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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

A non-governmental organisation International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED) estimates the pre-electoral environment of the 2020 parliamentary elections in the statement published on the 1st of July. The document reviews the condition of the country in terms of electoral legislation, political and media pluralism as well as the important socio-political processes that took place before June 2020.

According to the organisation, the upcoming elections carry significant importance as the political environment in the past two years has been especially tense and polarised. Also, another circumstance that makes the 2020 elections important is the influence of COVID-19.

As ISFED reports, the current processes of Adjara TV and the decision made by the European Court of Human Rights over the case of Rustavi2 TV has sharply changed the media environment. "The feeling that the media with critical editorial politics towards the government is being pressurised has strengthened," states ISFED and believes that it is fundamental for citizens to be able to receive impartial and objective news from the media. "It is vital to implement effective politics in terms to assure the freedom of media and execute any improper intervention in the work of broadcasters."

According to the statement, social me-

ISFED releases document, evaluating pre-electoral environment



ISFED

სამართლიანი არჩევნებისა და დემოკრატიის საერთაშორისო საზოგადოება

25 წელი

► International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED)

dia will be one of the substantial communication tools in the 2020 parliamentary elections. As ISFED states, presidential elections of 2018 and the following period clarified that Facebook is used not only for political actors to spread their own programmes and ideas but also for political discrediting as well by spreading disinformation and different types of harmful messages in an organised manner. The statement reads that even though deletion of Facebook accounts from the platform played a significant role in unloading the information space, the measure has a temporary effect and using platforms for manipulating public opinion still continues.

ISFED presented recommendations

towards the government of Georgia, Election Administration, State Audit Office, and political parties:

"TO THE GOVERNMENT"

It is important to adopt timely legislative changes as part of the electoral reform, which will help create equitable and fair electoral environment; considering the risks caused by COVID-19, proper legislative changes should be implemented, which will assure that the elections are held in the safe background; the government should facilitate Media organisation's free and impartial work. Under no circumstances should anyone intervene in broadcasters' work and restrict its guarantee of independence.

TO THE ELECTION ADMINISTRATION (TSESKO)

When recruiting professional members of the election administration, it is especially important that their selection is based on objective and transparent criteria. The role of the Cesko in this process is further enhanced by promoting the formation of an environment free from political influence at any stage of the competition; election administration should react effectively on disputes and should make decisions only after fluently surveying the circumstances.

TO STATE AUDIT OFFICE

As the election approaches, the mandate of the Audit Office will increase in terms of political funding and expenditures for electoral purposes, as well as for the purpose of monitoring political advertisements and election expenditures posted on social networks. Based on the experience of the last elections, it is an important challenge to determine the amount and origin of the money spent on social media platforms, and especially on Facebook, for the purpose of advertising or anti-campaign agitation. That is why it is even more important to respond effectively and in a timely manner to such cases so that these costs do not remain beyond the control of the Audit Office.

TO POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties and candidates should not use anonymous campaigns aimed at discrediting opponents, the media and other actors involved in the elections.

The document was prepared with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union. The views expressed in the document by International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy may not reflect the views of USAID, the US Government or the European Union," reads the statement.



► "The current processes of Adjara TV and the decision made by the European Court of Human Rights over the case of Rustavi2 TV has sharply changed the media environment."

UN Launches the Network on Migration to Support Coordination and Cooperation on Migration



TBILISI, JULY 1 2020 -- The United Nations Network on Migration was launched in Georgia by the UN Country Team in order to provide coordinated and coherent United Nations system-wide support to the Government of Georgia for strengthening migration policies and enhancing migration management efforts, in line with the Migration Strategy of Georgia 2016-2020 and 2021-2030, which is in the finalization stage.

“I wish to thank the Government for the traditionally excellent cooperation on migration,” said Dr. Sabine Machl, UN Resident Coordinator in Georgia. “We are committed

to work alongside the Government of Georgia to promote migration policies that are beneficial to all and in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

Ms. Nino Tsatsiashvili, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia and Ms. Khatuna Totladze, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia welcomed the establishment of the Network and thanked the UN agencies, especially IOM, for their support in helping to strengthen the benefits of migration and to address its many challenges.

It was also noted that this Network will become a platform for cooperation on migration

and will leverage the impact of the United Nations’ considerable expertise and capacity.

“We establish this Network in order to strengthen the coordination among the UN agencies and enhance the coherence of our common work and our impact on migration management in order to provide to the Government of Georgia the support in more effective way in the future,” said Sanja Celebic Lukovac, IOM Chief of Mission.

Ms. Dyane Epstein, Regional Director a.i. of the IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SEEECA) Region and Mr. Jonathan Prentice,

Head of the UN Network on Migration Secretariat in Geneva congratulated Georgia for the establishment of the Network and highlighted its importance for advancing the guiding principles and objectives spelled out in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). With the UN Network on Migration launch today, Georgia joins over 50 national and regional networks which have already been established globally to advance implementation on the ground and ensure that GCM is a living document, Prentice noted.

Coordinated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – the UN Migration Agency - the Network will work closely with the governmental institutions and agencies, international, non-governmental organizations, private sector and other stakeholders to foster a better understanding of migration dynamics and enhance information exchanges and coordination within the UN system and with the Government of Georgia entities and other stakeholder at the national level.

The Network will be open for membership to those UN entities in Georgia who express readiness to join and for whom migration is of relevance to their mandates.

ADB Allocates Grant Assistance for COVID-19 Rapid Testing Equipment in Georgia

TBILISI, 1 JULY 2020 — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed a contract for the purchase of fully automated high-throughput polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing equipment to support Georgia’s efforts to contain the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The testing equipment, valued at €440,000 (approximately \$495,000), will be supplied by Roche Diagnostics Turkey, A.S., and used by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories,



Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia.

“Georgia has responded remarkably well to the pandemic, preventing the spread of the virus and providing support to households and businesses that are most affected,” said ADB Country Director for Georgia Shane Rosenthal. “The equipment purchased through

ADB’s grant will increase testing capacity needed for continued containment as Georgia takes gradual steps to reopen the economy.”

“We are excited that the new equipment will increase national laboratory capacity by 2,000 tests per day and reduce the time it takes for diagnosis,” said First Deputy Minister of

Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia Tamar Gabunia. “We are committed to scale up the response with additional financial support from international donors to prevent, detect, and respond to the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and strength-

en national systems for public health preparedness.”

The equipment is funded through a grant drawn from the ongoing technical assistance program, Regional Support to Address the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 and Potential Outbreaks of Other Communicable Diseases. It follows a \$100 million loan approved by ADB on 28 May under its COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Program to provide budget support for Georgia’s comprehensive anti-crisis plan to combat COVID-19.

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.

THURSDAY		JULY 2	
Day		Mostly Sunny	
		High: 32°C	
Night		Clear	
		Low: 20°C	
FRIDAY		JULY 3	
Day		Sunny	
		High: 33°C	
Night		Partly Cloudy	
		Low: 20°C	

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World Bank provides additional support to help Georgia mitigate economic impacts of COVID-19

BY NATALIA BZHALAVA

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved €45 million in additional financing for the Georgia Economic Management and Competitiveness Development Policy Operation (DPO).

This additional financing from the World Bank will help the government of Georgia to cover an unanticipated financing gap that has arisen due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We stand by Georgia's side as a strong partner during this challenging time and support the government in its swift and effective anti-crisis measures to save people's lives and protect livelihoods, mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19, and maintain Georgia's strong record of economic reforms.. while Georgia's containment measures were successful in containing the spread of the virus, they come with fiscal and economic costs as in many countries around this world. This additional financing will be the much-needed lifeline support," stated Sebastian Molineus, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus.

According to the World Bank, the additional financial support is linked to the € 45 million



► Ivane Matchavariani, Finance Minister

Economic Management and Competitiveness Development Policy Operation (DPO) that was approved by the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors in March of 2020. The overall objective is to facilitate those reforms that can lead to job creation, greater economic inclusion and resilience, focusing on improving the efficiency of public resource use; promoting more

competitive markets; diversifying the financial sector; improving teacher deployment and remuneration; and strengthening investment promotion.

"The World Bank's support is very important for our country as it will be directed specifically at solving the problems caused by COVID-19. I would like to thank our partners once again for their great sup-



► The World Bank

port in reducing the economic impact caused by the pandemic in Georgia and also for helping to sustain the implementation of reforms in general," said Ivane Matchavariani, Minister of Finance of Georgia.

This DPO, the second in the series of three lending operations, is a part of the World Bank's broader support for the people of Georgia to help address the COVID-19 pandemic. The first operation was the \$80 million financial support package provided under the Fast Track COVID-19 Facility aimed

at addressing and mitigating the health and social impacts of the pandemic; the third tranche will focus on micro, small and medium enterprises and jobs affected by the pandemic.

"It has taken broad and fast actions to support our clients in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and is prepared to deploy up to \$160 billion over the next 15 months to help more than 100 countries – home to 70% of the world's population – protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery," stated the World Bank.

Wizz Air temporarily suspends base operations in Kutaisi

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Low-budget airline Wizz Air is temporarily suspending base operations in Kutaisi, Georgia, which does not mean that the company will suspend operations in Georgia. Andras Rado, the head of the WizzAir communications department, spoke about the company's plans at a press conference.

"We will monitor the development of events... we must follow international and local rules," he said.

According to him, the company will offer other opportunities to employees of the Kutaisi base. "We are working to keep jobs in Georgia and at the Kutaisi base," he said. According to Rado, the company will not fire employees at the Kutaisi base and will relocate them to other parts of its network. He says, it is too early to speculate on other future plans.

Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava says the company is not leaving the Georgian market and that the technical issue is where the company's planes will be based, in Georgia or in another country. The minister explained that the purpose of the overhaul of the



► Turnava: "Wizz Air is not going anywhere, it remains loyal to our citizens"

aircraft is to reduce the costs of the company. She reassured the population that the company is not leaving Georgia.

"I have just talked to the company personally and it will confirm publicly that it continues to cooperate with the Georgian government and Georgia, remains loyal to its customers, our citizens, who have been traveling from Georgia and vice versa at a very comfortable and quite affordable price through WizzAir all these years and with our support," she said.

The company's planes have been flying from Georgia for several years. Wizz Air operated flights from Georgia on both base aircraft (Georgian crew) and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Wizz Air planes used to fly to more than 25 destinations in 13 countries from Georgia to Georgia before the pandemic, now none of the flights are completed.

On June 30th, WizzAir canceled most flights until May 2021 - as of August 2020, only eight flights are available for flights

to Warsaw, Dortmund, Riga, Vilnius, Athens, Budapest, Vienna and Larnaca. The Civil Aviation Agency has issued a statement saying that regular air traffic will not be resumed until August 1st. They urged citizens to refrain from buying tickets.

Until now, high-ranking officials have said they are waiting for an official document from the European Union. Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani said on June 30th that the government's decision on air flights would be in line with the EU's decision.

As of now, the EU member states are starting to open their borders to third-country nationals. At this stage, the restriction

is also lifted for Georgia, which the EU considers safe.

According to Zalkaliani: "The EU member states will soon start sorting out the relevant criteria with the countries on the safe list, in order to be careful to move citizens in both directions."

Georgia's borders are still closed. The government's anti-crisis plan, launched in early May, was supposed to resume hosting foreign tourists from July 1st, but in late June it became known that regular flights would not be resumed until August 1st. The Georgian government cites the deterioration of the epidemic situation in many countries as the reason.



Wizz Air: Kutaisi base is temporarily closed, we will not fire employees