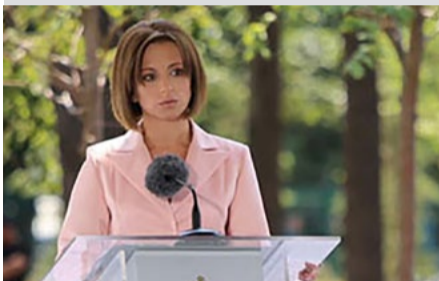


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## International partners condemn radical developments in Tbilisi, MEPs 'deplores' Georgian government for inactivity



► According to the Georgian Interior Ministry, 68 detainees have been released on parole, while 32 remain in temporary detention. Photo by Guram Muradov (civil.ge)

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On July 6, far-right protesters gathered on Rustveli avenue to protest against peaceful anti-violence and pro-LGBTQI+ protests that were held in response to the homophobic and violent events of July 5. The participants of the peaceful solidarity rally included political opposition, independent citizens, and LGBTQI+ supporters.

According to the Georgian Interior Ministry, Police detained over a hundred activists of violent ultranationalist groups on administrative offences as the July 6 rally "exceeded the limits of the law on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly." As the ministry notes, 68 detainees have been released on parole, while 32 remain in temporary detention. Police also detained two individuals on criminal charges for violence against a Palitra News cameraman and damaging the side windshield of a police car.

Violent right-wing groups took over the peaceful protest and injured citizens and law enforcement as they threw rocks and iron bars at them. Following the hours-long tensions, after the For Freedom rally activists left and the police escorted the journalists, the radical protesters took down and burnt the LGBT, as well as European Union, flags. Yesterday, Georgian Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava raised the European Union flag in front



► Georgian Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava raised the European Union flag in front of the Georgian parliament again, after the radical violent groups took it down and burnt it.

of the Georgian parliament again, stating that "destruction of the EU flag is unacceptable."

The events caused critical responses from international partners. The US Department of State condemned the violent attacks on civic activists, community members, and journalists. Ned Price, Department Spokesperson stressed during the press briefing on Wednesday that Georgia's leaders and its law enforcement officials are obligated to protect the constitutional rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

Members of the European Parliament have made a joint statement, decrying the violent actions of July 5, when civil activists, community members, and journalists were physically assaulted by the radical groups.

"Unfortunately, the Georgian authorities and religious representatives failed to speak loud and clear against homophobic rhetoric in the run-up to the Pride March. We deplore the Georgian government's lack of readiness to guarantee the safety of this gathering devoted to tolerance," reads the joint statement.

The MEPs reminded the Georgian government that an EU membership candidate country should have "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities."

# Lessons Learned From Failed March of Dignity

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The events of July 5-6 in the center of Tbilisi presented a new reality. The Dignity March on Rustaveli Avenue, which was supposed to be the central event of the LGBTQI+ rights week, did not take place. The participants of the well-organized counter protest organized a series of violence in the center of the city - by attacking journalists and taking a sharp anti-Western stance.

Protecting the rights of the LGBT community is considered a weak point in Georgian democracy, and special attention is paid to it by local NGOs, pro-Western political forces, and our Western friends. Holding pride weeks and various public rallies is considered to be an important part of protecting the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. It is no secret that a certain part of the Georgian society (let's not get into numbers) is against the pride week and public rallies.

This has been going on for years. Free media pays great

attention to gay rights and actively supports various events on behalf of the community, but the opponent's organizing skills aren't weak either.

The Georgian Patriarchate considers the public speeches of the LGBTQI+ community unacceptable and plans large-scale counter rallies against it. Opponents see the LGBTQI+ community's public speeches as propaganda for such a life, which they say is unacceptable to the Orthodox Church and Georgian national traditions.

The "March of Honor" planned by the LGBT community's human rights organization "Tbilisi Pride" did not take place on July 5, but the organizers postponed it due to the current situation. The contraction was distinguished from such rallies held in previous years by the existence of well-trained and organized radical groups.

The alleged reason for their protest was the potential public rally of the LGBT community, but the radical groups turned their aggression against journalists, smashed equipment

and beat more than 50 of them, ransacked the offices of two NGOs, protest tents in front of the parliament building, and dropped the EU flag.

On July 6, when Democratic forces staged a protest in front of parliament, they were surrounded by radical groups. The police did not allow them to disperse the rally this time, but in the end, the radicals considered themselves the winners. The police made sure the pride activists left the place, and in front of the parliament, radicals took the EU flag down.

Georgian media called the groups of people who rallied on Rustaveli Avenue on July 5 and 6 "radical pro-Russian (or pro-Putin) forces." Judging by the results, Russia has done a good job in this direction as well.

Russia can not remove the image of an aggressor in Georgia. The anti-Turkish propaganda, which was supposed to remind Georgians of a historical enemy, did not work.

It was much more effective to discredit the West in presenting it as an enemy of Orthodoxy and

national values.

The LGBT community occupies one of the central places in propaganda in this direction. "The EU is to protect the LGBT community. The EU and the West mean the loss of Orthodoxy and national values. Western ambassadors are rudely interfering in the internal affairs of our country," is the essence of this propaganda.

The EU flag has been raised in front of the parliament building for 17 years and until now, no one had dared to remove it, not even such violent groups.

Statements were made by the free media and the opposition, according to which the government of the Georgian Dream did not act properly to suppress the violent radical groups on July 5 and 6. On July 5, police forces were disproportionately small, on July 6, the number of police officers was much higher, and they were able to protect protesters from violent groups. But the government acts in a completely different way against the actions that it does not like.

Special equipment units,

water cannons, gas and rubber bullets were used to disperse peaceful protests outside Gavrilov's night or at the CEC. On July 5 and 6, the government did not resort to such a method, otherwise it would have easily dealt with the 'violent groups'. Such a 'limited response' from the government to radical groups has the opposition thinking that these groups will be nudged and 'activated' at the government's convenience. Local self-government elections are approaching, which has the significance of a referendum.

It is possible that violent groups include people who are usually used against the opposition. The Georgian Dream condemned the violence, but to some extent distanced itself from the LGBTQI+ community. This is also a pre-election calculation, because active LGBTQI+ support means losing the support of conservative circles in the society. It seems that the time left before the elections will contain many more surprises.

## Tikaradze presented the 10-year plan of the Ministry

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs Ekaterine Tikaradze briefed the citizens and members of the government on the achievements made by the Ministry in 2019-2021 and presented the 10-year plan of the ministry as well.

According to Tikaradze, the structural and personnel renewal of the ministry took place in 2019-2021. As part of the systemic change, the terms of financial compensation to clinics have been adjusted for the centralized management



In addition to the web portal, citizens can register for vaccinations through the hotline.

of state health programs, in particular, the 3-month funding interval has been reduced by one month, resulting in a debt reduction of €200 million. The state programs were centralized. The limit for the chemotherapy/radiation therapy component of oncology patients has been increased by €8000. In 2019-2021, the service pricing system was standardized and costs were optimized. Due to the radically different prices and out-of-pocket payments in the institutions, the implementation of a unified tariff policy for medical services has begun as

According to the minister, within the framework of the tariff, the state has started providing cardiac-defibrillators to patients free of charge.

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<b>THURSDAY</b>		<b>JULY 8</b>
Day		Sunny High: <b>32°C</b>
Night		Partly cloudy Low: <b>20°C</b>
<b>FRIDAY</b>		<b>JULY 9</b>
Day		Rain High: <b>26°C</b>
Night		Rain Low: <b>19°C</b>

published by **The Messenger**

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US DOLLAR - 3.1478 | EURO - 3.7289 | GBP - 4.3597 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.2874 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4122 |

## EU commissioner Varhelyi visits Georgia

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

During the meeting with MPs at European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi has arrived in Tbilisi as part of his July 6-9 visit to South Caucasus. Várhelyi met with Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava, representatives of all parliamentary political parties, the Prime Minister of Georgia, and Georgian Orthodox Church Patriarch Ilia II. The Commissioner, together with EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell, also met with business and youth representatives.



► According to Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze, the EU's four-year Economic and Investment Plan will focus on developing the business sector, stimulating job creation, and increasing the salaries of Georgian citizens.

► “The EU stands by Georgia and its people, including in challenging times such as the fight against COVID-19 crisis and political polarization,” European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Oliver Várhelyi stated after a meeting with the PM of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili.

During the meeting with MPs at the legislative, the conversation touched upon the implementation of the EU-mediated April 19 agreement. The Enlargement Commissioner called on all parties to sign the agreement and work together to implement it. The focus was also made on

the upcoming elections, and the work of international observers.

European Commissioner discussed the July 5-6 events as well, expressing gratitude to the parliament of Georgia for raising the EU flag outside the Parliament again, after aggressive right-wing protesters groups took over the protest space and burnt

the European Union and LGBT flags on July 6.

“Violence and vandalism are utterly unacceptable. The freedom of expression unhindered by violence or any discrimination needs to be upheld,” wrote Várhelyi on Twitter.

Várhelyi stated at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili that everyone should have the right to unite, gather and express their opinions freely. Várhelyi presented the EU's recently launched Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership countries and Georgia, which mobilizes “€23 billion to leverage up to €17 billion investments”. According to Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze, the EU's four-year plan for economic support to Georgia will focus on developing the business sector, creating new jobs, and increasing salaries.

At the meeting with the Georgian Patriarch on July 6, Várhelyi reaffirmed the EU's support to Georgia's territorial integrity. As the Georgian Patriarchate reports, the commissioner visited several Georgian cathedrals, including the Jvari Monastery located in Mtskheta.

The Commissioner will also meet with Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, and Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani during his stay in Tbilisi.

## Tikaradze presented the 10-year plan of the Ministry at the Republic Hospital

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As a result of the institutional strengthening of the Regulatory Agency, the system for identifying and responding to violations has been improved.

According to Tikaradze, work has begun on the introduction of a telemedicine system, for which the state has purchased 50 units of telemedicine systems. At the same time, funding for state programs, the number of services, and geographical coverage increased in the last 2 years.

In terms of emergency coordination and emergency care center, 218 new vehicles were handed over to the ambulance fleet. 57 new district administrative buildings were opened. The ambulance of Tbilisi and the regions were transferred to the unified management.

The state cash payments, old-age pensions, social packages, and assistance to socially vulnerable children have increased. The amount of funding for the State Agency for Care and Victims of Trafficking in the State Agency for Social Rehabilitation and Child Care has increased by 5 million.



► “Access to healthcare is one of the main priorities for our government,” the PM said.

According to Tikaradze, the process of developing alternative care services is actively underway within the framework of international cooperation.

The number of beneficiaries in orphanages has significantly decreased. With the continued support of the state to strengthen families, 523 children were returned to their biological families and work began on the establishment of a long-term child care medical and social center.

Speaking at the presentation of the 10-year plan of the Ministry, Tikaradze said that the main priority of the ministry is to significantly improve the quality of life of the population.

The plan envisages universal access to health services at all stages of life. In particular, in 2021-2030, the surveillance of communicable diseases will be strengthened, effective mechanisms for health promotion will be introduced, and access to maternal and child health and reproductive health services will be improved.

In her speech, the Minister of Health also said that the Ministry will be more focused.