



Weekly News Digest on Georgia

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Internal Affairs

❖ Political Developments

1. UNM-turned-Independent Helps GD Elect Dmanisi Sakrebulo Chair

Ramiz Ramazanov, a majoritarian member of the Municipal Council (Sakrebulo) in the southern town of Dmanisi, who recently quit the opposition United National Movement party supported the Georgian Dream to elect its candidate, Paata Kuliashvili as Sakrebulo chair, while himself becoming Kuliashvili's first deputy. UNM earlier said Ramazanov had been coerced by the ruling party to switch sides.

With the number of members split 15-15 between GD and the opposition, the ruling party needed the support of one councilor to elect the chairperson. Ramazanov was the only opposition councillor present at the today's session and his vote was enough for Georgian Dream to elect its pick as the chairperson.

Following recent reports about pressure exerted on him by the ruling party, Ramazanov told reporters today that he would quit the UNM and continue his work at the Sakrebulo as an independent member (*Civil.ge, December 10, 2021*).

2. In Quotes: Political Reactions to Health Minister's Resignation

Ruling Party reactions:

Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava: "You all listened to the briefing yesterday, there was no mention of a dispute. Often, when we gathered, no confrontation could be felt. Every day there is gossiping about [possible] resignation not only of Tikaradze but of any Minister, and sooner or later when it happens, then they say "we told you." [...] This person was the Health Minister for three years, and after the three years she made this decision."

Parliament Vice Speaker Gia Volski: They said there was an argument [between PM Garibashvili and Tikaradze]. This argument, about certain issues, was not even hidden. [...] The truth comes during a debate, and I hope this is the case now [...] I want to say one thing, she is a tough lady. She has worked 24 hours a day since the first day of COVID. [...] Fatigue is probably one of the reasons [for resignation]. That is what I think, this is my opinion. As for what happened and how it happened, time will pass and she will speak about it herself. A dispute can happen, even someone may leave the team... but Eka [Ekaterine Tikaradze] has not gone anywhere, she is a member of the political council."

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, General Secretary of GD: I did not know [about the Health Minister's decision to resign]. I respect her decision, and I would like to wish Eka success. Of course, she is not departing from the team, will continue her work in the political council. As for who the [new] Minister will be, let us wait and the decision will be made in the near future. There was no dispute... Maybe there was a discussion about certain issues, a divergence of opinions, but I do not know, I am not a representative of the government. What the Head of Government spoke to his cabinet ministers during their work is of course none of the business of the General Secretary or a member of the political council."

Opposition reactions

Zaal Udumashvili, UNM MP: "Everything depends only on one person, and that

Foreign Affairs and Security

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person is [Georgian Dream founder, billionaire] Bidzina Ivanishvili, who decides who the Minister or the Prime Minister shall be.”

Ana Natsvlishvili, Lelo MP: “If Georgia had coalition governance, first of all, someone like Tikaradze could not have taken on a position of such importance as the Health Minister, and even if she had, she would have been dismissed by the coalition government by, not [resigned] of her own will.

Salome Samadashvili, independent MP: “Not only the Health Minister, but the whole government should be handing in their resignation and leaving, when there is such an unfortunate result [of the pandemic] and so many people are dying. When the government is so unsuccessful in managing the process, of course, there would necessarily have been internal discord; and as it seems they began to blame it on each other. The government still cannot avoid its possibility with [Tikaradze’s resignation], as managing COVID [pandemic] is not only the Health Minister’s prerogative.” (*Civil.ge, December 11, 2021*)

3. PACE Monitors Conclude Tbilisi Visit

Co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for monitoring of Georgia, Titus Corlăţean (Romania, SOC), and Claude Kern (France, ALDE) met Georgian Dream and opposition MPs and Prosecutor General Irakli Shotadze on December 10, concluding their fact-finding trip to Tbilisi.

In the co-rapporteur’s meeting with Georgian Dream chair MP Irakli Kobakhidze, Parliament Vice-Speaker Archil Talakvadze and lawmakers Mariam Lashkhi, Irakli Chikovani and Givi Mikanadze, the sides discussed ongoing political developments and Georgia’s reforms, the Parliament’s press service reported.

GD chair Kobakhidze said that “we shared information on every issue pertaining to the domestic political developments. We covered all actual topics.” Vice-Speaker Talakvadze, on his part, said the GD lawmakers informed the monitors with their arguments and opinions which are “are grounded and reflect the reality.”

Also on December 10, the co-rapporteurs met with MPs Akaki Minashvili and Zaal Udumashvili of the United National Movement, the largest opposition party, discussing the imprisonment of ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili and judicial and electoral reforms, according to the Georgian Parliament’s press service (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2021*).

4. GD to Scrap EU-Brokered Rules on CEC Chair Selection

Ruling Georgian Dream party lawmakers are fast-tracking changes to Parliamentary Rules of Procedure, amending the EU-brokered anti-deadlock mechanism for appointing Central Election Commission chairperson and members.

If approved with three hearings, the change would be another deviation from the April 19 deal between the GD and the opposition.

As per existing rules, introduced in June following the compromise deal, the CEC chair and members are to be elected with a 2/3 supermajority. If the vote is unsuccessful, another vote is held with the same threshold no earlier than four weeks. If the lawmakers fail to again elect the candidates, subsequent votes shall require first a 3/5 majority and then a simple majority, to be held within the same timeframe.

If the new rules are adopted, the CEC chair and members can be elected immediately with a simple majority if the first 2/3 vote fails. There won’t be a

minimum time period for the votes anymore either.

According to existing rules, when the CEC chair and members are elected through the anti-deadlock mechanism, with less than 2/3 votes, they serve a temporary six-month term instead of the regular five years. This provision will remain unaffected with the changes (*Civil.ge, December 14, 2021*).

5. NDI Report on October Municipal Polls

Campaign Environment, Finance

While the NDI observers noted improvements in electoral transparency, they, however, underlined that the process was “marred by widespread allegations of misuse of administrative resources, vote-buying, and pressure and intimidation of voters, candidates, and journalists.”

They highlighted that state security services “were notably accused of pressuring candidates, supporters or voters, raising concerns about the freedom of Georgians to run for office and choose their representatives without fear of retribution.”

Political Environment

“Harsh rhetoric and exchanges of insults dominated the campaign period, while the focus on national-level narratives overshadowed local-level concerns,” the observers said.

While UNM and other opposition parties tried to portray the polls as a referendum for holding snap parliamentary elections, per the EU-brokered April-19 Agreement, GD focused on accusing the opposition of disrupting the electoral process and plunging the country into a political crisis, they noted.

The NDI observers also laid responsibility for public skepticism towards democratic institutions and processes on parties across the political spectrum, as “partisan gains appear to have been prioritized over the needs of the Georgian public.”

The report also stressed that the return and the October 1 arrest of ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili “dominated political discussions between the two election rounds,” and is perceived to have influenced voter turnout and the election results by “further perpetuating citizens’ perception of the bipolar choices before them.”

Media Environment

The NDI long-term observers noted that while the Georgian media environment is characterized by pluralism, it mirrors the deep polarization of the country’s political landscape.

“Polarized and politicized media limited voters’ ability to make an informed choice,” the report said.

The experts also pointed out that during the first and second-round election days, a number of journalists from government-critical outlets were confronted and threatened.

Speaking about the GD-tabled bill prohibiting the distribution of pre-election advertisements aimed at creating negative attitudes towards an election subject or candidate, the experts said legislating free speech during campaigns set a “dangerous precedent.”

Vote Counts, Recounts, Appeals

The NDI report said precinct result protocols in the first round of polls contained many mistakes, arithmetic errors and discrepancies, with the number of votes

cast differing from the number of voter signatures in almost 27% of proportional protocols. It said that District Election Commissions recounted 812 polling stations, about 22% of the total – “an unprecedentedly high number.”

Concerning the recounts after the runoffs, the observers noted that retallying of 274 precincts “revealed only minor discrepancies that did not affect the overall results.” But the NDI highlighted civil society’s concerns over incorrectly or deliberately invalidated ballots.

As for the complaints, the observers highlighted that the percentage of complaints rejected on procedural grounds diminished from the previous elections but still remained high. According to the report, of the total of 2,967 complaints submitted in the pre-election period, after the first round and after the runoffs, 14.6% were dismissed on technical grounds, about 66% on merit, while 9.4% were fully and 8.3% partially satisfied. 1.7% of complaints were withdrawn. (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*)

6. GD, Opposition Meet Over Constitutional Amendments

Several opposition MPs and the Georgian Dream lawmakers met today behind closed doors to exchange their positions on constitutional amendments to the electoral system, envisaged by the EU-mediated April 19 deal.

The meeting comes after remarks by the ruling party chair, MP Irakli Kobakhidze hinted at backtracking on the proposed changes, that would mandate holding any next two parliamentary elections, including snap polls, fully proportionally with a lowered 2% threshold, instead of the current 5%.

After the meeting, MP Irakli Kobakhidze said that everything with regards to constitutional changes remained “open,” and their fate – how the discussions on changes will continue and to what end – would depend “on a lot of things.” (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*)

7. ECHR Says Georgia Complicit in 2013 Mob Attack on LGBT Activists

The European Court of Human Rights on December 16 ruled against Georgia in a case of a mob attack on LGBT demonstrators on May 17, 2013 – the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) – in Tbilisi, arguing that the “unprecedented violence” against LGBT activists occurred with the state connivance.

The Strasbourg-based court said that authorities had failed to protect the peaceful demonstrators from homophobic and transphobic aggression, calling the ensuing investigation into the matter “inadequate.”

The ECHR ruling found violations of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) and Article 11 (freedom of association), both in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights, ordering Georgia to pay the applicants amount totaling EUR 193,500.

The application was lodged by 35 Georgian nationals and two non-governmental organizations – Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group and Identoba on 15 and 16 November 2013. The Court considered complaints of 27 applicants directly affected by the mob. The other eight, according to the application, managed to escape (*Civil.ge, December 16, 2021*).

8. At New Year Reception, Zurabishvili Talks Depolarization

President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili is hosting both Georgian Dream and opposition politicians for New Year ceremony today, seizing an opportunity to stress the need for political de-polarization and “national reconciliation.”

At the reception, uncharacteristic for enmity-dominated Georgian political elites, President Zurabishvili spoke of the need to changing “political atmosphere” after lengthy series of political crises in Georgia.

There is high time to end young-like clashes and move to different type of politics, President Zurabishvili told the ruling party and opposition leaders, adding that “even the [Georgian Orthodox] Church is divided” politically.

She also noted that while Georgian parties are engaged in antagonizing domestic political struggles, they tend to forget external threats the country faces.

A number of political party representatives are attending the reception in the Presidential Palace on Atoneli Street in downtown Tbilisi, including, Georgian Dream Chair Irakli Kobakhidze and Vice Speaker Archil Talakvadze, GD MP Davit Sergeenko; MP Nika Machutadze of UNM-led bloc; MPs Alexander Elisashvili and Levan Ioseliani of the Citizens party; Girchi lawmakers Iago Khvichia and Aleksandre Rakviashvili; MP Ana Natsvlishvili of Lelo party, independent lawmakers Salome Samadashvili and Davit Bakradze, as well as GD-friendly European Socialist MPs. From the non-parliamentary opposition ex-PM Giorgi Gakharia’s teammates, Kakha Kemoklidze and Natia Mezvrishvili, former Parliamentary Chairperson Nino Burjanadze, Ana Dolidze of the For People party, Gocha Tevdoradze of the Alliance of Patriots, former MP Eka Beselia, among others, have attended the reception (*Civil.ge, December 16, 2021*).

❖ **Economy and Social Affairs**

9. Georgia’s Foreign Trade Up 25.2% in January-November 2021

Georgia’s foreign trade turnover in January-November 2021 increased by 25.2% compared to the same period last year, reaching USD 12.83 billion, according to express data published by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on December 13.

Exports increased by 26.7% year-over-year, reaching USD 3.82 billion, while imports grew by 24.5%, to USD 9.0 billion. Meanwhile, the trade deficit stood at USD 5.18 billion, constituting 40.4% of the trade turnover in January-November 2021 (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2021*).

10. U.S. Congressmen Call for Stronger Trade, Investment Ties with Georgia

Eight U.S. Congressmen have urged U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai to “strongly consider” further strengthening bilateral trade and investment ties with Georgia.

The letter, that came after a delegation of Georgian Dream lawmakers visited Washington last week, was signed by representatives Carol D. Miller (R-WV), Jimmy Gomez (D-CA), Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA), Steve Womack (R-AR), Dan Crenshaw (R-TX), John Rose (R-TN), and Alex X. Mooney (R-WV).

Calling Georgia a “critical,” “committed” and “ideal” U.S. ally, the Congressmen underlined that the prospect of enhanced trade relations with the U.S. could “catalyze” the political and economic reforms that Georgia “must make” as an evolving democracy to increase stability in the Caucasus region.

Citing existing bilateral trade and investment agreements between U.S. and Georgia, they underscored the existence of a “strong foundation on which to deepen the trade relations.” (*Civil.ge, December 14, 2021*)

11. Economy Minister Meets Turkish, Azerbaijani Counterparts in Baku

On December 14, Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava attended the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey business forum in Baku, as well as met her Azerbaijani and Turkish counterparts, and Azerbaijani Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Rashad Nabiyev.

The 6th tripartite business forum, held recurrently since 2012, included more than 100 business representatives from the three countries, including more than 20 Georgian companies.

"The tripartite Business Forum is an event that truly demonstrates that these three countries, together with the private sector, have been able to tackle the most difficult and complex challenge of the pandemic and focus on the future to further deepen and intensify our business ties," Minister Turnava addressed the business forum, as reported by the Ministry's press service (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*).

❖ Occupied Territories

12. Moscow, Sokhumi Sign on Gasification Agreement

On December 9, the Kremlin-backed Abkhaz authorities and Moscow signed an agreement and a roadmap for the development of the region's general gasification scheme.

The agreement outlines party responsibilities and organizes the work on the development and approval of the region's general gasification scheme, which has to be carried out in 2021-2022, press office of the Abkhaz 'government' reported.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has reportedly promised Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania at their meeting in Sochi on November 2020, that Russia would consider assisting the region in a costly gasification project (*Civil.ge, December 10, 2021*).

13. Tbilisi Says Two Detained Near Tskhinvali Occupation Line

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) said today Russian occupying forces arbitrarily detained two Georgian citizens nearby occupied Tsinagari village of Akhagori Municipality, located adjacent to Tskhinvali/South Ossetia occupation line.

The SSG said Tbilisi has activated the European Union Monitoring Mission-administered hotline and informed Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions about the unlawful detention (*Civil.ge, December 10, 2021*).

14. Tbilisi Says Another Citizen Detained in Tskhinvali Region

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) stated today that Russian occupying forces have arbitrarily detained a Georgian citizen in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, nearby Zemo Nikozi village, adjacent to the occupied region.

The SSG said Tbilisi has activated the European Union Monitoring Mission-administered hotline and informed international partners about the unlawful detention.

"The destructive actions carried out by Russian occupying forces in the occupied regions and along the occupation line, including arbitrary detentions, damages the security environment in the region and significantly complicates the everyday life of locals," the State Security Service stated. (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2021*)

15. Abkhazia Hopes to Again Get Energy for Free from Moscow

Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania said today Sokhumi had asked Russia to provide electricity as water levels in the Enguri Hydropower Plant are expected to reach

critically low levels in the coming days.

"Over the past few months we have been negotiating with the Russian side. It used to be easier to solve such problems, now it is more difficult," Kremlin-backed leader told Abkhaz lawmakers.

Bzhania implied that the last year Abkhazia received 1 billion kWh energy for free from Moscow, significant parts of which were consumed illegally, mainly by crypto farms, despite efforts to curb crypto-currency mining (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*).

Foreign Affairs and Security

16. Tbilisi Irked as Russia Urges NATO Disavow Georgia, Ukraine Membership Promise

The Georgian Foreign Ministry decried today as unacceptable Moscow's call on the NATO to annul the 2008 Bucharest Summit decision that Georgia and Ukraine will eventually become members of the Alliance.

"In the fundamental interests of European security, it is necessary to formally disavow the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit decision that 'Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members'," said the Russian Foreign Ministry (MID) on December 10.

Russia's Pretentions

Moscow's demands were laid out in a lengthy MID statement, which claimed that 2008 Bucharest Summit pledge by NATO allies contravenes their commitment to the OSCE not to enhance security at the expense of the security of other states, that is, Russia.

The MID said Russia will push for laying out "serious long-term guarantees, excluding any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of threatening weapons systems in the western borders of Russia."

"All these years NATO has consistently moved eastward, ignoring the concerns expressed by Moscow," the MID complained.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry Retorts

The Georgian Foreign Ministry stated on December 11 it finds "any statement by a third party on reviewing the Bucharest Summit decision to be unacceptable" and in contravention of international law.

It highlighted that the Bucharest decision was made with consensus between Allied member states, and has been reiterated in every subsequent NATO Summit. It recalled the 2021 Brussels Summit communiqué declaring it unacceptable for any third party to interfere with other countries' right to decide their foreign policy course.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry stressed that it falls within the country's "sovereign decision to join NATO, one that is based on the unwavering will of the Georgian population. This aim is also reflected in Georgia's Constitution."

NATO Chief Responds

In response to the MID statement, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated earlier stance the Alliance "cannot accept that Russia is trying to re-establish a system where big powers like Russia have spheres of influence, where they can control or decide, what other members can do.

"We are going to sit down, talk with Russia, but not compromise on the right of every nation in Europe to decide their own path," said the NATO chief on December 10 in Brussels during joint press conference with freshly-appointed

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

"It is a fundamental principle that every nation has the right to choose his own path. This is enshrined in many documents and agreements that Russia has signed too – everything from the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, to the Charter of Paris, to many other accords," the Secretary-General concluded (*Civil.ge*, December 11, 2021).

17. Tbilisi Skips 3+3 Platform Meeting in Moscow

Georgia did not attend the first meeting of the so-called 3+3 regional cooperation platform, pushed by Moscow and Ankara in the aftermath of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war.

The inaugural meeting was held in the Russian capital on December 10, under the co-chairmanship of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko, Azerbaijani Deputy FM Khalaf Khalafov, Armenian Deputy FM Vahe Gevorgyan, Turkish Deputy FM Sedat Önal, as well as Director General of the Iranian MFA Alireza Haghighian.

"The representatives of the five countries expressed interest in Georgia joining the platform, for which the door remains open," said the Russian Foreign Ministry (MID) in the press statement on December 10.

The MID also noted that at the meeting the parties discussed "the development of multifaceted regional cooperation," including trade, economy, transport, and cultural-humanitarian issues (*Civil.ge*, December 11, 2021).

18. Secretary Blinken Says NATO Doors Open to Georgia, Ukraine

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken, has reaffirmed that NATO doors remain open to Georgia and Ukraine, referring to the 2008 Bucharest Summit decision that the two countries will eventually become members of the Alliance.

"If they continue to seek membership and meet the requirements," the process will move forward, he told NBC News on December 12. The comments come after Moscow has insisted the Alliance "formally disavows" the Bucharest Summit decision.

Discussing the complaints of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin over increased NATO presence in eastern Europe, Secretary Blinken pointed out that "everything president Putin says he wants to prevent, he's actually been provoking by his actions." (*Civil.ge*, December 13, 2021)

19. Georgian Justice Minister Meets Foreign Counterparts in Venice

Georgian Justice Minister Rati Bregadze is attending on December 13-14 the conference of the Ministers of Justice in Venice, organized by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. On the sidelines of the event, Minister Bregadze met his Italian, Hungarian, Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts.

The conference spotlights criminal justice and the role of restorative justice in Europe. The Georgian Minister delivered two speeches to his colleagues at the event about Georgia's Code of Juvenile Justice, including on resocializing and rehabilitating juvenile delinquents.

Justice Minister Rati Bregadze today met his Azerbaijani counterpart Fikrat Mammadov, and they discussed planned reforms by Georgia of probation and penitentiary systems, as well as to increase access to public services and the mobile Public Service Halls Project, the Georgian Justice Ministry reported (*Civil.ge*, December 14, 2021).

20. Judiciary Reform, Media Freedom Vital, Stoltenberg Tells Georgian PM

"It is vital that the work on judiciary reform, media freedom and accountability of the security sector continues," highlighted NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in a joint press conference with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili on December 15, after their meeting in Brussels.

The NATO chief said the Alliance expects "Georgia to uphold the democratic standards that it has worked hard to develop in the recent years." He also called on the Georgian Prime Minister to work with the opposition to "resolve political differences and reduce polarizing rhetoric and actions."

The Secretary General noted that during the meeting, besides the domestic situation in Georgia, they addressed regional security as well as Russia's "destabilizing activities" in the Black Sea region.

Touching upon Russia's "military buildup in and around Ukraine," Secretary-General Stoltenberg said "we agree on the need to remain vigilant, and avoid escalation. Any future Russian aggression would come at a high price and have serious economic and political consequences for Russia."

Alluding to Moscow's demand for NATO to disavow the 2008 Bucharest Summit decision that Georgia and Ukraine will eventually become members of the Alliance, the NATO chief said the two aspirant countries "have the right to choose their own alliances and Russia had no right to dictate that choice." (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*)

21. Georgia PM Meets EU Leaders Ahead of EaP Summit

Meeting with President Michel

The discussion between PM Garibashvili and President Michel touched on the importance of the EaP Summit declaration reflecting the key priorities of Georgia, the Georgian PM's press service reported.

In this context, the Georgian Prime Minister told the European Council President that integration into the EU single market and enhancing digital connectivity are important for Georgia.

Besides, the two officials discussed Georgia's reforms. "Reassured [Georgia's] commitment to the reform agenda on is [EU] integration path," PM Garibashvili tweeted after the meeting, adding that "ambitious benchmarks are set [and] we are diligent on this path."

Meeting with Commissioner Várhelyi

PM Garibashvili and Commissioner Várhelyi's meeting revolved around the main directions of Georgia-EU relations, including the implementation of the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership, and the Summit agenda.

The Prime Minister stressed the importance of gradual economic integration and of strengthening energy and digital connectivity with the 27-member bloc, including by maximizing the Black Sea potential, according to the PM's press service.

The parties also talked about the adoption of a new Eastern Partnership agenda, that is believed to strengthen the partner countries' security, economies, institutions, and societies, as well as mechanisms of environmental and digital transformations.

The PM reportedly also reiterated Georgia's ambition to apply for EU

membership in 2024 and vowed to continue implementing reports to this end.

Meeting with Associated Trio Leaders, Lithuanian President

The Prime Minister, together with Ukrainian and Moldovan Presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Maia Sandu, respectively, attended a working dinner chaired by Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda and attended by some other EU member state leaders.

"The reforms that have been implemented have required effort and have made a significant contribution to the political, economic, and social transformation of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. We have achieved good results, but that means only one thing – we cannot stop halfway," noted the Lithuanian President, adding: "The Associated Trio must continue to make progress on reforms, and the EU must offer these countries a European perspective." (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*)

22. Khangoshvili Murder Ruling: Berlin Expels 2 Russian Diplomats

Reacting to German court's ruling over Russia-linked 2019 murder of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said today "this murder ordered by the state – as determined by the Court today – represents a serious violation of German law and of the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Germany."

Minister Baerbock stated that the German Foreign Ministry summoned Russian Ambassador for talks, during which he was informed that Berlin declares two members of the Russian diplomatic staff *personae non gratae*.

"The man convicted today literally executed another man there in broad daylight with several shots. In his indictment, the Federal Public Prosecutor General came to the conclusion that this crime was committed on behalf of government agencies of the Russian Federation. This view was endorsed by the court in today's ruling," the top German diplomat noted (*Civil.ge, December 15, 2021*).