

## Politics

NGOs assess events of November 8 rally, call on the state, and opposition to dialogue



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## Opposition states it won't stop, schedules next rally for Saturday



Vakhtang Gomelauri briefed representatives of embassies and international organizations regarding the November 8 rally in front of the CEC.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The opposition held another protest rally yesterday, on November 9, in front of the parliament building.

The government has recently introduced a curfew, which restricts movement (both on foot and by vehicle) in public places from 22:00 to 5:00 in large cities.

GDI, ISFED, and HRC responded to the measure, claiming that the introduction of a curfew by a resolution of the Government of Georgia is unconstitutional as it has no legal authority to restrict freedom of movement. Moreover, they perceive the "attempt to quell the current wave of protests," and such a ban is neither effective nor proportionate means of achieving a legitimate goal.

"The imposition of a curfew by the Georgian government on November 9 is further evidence that Article 453 of the

Georgian Law on Public Health is unconstitutional and allows the executive branch to abuse its power and authority," NGOs wrote.

Public Defender also responded to the ban on movement. Nino Lomjaria wrote that using the government's decree to ban demonstrations and expressions will be unconstitutional since the Law of Georgia on Public Health allows for restriction of freedom of movement and not the right of assembly-demonstration.

Despite the restriction, the participants of the rally refused to leave the streets. Nika Melia, one of the leaders of the United National Movement announced during his speech at the rally that despite the restrictions, the young people will stay on Rustaveli Avenue together with the political leaders: "Let's see what else the regime will do." According to him, today, the opposition's main task is to defeat the regime with mini-

mal damage to society and this country must be put at the disposal of the people. He also announced the next rally on Rustaveli Avenue, scheduled at 15:00 on Saturday.

Around 23:00 the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia stated that the persons who violate the established regulations are being identified and they will be fined ₾2000.

Meanwhile, the Central Election Commission (CEC) released a statement regarding the incident of November 8. The CEC said that the rallies, including the ones at district elections commissions in previous days, put unacceptable form pressure on the administration and appealed to the parties that the election process is not over. They blame part of the opposition parties for obstructing the legal process and discrediting them as an independent agency. The CEC stated that they are ready to discuss any issue re-

lated to election issues in any peaceful format, appealing to international partners and local NGOs to facilitate dialogue, which is important for civic consent in the country.

Citizens and politicians gathered in front of the CEC building Sunday night, protesting the 2020 elections. None of the opposition parties recognize the October 31 parliamentary elections. They reject mandates received in the parliament and demand new elections. According to the CEC, the counting process is underway to verify and clarify the data of the precinct summary protocols.

The OSCE monitoring mission responded to the ongoing protests in Georgia following reports of clashes with police in Tbilisi over the October 31 parliamentary elections, calling on protesters

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Nika Melia called on the participants to form a live chain from Rustaveli Avenue to Vake Park on the day of the second round of elections as an act of protest.



Shame movement activists wanted to bring firewood to the area near the parliament, which law enforcers didn't allow and detained three of the members.

# NGOs assess events of November 8 rally, call on the state, and opposition to dialogue



“The action of the law enforcers against the demonstrators gathered in front of the Central Election Commission on the night of November 8 could not withstand any criticism and aggravated the current situation,” reads a joint statement published by ISFED, GYLA, and TI.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 8, opposition parties and their supporters gathered in front of the parliament of Georgia to protest the ‘illegitimate’ results of Georgia’s 2020 parliamentary elections. Later, activists marched to the Central Election Commission building, where the police fired water cannons to disperse the crowd. It was later reported that the police had also used tear gas, however, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has denied the information. Concerning the rallies, Public Defender Nino Lomjaria as well as Georgian NGOs, believe that the force used by the police was disproportional, and released statements.

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) expresses “extreme indignation about the use of disproportionate force by the state against protesters during the rally at CEC.” The statement published by ISFED reads that the police used excessive force

while trying to disperse the protest. According to the organization, the protest was in the early phase, when the police used water cannons, therefore “considering that the rally did not go beyond the form of peaceful expression, there was no ground for the use of force.”

Another non-governmental organization Democracy Index also stresses in its statement that there was no ground to disperse the rally and the force used against the civilians was disproportionate. The organization notes that the state has failed to keep a proper balance between the obligation to ensure the freedom to assemble and the goal of establishing public order, thus unlawfully restricted expression of protest.

Transparency International has made a statement, which reads that law enforcement units used, without proper grounds or warning, water cannons against a protest rally at the CEC building, in which a small number of people were taking part. TI states that according to the law, before using the force of special means, people must be warned and provided with a reasonable amount of time to comply with the state’s lawful demand. according to TI,

“police actions can be described as a gross violation of the constitutional right of assembly.”

ISFED and Transparency International Georgia (TI), together with the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA) have shared another statement, where the organizations call on both the ruling party and the opposition parties to find a way out of the situation through dialogues.

According to the joint statement, the election day was marked by numerous incidents, including attacks on journalists and representatives of monitoring organizations, voter bribing,

and confrontation outside the polling station. “Even though the 2020 parliamentary elections were a clear setback for Georgia and the worst elections held under the Georgian Dream government,” the organizations believe that the crisis can be resolved via talks between the ruling and opposition parties.

The Public Defender calls on the state and opposition parties to promptly start negotiations as well. According to the ombudsman, it is important to conduct talks with the participation of every electoral subject to agree on a legal and political solution.

“It is necessary to find ways to recount the results of contentious polling stations with maximum transparency and to ensure fair conduct of the second round,” reads the Public Defender’s statement.

Protests have been ongoing in Georgia since the Parliamentary elections, which the opposition parties believe were rigged. On November 8, opposition party leaders, who had gathered in front of the parliament of Georgia, addressed the government with three demands: Holding free and fair repeat elections; resignation of the chairperson of CEC Tamar Zhvania, and the formation of the commission in a fair manner; release of political prisoners. The demands were voiced by one of the leaders of party European Georgia Elene Khoshtaria, who gave Bidzina Ivanishvili time until 22:00 to “come out and talk to people about these issues with our partners.”

After the expiration of time set by the opposition, protesters

marched to the CEC building, where the police used water cannons to disperse them, in response to which activists started throwing stones at the police. Eventually, the rally came to an end as UNM member Nika Melia called on the crowd to leave the area and gather again the next day. Opposition parties state that they will not stop until their demands are met.

At a news briefing, Executive Secretary of Georgian Dream party Irakli Kobakhidze stated that a group with the leadership of Melia tried to storm the CEC building. According to First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Kakha Sabanadze, protesters gathered in front of the CEC building violently took down police steel cordons, threw blunt objects, attempted to break into the CEC building, and ignored instructions of the police. “MIA, within the frames of its powers defined by law, used a special tool -water cannon, due to urgent necessity.”

According to Sabanidze, 14 law enforcers, three media representatives, and about 10 protesters received injuries at the rally. He also noted that the police detained 19 individuals “under the Code of Administrative Offences for violating public order and disobedience to the rightful order of Police.” The Central Criminal Police Department of MIA has launched an investigation into the fact of organization and participation in gang violence in the vicinity of the CEC administrative building, crime envisaged under Article 225, Part I and II of the Criminal Code of Georgia.



14 law enforcers, three media representatives, and about 10 protesters received various health injuries during the rally.

## Weather

Tuesday, November 10

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 17°C  
Night 🌙 Clear  
Low: 7°C

Wednesday, November 11

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 16°C  
Night 🌧 Partly Cloudy  
Low: 7°C

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# Mobility restricts in 7 large cities

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

According to the decision of the Inter-Agency coordination council, on November 9, restriction on mobility from 22:00 to 05:00 came into force. The regulation applies to the large cities of the country: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi, Zugdidi, Gori, and Poti. Also, municipal and private kindergartens have temporarily suspended services in the cities.

Alexandre Khojevanishvili, Head of the Task Force operating at the Inter-Agency Coordination Council announced yesterday at a press-briefing that compared to the previous week, the number of infected individuals in the country is rising fast. In contrast with the early last week when the country reported 1900 cases a day, there are now up to 3000 infected individuals detected daily, therefore, as he stated, on November 7, the coordination council decided to tighten the regulations. Ban on mobility from 22:00 to 05:00, which entered the force yesterday, applies to both walking and driving.

Khojevanishvili paid attention to directions that are not subject to restrictions, in particular, the measure does not apply to the following directions: International cargo transportation, mobility of passengers and vehicles with a clearance of the Task Force if and when of critical importance for delivering official



Ban on mobility from 22:00 to 05:00, applies to both walking and driving.



On November 9, Georgia reported 2927 new cases of coronavirus, 2470 recoveries, and 24 deaths.

duties at pharmaceutical and healthcare facilities, institutions of strategic significance and media outlets, as well as the catering service delivery staff.

Based on the decree of the Minister of Health of November 6, if the Emergency Situations Coordination and Urgent Assistance Center employee dies of coronavirus, their family will receive one-off financial assistance up to ₾10 000 and in case of death during the performance of official duties, the family will receive up to ₾5 000. Unfortunately, since the spread of coronavirus, two ambulance doctors have died of the virus in Baghdati and Akhalkalaki.

On November 9, Georgia reported 2 927 new cases of coronavirus and the total number of infected individuals reached 60 680. As Khojevanishvili noted, regarding patient recoveries, a positive dynamic is maintained, with 2 470 people recovered yesterday. Unfortunately, 24 more people died and the death toll stands at 499.

Out of 2 927 cases identified on November 9, 1 033 were recorded in Tbilisi, 411 - in Adjara, 782 - in Imereti, 130 - in Kvemo Kartli, 74 - in Shida Kartli, 53 - in Guria, 150 - in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, 133 - in Kakheti, 79 - in Mtskheta-Mtianeti, 59 - in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and 23 - in Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti.

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to refrain from violence and on the authorities to respect the fundamental freedom of assembly and expression.

It stated that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's observation mission, a joint effort of PACE, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE / ODIHR, concluded that the technical aspects of the elections had been effectively managed, despite Covid-19. However, the dominance of the ruling party in election commissions has negatively affected the perception of impartiality and independence of the commission, especially at lower levels.

The head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly called on all actors to engage in a constructive dialogue, overcome the current polarization and work together to create a stable political environment, while simultaneously paying attention to the messages received from international stakeholders. "I want to express my support for the CEC for an inclusive process

of investigating alleged election irregularities."

Responding to a statement from the OSCE monitoring mission, the ruling party said it 'fully shares the spirit of the statement' and called on the opposition to "act within the law, return to constructive approaches and not jeopardize state institutions, democracy and the rule of law."

Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia assessed the developments with the CEC as a direct call for violently attacking state institutions, "to which the reaction of the state should be legitimate and strict." The PM who is in self-isolation, undergoing treatment for Covid-19, reminded that the country is fighting a virus and together, that everyone is "involved in a daily process of saving people's lives."

One of the leaders of European Georgia Giga Bokeria says opposition parties are ready for a dialogue with the government, but its focal point should be appointing elections.

## EU4Energy: EU supports workshop in Georgia on renewable electricity

On 6 November, the 'EU4Energy governance' project held an online workshop on the renewables sector in Georgia. The workshop focused on the assistance that the country needs for the development of contractual templates for renewables-based electricity generation.

The technical assistance project was implemented together with the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia and the Electricity Sys-

tem Commercial Operator. The outputs of the event will be sent to the Georgian authorities for comments and finalised in the coming weeks.

The 'EU4Energy' initiative covers all EU support to improve energy supply, security and connectivity, as well as to promote energy efficiency and the use of renewables in the Eastern partner countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and

Ukraine. It does this by financing projects and programmes that help to reform energy markets and to reduce national energy dependence and consumption. Over the longer term, this makes energy supply more reliable, transparent and affordable, reducing energy poverty and energy bills for both



Photo: European Union

citizens and the private sector.