

OPINION & ANALYSIS

MEPs express their concern over post-election events in Georgia



FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

IMF lowers Georgia's economic growth forecast for 2021



FULL STORY ON Page 3

US bill doesn't include preconditions for allocating aid for Georgia

FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

According to the official information released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo will be visiting Georgia on November 17-18. As the ministry reports, during his visit, Pompeo will hold meetings with Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, President Salome Zurbashvili, Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani, and Catholics-Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II.

The information reads that within the framework of the US secretary of state's visit to Georgia, High-level meetings will focus on priority directions under the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership as well as on prospects for further strengthening the partnership between the two countries in the fields of defense and security, trade and economy, democracy, people-to-people contacts, education, and cultural exchanges. The parties will also discuss the ongoing economic and democratic reforms in Georgia as well as the security environment in Georgia and the wider region.

MFA states that the visit is proof that the United States remains committed to supporting Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the country's continuous democratic development and European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

During yesterday's meeting of the

U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo to visit Georgia on November 17-18



► US secretary of state Mike Pompeo



► "The Secretary's last stop in Europe will be Tbilisi...to express our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, to urge further progress in democratic reforms."

Interagency Coordination Council, PM Gakharia commented on the visit of the US Secretary of State and stressed that "it is yet another demonstration of the importance and all-time high level of Georgia-US strategic partnership." Gakharia noted that despite the COVID pandemic and all the other challenges

the country is facing, "we must be fully focused on making ready for this visit."

As the Minister of MFA David Zalkaliani stated at the briefing yesterday, he believes that the upcoming visit is a clear sign of political support from the US administration. The same opinion has been suggested by Mariam Kvrivishvili,

a member of the Georgian Dream party, who announced that Pompeo's visit emphasizes the support from the US for the ongoing democratic processes in Georgia.

The leader of an opposition party Girchi, Zurab Japardze, noted that it is important that Pompeo meets with opposition parties as well.

MEPs express their concern over post-election events in Georgia



► Members of European Parliament Andrius Kubilius and Rasa Juknevičienė, also a member of Parliament of Lithuania Žygmantas Pavilionis express readiness to play a 'constructional role' in dialogues between the government, opposition, and people.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

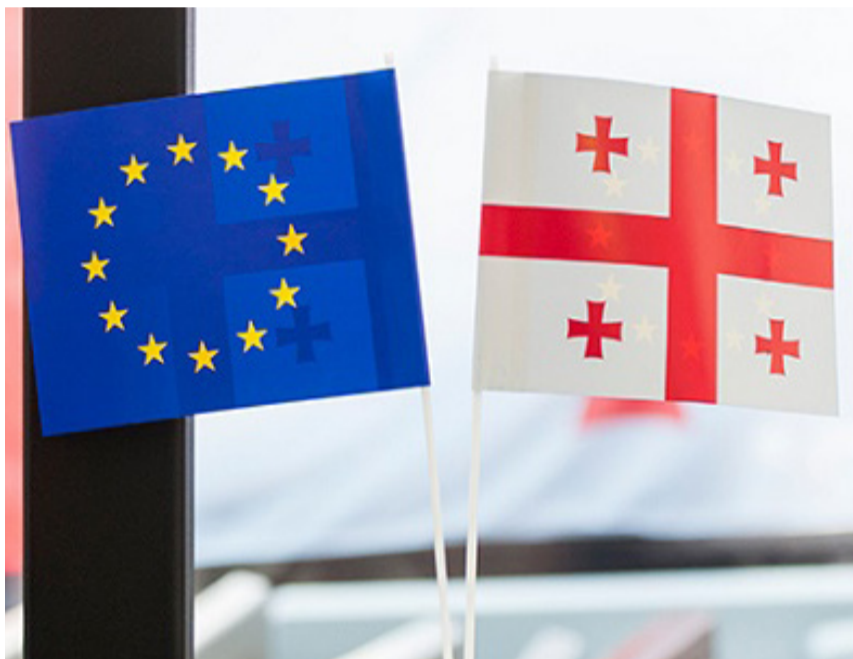
Members of European Parliament Andrius Kubilius and Rasa Juknevičienė, also a member of Parliament of Lithuania Žygmantas Pavilionis have published a statement where they express their concerns regarding the situation in Georgia that followed the October 31 parliamentary elections.

According to the statement, even though the elections were competitive and the voters had real alternatives, the conduct of the elections was affected by allegations spread about pressurizing the voters, which, as the statement read, has resulted in reducing public confidence. They believe that the situation has been aggravated by the reports that both opposition and NGOs are denied the possibility to fairly review their substantiated claims and appeal to existing institutions.

"Fair and transparent handling of all and any complaints remains a prerequisite to establishing trust and confidence among the Georgian politicians and people."

As the Lithuanian politicians believe, to find a way out of a difficult situation for the Georgian democracy, the Government of Georgia, together with the ruling party has the responsibility to address the existing problems and reach out for dialogue with the opposition.

They call on international organizations present during the first round of elections with their observation missions (especially OSCE



► "We have always been steadfast supporters of Georgia, its sovereignty, territorial integrity, democracy and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Georgian people."

and CoE PA) to assess complaints and election irregularities and present the conclusion.

The MEPs call on the government of Georgia to restrict the usage of force by police against peaceful protesters and not to provoke violence in the streets. Politicians express readiness to play a "constructional" role in dialogues between the government, opposition, and people.

"We trust Georgian authorities will use the legal means within the democratic processes Georgia has built over the last decades, to evaluate complaints and evidence about irregularities of elections and to seek inclusive dialogue with opposition and people, who protest on the streets. We stand ready to assist and play a constructive role in this dialogue."

According to them, on the backdrop of the recent development in the south Caucasus, Georgia needs political stability and unity to proceed with its ambitious European agenda. Kubilius, Juknevičienė, and Pavilionis call on every political side to take responsibility to ensure that Georgia concentrates its efforts on European integration and "has a parliament, which enjoys broad legitimacy and can address the immediate challenges."

Since the parliamentary elections of October 31, Georgian political parties and their supporters have been protesting the election results published by the Central Election Commission. Opposition demands the resignation of the chairperson of CEC Tamar Zhvania, holding free and fair repeat elections, and the release of political inmates.

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Court rejects lawsuit filed by opposition parties and NGOs to recount the votes

One of the leaders of the political party European Georgia, Sergi Kapanadze, stated that the court rejected 99% of the lawsuits filed by political parties and non-governmental organizations.

Kapanadze noted that the refusal to recount the votes at the polling stations means that the government, an extension of which is the Court in the current reality, is avoiding any legal way to establish the truth.

"We requested a recount at polling station 73. The precinct commission refused, but the Court granted us the right to see them and, after the recount, it turned out that 35 ballot papers were counted in favor of another political party," said Kapanadze.

Kapanadze gave an example of one of the cases, 57th polling station of the 22nd district, where 202 signatures were found to be extra. That is, 202 more people showed up to vote than was recorded at the polling station.

Fauci: COVID-19 vaccine will be available at the end of December if proven effective

Anthony Fauci, head of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, says the COVID-19 vaccine may be introduced in the US in December if its 'reliability and effectiveness' are proven. Fauch says he trusts the vaccine company, Pfizer, and if the food and drug administration gives him the green light, he is ready to get the vaccine himself.

According to Fauch, in the first stage, during vaccination, priority will be given to people working in the health sector and vulnerable groups who suffer from various diseases.

"We do not expect all doses of the vaccine to be available in December of this year. It will take a long time. More supplies of the vaccine will be available in March or April 2021," Fauci added.

According to him, in April 2021, approximately 700 million doses of the vaccine will be available.

US Secretary of Health Alex Azar told the CBN that "at the end of March, the beginning of April, they expect to get enough vaccines to reach everyone in the United States."

Government is preparing for another partial or full lockdown, FormulaNews reports

FormulaNews reports that according to the information of the Interior Ministry, the government is planning on another lockdown to go into effect at the end of the week.

Additional regulations will be introduced and tightened not only at night but also during the day.

Tengiz Tsertsvadze, Director General of the Infectious Diseases, has recently stated that lockdown would be the easiest way to take control

THURSDAY		NOVEMBER 12	
Day		Partly cloudy	
		High: 13°C	
Night		Overcast	
		Low: 6°C	
FRIDAY		NOVEMBER 13	
Day		Cloudy	
		High: 13°C	
Night		Partly cloudy	
		Low: 5°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 – 3.3186 | EURO – 3.9143 | GBP – 4.3948 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE – 4.3448 | SWISS FRANC – 3.6194 |

IMF lowers Georgia's economic growth forecast for 2021

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission has completed negotiations with the Government of Georgia and the National Bank of Georgia (NBG). According to a statement issued by the Foundation, the increase in the number of COVID-19 infections in Georgia and the aggravation of the political situation in the region are factors why 2021 growth in Georgia is expected to be lower than previously predicted. The report released by the IMF on October 13 forecasted 5% economic growth in Georgia in 2021, but after almost a month of monitoring, the IMF revised its estimate to 4.3%.

In addition, the IMF estimates that the crisis in the tourism sector will last more than a year and that the sector will return to 2019 levels only in 2024. According to the NBG, in 2019, Georgia's income from tourism exceeded \$3 billion, and this year this number is expected to be reduced by 90-95%.

According to the National Tourism Administration, 1.37 million international visitors visited Georgia in the first 9 months of 2020, which is 77.1% less than in the same period of 2019. The flow of visitors from the EU decreased by 83% this year and amounted to 66 thou-



▶ IMF says the tourism in Georgia will return to the 2019 level by 2024



▶ Georgia will receive \$112 million from the IMF

sand. Most of these visitors were in the country before the border was closed and Lockdown was declared earlier this year.

With macroeconomic policy discipline and donor support, reserves will be maintained at an adequate level in the medium term. "It is expected that the tourism shock will last for a long time and the level of tourism revenues will return to the level of 2019 only in 2024."

According to the same statement, negotiations between the Ministry of Finance and the IMF revised the 2021 budget deficit which has been increased to 7.6%. Until now, the deficit was projected at 5.1%, so increasing it means that the government plans to borrow more than was foreseen in the first draft budget next year.

The 'fiscal rule' states that by 2023, the fiscal deficit should be 3% of GDP and public debt 60% of GDP. Although the IMF statement does not directly state what GDP will reach Georgia in 2021, according to the text, the debt level should be 60% by 2023, there is a high probability that the debt will exceed 60% in 2021-2022.

According to Vera Martin Mercedes, the head of the IMF mission, Georgia will receive \$112 million after completing the 7th review of its program with the IMF.

US bill doesn't include preconditions for allocating aid for Georgia



▶ In July, the US House Appropriations Committee Announced External Finance Financing Bill for Fiscal Year 2021, which also discussed Georgia.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The US Fiscal Year 2021 State and Foreign Operations Funding bill, which has been approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee, no longer includes preconditions for allocating \$132 million financial aid for Georgia. Davit Zalkaliani, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, announced that the bill does not contain a 15% reservation regarding the allocation of funding for Georgia that existed

in the version adopted by the House of Representatives on July 24, 2020.

The bill also reads that 15% of the funds could have been withheld until the US Secretary of State determined and reported that the Georgian government is taking effective steps to strengthen democratic institutions, combat corruption and ensure that the rule of law in the private sector is consistent with internationally recognized standards.



▶ Bakradze says there was no basis for saying that Georgia should have expected any sanctions from the US.

"This proves once again that there is significant progress in Georgia's democratic development. It also reaffirms how opponents should not use the country's relationship with the United States, a key strategic partner, for their political interests," said Zalkaliani. The opposition accused the Georgian Dream leadership of worsening relations with the US, citing the caveat from the previous version of the bill.

Davit Bakradze, Georgian

Ambassador to the United States responded to the bill, reiterating that the strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States is at the highest level.

The highest level of our partnership is reflected in the legislative acts passed by the US Congress and even in the high-level visit that we expect next week. The reservation that existed in the draft House of Representatives, as we see, does not appear in the version

of the Senate," Bakradze announced, adding that in the aforementioned budget act we see, on the one hand, the support of Georgia from year to year, as part of foreign aid. He reminded us that the support to the Georgian economy from the American side has increased by 35 million compared to 3 years ago, and by almost 50 million compared to the data from 4 years ago.

According to him, the United States strongly supports Georgia's territorial integrity and this will become clear once again during Mike Pompeo's visit.

"As for the second and very important part- it was written in the 2017 budget for the first time and has not changed since then- that it is to support Georgia's policy of territorial integrity and non-recognition, which is a very important message for other countries around the world," Bakradze said.

The Appropriations Committee in July published a draft of the possibility of suspending the funding provided. The bill needs to be approved by the Senate and then signed by the US president to go into effect.