

Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze resigns

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On Saturday, April 24, Parliament Speaker and Georgian Dream party member Archil Talakvadze announced his resignation. Talakvadze explained that his decision came shortly after the recent negotiations with the country's opposition bloc and the EU-proposed agreement that followed it:

"Considering the fact that months of tense negotiations have now resulted in reaching an agreement, I think it would be appropriate for me to resign as a speaker of the parliament and have another person take on my role and handle parliamentary activities with more neutrality [...] Now that we have representatives of the opposition in the Parliament, I think my place is in the hall, side by side with my colleagues," Talakvadze said during the news briefing.

Former speaker of the parliament

will continue his activities in parliament as a vice speaker while his deputy Kakha Kuchava is currently introduced to Talakvadze's office. During a briefing, Talakvadze stated that it was an honour for him to act as a speaker of the parliament's 9th and 10th convocations:

"I would like to thank my colleagues and citizens of Georgia for their support and patience. We will continue to work together and fight for the country's future success, and we will certainly achieve more victories and guarantee the success of our country", Talakvadze added.

Kakha Kuchava was a deputy speaker of the 10th convocation of the Georgian parliament, as well as a member of the 9th convocation of the parliament when he served as Chairman of the Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources. Kuchava has been a member of the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia faction since 2016.



Archil Talakvadze

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Kakha Kuchava

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

According to the National Movement's Chairman Nika Melia, he accepts Members of the European Parliament as guarantors. He said this during a phone interview with the Mtavari channel.

"It is absolutely acceptable for the MEPs to act as my guarantors."

Melia says he finds GD's comments "comical" regarding how the agreement doesn't involve such a point.

He added that the agreement also doesn't state that he should have to pay bail, which has been offered to him.

Melia also addressed the amnesty law, stating that the police officers responsible for the violent acts during the June 20-21 demonstrations should not be pardoned under any circum-

stances.

"Believe me, the socio-political crisis will deepen significantly in the country, if the amnesty law is extended to at least one violent police officer, I am deeply convinced of that," he stated.

He urged opposition MPs not to vote for the amnesty bill if the Georgian Dream states that it also extends to members of the law enforcement agencies.

The paper, drafted at the initiative of European Council President Charles Michel, states that the parties shall respond to the issues considered as "politicized justice" within a week of signing, by amnesty and/or measures that would lead to a similar outcome.

The topic of the amnesty bill was accompanied by a series of concerns about who will be affected by this law. Part of civil society and the opposition is

Nika Melia agrees for MEPs to act as his guarantors



Melia talked about ongoing events during a phone interview with the Mtavari channel



MEP Andrius Kubilius expressed his readiness to discuss acting as a guarantor

against the law being extended to members of law enforcement that took part in the rally's dispersal.

Now former Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze stated that the amnesty bill would be enacted in accordance with the terms of the agreement. Georgian Dream, he claims, has "no subjective interest" in the matter.

The opposition parties are set to register the amnesty bill in the Parliament on April 27.

Political party Lelo leaders asked the MEPs to act as Melia's guarantors during their visit to Brussels.

Salome Samadashvili, a previous United National Move-

ment member, also supports the initiative for MEPs to act as Melia's guarantors.

"It should be noted that the text of the agreement envisages any possible way to free Nika, not just the amnesty or bail," Samadashvili said.

MEP Andrius Kubilius expressed his readiness to discuss acting as a guarantor with Formula Channel. According to him, there are many people in the European Parliament who support Georgia and offer their personal guarantees to Melia.

The agreement between the ruling team and opposition was mediated by the European Council President Charles Michel and was signed last week.

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Remains of 13 individuals who went missing during Abkhaz-Georgian war in 1992-1993 were laid to rest today in Tbilisi. Bodies of six servicemen and seven civilians were identified and returned to Georgia with the joint efforts of Georgia's State Ministry for Reconciliation and the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC).

It was reported earlier that upon the requests of the families of the deceased, they will be buried in several different places, including ancestral cemeteries. The remains of the four

Remains of 13 individuals who went missing during Abkhaz war laid to rest in Georgia

servicemen will be buried with military honours at the fraternal cemetery in the Digomi district of Tbilisi. In its official statement, Georgia's State Ministry for Reconciliation emphasized that as a result of Georgian-Abkhaz war, 2,300 people went missing in Georgia, and determining their fate and whereabouts is a part of the state's policy.

In a recent post on her official Twitter page, head of the International Red Cross Committee Severine Chappaz commented on the memorial service that was held at the Holy Trinity Cathedral (Sameba) on April 23 and 24:

"A very solemn and moving

ceremony today in Sameba church to honour the memory of the recently identified people who went missing during the 1992-93 conflict in Abkhazia organized by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality".

The service was attended by the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili and his cabinet, as well as the State Minister for Reintegration Tea Akhvlediani, who noted that as of today, with the joint efforts of Georgia's State Ministry for Reconciliation and the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC), remains of 206 individuals out of the total 2,300 have been identified.



In 2019, the Georgian government created a special commission charged with finding the burial sites of and identifying the

persons who went missing in Georgia during the 1990s and 2008 armed conflicts.

Weather

Monday, April 26

Day Few Showers

High: 21°C

Night Light Rain

Low: 10°C

Tuesday, April 27

Day Light Rain/Wind

High: 18°C

Night Light Rain

Low: 12°C

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Miners go on strike in Chiatura, Western Georgia

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Approximately 3,000 miners employed at Georgian Manganese went out on a strike in Chiatura, Imereti region of Western Georgia, to demand a salary raise, better working conditions and stricter environmental protection measures. Protesters bypassed trade unions and hired a private lawyer, with the help of which they addressed a letter to the Minister of Health of Georgia Ekaterine Tikaradze. The protesters' main demands include 50% pay rise, improving insurance packages, handing over employment contracts to employees, preventing the movement of heavy vehicles in the city and improving the general environmental situation in cities and villages. According to the participants of the rally, as a result of improper ore factory processing and extraction, the river Kvirila, air and drinking water are polluted and the soil in the nearby areas becomes useless.



One of the Georgian NGOs, Governance Monitoring Centre (GMC), has already expressed solidarity with the protesters:

"After the construction of the new factory by Georgian Manganese, the workforce doubled, while the remuneration remained the same. In addition, after the 2019 shares, the company was divided into parts and by the decision of the administration the salary was increased

only for the part of the employees. This became one of the reasons for the miners' dissatisfaction.

The Governance Monitoring Center (GMC) is in solidarity with the serious labor and environmental problems of the people living and working in Chiatura.

The Imereti Bureau of the Management Monitoring Center (GMC) closely monitors the processes and periodically provides



new information", the GMC official statement reads.

Yesterday, Georgian Manganese company reported that an agreement has been reached with some of the miners, who agreed to return to work on Monday, after being offered a ₾ 250 pay raise, and an annual holiday bonus of ₾ 250. The new

terms will be signed into contracts on April 26 and enter into force on May 1. However, in its official statement, Georgian Trade Unions Confederation said that an offer of ₾ 250 pay raise is unacceptable, as it only constitutes a 25% pay raise as opposed to 50% that the miners are demanding.

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

'Rioni Gorge Guards', a group of people protesting the construction of Namakhvani HPP, held rallies in different cities across Georgia on April 24.

The protest started in the village Gumati, where those against the construction have been holding rallies. The organizers then moved the protest to Kutaisi, where they blocked traffic on one of the main streets, Chavchavadze Avenue.

Supporters of the cause also gathered in Batumi, Kobuleti, Zugdidi, Poti, Pankisi gorge, Bolnisi, Rustavi, Lanchkhuti, Tskaltubo, Lentekhi and Kazbegi.

"We have the same problem. The works here have been halted due to our protests, but they have not yet refused to build the HPP. We support and fully share the demands of the Rioni gorge de-

fenders. If necessary, we will go to Imereti and take part in rallies on the spot. The government must understand once and for all that it must listen to the people," Temur Tsatiashvili from Pankisi told RFE/RL.

The protests followed the statement from the Government regarding the demands of the protesters.

According to the government's decision, a 9-12-month moratorium on the construction has been imposed to allow for the revision of environmental, geological, and seismological assessments.

"Presently, the company will only continue preparatory infrastructural work under the project's initial phase, in compli-

Rally to be held in Tbilisi on May 23 against Namakhvani HPP



Varlam Goletiani announced a large-scale rally in Tbilisi on May 23



Protests were held in different cities across Georgia on April 24

ance with the applicable construction permit," reads the statement.

Additionally, the Government promised to reduce the number of law-enforcement officers on the ground. Furthermore, the statement reads that additional barriers will be removed from the territory adjacent to the Namakhvani HPP construction site to allow protesters to hold rallies.

Varlam Goletiani, one of the protest organizers against the Namakhvani HPP, said that the protesters' key demands were the freedom to return to Namakhvani and set up tents there, as well as the termination of preparatory works by the company 'Enka.'

The April 24 rallies were held because the demands of the protesters were not met.

According to Goletiani, a large-scale protest rally will be held in Tbilisi on May 23, and the protests will be held indefinitely in the capital until all demands are met. He explained that the date was chosen to allow for the upcoming Easter celebrations to pass peacefully.

The 'Rioni gorge guards' have been protesting for almost six months against the planned construction of a 433-megawatt Namakhvani HPP in the Rioni Valley because they do not consider the project to be properly justified and believe it would cause significant environmental damage.