

Reforms, Investments, Security - EaP Summit Adopts Joint Declaration

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The 6th EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit was held in Brussels on 15 December, which, in the words of European Council President Charles Michel, "is an opportunity to demonstrate that, despite today's challenges, the EaP is of strategic importance."

This importance and commitment to the commitments to the welfare, security and democratic development of the EaP countries is clearly underlined in the Summit Declaration.

The summit was hosted by the leaders of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan, President of the European Council, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and High Representative Joseph Borrell. Belarus, whose relations with the European Union have deteriorated since the 2020 elections, did not attend the summit.

The summit discussed the EaP's updated 2020 agenda, which aims to restore and improve sustainability, and pursue ambitious reforms.

The agenda envisages a € 2.3 billion economic and investment plan for the Eastern Partnership countries. The summit was divided into five main areas - economics, governance, digital, environment and society.

At the end of the summit, participants noted their commitment to shared values, accountability, inclusiveness and diversity. They condemned the actions of the



► The EU together with these 3 countries will explore options for enhanced sectoral cooperation such as: the twin green and digital transitions, connectivity, energy security, justice and home affairs, strategic communication and healthcare.

Belarusian authorities and the mobilization of Russian troops along the borders of Ukraine.

The one-day summit of the EaP on December 15 traditionally ended with the adoption of the Declaration of Heads of State.

"The EU continues to stress the importance of the principle of inclusivity, providing equal access to opportunities and resources to all interested partners," the document says.

The declaration states that the EU will continue to support the implementation of

the EaP European school in Georgia along with the support for culture and creative industries.

The document also emphasises that the EU remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity within their internationally recognised borders, independence, and sovereignty of all Eastern partners. Joint declaration calls for renewed efforts for promoting the peaceful settlement of unresolved conflicts in the EaP region based on the principles and norms of international law.

According to the President of the Euro-

pean Council, the summit identified 4 main areas - first, that the partnership is based on the rule of law and democratic governance. The summit participants support the further strengthening of democracy in the region, the protection of fundamental human rights and the promotion of an inclusive society.

The next important issue is commitment to reform. According to Michelle, the summit was an opportunity to once again express the ambition to carry out reforms that will be aimed at meeting the expectations of citizens.

The 3rd direction is the investment package. According to Michelle, the EU proves to be a serious and reliable partner. The EU will support specific projects, small and medium-sized business initiatives that will contribute to the development of the partnership. The EaP should facilitate the region's greater integration into the EU, which includes the introduction of unified roaming, the expansion of Erasmus for students, greater integration into Eurozone, and more.

The last area highlighted by Michel is security. He said the EU wants to see a prosperous as well as a secure and stable region. Prosperity and security even help each other.

The declaration expresses concern over the recent escalation of the situation in the region and reiterates that there is no alternative to the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Garibashvili Meets NATO Sec-Gen in Brussels

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Within the framework of the visit of the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili to Brussels the meeting NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was held at the NATO headquarters. Stoltenberg announced that NATO would continue to provide political and practical support to its partners, and expects Georgia to maintain democratic standards. "It is vital that we continue to work on judicial reform, media independence and security sector accountability," said Jens Stoltenberg. As SecGen noted, NATO expects Georgia to adhere to the democratic standards on which it has worked hard in recent years: "We also urge you to work with the opposition to resolve political differences, reduce polarization rhetoric and actions."

According to Stoltenberg, NATO will continue to work on strengthening Georgia's defense capabilities - with naval support, joint exercises and information sharing. Traditionally, Stoltenberg thanked Georgia for its contribution to NATO efforts in Afghanistan over the years.

"We agreed that NATO would be very vigilant to prevent further escalation. Any further aggression by Russia will have a high price and at the same time will have very serious political and economic consequences for Russia. Georgia and Ukraine



► "We continue to call on Russia to stop recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to withdraw its military forces," Stoltenberg said.

have the right to choose their allies, and Russia has no right to dictate that choice," he said. According to the Georgian PM, every state has the right to choose its own foreign policy course, and for Georgia, NATO membership is 'a key issue in the country's foreign and security policy, which is supported by the vast majority of the Georgian nation'. He also said that Georgia is working closely with the Alliance to develop a clear vision for Georgia's integration into NATO.

"We have all the practical tools for membership and we are in active dialogue with the allies to prepare a political decision on Georgia's accession to NATO" According to the PM, it is time to intensify the process of Georgia's integration into NATO and make concrete political decisions.

Gharibashvili underscored that Georgia was working diligently on the practical implementation of the 2008 Bucharest Summit - where the Allies decided that Georgia would become a member of the Alliance. As the Head of Government noted, Georgia's practical cooperation with NATO is successfully developing within the framework of the Black Sea Security Partnership.

During his visit to Brussels PM also held official meetings with European Council President Charles Michel, European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi, as well as foreign leaders.

EXCHANGE RATES:

US DOLLAR - 3.0957 | EURO - 3.4873 | GBP - 4.1034 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.1942 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3474 |

EIB to Invest €34 million in Georgia to Deliver High-Speed Internet connections

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit was held on December 15 in Brussels, where many important decisions were made in terms of aiding EaP countries.

The joint declaration that was adopted by the end of the summit voiced multiple directions of EaP's future agenda, including plans for future assistance. Amidst the global pandemic declaration states that the EU will continue to support partner countries in addressing the pandemic, the vaccination process, to fight against anti-vaccine disinformation and to foster longer term health resilience.

Over €2.5 billion has been mobilized through the rapid Team Europe support package since 2020 and 13 million vaccine doses were donated to partner countries

via the COVAX Facility and through the EU Vaccine Sharing mechanism.

The EaP summit adopted a new agenda which will be underpinned by the €2.3 billion regional economic and investment plan with a potential to mobilize up to €17 billion in public and private investments for the region.

EIB President Werner Hoyer joined EU and Eastern Neighbourhood heads of state to pledge support for economic development and sustainable recovery in EaP countries.

€171 million of EU financing (EIB loans and EU grants) signed for strategic investments during the summit in Brussels underlined the EU commitment to sustainable and resilient socio-economic growth in the region. As the EU bank, the EIB noted that it fully supports the EaP's agenda



for recovery, resilience and reforms underpinned by the EU. The EIB has provided €11 billion of financing to the EaP countries since the establishment of the partnership in 2009. In parallel with the Summit, the EU signed a new agreement with Georgia, under which the European In-

vestment Bank (EIB) will invest 34 million to expand the Internet network in Georgia.

This investment will provide fast and quality Internet access to more than 1,000 Georgian citizens living in more than 1,000 villages and settlements in Georgia. It envisages the laying of 5,000 km

of fiber-optic cable and open access to the telecommunications infrastructure for telecommunications companies in Georgia, so that they can provide high-speed internet services to citizens.

According to the EU, this project will be one of the 5 leading initiatives for Georgia and will help the country reduce digital inequality and restore the economy after the pandemic.

The EaP program was approved in 2009 to bring Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia - as well as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine - closer to the EU, but without a clear offer of future membership. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have since signed an association agreement with the EU, including free trade. These countries are united in an associated trio and demand deeper integration with Europe.

Inflation Rate to Return to the Pre-Pandemic 3% Index By the End of 2022, Economy Minister Says



▶ Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava announced at the plenary sitting of the Parliament of Georgia that the inflation rate in Georgia will return to 3% by the end of 2022 and noted that high inflation is

'one of the most important issues' the Georgian population currently faces. She noted that in 2021 the inflation rate in the country 'instantly tripled,' due to the global pandemic. "As a result of the coordinated and targeted policy of the government and the National Bank (NBG), the NBG and the Inter-



▶ Economy Minister stated that overcoming poverty in the country is one of the key priorities of the government.

national Monetary Fund (IMF) the inflation rate will return to the pre-pandemic index of three percent by the end of the next year," the minister claimed.

Turnava stated that Georgia must focus on the industrial development that would help reduce Georgia's dependency on export, especially for food products.

According to the minister, 2021 was qualitatively different from the previous 2020, when they did not yet know any other and more effective way to fight the pandemic, other than closing borders and the economy. "In this context, 2021 has become a real breakthrough," Turnava noted. As the minister stressed, a very

important decision was made in the spring when the government refused to impose a lockdown and focused more on vaccination. "We opened the national economy, created a favorable environment for the national currency exchange rate stability, returned predictability to business that makes good precondition for further peaceful development," the minister said, adding that 2021 is a year of rapid recovery and a good precondition for further peaceful development.

The minister also focused on the issue of poverty in the country and underlined that it is one of the key priorities of the government to overcome this problem. In this regard, she welcomed the recent initiative of Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili which will provide jobs for socially vulnerable citizens who are capable of working instead of social assistance. The minister also noted that the government aims to increase the employment rate in Georgia by developing Georgian business and manufacturing.

FRIDAY DECEMBER 17

Day Mostly cloudy
High: 11°C

Night Partly cloudy
Low: 2°C

SATURDAY DECEMBER 18

Day Partly cloudy
High: 13°C

Night Partly cloudy
Low: 2°C

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