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UNM to sign the agreement only after Melia is free



► The GD supports the document offered by Charles Michel

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

As part of Georgian opposition and the ruling party signed the agreement proposed by European Council President Charles Michel, "A way ahead for Georgia", the United Georgian Movement representatives say that they will sign the agreement only after Melia is

released from prison. The agreement was already signed by Giorgi Vashadze, Chairman of the Strategy Builder, Badri Japaridze and Mamuka Khazaradze, leaders of Lelo, Khatuna Samnidze, Chairperson of the Republican Party, Vakhtang Megrelishvili, one of the leaders of Girchi, and Aleko Elisashvili, leader of Citizens.

The document was also individually

signed by Salome Samadashvili, one of the leaders of the UNM, who then left the party, Davit Bakradze, independent MP, and Zurab Japaridze, Chairman of Girchi - More Freedom.

The document of Charles Michel is also supported by the ruling party, Georgian Dream. The text was signed by Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze.

However, the part of the document

that focuses on the release of prisoners detained in connection with the June 20 case.

Giorgi Vashadze, the leader of the Strategy Builder, said that the amnesty will not apply to those who have not been prosecuted yet. As for the amnesty for the law enforcers, the leaders of the Georgian Dream say that it should affect the law enforcers as well.

On the other hand, the opposition opposes it. The victims of June 20 responded to the ongoing events and said that the parties do not have the right to decide whether to stop hearings of the ongoing cases.

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the Human Rights Center, organizations that protect the interests of citizens and journalists affected by the June 20, both in Georgia and at the European Court of Human Rights, consider the amnesty of law enforcers unacceptable.

The United National Movement of Georgia plans to only sign the document after Melia leaves prison. Former president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili posted a video on his Facebook and said that the document contains many shortcomings and is very far from something that could 'solve the crisis'. He called Melia 'the hero of UNM' and said he and Rurua should be released from prison unconditionally.



► Former president Saakashvili said that UNM should only sign the agreement after Melia leaves the prison

Business Associations offer anti-crisis plan, request meeting with PM

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

12 business associations request a meeting with the Prime Minister. According to them, the goal of the United Platform initiative is to stand by the government so that the country can overcome its economic problems with less losses.

As Shota Burjanadze, a representative of a cross-sectoral initiative group, the Prime Minister expressed his desire to communicate with the private sector during a meeting with representatives of large businesses - associations operating in various sectors of Georgia are responding to this initiative. According to Burjanadze, they are addressing the PM with a 6-point initiative to pull the country out of the crisis, in which the first demand is to abolish the curfew.

According to the statement, the goal of this cross-sectoral joint platform initiative is to stand by the government so that the country can overcome its economic problems with fewer losses. The statements of the representatives of various government agencies and epidemiologists indicate the danger of re-lockdown in the country (the so-called third wave).

"The country's economy has been partially closed for more than a year. We have had a full lockdown for 6 months, which is a completely inadmissible 'luxury' for our rather poor country. The country has many international financial commitments that need to be fulfilled. The only guarantee for this is the activated business sector, which is the main filler of the country's budget."

1. Immediate removal of the curfew: work processes in the country are interrupted 4-5 hours earlier, due to which the economy loses millions of GEL every day. Flights are scheduled, land borders are opened, tourists enter, but a country darkened and deserted at 8 o'clock is in fact the equivalent of anti-PR.

2. Start active preparations for the tourist season in the country: An example of such preparations is shown by many tourist countries, for example,



► 12 business associations have joined this initiative to bring the country out of the crisis, with a total of over 468 000 employees.



Turkey. In order for the national currency to strengthen, we need to receive foreign tourists in the near future. Without preparation, the country will not be able to receive a significant number of visitors - the hospitality sector is destroyed.

3. The restaurant business

will start operating on the weekends (subject to regulations): The restaurant business is one of the most mobilized businesses in terms of meeting the requirements of epidemiologists. Closing this business leads to completely uncontrolled, shady events and parties in the private

sector. Plus, the tourist is hungry on the weekends.

4. Accelerate the vaccination process: In order to accelerate the vaccination process, it is necessary to strengthen the propaganda about the positive results of vaccination. Today, both the vaccination process and the

propaganda are unsatisfactory.

5. Reduce tax burden on small and medium-sized businesses: Small and medium-sized businesses, which are most affected, should be taken care of by the state during this crisis. This applies to subsidies in some fields, as well as the removal or at least reduction of tax pressure.

6. Stop reproducing only negative information in the country: The progress of the country's economy is unthinkable without positive messages and positive attitudes. The media, like the government, are busy only with negative messages: the epidemic situation, the unfavorable state of the economy, the political situation, the Lari exchange rate, the killings, and so on.

"Mr. Prime Minister, you have announced that an anti-crisis plan will be presented soon - we are ready to participate in the preparation of this plan. We offer to plan a working meeting to discuss these topics," said the statement issued by business associations.

FRIDAY		APRIL 23	
Day		Mainly sunny	High: 20°C
Night		Cloudy	Low: 10°C
SATURDAY		APRIL 24	
Day		Rain	High: 21°C
Night		Cloudy	Low: 11°C

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Degnan: It is Nika Melia's personal decision to leave or stay in prison

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan stated that it is up to Melia to decide whether he leaves prison or not.

Degnan says that the agreement reached between the government and the opposition is discussing ways to free Nika Melia.

"It is important for the country to find a way forward, a way to continue its political life. This is what this agreement

serves. As for Melia, it is his personal decision. The agreement talks about different ways to release him," Kelly Degnan said. According to a new document from the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, Nika Melia will either be released on bail by the European Union or be released from prison under an amnesty law. Both of the options are unacceptable for Melia.

Lelo's Japaridze says the implementation of agreement points will be monitored by MEPs

According to Badri Japaridze, one of the leaders of Lelo, the implementation of the points in Charles Michel's new document will be controlled by MEPs Viola von Cramon, Andrius Kubilius and Rasa Juknevičienė.

According to him, the monitoring group will be further expanded.

According to Badri Japaridze, the implementation of this agreement is an

important issue for the EU and they will be fully involved in this process.

Lelo leaders Mamuka Khazaradze, Badri Japaridze and Grigol Gegelia left for Brussels on a working visit yesterday, April 21. According to the party leaders, a monitoring group of European MPs will be set up, which will closely monitor the implementation of the Charles Michel 5-point agreement.

European Union provides laboratory equipment to Georgia's Interior Ministry to improve technical capacities to effectively investigate crimes

Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectrometry System (GC-MS), worth 246,000 USD, will assist MIA's Forensic-Criminalistics to identify different substances within a test sample and effectively investigate crimes.

The EU has handed over a Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectrometry System (GC-MS) valued at 246,000 USD to the Forensic-Criminalistics Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MIA) on 20 April 2021. This support is provided under the EU's SAFE programme, in partnership with UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

The ceremony was attended by the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Mr. Giorgi BUTKHUZI and the Head of the Cooperation Section of the EU Delegation to Georgia Ms. Sigrid BRETTEL, as well as other relevant dignitaries from the Ministry, the EU Delegation to Georgia and UNOPS.

"Effective law enforcement is a key element of any state. I was very pleased to see how the equipment that the EU in partnership with UNOPS has provided to the Forensic Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is used in practice to support the investigation of crimes. This is the part of a wider EU programme, called "SAFE", which started two years ago with an EU contribution of 120 million GEL. The main purpose of SAFE is to strengthen the security sector in Georgia. It includes equipment and training to improve the operational and analytical capacities of law enforcement authorities" – said Ms. Brettel.

Mr. Butkuzi also mentioned the importance of the EU assistance and described how GC-MS system could improve MIA performance: "Within the framework of the "SAFE" program operating in Georgia since 2019, a mass spectrometer has been provided to the Expert-Forensic Main Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The device allows to trace both narcotics and explosives at the highest standards and in the



shortest possible time. It also enables us to effectively investigate fires, as well as carry out environmental supervision and analysis. The constant updating of its technical equipment is one

of the priorities for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and we annually strive to achieve international standards."

Participants toured the main laboratory of FCD's Forensic In-

strumental Analysis Unit to see how the GC-MS system is applied to identify different substances within a test sample, including drug detection, fire investigation, environmental analysis, explo-

sives investigation, and identification of unknown samples as is used by leading laboratories all around the world. The new GS-MS System allows results in less than an hour, which will significantly improve the Ministry's capacities for speedy and quality forensic examinations.

"At UNOPS we are proud to facilitate procurement, delivery and installment of the GC/MS system, which is already in operation at the Forensic-Criminalistics Department of the Interior Ministry allowing quality forensic examinations. Since the launch of the Project last year, we have successfully procured three major items for the Ministry with a total value of over one million US Dollars, significantly improving the Ministry's technological capacities in relevant areas. I would like to thank our partners - the EU Delegation to Georgia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia for excellent cooperation and continuous support to the Project" - said Ms. Elene Aladashvili, Project Manager at UNOPS, in her remarks.

The GC-MS system, regarded as a "gold standard" for forensic substance identification, has been procured through the financial support of the EU within the frameworks of the 'Support to Advancing Technical Capacities for Ensuring Human Security' Project implemented by UNOPS. The Project is part of a wider initiative by the EU for the security sector reform in Georgia - EU SAFE programme, and is aimed at supporting the Government of Georgia in achieving efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of institutions in the security sector through identification of specific needs and procurement of modern technology to enhance institutional and operational capacities of the designated security sector actors.

The EU SAFE programme has been implemented since July 2019. The International Relations Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia is one of the main counterparts in the programme implementation process.