

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's Inaugural Official Visit to Brussels

According to the press service, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze is scheduled to participate in the 8th session of the Georgia-EU Association Council. Following this, he will join Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Olivér Várhelyi, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, for a joint press conference.

During his visit, Kobakhidze will also meet with Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO, and participate in the meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission.

Kobakhidze is accompanied by a government delegation, including Levan Davitashvili, the First Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development; Irakli Chikovani, the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Defense; Iliá Darchiashvili, the Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Thea Akhvlediani, the Minister of State for Reconciliation and Civil Equality.

Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iliá Darchiashvili, emphasized the Prime Minister's starting point for foreign visits in Brussels as crucial. Darchiashvili highlighted two main objectives: Georgia's integration into the European Union and the Prime Minister's leadership in the Association Council, a vital bilateral platform.

"It is the first time that a country with the status of a candidate country continues to coop-



erate with the European Union in this format, and it is a very important message from the Prime Minister that he came to Brussels to hold the Association Council," said Darchiashvili.

According to Foreign Minister, the meeting of the NATO-

Georgia Commission, which is also very important, will also be held.

"Also, we will have a NATO-Georgia commission, which is our second main foreign policy priority. Therefore, this is also the main platform for our bilat-

eral cooperation and integration of Georgia in the Euro-Atlantic space. Here too, it is very important that the prime minister leads the commission. I think, in general, this first visit to Brussels will start a very important process. A new impetus will

come to strengthen and accelerate our foreign priorities. Therefore, it is important that tomorrow the Prime Minister will start this very important visit and important for the foreign political priorities of our country," said Darchiashvili.

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NDI Launches Pre-election Assessment Mission for 2024 Georgian Parliamentary Elections



NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has launched its Pre-election Assessment Mission (PEAM) ahead of the 2024 Georgian parliamentary elections. This involves high-level meetings to evaluate the electoral environment.

As per NDI Georgia, the mission aims to support Georgia's democratic development and the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of its population through constructive recommendations. It also underscores the international community's expectation for all election stakeholders to adhere to democratic principles.

Based on their information, the NDI delegation will release a report summarizing the key findings of the pre-election environment assessment after the meetings.

From February 19th to 23rd, the NDI delegation will convene high-level meetings with multiple stakeholders engaged in the election process.

"During the five days, the delegation will meet representatives from the government, po-

litical parties, civil sector, media, and diplomatic corps.

Prior to the 2024 parliamentary elections, the delegation members will evaluate the overall political environment and factors that could influence pre-election processes.

The delegation will scrutinize significant topics including election administration, citizen engagement, gender and inclusion issues, political parties, and the campaign process.

These meetings mark the initial phase of NDI's pre-election observation process, which also encompasses a second pre-election delegation, a group of long-term observers, and an election day observation delegation.

The pre-election observation mission of NDI will be conducted in compliance with the legislation of Georgia and the Declaration on the Principles of International Observation of Elections. The program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of the Consortium for the Strengthening of Elections and Political Processes (CEPPS)," the information reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

**Mamuka Mdinardze
Appointed Majority Leader in
the Parliament of Georgia**



Mamuka Mdinardze, the chairman of Georgian Dream, assumed the role of majority leader. Mdinardze informed reporters about this decision following the majority meeting.

Additionally, Mdinardze stated that Georgian Dream supported the candidacy of Rati Ionatamishvili as the faction chairman.

The majority will present the candidacy of Nino Tsilosani, Chairman of the Agrarian Committee, for the position of

Vice-Speaker of the Parliament.

“Inside the Parliament, we made several personnel decisions. The first change was the election of a majority leader, for which I received support as expected. Additionally, we addressed the vacancy

for the position of vice-speaker after Irakli Chikovani became the Minister of Defense. For this vacancy, the majority will submit the candidacy of Nino Tsilosani to the Parliament.

Furthermore, the Georgian Dream faction unanimously supported Rati Ionatamishvili’s candidacy as faction chairman.

Giorgi Tsagareishvili was elected as the first deputy chairman of the faction. After Nino Tsilosani is elected by the parliament as the vice-speaker, her seat, the

chairmanship of the agrarian committee, will become vacant. At that point, we will nominate her first deputy, Gela Samkharauli, to assume the role. Additionally, we will present Dachi Beraia as the candidate for the position of the first deputy chairman of the agrarian committee,” Mdinardze said.

**Economy Minister Emphasizes
Connectivity as Key Priority
for Upcoming Brussels
Meeting**



Georgia’s Minister of Economy, Levan Davitashvili, underscored the significance of trade and economic cooperation with Europe. He emphasized that at the upcoming meeting in Brussels, Georgia’s

focus on connectivity will be a key priority area, signaling a strategic approach to strengthen economic ties with Europe.

According to Davitashvili, a detailed action plan has already been prepared, aiming to further enhance economic relations.

“Additionally, we will discuss how, following the attainment of candidacy, Georgia can expedite its integration into the European single market. A detailed action plan, surpassing the DSFT commitments, has already been prepared to facilitate this process. We have presented

this plan to the European Union and anticipate a discussion about it. We expect confirmation from their side, essentially updating the agenda of cooperation in the economic sphere,” stated Davitashvili.

**ADB, Credo Sign Deal to Promote Food Security
and Women-Owned Agriculture MSMEs in Georgia**

TBILISI, GEORGIA (19 February 2024) — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Credo Bank have signed a loan of 65 million lari (equivalent to around \$25 million). The loan will support onlending activities to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), with a specific focus on targeting women borrowers in agricultural production, processing, and trade.

“Women account for over a third of the country’s agricultural employment and agricultural holdings ownership, but remain underserved in terms of accessing financial assistance. Credo is uniquely focused on closing this financing gap,” said ADB

Director General for Private Sector Operations Suzanne Gaboury. “Additionally, this project will promote domestic food production and import substitution to enhance the food security of Georgia.”

An accompanying technical assistance grant of up to \$700,000 will also be provided to

facilitate Credo’s rural outreach by expanding its digital infrastructure and promoting climate-resilient farming practices to its borrowers. The grant will support initiatives to improve women’s financial access and literacy in remote villages and improve rural women’s competencies in financial and digital

literacy.

ADB’s financing will provide long-term local currency funding to support Credo, which will help avoid foreign currency exposure and risks. To support the local capital market, ADB will issue local currency bonds to fund the loan.

“We deeply appreciate the long-term strategic partnership with the Asian Development Bank. Over the years, their unwavering support through over 185 million lari of total investments has been instrumental in our bank’s growth and development. This particular transaction is a significant milestone, as it will empower agriculture businesses, with a specific focus on women entrepreneurs,” said Credo Bank Chief Executive Officer Zaza Pirtskhelava. “The sizeable technical assistance will further enhance the bank’s digitization efforts as well as promote climate-resilient farming.”

Credo is the fifth largest com-

mercial bank in Georgia and has a robust rural presence with 87 branches and digital infrastructure serving 360,000 borrowers, of which more than half are women. It is owned by international social impact and development finance institutions such as Access Microfinance Holding AG based in Germany, responsAbility Investment Management AG in Switzerland, Triodos Investment Management BV in the Netherlands, and Proparco based in France. Since 2015, ADB has worked with Credo on projects covering MSME financing, affordable housing finance, and COVID-19 response.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.



Weather

Tuesday, February 20

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 11°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

Wednesday, February 21

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

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