

## Opinion & Analysis

The global context of the Georgian crisis

FULL STORY ON Page 2

## Politics

Support of Women Human Rights Defenders and Their Work

FULL STORY ON Page 3

## Economics / Politics

668 people vaccinated against COVID-19 in Georgia today



FULL STORY ON Page 3

# Association Council: EU calls for a swift resolution to the ongoing political crisis



The Association council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. PM Garibashvili led the Georgian delegation.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The European Union and Georgia held the 6th meeting of the Association

council on 16 March 2021. The council welcomed Georgia's progress on its European path, including in the challenging COVID-19 context, and recognised the

efforts of the Georgian Government to contain the virus as well as to ensure targeted social assistance to those in need.

The Association council noted that the elections of 31 October and 21 November 2020 were competitive and that, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. It agreed on the importance of addressing all recommendations related to the shortcomings identified by international observers, including OSCE/ODIHR, through ambitious and inclusive electoral reform to strengthen the electoral environment and render it more favourable for the democratic conduct of elections.

Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles stated at the press conference following the EU-Georgia Association Council that this meeting was held in a 'pivotal moment' for Georgia amid the current political crisis.

"Since the last parliamentary elections in Autumn, the EU has repeatedly said that all political actors need to find common ground and look for a way forward from the current political situation," Borrell said.

As he noted, this is especially essential while Georgia has to deal with the coronavirus pandemic as well as move forward with its 'wide-reaching reform agenda' including electoral and judiciary reforms.

The Association council strongly regretted the deepening political polarisation in Georgia. The EU called for a swift resolution to the ongoing political situation, for all parties to step up efforts to de-escalate the situation and come together to identify and agree on



According to Borrell, Christian Danielson is making a concrete offer to the negotiating parties in the upcoming days.

CONTINUED ON Page 2



# The global context of the Georgian crisis

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgia has been in a chronic political crisis since the October 31 parliamentary elections. The European Union is concerned about this and is actively trying to find a solution for the government and the opposition bloc. A high-ranking Russian official has commented on the situation too, which has come as a surprise to many, accusing the United States of acting against the Georgian Dream, ostensibly because the current Georgian government is no longer obedient to Washington's instructions.

Amid the strained relations between the government and the opposition bloc, Sergei Naryshkin, Director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, said on March 9 that the United States was going to support the opposition in Georgia and push its European partners to do the same. According to him, the US' dissatisfaction is caused by the fact that the Georgian Dream no longer follows the Euro-Atlantic course unconditionally. The ruling political force will only avoid problems if it follows

Washington's instructions exactly. There is a conclusion about the destruction of the Western course in general. "Georgia's example clearly demonstrates that the aspirations of individual national elites to gain Washington's patronage for their current tasks will soon lose de facto sovereignty and the ability to pursue independent policies both in the foreign arena and within the country," Naryshkin said.

Naryshkin's statement was immediately followed by a comment from the Georgian Foreign Ministry and was described as another manifestation of the hybrid war against Georgia. The new Russian provocation aims to deepen and provoke controversy inside Georgia, and to create distrust in the Georgian government outside the main strategic partner. The Foreign Ministry notes that Georgia's membership in the European and Euro-Atlantic family is a sovereign choice.

The government tried to use Narishkin's application in the internal political confrontation and the opposition. Lelo's Lana Galdava considers Narishkin's

statement as the clear confirmation of the fact that the current government of Georgia is not following the Euro-Atlantic integration course and that Russia is trying to maintain its policies here. According to Galdava, "the Georgian government's attitude towards the Russian Federation has already replaced the previous 'careful' attitude toward the Russian Federation with the criminal capitulatory one." Russia is not only occupying Georgian territories, but intensively continues the hybrid war against Georgia.

It must be said that the Georgian Dream has long been accused of pursuing a capitulating policy towards Russia and deviating from the Western course. The opposition bloc sees the solution in the change of government, which will allow the country to return to the path of democratic and Western development.

Georgian Dream already has a traditional response to the accusations of being pro-Russian. For them, the pro-Russian force is Mikheil Saakashvili and the National Movement. "Russia has been trying to destabilize the Georgian Dream government for

nine years. "The weapon of his attempt is always the same, Mikheil Saakashvili and the United National Movement," Sozar Subari said.

In the conditions of heated confrontation, the main issue of Georgian policy is to find an opportunity to reach an agreement between the government and the opposition bloc. During his visit to Tbilisi, the President of the Council of Europe left a 6-point plan of reaching an agreement. Even after this visit, Georgia's European friends have been giving more advice on steps to defuse the crisis, but no tangible results have come out of it. The easiest advice to start with, which does not take much time, is the release of political prisoners - Nika Melia and Giorgi Rurua. This is also the opposition bloc's main condition for starting a dialogue. The most important one of these issues is the appointment of early parliamentary elections which "Georgian Dream" categorically refuses to hold and declares the demand as a 'red line'.

However, if they really want to present themselves as a constructive force in the eyes of

their Western friends, the government will have to take some steps in this direction. The solution was put forward by part of the opposition - to hold a plebiscite on whether the people want to hold early parliamentary elections. The plebiscite, if the government agrees, will be held in autumn in parallel with the local self-government elections. The early parliamentary elections, if the people support it, would be postponed to 2022. Georgian Dream categorically refuses to hold a plebiscite.

The request to hold a plebiscite is considered unnecessary and pointless by part of the opposition, primarily the National Movement. Mikheil Saakashvili also expressed a negative attitude towards this idea, but, as it has already been said, holding a plebiscite for the early parliamentary elections is a completely acceptable solution for part of the opposition, which could lead to the entry of these parties into parliament if Melia and Rurua are released.

*(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)*

## Association Council: EU calls for a swift resolution to the ongoing political crisis

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

common ground. The Association Council agreed that it was vital for all actors to continue working, in the EU-supported mediation, to find an early resolution to Georgia's political crisis.

The council reiterated its call on all political actors to work together and to maintain open dialogue in Georgia, including with civil society, to further strengthen democratic institutions, consolidate pluralistic democracy, and advance reforms. Both sides stressed the need to continue the successful cooperation between the EU and Geor-

gia on strategic communication and countering disinformation.

"It's not by boycotting Parliament that we can look for solutions in the framework of political pluralism. All parties, all political actors within Georgia must look at the wider consequences of the current situation and we have been asking everybody to put the interest of Georgian people first and find compromises", Borrell said, noting that the responsibility rests with the ruling party and the government to find a way forward.

Asked by a journalist if he thinks the new parliamentary elections could be an effective solution, Borrell said that it's not up to him to decide whether new elections should be held in Georgia and all he can say is that the OSCE considers the elections in Georgia to be free and fair.

On the other hand, Georgian PM Garibashvili also answered

this question, saying it is not his prerogative to decide when the elections will be held. "All international organizations, OSCE, ODIHR, all recognized international observers, say that the elections were competitive, free and fair. The next parliamentary elections will be held in 2024," Gharibashvili announced.

The Association Council welcomed the progress made in the implementation of Georgia's Human Rights Strategy and its Action Plan, as well as the important work of the Human Rights Protection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The EU recognised Georgia's efforts in this area and encouraged Georgia to continue efforts to effectively implement the anti-discrimination law and to ensure protection for all persons belonging to minorities, and ensure gender equality.

Both sides welcomed the progress made by Georgia in the

implementation of the Association Agreement, including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). The EU and Georgia agreed to identify further products with export potential to the EU, for which the EU can assist. The Association Council welcomed the ongoing work to draft a new SME Development Strategy 2021-2025 and the EU side confirmed its readiness to support its implementation.

The EU reiterated its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. The Association Council took note of the judgment of 21 January 2021 of the European Court of Human Rights Grand Chamber in the inter-State case concerning the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008 and its consequences which concluded that

after the 12 August 2008 the Russian Federation, "exercising effective control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia," violated several provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The Association Council reiterated the obligation for the Russian Federation to fulfill its international obligations including under the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, notably to withdraw its military forces from the territory of Georgia and remove all impediments for the establishment of international security mechanisms therein. The Association Council further urged the Russian Federation to provide EUMM access to the whole territory of Georgia, in line with its mandate. The Association Council also called for access to international humanitarian and human rights mechanisms of relevant international organisations.

### Weather

Wednesday, March 17

Day  Partly Cloudy

High: 17°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 7°C

Thursday, March 18

Day  Showers

High: 12°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

**Natalia Kochiashvili**

Executive Editor

**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.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3205; Euro - 3.9660; GBP - 4.5946; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.5556; Swiss Franc - 3.5909

# 668 people vaccinated against COVID-19 in Georgia today

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

The National Center for Disease Control has announced that 668 people in Georgia have already received the newly delivered AstraZeneca vaccine in Georgia, and 4,202 medical workers have already registered to receive a vaccine. On March 15, when the nationwide vaccination programme was launched in the country, several health officials and doctors were jabbed during the livestream aired on TV.

The first one to register to receive the dose of anti-coronavirus vaccine was 73-year old Tamar Giorgadze, while the first one to receive the shot was the deputy head of the National Center for Disease Control, Paata Imnadze. He later reported that he felt great after receiving the vaccine shot, and called for more people to follow his example. Imnadze added that the receipt of the AstraZeneca vaccines in Georgia is the beginning of an end of the pandemic in Georgia, all while reinstating that the end of pandemic will not be possible without the nation-wide vaccination, thus urging everyone, and especially medical workers, to register for a vaccination.

On March 13, Georgia received 43,200 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine with the help of UNICEF. Next week, Georgia is expecting to receive 29,250 doses of US-Germany produced Pfizer vaccine. Head of the National Center for Disease



Tamar Giorgadze

Control, Amiran Gamkrelidze stated earlier that if at least 1,6 million people get vaccinated by the end of this year, Georgia will be able to go back to a normal way of living.

The Ministry of Health of Georgia announced earlier that it is beginning the new information campaign called "Get vaccinated, vaccine saves lives!", which is aimed at urging more people to get a vaccine shot in Georgia. Ministry's statement on its official Facebook page explains that vaccine reduces the risk of infection and death by the COVID-19 virus:

"Vaccine is the end of the pandemic", the statement reads.

The Ministry does, however, note that even if the person receives the two shots of the vaccine, they will still be obliged to wear a mask, as well as obey the social distancing regulations.

"Getting vaccinated is one's right and everyone's responsibility. Get vaccinated and protect your life and health. The vaccine protects us. Together we can stop the COVID-19 pandemic", the Ministry states.

As of the last 24 hours, 537 new cases of COVID-19 virus were identified in Georgia, as well as 128 recoveries and 8 deaths. A total of 29,652 tests have been conducted across the country, 7,449 of which were PCR tests and 22,203 were rapid tests. Since February 26, 2020, the country has confirmed 275,685 coronavirus.

## Support of Women Human Rights Defenders and Their Work

UN Country Team's Statement



UNITED NATIONS  
GEORGIA



Women human rights defenders are women who act to promote or protect human rights and all individuals who defend the human rights of women or work for gender equality. We have unfortunately, witnessed intense aggression and stigmatization of the work of women human rights defenders through social media in the past few days in Georgia, along with the threats and condemnation expressed against individual women human rights defenders.

Women human rights defenders are at the forefront of social

justice and feminist movements that advocate for the realization of gender equality, women's empowerment, and human rights for all, the UN Country Team in Georgia would like to reaffirm its solidarity with women human rights defenders, who are leading the fight for the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We underline that women human rights defenders are subject to the same types of risks as any human rights defender, but as women, they are also targeted for or exposed to gender-specific

threats and gender-specific violence. Often, the work of women human rights defenders is seen as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in the society, which can lead to hostility by some groups. Their families also become targets for threats and violence, aiming to discourage women human rights defenders from pursuing their work. Women defenders are more at risk of being subject to certain forms of violence and other violations, prejudice, exclusion, and repudiation than their male counterparts. Prompt in-

vestigation of all threats of violence against women human rights defenders should be launched.

In the times of COVID-19, when we see significant risks and drawbacks to the achievements made in the field of gender equality and signals of rise of misogyny are alarming. In this context the work of women human rights defenders is more important than ever so that we continue to build back better and collectively contribute to irreversible progress towards gender equality and the empowerment

of all women and girls, everywhere.

We condemn, any forms of intimidation, threats, violence, and other abuses against women human rights defenders, as well as attempts to subject women human rights defenders to stigmatization and ostracism and call on the Government to take appropriate, robust, and practical steps to protect women human rights defenders and to integrate a gender perspective into their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the protection of human rights.