

## Edison Research study regarding 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia



By KHATIA BZHALAVA

A study conducted by research company Edison Research, which was commissioned by Georgian broadcast company Formula TV, concerns Parliamentary elections of 2020 in Georgia. The poll was carried out within the period of August 25th- September 7th and surveyed 2850 people eligible for voting.

According to the poll, 94% of the people eligible to vote will participate in the voting. In particular, 75% said they would 'definitely' cast their vote and 19% said that they 'probably' will. 3% of the respondents said they 'probably will not' cast their vote and 3% said they "definitely will not."

As the study revealed, if parliamentary elections were to be held today, 38% of the surveyed people would vote Georgian Dream, 15% - the United National Movement, 6% - European Georgia, 23% have not decided yet who they will vote for. Giorgi Vashadze- Strategy Aghmashenebeli received 4%; Labour Party, Lelo for Georgia, Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Girchi -3% each.

57% of the respondents want to see not Georgian Dream, but another party or parties in the role of the ruler of parliament. 43% want the Georgian Dream to remain as



► 94% of the 2850 people surveyed will vote in the upcoming 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

a ruling party. Out of 57% of respondents who wish to see opposition party member as PM of Georgia, 25% wish David Bakradze to

hold the post of Prime Minister, 19% chose Giorgi Vashadze, 18% - Grigol Vashadze and 15% - Mikheil Saakashvili. For the record,

at the time of conducting the survey, only Giorgi Vashadze was officially nominated as a candidate for the post of Prime Minister.

The study showed that 22% of the surveyed citizens who intend to vote for the Georgian Dream, like a specific plan of the party for the development of the country's economy. 20% who said they would vote for European Georgia noted that they liked the pro-Western orientation of the party. 23% of the United National Movement supporters prioritize the party because of its strong leaders.

Based on the question 'If the elections were today, which candidate would you vote for?' Nika Melia- the United Opposition has a leading position( 52%) in the majoritarian district of Gldani, Elene khoshtaria - mutual candidate of opposition (39%) in the district of Vake, Beka Odisharia - Georgian Dream (49%) in Mtatsminda District, Irakli Kadagishvili - Georgian Dream (44%) in Telavi, Kvareli Lagodekhi majoritarian district and Davit Songhulashvili - Georgian Dream (62%) in Gurjaani, Signagi, Dedoplistskharo.

The survey was conducted through face-to-face questions and polled randomly chosen 2850 voters over age 18 countrywide ( except occupied territories). The margin error is 2.0%

## European Parliament approves report on Georgia's AA implementation

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The European Parliament (EP) has approved a report on the implementation of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU. At the plenary session, 552 MEPs voted in favor of the document, with 61 against and 78 abstentions.

In the report, the EP welcomed the deepening EU-Georgia relations and reiterated the need to continue implementing reforms under AA and DCFTA, while reiterating support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The report highlighted that "Georgia continues to face significant external challenges, notably a worsening situation in its occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia and cyber-attacks linked to Russian actors."

The document positively assesses Georgia's progress in the adoption of reforms and legislation, as well as the March 8 agreement between key political parties, however, describes the situation of the judiciary as "worrisome due to shortcomings of the selection procedure of judges and a series of cases against the opposition, which raised concerns about the impartiality of the legal system."

EP commended political parties for the signing of the March 8 agreement, establishing an "electoral system in line with Venice Commission recommendations." President Zurabishvili's decision to pardon two opposition leaders is also assessed as an important step towards easing tensions. The report calls on all parties to ensure that "all outstanding cases of politicized judicial processes are resolved without delay."



► The Parliament commended Georgia's "internationally-acclaimed" response to the COVID-19 outbreak and underlined Georgia's role as a reliable partner.

Noting that the October elections are "pivotal in confirming Georgia's democratic credentials," EP calls on the Georgian authorities to "fully address the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations" and to review legislation to address "shortcomings and challenges, such as misuse of public resources for campaigning, improper campaign financing methods, impunity for violence, dissemination of hate speech and xenophobia, vote-buying and the ability of voters, especially civil servants, to vote free from pressure and fear of retribution."

EP gladly noted that the EU accounts for 27% of Georgia's total trade and under-

lined the importance of structural reforms to "further improve" the investment climate in Georgia. EP also welcomed 900 000 visa-free visits made by Georgian citizens, but due to the increasing number of 'unfounded' asylum requests, calls on the Member States to recognize Georgia as a safe country of origin in order to "speed up the processing of such requests."

As for the rule of law, good governance and media freedom, EP expressed concern with recent court cases against opposition politicians, "which have undermined trust between the ruling party and the opposition,

may adversely affect AA/DCFTA-related reforms and run counter to the letter and spirit of the AA." The report calls on Georgian authorities to "refrain from pursuing any politically-motivated cases."

The report called for an investigation into all incidents of "excessive use of force" by Georgian law enforcement against "peaceful protesters and journalists, including during the June 2019 protests."

EP stressed that selection procedures for judges should be revised to ensure the full implementation of the Venice Commission recommendations, assessing the recent selection procedure of Supreme Court judges as "not entirely in line with the recommendations and marred by serious shortcomings."

EP also stressed the need for clear provisions regulating free and paid political ads in Georgian media and called on the authorities to "refrain from interfering in media freedom or pursuing politically motivated judicial cases against media owners."

EP condemned "constant violations by the Russian Federation, which exercises effective control over the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia," also expressing concern over the continuing "borderization" across occupation lines.

The report was debated in the European Parliament two days before the final vote. On September 14th, MEPs debated their report assessing the latest developments regarding the EU's AA with Georgia in a Plenary Session at the European Parliament.

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## European Parliament approves report on Georgia's AA implementation

Kati Piri, (Netherlands, Labour Party, part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) who addressed the Parliament on behalf of Sven Mikser, the rapporteur recalled, that the AA is a comprehensive framework that covers a wide range of policy areas from political dialogue, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms all the way to economic and trade relations. According to Piri, if the COVID-19 situation allows for it, the European Parliament should also dispatch an Election Observation Mission to Georgia. The report commends Georgia's internationally acclaimed response to COVID-19 outbreak. MEP highlighted the exemplary cooperation between the EU and Georgia in responding to this crisis. The report strongly condemns the ongoing provocations and the 'borderization' activities that continue along the Administrative Boundary Line.

Nacho Sánchez Amor (Spain, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) announced he was sorry that the opposition in the Parliament didn't support constitutional and electoral reform that the EU has contributed to and that benefits the majority party as well as minority parties in the system. He added that the OSCE is sending a normal EOM and the European



► The author of the report is Sven Mikser, a member of the Social Democrats in the European Parliament, the rapporteur on Georgia.

Parliament and the EU should do the same and support domestic missions as well because they are working brilliantly in the country.

Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy pointed out three important issues, the electoral context, "Now we expect effective implementation of these laws (new electoral system) and respect for the high-

est democratic standards," the justice reform, "it is important for the Georgian Parliament to revisit the selection process of Supreme Court Judges, which undermines transparent and genuine, the merit-based nomination process"; and the conflicts, "let me also reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."

Marina Kaljurand (Estonia, S&D) welcomed the recent electoral reform in line with the ODIHR recommendations and expressed hope that it will contribute to easing the polarization in Georgia's political and media landscape. She also recognized the promotion of women's representation, urging all political parties, especially and including the opposition, to do their utmost to guarantee peaceful, fair and free elections on October 31st.

Michael Gahler (Germany, EPP/Christian Democrats) noted that the political landscape, as in many states in transition, is polarized. Approximation with the EU is a view that is shared by many and that is why it is to be welcomed that a new election system has been developed.

Urmas Paet (Estonia, Renew Europe Group) noted that Georgian authorities should refrain from pressuring any politically motivated judicial cases and harassing opposition politicians.

Anna Fotyga (Poland, European Conservatives and Reformists) appealed to free Giorgi Rurua, 'thus fulfilling the March 8 agreement reached with all opposition leaders.'

Viola von Cramon-Taubadel (Germany, Greens/European Free Alliance) praised Georgia's efforts

in fighting Covid-19 and welcomed the new electoral code, adding that 'Internally, the shadow rule of billionaire Ivanishvili threatens democracy. Externally Russia's continued hybrid war threatens the country's sovereignty through military occupation, creeping annexation and cyber-attacks... A level playing field should be guaranteed for all political actors, while the judicial system should become more transparent.'

Helmut Geuking (Germany, European Conservatives and Reformists) said, that "we have to bring Georgia into our European home, because we know what the situation is with Russia, we know what the situation is with Crimea and Ukraine and we know that part of Georgia is occupied. So, we need to bring Georgia to Europe as soon as possible and make Georgia a fully-fledged member."

Borrell concluded: "We will also not shy away from reminding Georgia of the need to deliver on the full reform agenda. The problems at their borders should not be an excuse for solving the problems that only the Georgian people can solve. The EU through our AA will continue to support Georgia on this day and ever."

## Our Preference in Eastern Mediterranean is Diplomacy without Preconditions

Article by Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

The Mediterranean has always been the cradle of civilization as well as a basin of constant cultural and economic interaction. In this geography our past, present and future are inextricably intertwined. Turkey and Greece have always had only two choices: lock horns in a way that hurts both of us or find a win-win formula to define a mutually beneficial way forward.

The logic of 'permanent neighbor' naturally entails mutual respect for each other's rights. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case for what we experience in Turkey face these days.

Such mutual respect in turn should be manifest in a sense of obligation to solve all pending issues or outstanding conflicts through peaceful means and dialogue. In such a spirit, neighbors do not seek escalation, but seek direct diplomacy and dialogue in good faith and with an aim for genuine dispute resolution. Recently, governments like that of France are displaying an ill-advised yearning for their colonialist past. Did we really forget so quickly that the colonial period

brought nothing but enormous pain and suffering for so many peoples?

The pattern of accepted behavior of the metropolitan masters imposing their will on the periphery is over. Our President is advocating that the World is Bigger Than Five to call for a more equitable international order. We designate our foreign policy as Enterprising and Humanitarian to underscore the values we want to prevail and our tirelessness and creativity in pursuing them, all in service of the dictum of Peace at Home, Peace in the World formulated by Atatürk, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Venizelos. That is why we underscore mutual respect and equitable solutions to problems.

That is why Turkey supports NATO's initiative towards de-confliction and Germany's initiative for de-escalation with the ultimate aim of reviving the already established bilateral mechanisms between Turkey and Greece. We hope that Athens understand that those are two different things. Turkey respects Greece enough not to want to negotiate and agree with other parties over issues that must be settled directly between the two neighbors.

Our basic objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean are clear:

- fair and equitable delimitation of maritime boundaries;
- protection of our continental shelf rights against maximalist and excessive maritime boundary claims;
- protection of Turkish Cypriots' equal rights over the off-shore resources of the island through the establishment of equitable revenue sharing mechanism;
- creation of a genuine, inclusive, fair and equitable off-shore energy cooperation mechanisms with the participation of all parties, including the Turkish Cypriots (proposals to this end are still on the table) in the Eastern Mediterranean.

A string of maximalist claims cannot be imposed upon Turkey through the EU which has no competence over maritime boundary delimitation. You don't get to cut off Turkey's access to high seas and to its own maritime zones by claiming 40 thousand square kilometers of continental shelf for a tiny island like Meis or Kastellorizo that is only 2 kilometres away from Turkey and 580 from the Greek mainland. No law nor logic nor a basic sense of fairness would allow

an opposite argument.

Furthermore, attempts towards excluding a country like Turkey -with the longest relevant coastline in the region, a growing population, production capacity, and increasing energy demand - from the riches of its own neighborhood are not realistic either. As we said it several times- that shall not happen.

Therefore Turkey will naturally be firm in not allowing attempts to harm her fundamental interests. We maintain a naval presence in the region not for offensive ends, but for self-defence against interference with our seismic research activities within our own continental shelf (that was declared in accordance with international law as far back as 16 years ago, by the way!).


Dialogue and negotiations are indeed the first and foremost means in international law to address maritime boundary issues. We thus expect Greece to revive all dialogue channels with Turkey without any preconditions. Preconditions beget counter-preconditions (believe me, we could come up with quite a few of our own) and thus is not a good way to seek talks between two neighbors.




Every crisis may create an opportunity and we must seize it to move ahead peacefully. It is evident that any negotiation process should include an exercise of give and take. The alternative is sweeping the problems under the carpet and hope they go away or somebody else solves them for you. However, problems tend to get ever more complicated as time goes by, let alone disappear on their own. We need strong, effective and rational leadership in order to hand down peace and security to future generations. That exists on Turkish side. What we do today will define not only today but also tomorrow and you know all too well that Turkey can go whichever way Greece chooses. The choice is in fact not that of Turkey nor France nor anyone else for that matter but of the esteemed leaders and people of Greece.

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Night  Cloudy  
Low: 17°C

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# IMF Staff Concludes Virtual Visit to Georgia

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) team, led by Ms. Mercedes Vera-Martin, held virtual meetings during September 8-14, 2020, to discuss recent economic and financial developments and progress with the structural reforms.

The policy response, including temporary tax relief measures and expanding health and social spending to support poor and vulnerable groups, has been so far successful in containing the economic and social impact of the pandemic.

Structural reforms to support higher and more inclusive growth remain essential to limit the scarring in Georgia's medium-term economic potential.

At the end of the visit, Ms. Vera-Martin issued a statement, noting that "The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on Georgia's economy. While the health impact of the pandemic has been well-contained, the external position has deteriorated as tourism revenues have come to a virtual standstill."

According to the IMF statement preliminary data suggest a tentative recovery in domestic demand beginning in June. Growth in credit to the private sector remains robust, partly supported by government subsidies on lara-denominated mortgages. Slack



► The COVID-19 pandemic's health impact has been well-contained, but it has had a significant impact on economic activity.

demand and the post-lockdown recovery in supply have recently put downward pressures on inflation.

Growth is expected to contract by 5%, a slightly higher contraction than at the time of the Sixth Review, partly reflecting a more severe slowdown in the second quarter of 2020 and a more protracted recovery in external demand. Given pervasive uncertainty about the pandemic, downside risks to the outlook dominate. "The realization of these risks, including from a more prolonged slowdown in major trading partners and a slower-than-envisaged recovery in tourism, may require continued exchange rate flexibility and additional policy support," wrote Vera-Martin.

Prudent macroeconomic policies prior to the pandemic, including the build-up of external and fiscal buffers, and strong support by the international community allowed the authorities to launch a sizable fiscal package to mitigate the social and economic impact of the pandemic. The government expanded social transfers, enacted temporary tax relief measures for businesses and households, and provided some subsidies to sustain activity in the sectors most affected by the shock. Over the medium-term, addressing the decline in revenues in 2020 will be important to formulate a gradual fiscal consolidation, as required by the fiscal rule, and build fiscal space for needed spending on



► "IMF mission positively assesses National Bank policy in all directions," announced Gvenetadze, NBG head.

education and infrastructure. On the structural fiscal reforms, the mission welcomes the continued commitment to enhance tax administration, expand the coverage and monitoring of fiscal risks, and formulate a strategy to improve the corporate governance of state-owned enterprises.

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has also taken several measures to support economic activity and financial stability, including lowering the policy rate. At the onset of the COVID-19 shock, the NBG eased capital and regulatory requirements, provided lara and FX liquidity, and preemptively requested additional provisioning for banks. In response to declining economic activity and easing inflation

pressures, the NBG appropriately reduced its policy rate. Maintaining exchange rate flexibility remains essential to manage the shock.

According to the report, the implementation of structural reforms under the EFF has progressed well. Parliament approved the legislation to index basic public pensions in July, and the new insolvency law is expected to be approved soon. Timely implementation of the legislation related to corporate insolvency and banking resolution will help improve the business environment and financial sector resilience. Structural reforms remain essential to limit the scarring in Georgia's medium-term economic potential and promote higher and more inclusive growth.

# Georgia hosts 112<sup>th</sup> session of UNWTO Executive Council

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On September 15-17, Georgia is hosting the 112th session of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The session was opened by the PM Giorgi Gakharia with a greeting speech in Biltmore Hotel, Tbilisi. Within the frame of the event, official representatives of UNWTO, ministers, honorary ambassadors and representatives of tourism organizations visited Tbilisi together with Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the UNWTO. The information is published by the Ministry of Economy And Sustainable Development.

The Executive Council of UNWTO consists of 32 member states and represents the governing body of the organization. The council assures the effective work of the organization and discusses the main issues of travel and tourism industry policy considered by the global agenda. UNWTO holds Executive Council sessions at least every two years, permanently in Spain, where UNWTO's headquarter is located, however, based on the unprecedented decision of the organisation, for the first time in the history of the Executive Council, the host country of the session is Georgia.

As the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development states, holding UNWTO high-rank meetings in Georgia had been decided yet



► 170 delegates from 24 countries arrived in Georgia to attend the meeting of the UNWTO Executive Council.

prior to the pandemic. Initially, the event was scheduled to take place in June 2020. The representatives of the organization visited Georgia so as to study the situation on the site and gave a positive estimation to the readiness of the country to host a high-rank representative meeting, however, due to the pandemic, the meeting was postponed. As the process of re-selection of the host country started, considering that Georgia is one of the safest countries in terms of epidemiological situation, the decision was made to hold the UNWTO Executive Council session in Georgia.

In the opening speech, the PM expressed gratitude towards Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the UNWTO as well as to the

member states of the Executive Council for the contribution made to the decision of holding the session in Georgia, for the first time outside the border of Spain.

Considering that the main topic of the session regards pandemic difficulties, particularly challenges related to the most affected sector of tourism, the PM highlighted that Georgia was able to receive the status of a green-country and is one of the safest tourist destinations.

"The trend of the recovery of tourism will be one of the most important events in the post-crisis period globally, and it is our wish to be pioneers in this process, on

the basis of the experience gained in terms of safety in the tourism sector," said Gakharia.

The PM noted that Georgia has two main goals in the fight against the pandemic- to protect the health and the lives of its citizens and to save the economy.

The session is held in full compliance with the safety and guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) and The National Center for Disease Control of Georgia (NCDC) and is under strict observation of Georgian epidemiologists. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development notes that the participants of the event underwent PCR testing a few hours before their departure for Georgia and according to the protocol recognized by NCDC, presented the documentation confirming the testing at the border. As for the other participants who were unable to present such documentation at the border, they were tested in Georgia and remained in isolation until results were received.

Among the delegates of the UNWTO Executive Council session are high-ranking guests from Spain, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and other countries. Prior to the session, foreign guests guided by Mariam Kvirivshvili, the Head of Georgian National Tourism Administration and Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the UNWTO, visited the sights in old Tbilisi.



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