

POLITICS

Parliament approves amendments to Labor Code of Georgia

FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

PM and EU Commissioner sign finance agreement

FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Series of confrontation took place near the Marneuli District Election Commission on September 29th between the supporters of the ruling Georgian Dream and the opposition United National Movement parties. According to the commission chairman, a group of people tried to break into the commission building, after which, one of the commission members was physically attacked. The police intervened and neutralized the situation. Later, another clash happened during which, a cameraman of Public Broadcaster, two journalists, and two cameramen of Mtavari Arkhi were injured.

According to the commission chairman, a group of people attempted to break into the commission building and obstruct the work of commission members, after which they physically assaulted one of the members.

The supporters and members of the United National Movement (UNM) state that they had gathered in front of the commission building to protest. As the UNM majoritarian candidate, Azer Suleimanov noted, the District Election Commission had held its first meeting the day before and elected chairmen of the precincts, as well as deputies, 'in secret,' (without the UNM), which was the reason for the protest.

Both sides accuse each other of provoking the conflict. The persons involved in the incident have been questioned. The Central Election Commission condemned the facts of 'violence and attempts to pressurize the DEC' which took place on September 29th. CEC mentioned a fact of beating a person employed by Marneuli DEC, who asked to explain why he was being filmed without his permission and was beaten in response. Commission also mentioned a fact of an attempt to break into the DEC building by authorized persons and stated that such form of communication is unacceptable for Election Administration (EA).

CEC explained that the accusation towards DEC as if UNM representa-

Confrontation between Georgian Dream and United National Movement supporters in Marneuli, Journalists injured



► Both Georgian Dream and the United National Movement blame each other for provoking the confrontation.



► An investigation has been launched into the facts of inflicting bodily harm and unlawful interference with a journalist's professional activities.

tives were not informed about holding the first session is not true.

"Every member was well-informed via contacts (telephone numbers) indicated by them, some of whom did not appear at the session and some of whom could not be reached due to the indicated irrelevant telephone number... It is noteworthy that the act of DEC's Chairperson, upon summoning the first sessions, was publicly posted at DEC's in a visible place," reads a statement published by CEC.

EA calls on observers and international organizations to pay close attention to the actions of certain electoral

stakeholders that deliberately try to discredit the Election Administration and create a tense pre-electoral environment.

Later that day, another incident took place in Marneuli, which resulted in injuring journalists and a cameraman, as well as the representatives of the UNM.

As Public Broadcaster's journalist reported, during a physical confrontation between activists of the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement, one of the participants in the incident attacked the cameraman, beat him and smashed his camera. Accord-

ing to Jeikhun Muhamedali, a journalist of Mtavari Arkhi, he was beaten by 5 or 6 individuals, two of whom could be identified.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, an investigation has been already launched into the incidents, including the fact of unlawful interference with a journalist's professional activities. As the Director of the Kvemo Kartli police Department, Lasha Gogliashvili stated, search operations are underway, however, no one has been arrested so far.

On the following day, on September 30th, another incident happened, when a specialist of Marneuli headquarter of Election Commission was chased while he was headed to Marneuli. According to one of the leaders of Georgian Dream, Irakli Sesiashvili, the specialist got hit by another car and 'was beaten mercilessly.' Sesiashvili believes that the incident is related to the developments of the previous day and thinks that the Georgian Dream's political opponents are involved in it.

This is not the first time of such a conflict between the Georgian Dream and UNM within the pre-election period. On September 28th, a similar confrontation took place in Bolnisi, which resulted in 10 Georgian Dream members injured. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has started an investigation into this case as well.

Parliament approves amendments to Labor Code of Georgia

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The parliament of Georgia adopted amendments to the Labour Code aimed to protect workers' rights at the third hearing with 82 votes for and none against.

The amendment will allow the Labor Inspectorate to monitor and respond to labor rights violations. Accordingly, check for violations by private companies. If necessary, the amendment also provides for the imposition of sanctions.

According to NGOs, the changes will substantially strengthen the mandate of the Inspectorate, which will improve state oversight of workers' rights and safety.

The initiator of the bill on the amendments to the Labor Inspection Reform, MP Dimitri Tskitishvili, announced that this is a fundamental update of labor rights standards and the issue of interns are also covered.

"Employee rights, the relations, and cooperation between the employer and the employee will be regulated by law," Tskitishvili said, adding that the clear norms prohibiting discrimination have been established as well.

As Irakli Kobakhidze, one of the initiators of the changes told reporters, this is a fundamental package that envisages many innovations, including labor inspection and its full implementation by creating a strong institutional mechanism to ensure the protection of labor rights.

The approved amendments were praised by the US and EU embassies in Georgia. The U.S. Embassy commended Parliament for adopting amendments to the Georgian Labor Code to protect workers' rights. According to the statement, holding employers to internationally recognized labor standards is essential to achieving inclusive growth, enhancing economic stability, and improving the investment climate.

"For the first time, Georgian workers will be guaranteed overtime pay, layoff benefits, and paternity leave," said the statement, noting that the State Labor Inspectorate now has



► The amended Labour Code defines terms of a work contract, including internship and overtime payment, bans discrimination at the workplace, and regulates disputes.



► The U.S. Embassy commends Parliament for adopting amendments to the Georgian Labor Code to protect workers' rights.

the authority to conduct unannounced inspections in all sectors. The legislation was referred to as a key step toward meeting international standards and strengthening trade relationships. The U.S. Embassy also announced that it will closely follow the implementation of these amendments, including the expanded Labor Inspectorate mandate, which will be critical to ensuring fair treatment of workers.

According to the EU Amba-

sador to Georgia Carl Hartzel, this is a significant step forward in terms of working conditions in Georgia and a strong message in terms of fulfillment of Georgia's obligations under the Association Agreement.

The amendments to the Labor Code include the most important obligations of the EU legislation that Georgia has fulfilled, in particular the protection of labor and employee rights, overtime pay, protection against collective reductions, anti-discrimination and gender equality provisions.

"We expect to support the Independent Labor Inspectorate with sustainable staff and financial resources, as well as trained and equipped staff, who will carry out their expanded duties from 2021 for the benefit of Georgian employees and society as a whole," said Hartzel.

The Labor Code was amended in 2013. In 2015, the Department of Labor Inspection was established. Their new mandate was limited to occupational safety issues and required the prior consent of the employer to inspect the workplace. Consequently, the recommendations had no binding force. The amendments, adopted in February 2019, expanded the powers of the Labor Inspectorate in the area of security.

Filling the knowledge gap on mediation and arbitration

EU AND UNDP RELEASE RESEARCH ON GEORGIAN PERCEPTIONS OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

TBILISI. 30 September 2020 – Georgians still know little about alternatives to the court system in resolving commercial or civil disputes, but this trend is changing over time and interest in mediation and arbitration is growing as the benefits become apparent. These are some of the findings from recent research on public awareness of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADRs) in Georgia that were released today by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

"By establishing mediation and arbitration as alternatives to the expensive headache of going to court, Georgia has expanded access to justice for both individuals and businesses," said UNDP Head Louisa Vinton. "But if people are not aware of the opportunities, they might miss the chance to protect their rights in an affordable way. Our new study will help us spread the message that people have a choice."

"For many years now, the EU has been supporting the development of arbitration and mediation in Georgia as part of our wider assistance to the justice system and the private sector," said Catalin Gherman, Deputy Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation to Georgia. "Easy and diverse access to justice is vital for both citizens and commercial companies to protect their civil and economic interests."

The research revealed that over 80 percent of Georgian citizens and businesses never heard of mediation. 70 percent of citizens and 54 percent of businesses have little or no understanding of arbitration. However, after receiving some additional information, more than half of both companies and citizens say they would choose mediation and arbitration over going to court if they had a dispute to resolve.

Those who already had experience with alternative ways of resolving disputes tend to be contented with the process and service. 90

percent of arbitration and 56 percent of mediation users assess them positively, noting that low fees and faster resolution are the advantages of both methods. The time spent on mediation if parties fail to settle is viewed as a shortcoming. As a disadvantage of arbitration, representatives of the private sector note that an arbitral decision cannot be appealed.

The research was conducted by the Georgian research company "Institute of Social Studies and Analysis" (ISSA) in 2019 and 2020. Its findings are based on face-to-face interviews with 1,500 people in nine cities of Georgia and online interviews with representatives of 1,255 private companies in different sectors.

Georgia adopted its Law on Mediation in 2019 after years of preparations and discussions supported by international partners, including the EU and UNDP. The Association of Mediators was established the same year aiming to support,

regulate and train mediators and inform the public about mediation.

Arbitration in commercial disputes has been developing in Georgia for over a decade now, largely thanks to the joint efforts of the Georgian Government, the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), the business community and international partners. The Georgian International Arbitration Centre (GIAC) and the Georgian Association of Arbitrators (GAA) were set in motion in 2013. In 2020, with assistance from the EU and UNDP, the leading Georgian arbitration organizations signed a Code of Ethics, agreeing to comply with high standards of professionalism and ethical behaviour.

The EU and UNDP are promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution as part of the EU's wider programmes EU4Justice and EU4Business, contributing to justice reforms and private sector development in Georgia.

SATURDAY		OCTOBER 1
Day		Rain
		High: 18°C
Night		Partly Cloudy
		Low: 14°C
FRIDAY		OCTOBER 2
Day		Partly Cloudy
		High: 23°C
Night		Partly cloudy
		Low: 14°C

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper,

and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

EXCHANGE RATES:

US DOLLAR - 3.2878 | EURO - 3.8415 | GBP - 4.2255 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.1711 | SWISS FRANC - 3.5609 |

PM and EU Commissioner sign finance agreeme

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia is paying an official visit to Brussels, meeting top EU officials. On September 20th, together with the European Commissioner Oliver Varheim, PM signed two financial agreements with a total budget of € 129 million, aimed at improving the socio-economic situation in Georgia following the spread of the coronavirus. The meeting focused on the challenges posed by the COVID-19 global pandemic and stressed the importance of EU assistance to Georgia.

Gakharia said that the signing of the "Sustainability Contract" and "Integrated Territorial Development" documents during the visit is another confirmation of the special partnership between Tbilisi and Brussels.

The European Commissioner emphasized the need to strengthen transport and communication links, economic recovery and development, whilst PM stressed the importance of developing physical transport and communication links with the EU not only politically and economically, but also in terms of security, noting that the majority of the Georgian population supports Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The meeting also touched upon the importance of implementing new initiatives within the Eastern Partnership and concentrating more on bilateral relations with associated partners. It was noted that Georgia is a leader in the Eastern Partnership.

Gakharia also met with the Vice-President of the European Commission, Margarita Skhinas. The conversation focused on the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and the significant financial support provided by the European Union to Georgia in this process.

It was noted that the European Union is a strategic partner of Georgia and the vast majority of Georgian citizens support the country's European integration. Georgia was named as a leader in the region in terms of democratic development and reforms, and the recent reform of the electoral system, which involves a transition to a more proportionate system, has brought the country to a new level of democratic development.

The VP of the European Commission praised the reforms implemented in Georgia. Talks focused on the opportunities provided by the Georgian Association Agreement, the Free Trade Agreement, and visa liberalization.

It was noted that Georgia has more ambitions, more integration is needed and the full use of the Black Sea region is used as much as possible.

"Closer cooperation with Georgia is valuable for the EU, which should become even closer



► €129 million agreement aims at improving the socio-economic situation in Georgia.



► PM spoke with Joseph Borrell about Georgia's role in the Black Sea region and the importance of more physical integration with the European Union.



► Gakharia addressed the European Commissioner Maria Gabriel with an initiative to equalize the tuition fees of Georgian students in Europe with the students of EU member states

and it will be so," said the VP in her tweet.

All key issues on the Georgia-EU agenda, including the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, practical tools for establishing transport and communication links, and the role of the Black Sea in this context were discussed by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Security, EU High Representative for Policy Affairs, Vice-President of the European Commission, Joseph Borrell, at a meeting held today at the European Commission.

The role of the European Union in the format of the Geneva talks was emphasized and the importance of the EU taking even clearer positions and sharp assessments of the ongoing process in the occupied territories, which will give a

new, additional impetus to the format of the Geneva talks. The conversation also touched upon Georgia's peace initiative - "A step towards a better future."

The parties discussed preparations for the forthcoming EaP Summit, which will be held in March and where concrete visions will be presented as member states see the Eastern Partnership after 2020. The PM noted that the Georgian side's approach envisages the development of additional mechanisms, including a differentiated approach to Georgia, which is a leader among the EaP countries and deserves a more specific tool, including access to the single market and strengthening the EU-region link.

The PM held a meeting with the European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ulva Johansson. Georgia's successful steps towards the implementation of

the visa liberalization regime were especially noted, in particular, the new law adopted by the Parliament of Georgia, which regulates the procedures for leaving the country, was positively assessed. Cooperation between Georgian and EU institutions, such as EUROPOL and Frontex, was positively assessed, which became the basis for successful legislative initiatives implemented by the Parliament of Georgia.

Talks focused on areas of cooperation such as circular migration and legal employment of Georgian citizens in EU countries. The expansion of the network of police attachés in European capitals by Georgia was positively assessed and it was noted that this is a good basis for cooperation between the EU and Georgian law enforcement agencies.

The conversation also

touched upon the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 31st in Georgia. The European Commissioner positively assessed the implemented constitutional reform, the progress made by Georgia on the path of European integration, and reaffirmed its strong support for Georgia on this path.

During his visit, Gakharia addressed the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth Maria Gabriel with an initiative to equalize the tuition fees of Georgian students in Europe with those of students from EU member states. The parties discussed the possibilities of expanding cooperation in the field of students, science, and innovation, as well as the prospect of Kutaisi University joining the EU Universities Infrastructure.

At the meeting with the President of the European Council Charles Michel PM noted that Georgia has set three main priorities on the path to EU integration - democratic development and institutional strengthening, strengthening Georgia's strategic role in the wider Black Sea region, and improving transport and communication links.

The Prime Minister noted that Georgia is an integral part of European security and is ready to contribute more in this direction. The EU-Georgia High-Level Strategic Security Dialogue was highlighted as an important component of bilateral security cooperation. The sides paid attention to the situation in the region and the challenges in the occupied territories of Georgia.

The President of the European Council reaffirmed the EU's strong support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as for its policy of non-recognition of the occupied territories.

The conversation also touched upon upcoming elections and cybersecurity, which is a significant challenge facing modern states.

Gakharia also met with the President of the European Parliament David Maria Sasoli.

During his visit, the PM also released a statement on another military confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia. He once again called on the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and international actors to make the most of their opportunities to stop the escalation and resume dialogue.

"As you know, our country has good neighborly relations with both countries - Azerbaijan and Armenia...Our common interest is to establish peace in the region as soon as possible. "Georgia is ready to support this process in any way possible, including hosting a meeting of representatives of the conflicting parties in Tbilisi for a dialogue," announced Gakharia.