitashvili, ₾37 million has been mobilized for this purpose, with which farmers will buy fertilizers, plant protection and care products, seeds and planting materials, and will pay for plow-

ing works.

During 2020, 42,000 farmers will be exempt from irrigation service fees. According to the Minister, this means that the state will pay up to ₾75 per hectare, reaching a total of ₾4 million. They will be fully freed from a debt of ₾8 million, which they have accumulated in 2012-2019 due to non-payment of reclamation services.

Farmers who need to purchase equipment, arrange a greenhouse or irrigation system, will be directly funded by the state in the form of a 50% grant.

All farmers will receive 150 liters of diesel fuel per hectare, which is guaranteed to be ₾1 cheaper than the market price.

During the address, the PM also called on all farmers to register their lands that they have not yet registered as soon as possible, since the assistance is directly related to that. He also noted that funding has already been allocated for systematic

land registration, which means that any type of land will be fully registered and registered in the country within 3 years.

According to Davitashvili, support for cooperatives and agricultural cooperatives is an important direction in rural and agricultural development, and state programs will finance agricultural cooperatives to purchase equipment that will allow: manufactured products to be marketed in accordance with market demand; introducing international standards for food safety management and branding of manufactured products; obtaining accounting services.

The anti-crisis plan states that powerful milk cooperatives will be set up in Akhalkalaki, Dmanisi and Dusheti municipalities.

Additional 10% co-financing is provided for agricultural cooperatives in the sectoral programs of the Rural and Agricultural Development Agency.

Changes have been made to the preferential agro-credit project, according to which a new subcomponent will be added to the working capital component of the project - financing of plant turnover. According to the plan, the loans will be issued from ₾5 000 to 100 000, and the state will fully finance the interest rate for 6 months in case of secured loans, and in case of unsecured loans - in the amount of 17% per annum.

The total estimated volume of loans issued to farmers under the program will be ₾50 million.

The annual budget co-financing amount is ₾4.5 million and 5000 potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to use the program.

At the same time, the percentage of co-financing in the component of fixed assets of "preferential agro-credit" is increasing. Instead of the existing 8% per annum, the state will fund 11% for the farmer for 48 months. The percentage of co-financing for leasing is also increasing, from 9 to 12%.

In the component of fixed assets and in all its subcomponents the upper limit for interest rates for banks is rising, instead of 15 it will be 18%. In addition to the fixed asset component and leasing, financing for the production of grape processing plants and pasta products is added. The total estimated volume of loans to farmers under the program will be ₾25 million. The total budgetary amount of annual interest co-financing is ₾4 million (for 2 years).

In 2020, the budget of the project "Preferential Agrocredit" is ₾74 million and ₾7.5 million was allocated for the project within the framework of anti-crisis measures.

Farmers will be able to apply to the relevant subdivisions of the Ministry of Agriculture from May 20. The total budget for the assistance will be ₾300 million and state aid will affect about 200 000 farmers in the country.



PM Gakharia called on the citizens to buy Georgian products.

Representative of UNDP finds Georgia's approach in terms of fighting against pandemic exemplary

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crisis and becomes even stronger," said Steiner.

As Louisa Winton, the Resident Representative of the UNDP in Georgia stated, events implemented in response to the Pandemic saved many lives in Georgia. According to her, soon this example will be acknowledged as the best practice.

The UN focuses on five key streams in its response, which places communities at the centre of recovery efforts:

- Protecting the existing health services and strengthening health systems' capacity to

respond to COVID-19;

- Helping people cope in adversity through social protection and basic services;

- Protecting jobs, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and informal sector workers through economic recovery programmes;

- Guiding the necessary surge in fiscal and financial stimulus to make macroeconomic policies work for the most vulnerable and strengthening multilateral and regional responses;

- Promoting social cohesion and investing in community-led resilience and response systems.

The financial requirements of

the Fund are projected at \$1 billion in the first nine months and will be subsequently reviewed. Georgia is in the of 46 countries that will benefit from this fund. UN representatives to Georgia will receive \$1 million in the near future to protect the most vulnerable groups of the Georgian community from socio-economic shock caused by the Pandemic.

UNDP support includes raising awareness of Georgian population about preventing coronavirus as well as distributing protective items and providing other types of assistance to Abkhazia and settlements of displaced persons.



"Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Achim Steiner highlighted that alongside lifting economic restrictions, Georgia also pays attention to the post-crisis development agenda."

According to Daily Mail Kremlin-linked cyber hackers are based in Georgia



“One source claimed that hackers demanded £2 million, in exchange for the details, but later even offered the company a ‘discount’ in case they found a cure for the virus,” reads the article.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

According to the Daily Mail article, highly confidential details of hundreds of Britons taking part in medical trials have been stolen from a lab fighting Covid-19. The investigation suggested that the hackers responsible for the attack are based in Georgia and linked to the Kremlin and Russian security services.

Last week, The Mail On Sunday revealed that hackers linked to Iran and Russia were responsible for ‘utterly reprehensible’ attacks to British institutions tackling the virus, including universities and research labs. Two days after the report, the security services released official guidance to research facilities on protecting themselves from such attacks but insisted that none had been successful.

On May 9th, the newspaper revealed new details about the scale of the online battle, which had left the intelligence community ‘stunned.’

In particular, A West London clinical facility that runs trials for medicines and vaccines was attacked in March, with hackers stealing reams of intimate data. As the article reports Hammersmith Medical Research (HMR) admitted that historic scans of passports, national insurance cards and visa documents, as well as patient photos, health questionnaires and medical history documents, were stolen on March 14th.

The ‘Maze’ group of hackers claimed the responsibility for the attack and even published some of the medical records on the dark web, with the lab turning to Britain’s National Cyber Security Centre for help.

As further investigation suggested,

hackers linked to the Kremlin and Russian security services are based in Georgia. One source claimed that hackers demanded £2 million, in exchange for the details, but even offered the company a ‘discount’ in case they found a cure for the virus.

The member of the United National Movement, Khatia Dekanoidze responded to the article by saying that, there are hacker groups operating in Georgia and either State Security Service knows nothing about it or deliberately promotes creating Georgia as a platform for Russian hybrid warfare.

In the briefing, Dekanoidze accused the government of funding anti-western indoctrination. As she said, the hybrid warfare conducted by Putin, the Kremlin and Russian special services against the West is a significant threat to the civilised world. What she finds especially alarming is that the newspaper precisely referred to the hacker group as based in Georgia. According to her, this will deeply damage our country’s national interests as well as its Euroatlantic aspiration.

One of the leaders of political unity Lelo for Georgia, Saba Buadze responded to the Daily Mail article as well. As he said, nowadays the rate of clearance of cyber

crimes is low, and a lot of hacker attacks remain uninvestigated, including attacks on government facilities, banking sector, and personal information of citizens. Buadze finds it very important strategic documents and criminal law policies to be reviewed as well as financing of the cybersecurity field to be enhanced.

On the other side, the members of the Georgian Dream question the authenticity of the information published by the Daily Mail.

As the vice-speaker of the parliament Gia volski assessed, “this is a tale that even kids do not believe in.” He also stated that the quality of relationship and co-working between Georgian and British/western special services assures the absence of unshared information between them.

The chairperson of Defence And Security Committee, Irakli Sesiashvili noted that relevant authorities of Georgia have a tight partnership with British colleagues and they actively assisted Georgia in times when Russia conducted a cyber-attack on Georgia.

As Sesiashvili stated, since Georgian agencies would not miss this kind of information, Daily Mail must have released unconfirmed information.



Saba Buadze, leader of political unity Lelo for Georgia, finds vital financing in the cybersecurity field to be enhanced.

The medical facility forced to requite for the damage caused by the misconduct

According to the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Tbilisi Court of Appeals to pay the medical institution 5,000 GEL in moral damages and 10,000 GEL (funeral expenses) for material damage.



GYLA shedding light on doct mistreatment from medicine.

BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

According to GYLA, a patient died on December 5, 2014, as a result of im-

proper treatment by the doctor of the Akhmeta Regional Emergency Medical Service. According to them, the patient’s parents complained that the ambulance had performed a wrong medical operation, failing to comply with the recognised medical standards, which led to the patient’s death. Apart from the wrong medical action, the ambulance was not equipped with the appropriate medical equipment.

The court pointed to the fact that despite the patient’s complaints (severe chest pain which was reported at the time of the ambulance call), the medical staff did not take an electrocardiogram due to lack of proper equipment and did not consider these complaints to be notable enough.

Considering the established factual circumstances, the court concluded that the damage caused in the case under consideration (death of the plaintiff’s son) was



The moral damages the parent suffered need to be compensated

caused by the shortcomings in the treatment process by the medical staff. It should be noted that the Georgian legislation does not explicitly provide for the possibility of compensation for moral

damages to a medical institution due to the death of a close relative of the person.

Eventually, the court assessed the situation to be a precondition for moral damages.