

## EU Official Borrell Concerned Over Georgia's 'Stalled' Judiciary, Electoral Reforms

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has stated that he shares the concerns of Georgian opposition about the 'stalled' judiciary and electoral reforms. In his letter sent to eight Georgian opposition politicians, Borrell stresses that these "reforms go to the essence of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement."

Borrell's letter reads that the timely adoption and implementation of inclusive reforms will facilitate Georgia's progress in further building the country's democracy and resilience, and "ending the damaging polarization currently affecting the Georgian political system."

He underlined that even though the primary responsibility lies with the government, both the government and the opposition should contribute to the de-escalation and to pursuing a 'constructive reform agenda'.



► Borrell underscored that those countries which remain committed to reforms will benefit from the EU.



► According to the High-Level Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, the EU will continue to advocate for ambitious reforms based on the EU-Georgia Association Agreement.

Borrell also stressed that it is important to pay special attention to the justice sector and democratic reforms.

"As outlined in the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 15 December, the scope and depth of our cooperation will continue to be shaped amongst other aspects, by the pace and quality of reforms," he noted, adding that those countries which remain committed to implementing reforms will benefit from the EU. According to the High Representative, the EU will continue to advocate for ambitious reforms based on the EU-Georgia Association Agreement.

Borrell's letter comes in response to the opposition's letter sent to European Council President Charles Michel, Euro-

pean Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi, and Josep Borrell on December 9. Eight opposition politicians expressed concerns regarding political development in the country and the ruling Georgian Dream (GD)'s withdrawal from the EU-mediated April 19 agreement. The address reads that before annulling the document, GD 'undermined' it by taking actions contradicting the agreement.

"Continuing judicial appointments, stalling reforms of the judiciary, incomplete implementation of the electoral reforms, and selective reading of the agreement on amnesty law are just a few examples of this," the Georgian opposition's letter reads.

## UNM Announces Mass Hunger Strike

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

A total of 9 tents have been set out on Kakheti Highway close to the central office of the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party with about 300 people on hunger strike, following the announcement of a mass protest demanding ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili's release on December 21st at a rally in central Tbilisi.

Head of the UNM Nika Melia stated at the rally on Rustaveli Avenue that more than 300 people are joining the protest, noting that "the hunger strike will not end until Saakashvili is released from prison."

"It's a tough decision, it's a constitutional right, it's a non-violent method of protest, but it's tough. In the process of making these difficult decisions, I may not be able to advise many people and I will not be able to force anyone to take this difficult step, but the more massive it is, the higher the consolidation, the sooner the result will be," Melia said, emphasizing that they will not tolerate the imprisonment of the third president of the country and hunger strike protest will not stop until Saakashvili is ousted.

According to Melia, the location of the



► "This mass hunger strike will last until Mikheil Saakashvili is released."

UNM party office was chosen because children shouldn't have to see this during the New Year events on the central streets and he also does not want to interfere with President Zurabishvili in the reconciliation process.

Mikheil Saakashvili called on the hunger strikers demanding his release to be under constant medical supervision and to receive mineral supplements.

"I call on my comrades to be constantly under medical supervision, to take mineral supplements regularly. It was with the help of these mineral supplements, which does not violate the protocol of the famine, that the famous Ukrainian director Anatoly Sentsov, who was captured, endured 120 days of starvation in Russian prisons.

Hopefully, we will not need so much time, because in addition to the hunger strike, other protests are taking place in the country against the background of the complete collapse of the government and such oppression and ridicule of the people. Because of the great injustices that affect every citizen daily," Saakashvili said, adding that by such self-sacrifice his supporters risk their

Continued to page 2



EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.0958 | EURO - 3.4964 | GBP - 4.1038 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.1862 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3621 |

# Saakashvili On the Mass Hunger Strike

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Former President Mikheil Saakashvili calls on the hunger strikers to take mineral supplements. In addition, he says, there are other protests in the country.

"I would like to remind you that as a result of massive famines, Mahatma Gandhi gained independence from India, while Mandela and his comrades overthrew apartheid. My friend Anatoly Sharansky has been on hunger strike for more than a year in total, and his topic has been at the forefront of Reagan and Gorbachev meetings. Sharansky was a comrade-in-arms of Merab Kostava, who also starved for a long time and many times.



Anatoly then went to Israel, where he became a minister and published a book on democracy, one of President George W. Bush's favorite books, which

was one of the sources of Bush's inspiration for standing by the Rose Revolution and constantly talking about Georgia.

The widespread mass move-

ment of the national movement in Georgia was started by the mass hunger strike of 1988. Starvation is not a safe process. The famous Georgian dissident Nazi Shamanauri, who died in a psychiatric prison as a result of a long hunger strike, was killed. Famous Ukrainian poet and dissident Anatoly Marchenko died of starvation in the Donetsk colony.

Therefore, I urge my comrades to be constantly under medical supervision to take mineral supplements regularly. It was with the help of these mineral supplements, which does not violate the protocol of the famine, that the famous Ukrainian director Anatoly Sentsov, who was captured, en-

duced 120 days of starvation in Russian prisons.

Hopefully, we will not need so much time, because in addition to the hunger strike, other protests are taking place in the country against the background of the complete collapse of the government and such oppression and ridicule of the people. Because of the great injustice that affects every citizen on a daily basis," Saakashvili wrote.

On December 21, party chairman Nika Melia said that a mass hunger strike would begin demanding the release of Mikheil Saakashvili. Tents were set up at the UNM headquarters at night. Part of the party leaders are starving along with activists and citizens.

# UNM Announces Mass Hunger Strike

From page 1

own life and health to defeat injustice and such sacrifice has defeated the British and Soviet empires. He also reminded those who see hunger as a 'marginal' and 'ineffective' form of protest, citing the examples of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Anatoly Sharanshki.

Among the protesters are members of the UNM, including Nika Melia, Giorgi Baramidze, Akaki Minashvili, Giorgi Botkovieli and civil activists.

Opposition MP Levan Ioseliani from the Citizens party responded to the issue and noted that it is 'impossible for a person to be released from prison because of someone else's hunger.'

Georgian Dream MP Sozar Subari said the UNM's action is 'pointless,' adding that 'it would be good if they returned to the political process.' GD member Beka Davituliani also thinks the protest 'won't change anything,' calling the demand of the protesters 'utopian.'

The former president was convicted in absentia on two counts of abuse of power and sentenced to six years in prison. He faces additional charges including illegal seizure of property, embezzlement, illegal rally dispersal, and illegal border crossing.



► A rally demanding Saakashvili's release was held on Rustaveli Avenue on his birthday.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 23

**Day** ☀️ Mostly sunny  
High: 1°C  
**Night** ☁️ Partly cloudy  
Low: -5°C

FRIDAY DECEMBER 24

**Day** ☀️ Sunny sky  
High: 3°C  
**Night** ☁️ Partly cloudy  
Low: -6°C

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