

Court replaces Nika Melia's pre-trial detention with release on bail, UNM chair leaves prison.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

United National Movement Chair Nika Melia left prison yesterday, following the decision of the Tbilisi City Court to substitute his pre-trial detention with a release on bail. The decision came after the European Union posted Melia's € 40,000 bail on May 8, per the EU-mediated agreement reached between Georgian political parties in April. Defendant Melia himself was not present at the hearing, as he had been expelled from the courtroom during the previous trial for disrespect towards the judge.

After leaving the 12th penitentiary in Rustavi, Melia thanked all the international partners engaged in the EU-mediated talks, including EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell, European Council President Charles Michel, and U.S. Ambassador Kelly Degnan. Melia especially highlighted the contribution of Zygimantas Pavilionis, the Chairman of the Lithuanian Foreign Affairs Committee. "With no exaggeration, Pavilionis is a person who has awakened the international community... If not Pavilionis's efforts, I do not think the responses from the international community would be the same" Melia said.

Melia did not give a concrete answer on entering the parliament. As he announced, very intense consultations would be held in the following days with the leaders of the National Movement bloc and the parties that have entered the parliament. "It will take several days to make the final decision. I know for a fact that there are different positions inside the party [UNM] on this issue," Melia stated.



"I would like to thank all supporters who want stability in the country," UNM Chair Nika Melia said.

Tbilisi City Court ruled imprisonment for Nika Melia in February. He is charged with incitement to violence during the June protests in Tbilisi in 2019. He was released on € 30,000 bail, however, UNM Chairman violated the bail condi-

tions by removing his monitoring bracelet, resulting in the court's decision to increase the bail amount to € 40,000 in November 2020. Melia refused to pay the added bail as he considered it unfair. In February, Tbilisi City Court replaced

Melia's bail with custody. He was arrested on February 23. The release of the UNM head was one of the major demands of the opposition during the EU-mediated talks between the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition.

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Nika Melia's bail € 40 000 was paid by the European Union on May 8. The funds were made available by European Endowment for Democracy.

Georgia and Northern Macedonia sign visa waiver document



Georgian citizens will be able to travel to Northern Macedonia without a visa.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI
 President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili paid an official visit to Northern Macedonia on May 10 to hold meetings with President Stevo Pendarovski, Assembly President Talat Xhaferi and Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi.

The president of Georgia held a face-to-face meeting with the Northern Macedonia president in an expanded format. The sides discussed the security in the region, the economic and social difficulties caused by the pandemic and the vaccination processes.

“Over the past decades, we have been cooperating intermittently via international organizations, and it is time to increase our relations from international forums to the highest level,” said the president of the Republic of Northern Macedonia at a press

conference, noting that this is the first step in this direction is to regulate and promote the legal framework.

According to him, the issues of development of bilateral relations were discussed at the meeting with Zurabishvili. He called the visit historic, since it is the first official visit after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries on February 16, 2019.

Zurabishvili briefed Pendarovski on the political situation in Georgia and the most important EU-brokered agreement to overcome the political crisis. Zurabishvili spoke about the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied territories of Georgia, kidnappings, illegal detention and in particular, the case of Zaza Gakheladze.

During the official visit, the Presidents of Georgia and the Republic of Northern Macedonia signed an agreement ‘On Exemption from the Obligation to Obtain Visas’ between the Governments of Georgia and the Republic of Northern Macedonia.

According to them, the agree-

ment on visa exemption is aimed at introducing favourable conditions for mutual access for citizens of the two countries. The agreement provides for persons

with a biometric passport to be allowed to enter, stop or transit through the country without a visa.

The Minister of Culture,

Sports and Youth Affairs of Georgia, Tea Tsulukiani, and the Minister of Culture of Northern Macedonia Irena Stefoska, signed a memorandum on cooperation in the field of culture. It aims to deepen relations between the agencies of the two countries, as well as to develop cultural ties. Encourage activities, exchange information, promote participation in seminars, conferences and cultural events.

The meeting also focused on the NATO summit scheduled for June 14, the process of Georgia’s integration into NATO and the European Union, and the importance of Northern Macedonia’s support in this regard. The sides also discussed the current developments in the region and Ukraine, noting that de-escalation requires more active involvement of the international community, NATO and the EU in a non-confrontational manner. President Zurabishvili has invited the President of the Republic of Northern Macedonia to Georgia.

Within the framework of the visit, the President of Georgia is scheduled to meet with Georgian athletes working in northern Macedonia and representatives of the cultural sphere. The official visit of the President to Northern Macedonia will end on May 11.



“We support Georgia’s right to establish closer relations with NATO”, said Stevo Pendarovski.

Weather

Tuesday, May 11

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 17°C

Night Clear

Low: 8°C

Wednesday, May 12

Day Clear

High: 24°C

Night Clear

Low: 13°C

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Government offers farmers to purchase leased lands at 25% discount



The decision applies to almost 2,000 farmers of which 439 have already registered to purchase their lands.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, the government of Georgia announced the decision to offer benefits to farmers willing to buy out leased lands. According to the decision made at the government's meeting, farmers who rent land from the state will be able to purchase them at a 25% discount. The decision aims to increase the accessibility to agricultural lands in order to encourage economic

development and employment. The decision applies to almost 2,000 lessees.

According to Economy Minister Natia Turnava, the government has recently allowed the farmers who have leased land from the state and have been cultivating them for many years to buy those lands directly at a market price. However, according to Turnava, the recent trends show that the prices of the lands are quite high, and that many

farmers are unable to afford them. Therefore, the decision has been made to offer farmers a 25% discount. As the minister said, the main task is not to leave uncultivated land, to enable the farmers to participate in the state programs and attract funding.

As Turnava stated, primarily, this offer allows farmers to cultivate lands and seek more finances, private investment, as well as benefit from the wide



According to Economy Minister Natia Turnava, the main goal is not to leave uncultivated land, enable the farmers to participate in the state programs, and attract funding.

range of state programs that the Economy and Agriculture Ministry programs offer. The Economy Minister believes this decision will encourage investments in agricultural land and will help recover the economy.

439 of 2000 farmers who rent land from the state have already registered to purchase their lands.

At yesterday's government meeting, the Cabinet discussed 13 issues listed on the agenda. Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Irakli Karseladze briefed the imple-

mentation of the program Renovated Regions, noting that the special commission is actively holding meetings and concrete areas are selected to implement projects under the program. Renovated Regions, a program initiated by Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, covers 63 municipalities and aims to ensure urban renovation in the regions, involving the development of important sites owned by the state, municipalities, and private owners. The estimated value of the first phase of the project is ₾ 500 million.

Construction of Namakhvani HPP postponed for another 12 months – Minister of Economy of Georgia

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Earlier today, on May 10, the Minister of Economy of Georgia, Natia Turnava has announced that the construction of the Namakhvani HPP will be postponed for 12 months. She explained that the moratorium on the construction has been imposed because of the mediation process with the participation of the chairman of the EU Energy disputes Council will be held between the government and the non-governmental sector, which will, subsequently, help assess the environmental impact of the construction of the Namakhvani hydroelectric power plant and help build the trust towards the project:

"The mediation process will be between the non-governmental sector and governmental structures. We, of course, are acting within the law and in accordance with the announced priorities", Turnava said.

The Minister added that there are no plans of visiting the protesters in the Rioni gorge, however, the "door is opened for them to join the negotiations".

The project of building the Namakhvani power plant in the Rioni gorge of the Western Georgia has sparked a wave of protests, as activists, supported by the number of environmental experts,



believe that the construction may pose serious seismic and ecological risks to the area, as well as leading the locals having to leave their homes and relocate elsewhere. The protests under the "Protect the Rioni gorge" slogan continued for several months, despite the efforts of the local law enforcement agents to disperse them and prohibit access to the protest site.

The project of building the Lower and Upper Namakhvani power plants with a total capacity of 433 MW is being realized by one of the Turkish largest companies ENKA with the direct support of the government of Georgia. The government's main argument in favor of the construction is that the new power plant, can, potentially, ensure Georgia's independence in producing energy as the Namakhvani HPP would become the country's largest project since the Enguri HPP constructed in 1987.

Earlier yesterday, the activists protesting against the construction of the HPP announced that they would be holding a meeting with the residents of Tsageri municipality in order to introduce them to the activists' action plan, and, according to the members of the Protectors of the Rioni Gorge movement, a similar meeting will be held with the residents of Ambrolauri.