

EU, US ambassadors express regret over Georgian parliament's 'failure to reform judiciary'



► "The EU's assistance to Georgia remains conditional on progress on key reforms," said EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The approval of the constitutional changes by Georgian MPs on Tuesday was followed by severe criticism from the EU delegation and the US Embassy. The ruling party took out a clause of the draft which proposed electing General Prosecutor through a three-stage selection procedure, by the support of three-fifths of MPs. The US embassy criticized the parliament of Georgia for failing to approve the amendments "aimed at ensuring broad, multi-party support for an impartial Prosecutor General" and assessed this step as "another missed opportunity to increase the independence, transparency and integrity of Georgia's judiciary." According to the embassy, this constitutional amendment would have been an important step toward minimizing the political pressure on the Prosecutor's Office and assuring the impartiality and independence of the judiciary.

The constitutional changes, which also proposed holding the next two parliamentary elections with a two percent election



► Ruling Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze said that the US and EU Ambassadors need 'appropriate legal consultants.'

threshold and in a fully proportional electoral system, were approved with the first reading by 126 votes pro and none con. Opposition parties share the criticism of the foreign partners and state that the Georgian Dream made them choose between either supporting the lowering

of the election threshold and allowing the withdrawal of changes on the election rule of Georgia's prosecutor general, or letting the constitutional amendments flop. The US Embassy responded to such comments from opposition leaders by saying that all parties that signed the April 19 Agree-

ment were equally committed to increase the public's trust in the independence of the Prosecutor General from political interference.

According to the embassy's statement, Georgian Dream pledged on July 28 to adopt constitutional amendments in parallel with the April 19 Agreement.

"This is yet another broken promise by the ruling party to make the much-needed judicial reforms that Georgian Dream and opposition party leaders have pledged, of their own accord, to adopt," reads the statement.

According to the EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell, the amendment was aimed at reducing the risk of one party alone appointing a Prosecutor General in the future and was meant to increase the independence, transparency and quality of the Judiciary in Georgia. Hartzell recalled that the appointments to the Supreme Court in the past two years were been assessed by the OSCE/ODIHR "to lack integrity, objectivity and credibility."

EU Ambassador stressed that even though the European Union remains committed to supporting Georgia's reforms in line with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the EU's assistance to Georgia is still dependent on the progress achieved on implementing key reforms.

Head of the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party Irakli Kobakhidze stated that the proposed change over the selection of the chief prosecutor was "legal nonsense," and since the April 18 agreement is now annulled, he believes that there is no political, legal or moral obligation to reflect it in the constitution.

Kobakhidze responded to the criticism of the EU and US embassies, noting that the Ambassadors were given incorrect consultations and their statements were the result of invalid legal analysis.

The amendment that the ruling party withdrew envisaged the selection of the country's chief prosecutor by the support of three-fifths of MPs. If the parliament would not manage to elect the prosecutor general twice in this way, then he would be elected by the parliamentary majority for one year instead of six.

Supreme Court sentences wanted ex-defence minister Kezerashvili to 5 years in prison

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The former Minister of Defense of Georgia under the United National Movement (UNM) government and currently the owner of 51% share of opposition-minded Formula TV was sentenced to 5 years in prison in absentia on September 7, 2021. The verdict was made by the Georgian Supreme court for embezzlement of state-owned funds in the amount of more than € 5 million, which should have been spent on

military exercise back in 2008, during Kezerashvili's term at office.

According to the prosecution, on January 10, 2008, Kezerashvili, issued an order to sign a contract with the company registered in the offshore zone, without any grounds and without checking the company, in order to embezzle funds in favor of a related person. He also verbally instructed a person close to him, who then served as the head of the State Procurement Department of the Ministry of Defense, A. N., to sign a contract with a

company representative unconditionally, immediately, without any verification, on the same day.

This task was performed in gross violation of the requirements of the Statute of the State Procurement Department, in particular, without checking the legal value of the offered services without checking the legal entity, without the consent of the relevant departments of the Ministry of Defense and the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces. On the same day, January 10, 2008, he signed an

agreement with the company on the planned combat training of the relevant units of the Ministry of Defense. The cost of the services stipulated in the contract was set at €5 685 000, of which €5 060000 were transferred to the company's account on Kezerashvili's instructions, and the company's obligation in return - to conduct military exercises - was not fulfilled at all.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1115 | EURO - 3.6924 | GBP - 4.2936 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.2469 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4035 |

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According to the decision, Kezerashvili was found guilty of Article 182, Part 2, Subparagraph "d" and Article 3, Part 3, Subparagraph "b" of the Criminal Code of Georgia and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He was also deprived of the right to hold a position in the public service for 3 years. The sentence was halved on the basis of the Law of Georgia on Amnesty of December 29, 2012, and finally Kezerashvili was sentenced to 5 years in prison and deprived of the right to hold a position for 1 year and 6 months.

As for the former head of the Procurement Department, who was convicted in the same case and sentenced by the Tbilisi City and Appeal Courts for the crime under Article 342, Part 1 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, the guilty verdict against him remained unchanged.

The Supreme Court panel of 3 members of the Supreme Court - Shalva Tadumadze, Levan Tevzadze and Merab Gabinashvili, ruled against Kezerashvili.

Recall that in 2017, the Court of Appeals acquitted Kezer-



► Former Defence Minister of Georgia Kezerashvili has been on the run since 2012.

ashvili in his case, which was appealed by the Prosecutor's Office to the Supreme Court. Shalva Tadumadze was the Prosecutor General at that time. 5 separate proceedings were launched against him back in 2012, related to money laundering, embezzlement, corruption and abuse of authority, although he has not been convicted in any of them so far. The court acquitted Kezerashvili, among others, in the case of alienation of Imedi TV. Interpol declared a search for Kezerashvili by red notice

in 2014. However, it terminated the search the next year. The GD officials said that Interpol's decision was connected with a changed methodology, while Kezerashvili's lawyer stated that the case was believed to be politically motivated. Georgia has requested Kezerashvili's extradition from France and the UK twice. However, the request was declined.

Kezerashvili responded to the guilty verdict of the Supreme Court on Facebook, pledging to appeal this 'shameful decision'

by the Supreme Court in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

"The decision made by Ivanishvili's personal lawyer and former Prosecutor General in the Supreme Court is another step on his part to adjust the judiciary to its own narrow political tasks... Over the years, I have been an active supporter of any manifestation of the struggle for freedom in Georgia - be it civic activism or support for Western-based media free from government influence," Kezerashvili wrote.

He accused PM Garibashvili of orchestrating the court process - "that is exactly him who thinks this will blackmail me or the television I support."

Kezerashvili, who is described as one of the wealthiest former UNM officials, served as the head of Georgia's financial police between 2004 and 2006, while between 2006 and 2008 he was the defence minister. He was one of the first UNM officials who fled the country shortly after the 2012 parliamentary elections in which the Georgian Dream coalition defeated the UNM.



► Prosecutor General's Office is continuing the investigation to find the criminally embezzled funds belonging to the Ministry of Defense, transferred from Georgia to different countries, to identify the final owners of the illegally misappropriated funds and the persons involved in the criminal scheme

First outlet village to open in Georgia in 2022, PM says

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

In just one year, the first outlet village in Georgia will open to serve both Georgian citizens and millions of our country's visitors, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili stated in his speech at yesterday's presentation of the Outlet Village project. The project will cost about €70 million and will be implemented by the local real estate development company Domus.

Tbilisi Outlet Village was designed by one of Europe's leading architectural firms, L35. The company has designed La Roca Village near Barcelona, Las Rozas Village near Madrid as well as Mallorca and Lisboa Fashion Outlets. The exterior was inspired by the historical architecture of Tbilisi and



► Tbilisi Outlet Village was designed by one of Europe's leading architectural firms, L35.

the surrounding Georgian villages. According to the brochure, Outlet Village is unique with no comparable shopping destination within this part of the world and will offer leading global clothing brands as well as diverse food facilities.

According to Garibashvili, the

Outlet Village will create 500 new jobs during construction and will employ 2,000 people after opening.

"We are happy to have a Spanish company involved in the project's designing. It is also exciting to have our new trade space managed by an American-European



► Together with the project's investors and partners, the PM buried a symbolic time capsule to mark the launch of construction.

outlet management company," noted the PM.

He emphasized at the presentation that tourism development is one of the key priority directions of the Georgian government. According to the PM, even though the pandemic deeply damaged the tourism sector, expectations are

optimistic as the economy tends to recover very fast.

The first-ever Outlet Village in the region stretching 10 hectares of land will be located just outside Tbilisi, near Lilo. Georgian Outlet Village and Resort Group will complete the initial phase of construction in 2022.

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 9

Day ☁️ Cloudy
High: 23°C

Night ☁️ Partly cloudy
Low: 18°C

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 10

Day ☁️ A few clouds
High: 26°C

Night ☁️ Clear skies
Low: 16°C

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