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Georgian Dream annuls April 19 Agreement



► According to Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze, the ruling party was the only side fulfilling the EU-proposed Agreement.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On Wednesday, ruling Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze announced the EU-brokered April 19 Agreement as annulled, citing that the document 'had fulfilled its mission' and 'exhausted itself' 100 days after signing as the majority of opposition parties refrained from joining the document. As he stated, by annulling the agreement, the political processes in the country will continue following the constitutional order.

Kobakhidze thanked European Council President Charles Michel for his efforts and support and stated that the agreement positively affected the development of political processes in the short run and 'forced the radical opposition to stop sabotage against state interests'.

Kobakhidze accused opposition parties of non-fulfillment of the agreement. According to him, the United National Movement, the party which won the most opposition seats in parliament, refused to sign the deal and the other opposition parties were consistently violating the document. As he remarked, the ruling party was the only side that was fulfilling the agreement.

"Although more than half of the opposition MPs have not yet signed the agreement, we can see that our international partners do not find it necessary to strongly urge the radical opposition to sign the document and participate in its implementation," GD party chair noted. "Single-sided royalty to the agreement is insulting to our party and our voters will not tolerate such an unprincipled behavior from us," He added.



► According to 18 local civil society organizations, Georgian Dream is ready to "sacrifice the country's prosperity, Western orientation, democratic development and friendly relations with strategic partners" to retain power.

Kobakhidze noted that holding municipal elections under the EU-mediated agreement, while the major opposition party refused to sign it 'would be harmful to Georgia's interests.'

"In this situation, there is no alternative to annulling the EU-mediated agreement," said Kobakhidze.

According to him, the ruling party is ready to 'express goodwill' and call snap

elections even if the Georgian Dream party receives 53% in the municipal elections, instead of 43%, as proposed in the EU-mediated agreement.

"We will do so if the opposition parties show us with their actions that our political system is ripe enough for an effective coalition governance and such a regime will not harm the state interests," he noted.

Kobakhidze also said that even after the annulment of the agreement, reforms proposed by the document will still be carried out.

The Ruling party's decision has received backlash from the opposition. Several opposition leaders have urged opposition MPs to give up their mandates and the Lelo opposition party has stated that they might boycott the upcoming municipal elections. According to Mamuka Khazaradze, Chairman of Political Union Lelo for Georgia, 'GD has betrayed our Western partners, the Georgian people, peace, and stability.'

Leader of opposition party Girchi - More Freedom Zurab Japaridze has left parliament, stating that the agreement was his reason for entering the state legislature. Japaridze believes that the ruling party's decision is equivalent to the 'rejection of this country's Euro-Atlantic future.' According to him, the reason behind GD's decision is that the ruling party knows they will not be able to take 43 percent of votes in the municipal elections.

18 local civil society organizations have released a statement, saying that the decision 'constitutes a straightforward rejection of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic course and the peaceful development of the country through democratic reforms'.

The ruling party and the opposition signed the agreement proposed by European Council President Charles Michel after 6 months of political deadlock following the 2020 parliamentary elections. The agreement has not been signed by the United National Movement's bloc, Alliance of Patriots, European Georgia, and Labor party.

PACE President Daems pays official visit to Tbilisi

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Rik Daems arrived in Georgia for a 2-day official visit on July 27. He held meetings with the PM Gharibashvili and Foreign Affairs Minister Davit Zalkaliani, Parliament Speaker Kuchava, and Representatives of Opposition Parties.

During the meeting with government officials, the focus was on the positive role of Georgia in the Caucasus and the successful mediation of the PM of Georgia, which resulted in the release of 15 Armenian citizens and the delivery of important maps of mined territories to Azerbaijan.

“The parliamentary delegations of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia will try to resolve the issues in which Georgia will play a leading role,” Daems said.

Talks also concerned the agreement reached through the mediation of Charles Michel. At all meetings, Daems drew focus on the implementation of the agreement. He has urged all Georgian political parties to practically implement the April 19 EU-mediated agreement which includes large-scale reforms including in the electoral and judiciary fields.

Daems said that the EU-mediated agreement, which solved a 6-month political crisis in Georgia, should be ‘fully implemented in practice without further delay’ and that will push Georgia towards ‘full European integration.’

“Stop the game and put it into practice, because its components are extremely important,” Daems said.

He also underscored that the recommendations and opinions of the Venice Commission, a body with a high worldwide reputation for constitutional reform and the electoral system, are always needed when carrying out reforms and the cases where they were not taken into account are grounds for debate.

Gharibashvili noted that the ruling team has fulfilled the provisions of the agreement and the process continues, yet underscored that a large part of the opposition has not signed the Charles Michel Agreement, which is an obstacle to stabilizing and calming the political situation.

The parties also discussed the



► Kakha Kuchava will be the main speaker of the Conference of Chairmen of Parliament of the Council of Europe member countries, which will be held in Athens in September.



► PACE President called on Georgian politicians to reduce polarization through de-escalating emotions and attempt to be part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.

2021 local government elections. The PM noted that the government is motivated to hold the elections in a calm and transparent environment and addressed Daems with a request to send as many observers as possible to prevent anyone from speculating on the elections for any reason.

Daems said that he has ‘never heard’ of municipal elections and ‘something like a referendum’ being conducted simultaneously as is planned in Georgia for the October 2 municipal elections.

“I do not know how it will work, it's a bit strange, you are going to elect mayors and it is somewhat a referendum between the opposition and the government. It's interesting, but I'm not going to interfere.”

Per the EU-mediated agreement, if the ruling party receives less than 43% of total votes in the municipal elections, repeat parliamentary elections must be held in the country, as the opposition has demanded this since the 2020 parliamentary elections. However, as Georgian Dream announced on July 28, the ruling party exited the agreement and announced it would be annulled. Recall that the opposition United National Movement, European Georgia, and the Labour parties have not signed the agreement in the first place.

The EU-mediated agreement was proposed by the European Council President Charles Michel to help the Georgian political parties resolve a political crisis

that began after the 2020 parliamentary elections when Georgian opposition parties refused to take up their seats in parliament because they said the elections were rigged by Georgian Dream. The Temporary Investigatory Commission of the Parliament concluded otherwise - note that major opposition parties have boycotted this commission as well.

The meeting also focused on the events of July 5-6. “If anyone has a perception that the government is going against media freedom, I will be against it. Freedom of speech and of the press is important,” the PACE president commented, clarifying that there is a difference between your own opinion and what is happening.

The press can have an opinion, but it must be clear that it is an opinion and not just about facts. According to him, violence is completely unacceptable and it is unfortunate what happened to the media. Violence in the streets should be controlled as much as possible, but the authorities are not always able to do so fully.

Daems believes that all the details of why this happened, who encouraged it, and for what reason will be clarified and all perpetrators will be held accountable. This is something that society needs to talk about to make it never happen again. According to him, the press has a huge responsibility to try to ease the polarization on one hand and gov't has the duty to protect all citizens, including journalists to do their job.

Parties also spoke about the situation in the occupied territories of Georgia. The PM stressed the importance of intensifying efforts to secure the release of the illegally detained Irakli Bebuia. He also said it was important for the international community to continue to speak out about the Russian Federation's illegal actions and human rights abuses in the occupied regions of Georgia and to take appropriate steps to ensure that the Russian Federation fulfills its political and legal obligations, including the cease-fire agreement. The necessity of entering international monitoring missions in the regions of Georgia occupied by Russia was also emphasized.

The PM noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Georgian government made every effort to assist citizens living in occupied Abkhazia, including free medical treatment and admission to universities without examinations. The head of government expressed concern that the de facto government of occupied Tskhinvali was refusing humanitarian aid offered by the central government.

He also reviewed the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of Georgia and called it very successful. In addition, Daems clarified that the Georgian delegation to the PACE will be joined by 4 members from the opposition by the beginning of September. At the end of the speech, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly expressed his strong support for Georgia, including the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and thanked the Minister of FA for the close cooperation, including the warm hospitality and the meeting.

THURSDAY		JULY 29
Day		Light rain High: 23°C
Night		A few clouds Low: 18°C
FRIDAY		JULY 30
Day		A few clouds High: 29°C
Night		Clear skies Low: 19°C

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Public Defender urges political official to refrain from obstruction of journalistic activities



► “Journalistic activities are endangered, and due to safety risks, this can have a chilling effect on the media and may lead to self-censorship, which will ultimately undermine the media freedom,” says Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria has responded to frequent attacks on journalists in recent weeks, stating that there has been an increase in the number of cases of physical and verbal abuse of journalists and obstruction of their activities after the violent events of July 5.

According to the Public Defender, in a situation where society has become highly polarized and increasingly intolerant of a different opinion, instead of political officials condemning such actions, they often show disrespectful attitudes towards journalists, which according to the ombudsman, encourages violence against media representatives.

“Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies do not respond to all similar cases in a timely, strict, or effective manner. Organizers of the violence committed against journalists on July 5-6 have not been identified and appropriate measures have been taken to bring them to justice, which creates a syndrome of



► Lomjaria emphasizes the vital role of a free, pluralistic and critical media environment for a democratic society.

impunity,” reads the statement published by the Public Defender.

According to the statement, these circumstances endanger journalistic activities and may

lead to self-censorship, ‘which will ultimately undermine media freedom’.

The Public Defender emphasizes the vital role of a free, pluralistic and critical media

environment for a democratic society as well as its special function in terms of the protection of human rights and the rule of law in the country. It is noted that the state is obliged to protect the

rights of journalists as persons with special status and to take appropriate measures to prevent such incidents.

The Public Defender urges the Prosecutor General’s Office of Georgia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia to respond promptly to criminal acts against journalists on or after 5-6 July and make public the results of identification and prosecution of offenders, including the organizers of actions of violent groups on July 5-6. The Public Defender urges political officials not to allow the obstruction of journalistic activities and violence against media representatives, not to discredit journalists regarding their critical views, and to publicly condemn such cases committed against them.

A total of 53 journalists were injured at the rally of right-wing activists against the Tbilisi Pride march on July 5. Even though dozens of individuals have been detained in connection with attacks on media representatives, police have not detained the right-wing rally organizers yet.