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EU mediator Christian Danielsson meets with president of Georgia, ruling and opposition parties



Christian Danielsson, the personal envoy of European Council President Charles Michel, is to leave Tbilisi today, after presenting the document he has been working on.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

EU mediator Christian Danielsson arrived in Tbilisi on Sunday for the second time this month to help the ruling and opposition parties complete the negotiation process. Yesterday, he met with President Salome Zurbashvili and held

a meeting with the Georgian Dream party and several opposition parties.

At Danielsson's meeting with President Zurbashvili at the Orbeliani Palace, where the sides discussed the ongoing political consultations, Zurbashvili stressed the importance of de-escalating the political crisis and the EU's active

involvement in overcoming the post-pandemic economic crisis.

After the meeting with Danielsson held behind closed doors at the EU Delegation to Georgia office, GD party Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze stated that under no circumstance would an early election be held. Georgian Prime Minister Irakli

Garibashvili announced that the government is ready for fair and rational compromise. He stressed that there would be no destructive steps coming from the ruling party. "On the contrary, the opposition has disrupted the dialogue and made no compromises," said Garibashvili. The PM once again ruled out the possibility of early elections, stating that the results of the 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia had been recognized by the whole world. He also added that there are no political prisoners in the country.

Later yesterday, Danielsson met with the representatives of the political party Lelo, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Girchi – More Freedom, European Georgia, United National Movement, and Labour party. After the meeting, Zura Japaridze, the leader of Girchi- More Freedom stated that the recent meeting did not provide any hopes to say that steps had been taken forward. "After this meeting, I find it difficult to say whether we will reach an agreement or not... If no agreement is reached, the crisis will deepen and this country will be in an even worse situation," Japaridze said.

In the evening, Danielsson held a press conference and stated that compromises are required from all sides. According to him, signing the document is an opportunity for the leaders to demonstrate their democratic maturity and the aim is to build a sustainable framework that will address the lack of systemic reform to increase the public confidence in the electoral process and judiciary.



The leaders of the ruling GD party have ruled out any possibility of holding early elections.

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Enguri HPP to resume operating in May, after six months of repair works

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

The Enguri Hydropower Plant is expected to resume generating electricity in May this year, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili announced today. He added that the renovation of the Enguri HPP which began in January, is one of the largest renovation works that have been carried out on the power plant during the last 20 years, and the total cost of the Enguri HPP renovation project amounted to 42 million euros, 7 million of which were received from the European Commission in a form of a loan, and the remaining 35 million euros were taken out as a loan from the European Bank of the Construction and Development.

Minister of Economy Natia Turnava, who visited the Enguri power plant along with PM Garibashvili, referred to the HPP as the symbol of Georgia's economic independence:

"Our government will do everything in its power to strengthen the future energy independence of our country, and build more HPP based on the existing resources", Turnava told the journalists.

She added that the country will continue to develop alternative sources of energy, such as solar energy, wind power, and eco-friendly hydrogen energy, however, according to Turnava.

"HPPs such as dams and reservoirs will continue to serve as a guarantee that in the future, Georgia will not depend solely on the import."

"Enguri HPP has existed for more than half a century already, and it is our national heritage that was left to us by the previous generation. It is also a very important HPP that strengthens our energy independence and sovereignty. Without Enguri, our sovereignty would have been under a threat. This



HPP unites Georgia as it serves the whole country, including our brothers and sisters in Abkhazia, and it is our treasure", Turnava added.

The repairment works on Enguri HPP began in January this year, and the plant was completely shut down because the main part of the facilities which

needed repairing the most – the drainage tunnel, required the station to be emptied completely. The winter and spring months were specifically selected for the

large-scale renovations, as during this time, the water resources of the Enguri HPP are usually the lowest.

Weather

Tuesday, March 30

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 12°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 6°C

Wednesday, March 31

Day Mainly Cloudy
High: 12°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 7°C

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Current account deficit in 2020 amounts to \$2 billion US

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has reported on March 29 that the current account deficit in 2020 was \$ 2.0 billion (\$ 6.1 billion), or 12.3% of GDP. The current account deficit in the 4th quarter of 2020 was \$ 560.2 million (\$ 1.8 billion).

In the formation of the current account, the report of trade in goods, services, and income contributes negatively, while the effect of the current transfers is positive. It should be noted that in the last quarter of 2020, the current account deficit decreased by 0.1% year on year, while the ratio to GDP increased from 11.9% to 13.2%.

According to the NBG, the largest component of the current account was still trade-in goods, the negative balance of which decreased by 19.8% year on year to \$887.0 million. (€ 2.9 billion). At the same time, exports of goods fell by 12.4% year on year, while imports fell by 15.7%.

In the 4th quarter of 2020, the net income account was -\$224.7 million (€ 735.0 million). Both positive net wages (by 53.9 %



Georgia's total external debt increased by \$640.1 million in the 4th quarter of 2020.

and negative net investment income (by 20.4 %) decreased.

The traditionally positive component of the current account is current transfers, the credit of which grew by 59.5% year-on-year to \$ 645.9 million (\$ 2.1 billion) in the fourth quarter of 2020. Private sector net transfers increased by 33.9% during this period. Net transfers from the government sector also increased to \$144.7 million (€

473.2 million).

Net foreign direct investment stood at \$ 120.0 million (€ 392.6 million) in the 4th quarter or 2.8 % of quarterly GDP.

According to the NBG, Georgia's net international investment position as of December 31, 2020, amounted to \$24.8 billion, which is -156.3 % of annual GDP. This figure increased by \$ 955.7 million compared to the previous quarter.



In 2020, Georgia's total international assets decreased by \$125.8 million.

As of December 31, 2020, total international assets stood at \$ 10.9 billion (€ 35.8 billion), down \$125.8 million from the previous quarter, according to the central bank.

According to the agency, total international liabilities amounted to \$35.8 billion (€ 117.1 billion), which is \$ 830 million more than in the previous quarter. Georgia's total external debt as of the end of 2020

amounted to \$20.3 billion (€ 66.5 billion), which is 127.7 % of GDP in 2020.

At the same time, according to the NBG, the state external debt amounted to \$9.7 billion (€ 31.9 billion), which is 61.3 % of GDP.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, the external debt of the National Bank of Georgia increased by \$125.4 million.

Pandemic risks widen gender gaps in Georgia, says World Bank



According to the 2020 Georgia Gender Assessment report by the World Bank, restricted access to finance and other barriers could limit women's entrepreneurial potential.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The World Bank released the 2020 Georgia Gender Assessment report yesterday, according to which, Georgia has experienced economic growth and poverty reduction in recent years, however, the benefits of this process have been unevenly distributed between men and women. The report also reads that poverty rates for women fluctuate in Georgia, depending on educational attainment, marital status, and sociodemographic aspects.

According to the World Bank, despite advances in terms of gender equality, against the backdrop of the Covid-19 crisis, the country faces the risk of stagnation and even regress in some

areas.

The report reads that even though education is accessible for women in Georgia, it does not necessarily mean the improvement of their skills and labor market outcomes.

"Despite near-universal school coverage, the education system struggles to provide quality learning and skills for boys and girls, which is reflected in Georgia's Human Capital Index (HCI) of 0.57, implying that children achieve only 57% of their human capital potential by age 18," states the World Bank.

It is pointed out in the report that women face limited access to economic opportunities compared to their male counterparts. According to the WB, Georgia's gender gap in labor force partici-

pation stands at 19 percentage points, and considering the differences in demographics and job characteristics, men earn 16 percent more than women. According to the report, the evidence of the recent survey conducted in Georgia indicates that women have been more likely than men to leave jobs since the breakout of COVID-19.

The World Bank says that in the Europe and Central Asia region, the pandemic has further aggravated gender vulnerability, where women face immense stress in balancing "paid and unpaid work," which implies, on the one hand, family and childcare needs, and on the other hand, ensuring the successful operation of their own business

and activities.

The World Bank noted that they are committed to continuing to support the government,

civil society, and other development partners in promoting gender equality for Georgia and its people.



The World Bank says that women face limited access to economic opportunities compared to their male counterparts as men earn 16 percent more money than women.

EU mediator Christian Danielsson meets with president of Georgia, ruling and opposition parties

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"Let me remind you that if an agreement is reached, there will be no winners or losers. There will be only winners. And in particular, one main winner will be the people of Georgia. So tonight

I call on all the parties to ensure that tomorrow Georgia is the winner," said Danielsson at yesterday's press conference. He didn't specify the details of the meetings; however, he stated that the document would be ready later on Tuesday.