

## EU releases 2021 annual report on EU-Georgia Association Agreement

By Liza Mchedlidze

The European Union has published an annual report on the association agreement with Georgia. The report reviews the reforms carried out by Georgia within the framework of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement over the past year.

The report states that convergence with EU legislation continued during 2021 and the first half of 2022, although key areas of rule of law and governance, including the judiciary remain of concern for the EU. Also, the report reads that there was a significant setback in relation to human rights.

A report prepared by the External Action Service and the European Commission shows that the EU-Georgia Association Agreement was still the driving force behind the reforms. Overall, alignment of national legislation with EU legislation under the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) is well underway and progressing. Inclusive and ecologically balanced growth was a central element of EU-Georgia cooperation. In 2021, the EU continued its assistance related to the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to a strong and sustainable socio-economic recovery, which laid the foundation for the implementation of the Eastern Partnership Economic and Investment Plan.

According to the report, "in 2021, challenges threatened to undermine the country's democratic foundations and a setback in terms of the rule of law. This is a renewed and serious commitment to democratic consolidation, judicial reforms, actions to reduce political polar-



ization and strengthen the rule of law, and to guarantee a professional, pluralistic and independent media environment." It shows the necessity. These are the essential priorities for Georgia to move forward on the European path".

The report lists specific issues that the EU considers problematic: restrictions on the functioning of the parliament after the 2020 parliamentary elections, flaws in the conduct of local elections, July 2021 violence against journalists and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people without further substantive investigation, Information about hearings of part of the Georgian and diplomatic community.

"Over the past year, the reform of the judicial system has been delayed and even regressed in key areas. Several important laws were passed by the Parliament in an accelerated manner without the necessary consultation and analysis on compliance with EU or Council of Europe standards. These laws affect the functioning of the judicial system, key appointment procedures, secret surveillance procedures and included the disbanding of the State Inspector Service. Also among the problematic issues was the partial implementation of the agreement reached through the mediation of Charles Michel. In 2021, the significant socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Georgia continued,

and the existing vulnerability became even more acute," the report reads.

The following issues are also problematic according to the EU report: State Inspector Service, politically sensitive court cases, media environment, cancellation of the march of pride, Gender equality and others.

In the report it is mentioned that the Public Defender and her office were under pressure because they were responding to sensitive issues.

The report generally states that Georgia has a deterioration in all key areas.

"The Public Defender and her staff actively continued to fulfill their oversight role. The recommendations issued in accordance with his mandate were only partially implemented by the Georgian authorities. The office was under pressure for speaking out on certain politically sensitive issues, including Tbilisi Pride and the conditions of imprisonment of former President Saakashvili. Attempts were made to undermine the independence of the Office of the Public Defender and question the integrity of its employees," the EU report reads.

According to the EU, media freedom in Georgia significantly worsened compared to last year, especially in relation to the safety of journalists.

"Georgia's media landscape remained pluralistic and competitive, but also highly polarised. In the 2020 World Press Freedom Index Georgia has maintained its 60th rank among 180 countries. Its Freedom House rating decreased slightly, with an aggregate "freedom score" of 61, compared to 63 in 2019."

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42 countries, including Georgia, issued a joint statement regarding the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and called on the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw its military forces and all other unauthorized personnel from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, its immediate surroundings, and all of Ukraine.

The statement was published on the website of the EU delegation.

The joint statement was developed by Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Also by the European Union.

The statement states that the unprovoked and unjustified aggressive war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine,

## Georgia and 42 countries call on Russia to withdraw its military forces from Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant



a sovereign country, is a gross violation of international law, including the UN Charter.

In the statement, the countries strongly support the fundamental importance of nuclear safety and note that Russia's control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant - Europe's largest nuclear power plant - poses a great threat to these principles.

"The deployment of Russian military personnel and weapons at the nuclear facility is unacceptable and violates the principles of safeguards to which all IAEA members are committed.

The presence of Russian military forces at the Zaporizhzhia NPP prevents the operator and the Ukrainian authorities from fulfilling their nuclear and radiation safety obligations under international conventions and IAEA safety standards and prevents the IAEA from fulfilling its safety mandate.

We call on the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw its military forces and all other unauthorized personnel from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, its immediate surroundings, and all of Ukraine so that the operator and the Ukrainian authorities can resume their

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The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

'Peace Policy will bring us closer to Unity', Gharibashvili on 30th Anniversary of War in Abkhazia

has brought unjustified destruction, displaced hundreds of thousands of people in their own homelands and, most tragically, cost the lives of many of our fellow citizens - soldiers and civilians - on both sides. Together with our entire community, I once again honor In vivid memory



August 14 marks the 30 years since the start of war in Abkhazia and the Prime Minister of Georgia released a statement regarding the date.

The Prime Minister stated that he believes that the 'peace policy' brings Georgia closer to the day when "we will continue to build a united, strong, peaceful, democratic state together with the brothers from Abkhazia and Ossetia."

"The most dramatic event in our recent history, the inter-fraternal conflict

of each of them.

I deeply believe that our policy focused on peace, mutual respect and dialogue brings closer the day when we will continue to build a united, strong, peaceful, democratic state together with our Abkhaz and Ossetian brothers, which will create all the conditions for the security, well-being, preservation and strengthening of the identity of each citizen." the statement reads.

Georgia will not get the EU candidacy under Georgian Dream rule, says Mamuka Khazaradze

"I repeat once again, under the conditions of "Georgian Dream", Georgia will not get the status of a candidate. It is very sad, but it is better to face the truth. No one has these illusions. As "Georgian Dream" governs this country, it is di-



The leader of the 'Lelo' party, Mamuka Khazaradze, when commenting on the report of the European Union, which refers to the implementation of the association process by Georgia said that under the conditions of the Georgian dream, Georgia will not be able to receive the status of candidacy for the European Union.

rected towards the orbit of what is called the orbit of Russia, that is clear. People in Georgia realized that "Georgian Dream" is not a Western power, it is a Russian power in Georgia under the leadership of Bidzina Ivanishvili," said Mamuka Khazaradze.

EU report: There was pressure on the public defender to respond to sensitive issues

In the EU report, which refers to the implementation of the association process by Georgia, it is noted that the Public Defender and his office were under pressure because they were responding to sensitive issues.



The report generally stated that Georgia was in decline in all key areas.

"The Public Defender and his office actively continued to fulfill their supervisory role. The recommendations issued in accordance with his mandate were only partially implemented by the Georgian authorities.

The office has come under pressure for speaking out on certain politically sensitive issues, including Tbilisi Pride and former president Saakashvili's prison conditions; Attempts were made to undermine the independence of the Office of the Public Defender and question the integrity of its employees," the EU report said.

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sovereign responsibilities within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine and legiti-

Weather

Monday, August 15

Day Partly Cloudy High: 37°C

Night Clear Low: 23°C

Tuesday, August 16

Day Clear High: 38°C

Night Clear Low: 23°C

mate operating personnel can carry out their duties without external interference. Without danger or unacceptably strict conditions of work," the statement reads.

As stated in the statement, there is no doubt that Russia's invasion and its continued presence in Ukraine's nuclear facilities significantly increase the

Georgia and 42 countries call on Russia to withdraw its military forces from Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant

risk of nuclear incidents and accidents.

"We strongly condemn Russia's use of disinformation to

justify its illegal actions in Ukraine," the statement said.

According to the statement, the international community

will hold Russia accountable for its aggression and Russia must be held accountable for its illegal actions in Ukraine.

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# Ambassador of Japan to Georgia H.E Imamura Akira makes the first visit to Mestia Municipality

On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Georgia, on August 11, when Japan celebrates National Mountain Day, His Excellency Ambassador of Japan to Georgia Mr IMAMURA Akira visited Mestia Municipality. From the heart of the Caucasus Mountains, he underlined the crucial role of mountains in providing key ecosystem goods and services

to the planet.

During the visit, the Ambassador met the Mayor of Mestia Municipality, Mr Kapiton Zhorzholiani who discussed the possibilities and existing challenges in the Municipality. They also talked about the projects that have been implemented within the Japanese support and activities for future cooperation.

The Ambassador visited Ushguli Village with the Mayor

of Mestia and got incredibly impressed with its history, cultural features, unique architecture and beautiful nature. One of the important parts of the trip was a visit to the house-museum named after the Georgian mountaineer, Mikheil Khergiani, and the Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography which boasts an exceptional collection of ethnographic objects, medieval manuscripts, and icons. Throughout the

trip the Ambassador was introduced to Svanetian food, music, and dance.

During his trip, the Ambassador visited a photo exhibition that illustrates the Georgian mountain resorts. The exhibition is organized by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia - Ltd Mountain Trails Agency, funded within the mini-grant program of the Japan International Coop-

eration Agency (JICA). The exhibition will be open to the public from August 17.

One of the highlights of the Ambassador's trip was a visit to the Rehabilitation Center for the People with Disabilities. The Center was established in 2019 with the financial support of the Japanese government. It is the first rehabilitation center in the municipality, which provides essential services to up to 100 PWDs.

