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TOPICS OF THIS ISSUE

- **Georgian Political Crisis finally come to an end?**
- **OSCE member states call on Russia to comply with the ECHR's judgement on the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008**
- **Russia does not consider lifting flight restrictions on Georgia**
- **Developments regarding Georgia's occupied territories**
- **The Georgian government has paid four times as much for a vaccine, which it is unable to use**

RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Has the Georgian Political Crisis finally come to an end?



On April 19, part of the **Georgian opposition parties** **signed** the new **compromise document proposed by the European Council's President Charles Michel**. If implemented, the **agreement is supposed to end the political crisis created by politically motivated prosecutions as well as by the opposition boycotting the legislature**, calling the 2020 parliamentary elections rigged. Several political parties, including the United National Movement (UNM) - the biggest opposition party - have so far not signed the deal because the Georgian Dream (GD) government has not made enough concessions.

The previous proposal put forward by the EU failed to convince the opposing parties to reach an agreement. The new **compromise** introduced by the European Council's President Charles Michel on April 18, however, **addressed two key concerns of the opposition - the release of "political prisoners" and potential early Parliamentary elections - missing in the previous version**.

The day after the agreement signing ceremony at the Presidential Palace, attended by President Michel via videoconference, the European Council's President paid an official **visit** to Georgia, meeting with the GD government leaders as well as the opposition parties.

It is noteworthy that key UNM leaders Mikheil Saakashvili (honorary chairman of the party) and the UNM's chairman Nika Melia (currently detained over **charges** for inciting and heading mass violence on the night of June 20-21 in 2019 - highly regarded as a politically motivated case) originally rejected the proposal. However, with the opposition parties and individual politicians (among them, Grigol Vashadze, former chairman and presidential candidate of the UNM as well as Salome Samadashvili of the UNM) signing the EU's proposed agreement and Charles Michel personally visiting Tbilisi for the second time in less than two months, Mikheil Saakashvili **addressed** his party to consider signing the document once the government releases Nika Melia from prison. Moreover, Saakashvili promised the UNM's supporters that he will be returning to Georgia prior to the local elections in

Autumn - a commitment that he has made a number of times before and never fulfilled.

The US Department of State welcomed the signing of the EU-proposed April 19 agreement between Georgian parties, with the US' spokesperson Ned Price [saying](#) that this "sign of good faith is important progress for Georgia's democratic development," underscoring that the "implementation will be equally important," adding that the US will "remain committed to helping Georgia ensure this agreement achieves its aspirations".

OSCE member states call on Russia to comply with the ECHR's judgement on the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008

12 OSCE member states (Norway, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sweden and the Ukraine) [issued](#) a **joint statement calling on Russia to fully comply with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)** "by putting an end to human rights violations in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, enabling the IDPs to return to their homes in safety and dignity, and ensuring an adequate and effective investigation of the events as indicated in the ECHR's ruling". They urged Russia to "also investigate all violations of this Convention during the active phase of the hostilities", among them, the death of Dutch RTL TV cameraman Stanislaus Storimans by cluster munitions.

Russia does not consider lifting flight restrictions on Georgia

Former Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs and the current Russian Federation Council's Senator Grigory Karasin [stated](#) that "it's early to discuss resuming air traffic with Georgia" following the recent controversial [visit](#) of pro-Kremlin journalist Vladimir Pozner to Tbilisi. Russia has restricted Georgian air traffic on Putin's orders as a response to an anti-occupation rally in Tbilisi during Gavrillov's visit back in June, 2019.

In addition, Karasin labeled the protesters of Pozner's visit as "radical screamers in Georgia", and , on the other hand, praised PM Irakli Garibashvili for a "balanced and condemning statement [of the protesters]."

Developments regarding Georgia's occupied territories

The Georgian government [dropped](#) a mandatory 5-day quarantine for citizens from occupied territories crossing into the rest of Georgia. Instead, they will now be tested and enrolled in the COVID vaccination process. The decision comes after four residents from the Russian-occupied ethnic Georgian majority district of Gali, who were headed to the Tbilisi controlled territory, [were found](#) dead in the Enguri river. In a change of position, Sokhumi came up with an [initiative](#) to reopen the Enguri crossing to the residents of the district of Gali. The de facto government of Abkhazia made the proposal despite resistance from the local opposition. The radical opposition in Abkhazia was even suggesting trenching or mine-laying the border and

closing it permanently. This case once again showcases the division between the de facto government of Abkhazia, which is ready for at least some level of cooperation with Tbilisi, and the pro-Russian opposition, advocating for cutting off any ties with Georgia.

As reported in the previous issues of the Georgia Watch Briefing, despite promises from Russia, occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali still have not [received](#) doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. Nonetheless, they still [turned down](#) Tbilisi's vaccination scheme offer. Having [sent](#) Sputnik V vaccine doses to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions only for its military personnel and their families, even ending the vaccination process for the occupation forces, Russia continues not to keep its promise made back in the beginning of 2021.

MONITORING OF DISINFORMATION CASES

Disinformation that Turkey is obliged to return Georgian historical territories. A Facebook post, disseminated on April 10 and accompanied by a map, claimed that 100 years ago Soviet Russia gave away Georgian territories to Turkey in exchange for Crimea on a 100-year lease, and according to the post, Turkey must now return the territories. This [claim](#) does not reflect reality, because in 1921 the Georgian historical region of Tao-Klarjeti and its adjacent territory, including the districts of Artvin, Ardahan, Oltu and Rize were ceded to Turkey under the Treaty of Kars and the treaty does not oblige Turkey to return the territories. As for Crimea, it became an independent republic in 1917 but was then occupied by the Bolsheviks in 1918. It never became a part of Turkey and in 1921 was recognized as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

False claim about Uranium-238 mining in Rioni Valley. On April 3 several Facebook groups and pages spread information that in Rioni Valley, where Turkish company Enka plans to build the Namakhvani hydro power plant, there are significant deposits of Uranium-238. Some of the sources claimed that Turkey has interests in Rioni Valley in order to obtain these deposits of Uranium. [Myth Detector](#) reached out to the National Agency of Mines, who refused to divulge information about Uranium mining in Rioni River Valley. According to the Agency, geological materials accumulated in the geological funds provide no indication of the uranium-238 deposit existing at the Namakhvani HPP construction site.

Presenting a video of WWII Veteran as proof that President Kennedy was alive. A video depicting the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump embracing the old man had an unusual description claiming that the man in the video is actually the 35th President of the United States, John Kennedy who was alive after all this time and died just one month ago. The video [verification by Myth Detector](#) has revealed that the man featuring in the footage whom Donald Trump embraced is World War II Veteran Russell Pickett, and the event took place in France on June 6, 2019 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Normandy Landings, also known as D-Day. Russell Pickett, unlike Kennedy who was killed in 1963, died of complications of heart disease on

August 2, 2020. The two men do not even resemble each other in photos from their youth.

NAMING AND SHAMING

The Georgian government has paid four times as much for a vaccine, which it is unable to use

On April 5, the **Health Minister of Georgia, Ekaterine Tikaradze, and the director of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Amiran Gamkrelidze, officially presented the Chinese vaccine "Sinopharm" at the press conference attended by the Chinese Ambassador in Georgia, Li Yan.** According to Tikaradze's [statement](#), "More than 40 million people have been vaccinated with Sinopharm, and no questions are heard about its reliability". Her words were backed by the Ambassador, who [claimed](#) that "This vaccine is made by a traditional, reliable method, so it has very few side effects. More than 100 million doses of this vaccine have already been used, but it has not had any serious side effects. Therefore, the safety and efficacy of this vaccine are recognized by many countries." She highlighted the importance of [Sino-Georgian cooperation](#) on the matters of the Covid-19 pandemic and portrayed China as Georgia's close friend and partner. This "partnership" is also justified by Gamkrelidze's preceding statement, according to which China will give [100,000 doses of the Chinese "Sinovac"](#) as a gift to Georgia. However, the reality is that the World Health Organization has not yet officially accredited either "Sinopharm" or "Sinovac". Therefore, the country has paid around \$2,000,000 for the vaccine, which it cannot use. Minister Tikaradze [mentioned](#) with the media that it was important for Georgia that a strict Hungarian regulator already approved the vaccine, that they were in communication with the WHO, which would decide whether to wait for accreditation or, as in Hungary, start the vaccination process in Georgia without its approval. The recent decisions prove that the Georgian government is not willing to wait for the official WHO permission. Whether the latter will approve the vaccine or not, the vaccination with Chinese "Sinopharm" will start already [on May 4](#) in Georgia.

It is highly notable that the Chinese "Sinopharm" is the most expensive vaccine and costs \$18-20. According to Gamkrelidze, Georgia purchased ["Astrazeneca" through the COVAX platform for \\$4-5 and "Pfizer" for \\$11-12](#). Therefore, at the price of the non-accredited "Sinopharm", Georgia could purchase four or five times more of the accredited vaccines. These circumstances require reflection and extensive investigation.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS - Rondeli Foundation) published the tenth [issue](#) of China's Activities in the South Caucasus. The document includes recent developments on the deepening bilateral political, economic and cultural ties between China and the South Caucasian states, especially

with Armenia. Notably, after Azerbaijan, Georgia also purchased the Chinese COVID vaccine Sinopharm and China donated an additional 100 000 doses of Sinovac.

Civic IDEA has published the [6th China Watch report](#) entitled "Nuctech Company Ltd. in Georgia", which covers the controversies over the biggest Chinese security scanner distributor "Nuctech Company Ltd". The latter evaluates the company's cooperation with the Georgian government; fraudulent activities related to Georgian and foreign tender procedures; malfunctions of its security equipment; and corruption scandals worldwide. More specifically, the report discusses the cases of Georgia, Namibia, Taiwan and Europe; reveals Nuctech's military ties with the Russian Federation; and reviews US adversarial policies towards it.

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