

## Politics

**European Council president Charles Michel visits Georgia**

Michel will meet Georgian officials today

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**Thousands rally in Kutaisi to protest Namakhvani HPP construction**

HPP is being constructed by Turkish company Enka

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## Civil unrest continues, opposition promises more rallies to follow



BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On February 26, Georgian opposition parties continued to protest against the detention of the leader of the United National Movement party Nika Melia. The rally took place on Rustaveli Avenue in front of the Georgian Parliament building.

ing. The protest began with the national anthem of Georgia.

Protestors put up several tents in front of the Parliament building, one of which was placed on the road but later relocated to the pavement upon the police request. The activists also promised that if their demands are not satisfied within the next

two weeks, they will start placing tents on the road and interrupt the car movement on one of the main streets of the capital.

The opposition announced several more protests to take place in the next two weeks. On March 2, the opposition is planning a picket in front of the Georgian Parliament, another picket is scheduled

for March 5, and it is supposed to take place outside of the government building. On March 11, protestors are planning to gather outside of the Court, which the opposition considers to be the main "symbol of the current regime." March 13 is marked as the day of nation-wide protests in Georgia.

United National Movement member Tina Bokuchava said that the rally was not aimed at hindering MPs from entering the Parliament.

"This gathering was mostly aimed at discussing the next protest that will take place on March 2, in front of the Parliament building. We are not trying to interrupt the movement of the so-called MPs on the pavement. They will, however, be forced to get out of their expensive cars on the road, as a result of our peaceful protest, because we are planning to protest on the road," said Bokuchava.

The protests sparked, when Nika Melia, leader of one of the United National Movement – one of the largest opposition parties in Georgia, was arrested in a SWAT operation at the party's office. He is now charged with publicly violating the conditions of his bail by removing the tracking bracelet at one of the rallies in November 2019 and refusing to post his bail payment, despite being repeatedly asked to do so. Melia, who still refuses to pay the bail, has recently sent a letter from prison in which he said that he never felt as 'free as he feels right now' and urged people 'to fight for freedom until the end'. Melia was found guilty for inciting violence during the June 2019 mass protests in Tbilisi.





# European Council president Charles Michel visits Georgia



European Council President plans to visit Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The President of the European Council Charles Michel will visit three countries from February 28 to March 3. Michel's visit to Georgia started yesterday, on February 28. President Michel met President Maia Sandu in Chisinau before flying to Georgia.

In Georgia, he is planning a special meeting with President

Salome Zourabichvili, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, and Parliament Chairman Archil Talakvadze.

The European Council President also plans to visit the administrative boundary line and meet opposition representatives to discuss the ongoing challenges and problems.

As for his visit to Ukraine, he plans to discuss the relations between the EU and

Ukraine President Zelenskiy as well as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the countries. The agenda also includes the future of the Eastern Partnership.

According to the Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia, Minister of Foreign Affairs Davit Zalkaliani, the visit of Charles Michel is an expression of the EU's support for Georgia as an important partner of the EU in the region.

Maka Bochorishvili, a member of the Georgian Dream and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration, believes

that the visit of the President of the European Council to Georgia should not be viewed solely in the light of domestic developments. In her words, the visit of Charles Michel "is of great importance in terms of foreign policy."

As for the opposition, they believe that the President of the European Commission will have strict views on the ongoing events in the country.

The President of the European Council arrived in Georgia yesterday. He will have meetings with the representatives of the Georgian government today and leave the country tomorrow.



Charles Michel arrived in Tbilisi yesterday.

# Lietuva's president offers to mediate talks between the ruling party and Georgian opposition

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

President of Lietuva Gitanas Nauseda offered to mediate

the talks between the ruling party and the opposition to help the country to end the ongoing political crisis. In his speech marking 100 years since the Soviet forces occupied Georgia President Nauseda said that Lietuva is ready to facilitate the dialogue and the resolution of the current crisis in Georgia:

"Exactly 100 years ago, the Red Army occupied the newly formed Democratic Republic of Georgia and put an end to the desire of the Georgian people to have their country become a legitimate member of the international society. Thus, as a result

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## Weather

### Monday, March 1

Day Overcast  
High: 9°C  
Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 0°C

### Tuesday, March 2

Day Mostly Cloudy  
High: 10°C  
Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: -1°C

published by

**The Messenger**

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3255; Euro - 4.0322; GBP - 4.6258; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4633; Swiss Franc - 3.6726

## Thousands rally in Kutaisi to protest Namakhvani HPP construction



The rally in Kutaisi was attended by thousands from different regions of Georgia

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Thousands of people gathered in the central square of Kutaisi to protest the construction of the Namakhvani Hydro Power Plant. The cascade is planned to be built by Turkish company Enka. The protesters demand that the company be removed from the gorge.

Protestors claim that if the company does not follow the demands of the people, they will continue protests in two weeks, on March 14. Protestors are planning to

go to Namakhvani and camp there.

The protests near Namakhvani started 126 days ago. The protesters' demands have not changed, claiming that the contract with the Turkish company must be terminated.

The Namakhvani Cascade project envisages the construction of two independent HPPs in Rioni Valley: Kvemo Namakhvani HPP (333 mV) and Zemo Namakhvani (100 mV). The annual output of the cascade - 1,500.00 GWh, which represents 12% of annual consumption.



If the demands are not met, protesters are planning to hold another rally in two weeks

Former President of the country Mikheil Saakashvili posted a special video address on his Facebook page, showing support to protesters in Kutaisi. He said that today, for Georgia, protecting nature, improving the climate, and developing tourism should be of higher priority.

The former president says that today there are many other means of energy production, including wind turbines and solar energy, however, according to him, it is in the interest of Bidzina Ivanishvili to construct Namakhvani HPP.

The Namakhvani HPP cascade is to be built on the Rioni river. The project is worth about \$750 million and the cascade should start to operate in 2025-2026.

Activist Varlam Goletiani addressed people at the rally, urging the govern-

ment of Georgia to retract the "illegal, wrong, and anti-state permission of the project." Goletiani also noted that the failure of the government to meet the demands would equal greenlighting confrontation between the anti-HPP activists and the police.

He also said that the protestors will not ever get bored of defending their own land. People arrived in Kutaisi yesterday from different parts of the country to protest the construction of the HPP.

The opponents of the project are claiming that the constructions are planned to start without any prior research, which is increasing the risks. They are concerned about the devastating environmental impact for the regions affected, their biodiversity, and cultural heritage.

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of those unfortunate events, and against its own will, Georgia became a part of the Soviet Empire", President Nauseda said in his speech.

The president emphasized that the years of Soviet repressions did not manage to demolish the spirit of independence among the Georgian people:

"The standard Soviet practice of repressions and forced assimilation destroyed the political and intellectual elites. Long decades of occupation, filled with pain, suffering, and forcible actions against the population of Georgia, followed. Despite that terror, people maintained the spirit of freedom sometimes hidden or underground but cherished and kept secure. Seven decades after the occupation, Georgia saw a revival of this spirit, resulting in re-established independence and statehood – once again gaining the opportunity of becoming a respected member of the inter-

national community".

Nauseda stated that the recent detention of one of the opposition leaders Nika Melia is worrisome, also adding that political decisions can only be reached via an internal dialogue between all parties involved:

"Georgia's ambitious European and Euroatlantic integration goals require broad political unity and concerted actions, including constructive and continuous dialogue with all political parties. We remain fully committed to supporting Georgia's Euroatlantic path and will support all efforts to overcome the current political situation. Lithuania is ready for mediation efforts in searching for dialogue and consensus among all parties."

President Nauseda's statement ended with him reaffirming Georgia of Lithuania's continuous support in countering Russian aggression and illicit occupation of Georgian territories.

## Lietuva's president offers to mediate talks between the ruling party and Georgian opposition

