

## POLITICS

Government lifts more restrictions



FULL STORY ON Page 2

Minister of Economy of Georgia met with Mission Director of USAID/Georgia

FULL STORY ON Page 2

## ECONOMICS

Georgia in World Bank top 10 in terms of bribery cases and freedom from bribery pressure



FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

At the initiative of the Georgian Dream, the Election Code will be amended and strict sanctions will be imposed on cases of voter coercion, intimidation, and violation of the secrecy of the ballot. The Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakvadze stated about it at the briefing held at the office of the ruling party.

According to him, the Election Code will indicate that in case of such an action, a person will be held criminally liable, and relevant changes will be made in the Criminal Code as well.

In particular, according to Talakvadze, intimidation of voters, or coercion committed in various ways, for violating the secrecy of the ballot will result in a fine, or house arrest for a term of 6 months to 2 years or imprisonment for up to 3 years.

According to the Speaker, this will give more confidence to the citizens in the election process and, at the same time, will end the speculations of the part of the opposition that, on the one hand, did not support democratic electoral changes in Parliament and, on the other hand, continued to criticize and discredit the

## Forcing a voter to violate the secrecy of the ballot to become punishable by up to 3 years in prison



► Discussions on the changes initiated on the 26th of August will begin in September.

government and the election process. The Parliament of Georgia adopted the amendments to the Election Code in the third reading on July 2.

According to Sergi Kapanadze, the head of European Georgia's election headquarters, the government's initiative to amend the election and criminal codes is

an attempt to show international observers how the government limits any kind of influence on voters. He said that all this was already punishable and it seems that they are trying to appear white and fluffy with international observers.

"The main problem is how they execute this law and towards whom. Until

now, there has not been a single case where any acts of intimidation, bribery, or coercion of voters by Georgian Dream officials or public servants have been punished," Kapanadze said.

According to him, the problem will be the execution of this decision in the future.



► Kapanadze says the government's initiative to amend the election and criminal codes is an attempt to show international observers how the government limits any kind of influence on voters.



# Government lifts more restrictions

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Another Inter-Agency coordination council meeting was held on August 26th. After the meeting, council members held a briefing at the government's administration and introduced the decision about lifting more restrictions. Furthermore, Amiran Gamkrelidze, the Head of NCDC noted at the briefing that Georgia is engaged in negotiations to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

According to the latest decision, quarantine restrictions in Mestia and Lendjeri, which were imposed on August 10th, will be removed on September 2nd. For now, these zones are under intensive testing and as Gamkrelidze stated, epidemiological studies will proceed after the quarantine restrictions are lifted.

Due to the pandemic, the education process in Georgia was conducted remotely. During the briefing, it was stated



► Schools will start on September 15th and kindergartens- on October 1st.

that schools and kindergartens will be opened gradually. The decision was made following international practice, which shows that a gradual approach is vital for mobility reduction, therefore kindergartens will be opened on October 1st, two

weeks after the schools are opened. The government also works on opening universities, however, the specific date is yet undetermined.

A decision to open theatres and cinemas has also been made. Cinemas will start operating



► Oxford and AstraZeneca are working on the COVID-19 vaccine.

from September 15th and two weeks later, from October 1st, theatres will open. These facilities will have to assure that every visitor sits one seat away from each other. Also, in theatre, performances must be conducted without intermissions.

At the council meeting, members discussed the COVID-19 vaccine. According to Gamkrelidze, vaccine production is in its final stages and will likely be approved by late fall. As he start-

ed, council members discussed what procedures to undergo to receive a vaccine, which is being produced jointly by Oxford and AstraZeneca.

As of August 26th, 1436 coronavirus cases have been confirmed. 1150 patients have recovered and 19 have died. The last death was reported on August 24th. The patient was an 87-year-old woman, whose health condition was aggravated due to other underlying diseases.

# Minister of Economy of Georgia met with Mission Director of USAID/Georgia

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava met Peter Wiebler, Mission Director of USAID/Georgia. At the meeting, the sides focused on the USAID Economic Security Program and talked about plans, such as financial assistance to Economy Sectors during the post-pandemic period, including light industry, tourism, information technologies, and others.

Peter Wiebler informed the Minister about the progress of cooperation between the USAID Economic Security Program and agencies within the Ministry's system in the direction of sup-



► The Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Natia Turnava, and Peter Wiebler/Mission Director of USAID/Georgia.



► The meeting was also attended by the representatives of the Economic Security Program and the agencies within the Ministry's system.

porting product development, marketing, strategy, and the fight against the new coronavirus. It was noted that the efforts of the USAID Economic Security Program aim at economic growth and development in value chains and sectors such as light industry, tourism, creative industries, shared intellectual services and solid waste management.

"USAID has made a very important decision to extend its support, assistance, and funding to the programs, which the Agency will implement in coordination with the ministry and its agencies," said Natia Turnava, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development.

According to the minister, it is important to support tourism

during the harsh times of the pandemic, and to support investment politics, especially in such fields, where high values are created. As Turnava said, another prioritised direction is the privatization of the state property, under which the Economic Security Program will support the state to attract potential investors. She stated that electronic commerce

and other high-tech fields will be assisted as well.

According to Wiebler, the main reason why the Economic Security Program should continue is that it facilitates the recovery of the economy after the Coronavirus and includes (light industry, electronic commerce, and Information Technologies programs.

<b>THURSDAY</b>		<b>AUGUST 27</b>
Day		Clear
		High: <b>29°C</b>
Night		Clear
		Low: <b>16°C</b>
<b>FRIDAY</b>		<b>AUGUST 28</b>
Day		Clear
		High: <b>32°C</b>
Night		Partly Cloudy
		Low: <b>18°C</b>

published by **The Messenger**

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## Georgia in World Bank top 10 in terms of bribery cases and freedom from bribery pressure

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgia is in the top 10 in the world in terms of the number of bribery cases and freedom from the pressure of bribery. The World Bank Enterprise Survey focuses on many aspects of the business environment that play a major role in the growth and development of the private sector and, consequently, the economy as a whole.

Enterprise surveys are conducted every 4 years. The research aims to evaluate the business environment. The survey was last conducted in Georgia from March 2019 to January 2020. During this period, 581 company owners and high-ranking managers were interviewed in Georgia.

The questions in the study cover exactly the factors that are important for the business environment and the economy: infrastructure, foreign trade, finance, regulations, taxes and business licensing, corruption, crime and the informal economy, access to finance, innovation, labor, barriers to the business environment.

The Enterprise Survey is conducted by the World Bank Group in partnership with partners (EBRD, EIB, DFID). The study covers all geographical regions of the world and hundreds of thousands of small, medium, and large private companies.

In terms of freedom from corruption, Georgia deserved the best rating in the world. In particular, Georgia is among the top 10 countries among 144 countries in terms of the number of bribery cases. It also ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of freedom from bribery pressure.

The number of private sector businesses in Georgia, which at least once, in practice, solved the case of bribery, is only 1.3% of the surveyed companies. While this indicator is 10% in the countries of Europe and Central Asia and 12% in high-income countries.

Also, the best rate is in those government instances where, in general, the fact of requesting/offering bribes is most likely to be observed (construction permits, government contracts, and meetings with tax officers). In Georgia, the demand for gifts/informal payments from private companies is only 1-1.4%, while this figure reaches 9-15% in the countries of Europe and Central Asia, and 10-19% in high-income countries.

0 points (percentage) the facts of gift-giving by private entities to obtain operating licenses were observed (world average - 13 percent). Consequently, the value of the gift that companies have to pay to



World Bank Enterprise Survey assesses the health of the country's private sector.



► "The business environment in Georgia is much more favorable than in many other countries," said Sebastian Molineus.

maintain a government contract is equal to 0. "According to these 2 indicators, Georgia occupies the best place in the world among all the surveyed countries," the Ministry of Finance said in a statement.

Sebastian Molineus, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus, says the Enterprise Survey is a very important survey that assesses the health of the country's private sector and is one of the few surveys that

is truly global in its coverage. He noted that entrepreneurs, directors of firms here in Georgia spend much less time due to the burden of regulation on tax rates and administrative issues. "Obtaining permits is much faster than in other countries, and in general, the business environment is much more favorable than in many other, similar countries," Molineus stressed.

He also spoke of the problems that still need to be solved,

mainly with infrastructure, as well as obtaining construction permits (compared to other similar countries), access to funding, and finally, labor resources with an adequate education.

According to the data available for 2012, Georgia's rates of bribery (9.84 percent) and freedom from bribery (8.72 percent) were 8-15 times lower than in 2019, respectively. In 2012, the data was from the 2008 survey.

The situation began to im-

prove significantly in 2013 when the number of bribery cases and the indicators of freedom from bribery pressure improved dramatically (1.43% and 0.94%, respectively). The best results were in the 2019-2020 survey, where bribery rates improved to 1.3% (the rate at which firms had at least one bribery claim) and bribery rates fell to 0.6% (rates of public transactions where bribes and informal transactions penalty was requested).