

## Deputy Minister of MFA meets the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus



The sides focused on the difficult safety, human rights, and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories.

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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar met with the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Lasha Darsalia on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Mr. Toivo Klaar announced on his official twitter page about his visit to Tbilisi and Sokhumi noting that the meeting would focus on local issues, but "regional developments will also loom large in the background."

The sides emphasized the difficult situation in the occupied territories regarding safety, human rights, and humanitarian issues, "which has further deteriorated against the background of increasing provocations by the Russian Federation during the pandemic."

According to the information published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the sides discussed the issues of suspending the process of so-called 'borderization' as well as the release of Georgian citizens illegally detained in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali.

Attention was also focused on the harsh humanitarian situation in Gali and Akhgori and the need of providing free movement. The minister stressed the steps taken by the government of Georgia, which were aimed at assisting the

people affected by the conflicts during the pandemic. Darsalia noted that the government of Georgia will continue its efforts to alleviate the impact of the occupation regime on the local population.

The parties talked about the timely continuation of the Geneva International Discussions (GID). The Deputy Minister expressed concerns over breaking off the 51<sup>st</sup> round (October 6-7) of GID by Russian Representatives and called on the partners with a request to take effective measures to ensure that the round of discussions takes place in December. The sides paid attention to the need to achieve

progress on key issues on the agenda of the Geneva International Discussions. Also, as the ministry noted, the need for restoring Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in the Gali region was emphasized.

The Deputy Minister thanked the EU and its Special Representative for the efforts directed at resolving Russia-Georgia conflicts and added that on the background of worsening the situation, it is even more important the topics related to the occupied territories of Georgia to remain on the agenda of the EU.



The Geneva International Discussions were launched in October 2008 to address the consequences of the Russia-Georgia 2008 war.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

# GYLA releases second interim report on October Elections

On October 12<sup>th</sup>, a non-governmental organization Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) published the second interim report of the 2020 Parliamentary elections long-term observation mission, which reflects the facts of violations and occurrences of bad practice that were revealed in the month of September.

According to GYLA's statement enclosed to the report, within the framework of long-term observation missions, GYLA monitors pre-election processes in 9 regions, Tbilisi, Adjara, Guria, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Imereti, Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, and Kakheti.

According to the statement, occurrences of violence were frequent in September, "which became alarming during the violent confrontations in Bolnisi and Marneuli." GYLA has also become aware of cases of threats and attacks on activists of opposition parties (National Movement, Lelo for Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Labour Party). "All of them contain signs of criminal offense," reads the statement.

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, a physical confrontation took place between the Georgian Dream and



The chairman of Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, Sulkhan Saladze.

United National Movement activists in Bolnisi, which resulted in injuring 10 Georgian Dream Members. Also, on September 29<sup>th</sup>, at Marneuli District Election Commission another physi-

cal and verbal clash happened between Georgian Dream and UNM supporters. Later that day, a cameraman of Public Broadcaster, two journalists, and two cameramen of the main

channel, who had arrived on the site to cover the news, were attacked and physically assaulted as well.

According to the statement, as in the previous reporting pe-

riod, the facts of obstruction of pre-election campaign activities by the government have been revealed again, which, according to GYLA, is harmful to an equal electoral environment. The report also provides information about violating the requirements of electoral legislation by some municipalities.

Sulkhan Saladze, the chairman of the organization noted at the briefing yesterday that compared to the previous report of a long-term observation mission, which included the data gathered within a 3-month period (June, July, August), cases of threatening and violence during the pre-election period has increased in September.

Overall, GYLA's observers have detected 1 case of bribing an elector, 11 cases of threatening and violence, 3 cases of obstructing party's pre-election campaign. An investigation has been launched into several cases, however, as Saladze noted, the organization considers that in some cases, the investigation might have been launched under the wrong article.

GYLA's report is funded by the Open Society Georgia Foundation. The organization proceeds to monitor the pre-election activities and collect data, which will be included in the November month report.

## NGOs appeal to the government and international organizations on Irakli Bebu's case



Irakli Bebu burns the Abkhazian flag and receives backlash on social media.

BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

Up to 10 non-governmental organizations operating in

### Weather

Tuesday, October 13

Day ☀️ Clear  
High: 23°C  
Night 🌙 Clear  
Low: 11°C

Wednesday, October 14

Day ☀️ Clear  
High: 25°C  
Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy  
Low: 12°C

harsh comments on the arrested Irakli Bebu on social networks, some demand his severe punishment ... Restrictions on the use of legal mechanisms during the occupation create a special sense of impunity," read the statement.

According to the authors of the statement, Irakli Bebu was sentenced to 30 days in prison as a measure of restraint and remains in the Sokhumi isolator. Bebu's family has limited communication with him and does not have reliable information about his treatment and health condition. Bebu was allegedly appointed a treasury lawyer and the issue of his effective protection.

Bebu was arrested by de-facto law enforcement in Abkhazia on September 30<sup>th</sup> on charges of burning an Abkhazian flag. In the video, Bebu confirms this fact, but states 'that he has nothing against Abkhazians.'

He is accused of committing crimes under several articles of the de-facto government of occupied Abkhazia, including insulting state symbols, which is punishable by up to 1 year in

prison; Deliberate damage or destruction of property under aggravating circumstances, which carries a sentence of 4 to 7 years in prison, and illegal possession of a weapon, punishable by 2 to 5 years in prison.

Irakli Bebu's family has been displaced from Abkhazia since 1993. In 2016, he returned to Gali to take care of his elderly grandmother and could not return to Tbilisi due to the lack of documents required for crossing the border.

There are a number of illegal detainment of Georgians in the occupied territory, including the obscure death of Irakli Kvaratskhelia in the de-facto penitentiary, the tragic cases of the loss of life of Giga Otkhordia, Archil Tatumashvili and Davit Basharuli.

The situation in Abkhazian prisons and inadequate conditions for prisoners there, who are deprived of basic rights and adequate living conditions in penitentiary institutions, remain a severe issue. Unadapted prison conditions carry high risks of spreading diseases and do not provide minimal guarantees of protec-

tion and respect for privacy.

The authors of the statement call on the International Organizations and the Diplomatic Corps to take appropriate political, diplomatic, and administrative action to secure the life, safety, and rights of detainee Irakli Bebu.

International organizations operating on the territory of Abkhazia should facilitate the communication of the detained Irakli Babua with his family and the process of studying and monitoring his physical and psychological condition.

The signatory organizations are the Center for Human Rights Education and Monitoring, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, the Center for Human Rights, the Institute for Democracy Research, the Institute for Tolerance and Diversity, the Platform for Peace and the Center for Peace and Civic Development.

The detainee's family says Bebu's life is in danger and is asking for help.

Georgian Security Service responded to the arrest of the young man, saying they hold Russia accountable. According to them, the detainee is in Gali and his life is not in danger.

A criminal case has been launched against Irakli Bebu under several articles.

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## GoG says up to 100 000 citizens lost their jobs



**“There is no resource to reduce labor costs in the public sector, as it may lay off several thousand people, but that does not mean it will save money,” announced Kakauridze.**

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office (Geostat) released data, according to which in 2019, the average monthly nominal salary of employees in Georgia increased by 5.7% or ₾61.2 compared to last year and amounted to ₾1 129.5.

According to Geostat, in 2019, wage growth compared to the previous year was observed in almost all sectors. Relatively high salaries were observed in the following fields according to the types of activities: Financial and insurance activities - ₾2,030.2 (decreased by 9.2 % compared to the previous year); Professional, scientific and technical activities - ₾1 896.0 (increased by 10.7%); Construction - ₾1 631.1 (increased by 5.1%).

Meanwhile, according to the agency, the average monthly salary of women in 2019 was set at ₾869.1, and for men - at ₾1361.8. Annual wage growth, respectively, was 5.7% for women and 6.3% for men.

In 2019, the average monthly salary of employees in the public sector was ₾237.4 less than in the non-state sector. Compared to 2018, salaries in the public sector increased by 9.1%, and in the non-governmental sector by 4.1%, amounting to ₾973.7 and ₾1 211.1, respectively.

According to Geostat, in 2019, the average monthly salary of employees in the business sector increased by 5.5% and amounted to ₾1,161.7. According to the types of activities, the highest salaries are recorded in the field of professional, scientific

and technical activities (₾2,104.5, increased by 10.2% compared to the previous year), as well as in the field of construction (₾1,641.8, increased by 5.2% compared to the previous year).

In 2019, the average monthly salary in the non-profit and financial sectors increased by 6% compared to the previous year and amounted to ₾1,068.5.

Due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, the respective number in 2020 may not be much higher. According to

the Deputy Minister of Finance, Giorgi Kakauridze up to 100 000 citizens have lost their jobs because of coronavirus. The statement was made at a hearing in parliament, where the 2021 initial state budget is being discussed.

“The number of employees will increase in 2021 at the expense of investment and economic activity. At least 20 thousand must restore income. These are not lost jobs this year, these are lost because there is a pandemic in the country and the

economic downturn always affects that,” Kakauridze underlined.

Note that the program of unemployment compensation has been running for the last 6 months and provided monthly assistance to those who had salaries up to and including the first quarter of 2020, but then lost their income. This assistance was issued for 6 months, however, it was terminated immediately for the citizens if other income in the amount of more than ₾10 was recorded in their account. According to official statistics, 161,905 people have benefited from this assistance at least once in the last 5 months.

Kakauridze also announced that the initial version of the budget will be significantly revised in the next period.

The document includes the following economic parameters. In 2020, the economic growth rate will be -4.9 %, although in 2021 we will already return to the 5% growth rate.

As for the inflation rate, it's assumed that the inflation rate will be less than 4% by the end of the year, and next year will be close to the 3% inflation target.

“As for the budget deficit, which is one of the important indicators, in 2021, we will have a budget deficit of 5.1 percent,” said the Deputy Minister.

The draft budget for 2021 does

not envisage an increase in salaries in the public sector. As he pointed out, the amount invested in wages in 2021 is a resource needed to fund a full year of increased wages for police and the army this year. Thus, the first version of the budget reflects the obligations undertaken by the state.

“The budget envisages a legislative initiative regarding the indexation of pensions, envisages an increase of teachers' salaries by ₾100. Also, in kindergartens, where salaries have been increased this year, it will be fully funded by 2021. In 2021, the increased salaries of police officers and soldiers will also be fully funded this year,” said Kakauridze.

According to him, the first version of the budget does not yet reflect the costs of the pandemic, as there's still a lot of uncertainty and the costs associated with purchasing the vaccine or re-testing and treating it is unknown so far.

Kakauridze noted that a lot depends on what the economic expectations will be worldwide. In October, the ministry will participate in the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, where updated forecasts for the world economy will be published, thus there will be a basis for more accurate analysis and planning available.



In 2019, the average monthly nominal salary in Georgia increased by ₾61.2.

# History competition final awarding ceremony held in History Museum Garden

BY LIZA NORWICH-GERWIK

The Simon Janashia History Museum has hosted an international competition, History Competition in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, winners awarding ceremony organized by DVV International. The subject of the competition was "Migration - Life from new chapter" (XIX-XXI centuries).

The official award ceremony was attended by German ambassador to Georgia H.E. Hubert

Knirsch, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia representatives Mariam Chikobava and Tea Karchava, International migration organization's local program coordinator Natia Kvitsiani.

The project is organized by DVV International and Koerber Foundation and funded by the Federal Ministry of Interior of Germany and is held in Eastern partnership countries - Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. The purpose of the project is to

support History competitions in these countries and strengthen partnerships between the countries.

Partners of the competition in Georgia are Georgian Association of History Educators (GAHE), Soviet past research laboratory (SovLab) and Writers house of Georgia.

Seventy students of age 15-18 from different regions of Georgia are taking part in the History competition. They are researching stories of their grandparents,

parents, neighbors, or family friends. To revive the past, they are using old photos, letters, articles, libraries and archives.

2019-2020 Competition theme is "Migration - life from new chapter." Despite the Covid-19 restrictions, students showed high interest and the quality of work has significantly improved compared to last year.

The members of the jury of this year's history competition are: Prof. Oliver Reisner (Ilauni), Prof. Leila Khubashvili

(TSU), Dr. Amiran Jamagidze (TSU), Natia Kvitsiani (International Organization for Migration Program Coordinator), Rusudan Kobakhidze (Sovlab Researcher), Ketevan Sikharulidze (Sovlab Researcher), Davit Jikia (DVV International Project Coordinator).

The winners of the history competition are: 1<sup>st</sup> place-Davit Mikautadze, 2<sup>nd</sup> place Mariam Bekauri, 3<sup>rd</sup> place- Tamar Chkhvitunidze and Ana Levidze.

