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Health Minister: We are dealing with inefficient management



Government will likely impose further restrictions,

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

As of November 16, there were 16,785 active Covid-19 infected cases, of which 5,658 are treated in hospitals and 7,812 at home. 50,256 people are recorded to be in self-isolation.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases increased by 3,175 to 82,835. According to the information published on a special page stopcov.ge, 65,291 of them have recovered and this figure has increased by 3,230. Covid-19 has killed 733 people in Georgia.

Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control, claims that there are enough beds mobilized in the country at the moment and there is no need to arrange field hospitals. According to him, currently, up to 5,000 citizens are treated in hospitals, which is 30% of the total number of infected people, and this figure should be reduced to 15% under good management.

According to Gamkrelidze, additional 3,000 beds can be mobilized and a total of 8,500 beds will be available in hospitals.

After the meeting of the Interagency Coordination Council, Gamkrelidze said the current restrictions will be tightened even more, yet clarified that a full lockdown would

not be considered.

According to the Minister of Health Ekaterine Tikaradze, the clinics should transfer relatively light patients to covered hotels and should use breathing equipment for severe patients with oxy-

gen beds. She noted that this issue was addressed at a meeting with the heads of the clinics, which took place twice in the government administration, with the involvement of the Prime Minister last week.

"Here we are dealing with inefficient management, on which we have consulted, agreed on these issues and clinics will improve management, thus mobilizing respirators and oxygen beds for the patients who need it," Tikaradze said, adding that to date, 1,040 respirators and up to 3,400 oxygen beds have been mobilized and additional respirators have been purchased and will be distributed to clinics as soon as they arrive.

She clarified that 868 beds are mobilized in the country in the direction of Covid management and this number is increasing by 100-200 beds daily. According to Tikaradze, up to 800 patients are leaving hospitals daily, while the admission and hospitalization rate is high.

Given such a situation, the new platform was created for citizens enabling them to get information about the identity of the family doctor and the primary health care institution through the new informational portal.

According to the Ministry of Health, by referring to the personal number on the portal, the citizen can find out which primary health care institution is registered and also receive information about the identity of the family doctor who will monitor the patient's health condition.

ოჯახის ექიმის/სამედიცინო დაწესებულების
საკონტაქტო ინფორმაციის მისაღებად
ახალი საინფორმაციო პორტალი ამოქმედდა

ambulatoria.moh.gov.ge

Ambulatoria.moh.gov.ge - The citizens can find a family doctor at a new portal.

MDF releases pre-election monitoring report on anti-Western messages, hate speech, fake news



The monitoring of hate speech and anti-Western narratives covers the period from August 1 to October 25, 2020, while the monitoring of fake information includes cases revealed in a period between August 1 and November 10.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Media Development Foundation (MDF) has published the results of monitoring conducted ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections. The monitoring focused on the cases of anti-Western messages and hate speech voiced by electoral subjects and political parties, as well as fake news and discrediting campaigns. The monitoring of hate speech and anti-Western narratives covers the period from August 1 to October 25, 2020, while the monitoring of fake in-

formation includes cases revealed in a period between August 1 and November 10.

According to the report, electoral subjects made a total of 157 anti-western speeches during the monitoring period. The largest share (65) of anti-western messages targeted the West as a common geopolitical space with shared values, as well as geographical and institutional unity. Then comes NATO with 41 messages. Statements against NATO were most frequently made by The Alliance of Patriots, "highlighting the need

for supporting neutrality and direct talks with Russia as a solution to the problems." 26 statements were made against the United States, 15 against civil society organizations and Soros, and 10 against the European Union.

Among political parties, the majority (89) of the anti-Western comments were made by the Alliance of Patriots, followed by Georgian March and Georgian Idea parties (18).

Out of 140 statements made during the reporting period containing hate speech, the largest share accounts for xenophobic comments, which is then followed by comments of homophobic context. According to the report, among politicians, the majority of discriminatory remarks were made by the members of Alliance of Patriots (75), followed by Georgian March with 37 comments, Free Georgia - 7, Georgian Idea - 5, Georgian Roots - 4, Lelo for Georgia - 4. Labor Party and Georgian Dream each made two comments. The majority of xenophobic statements were Turkophobic, Armenophobic about migrants, and against the sale of lands to foreign nationals.

As the report suggests, within the reporting period, 22 pieces of

disinformation and manipulative context have been verified, which were spread by politicians and election stakeholders. The report also refers to conspiracies around COVID-19. The conspiracies spread by the politicians (Alliance of Patriots, Georgian Idea, Zviad Tomaradze), concerned the non-existence of the virus and threats related to vaccination.

MDF names the topic of David Gareja Monastery Complex as the most influential discrediting campaign that had been launched by the government ahead of the parliamentary elections against the opposition parties. Discrediting campaign related to David Gareji Monastery Complex, which is located on the disputed section of the Georgian-Azerbaijani state border, served the purpose of spreading the information that "the previous government sold Davit Gareji monastery to Azerbaijan."

"The campaign promoted a narrative that opponents are selling churches and homeland, while the government is neutralizing threats. The campaign was accompanied by a criminal investigation launched based on topographic maps provided by businessmen with close ties to Russian intelligence services,"



Media Development Foundation (MDF).

reads the report.

During the reporting period, MDF also observed fake news on social media against political and other stakeholders. The monitoring has revealed that besides disinformation spread by politicians, 31 other pieces of disinformation were revealed. The largest share (16) was against opposition and eight against the Georgian Dream. The study has also detected 4 cases of disinformation and manipulative content is spread in support of the ruling Georgian Dream. Two pieces of fake information were spread against the US Ambassador and one by a Georgian Trump-supporting page against Joe Biden. As the monitoring has revealed, the most common form was the falsification of quotes also spreading fabricated posts/documents and photo/video manipulations.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Georgian Security and Foreign Policy Community writes Mike Pompeo, requests permanent presence of American armed forces in Georgia

We offer you the open letter written to the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo:

To: The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State

From: Georgian Security and Foreign Policy Community

Subject: Permanent Presence of American Armed Forces in Georgia

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We, the representatives of the security and foreign policy community of Georgia, sincerely welcome your visit to Tbilisi during these heated times. We are united in our desire to share our views

on advancing the U.S.-Georgia defense and security partnership. For Georgia, the United States is a vital ally. Likewise, we believe in Georgia's share in bolstering Western interests in Europe and globally. Georgia stands as a keystone for securing our allies' foothold in the East-West Corridor, which multiple U.S. administrations have invested so much to build. We see a U.S.-led Euro-Atlantic system as the only guarantor of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

In recent years, the South Caucasus and the Black Sea regions have become areas of geopolitical instability. Most of these security risks stem from Russia's ambitions to reconstitute a Soviet-era "sphere of influence," in what Moscow perceives as its "Near Abroad." Emboldened by its freedom of action, Russia recently deployed troops to Nagorno-Karabakh to enhance its regional military posture.

Since regaining independence, the freedom-loving citizens of Georgia have toiled to create a functional democracy. In this project, the United States has been an indispensable ally by elevating Georgia to, in the words of President Ronald

Reagan, a "Shining City Upon a Hill" that has overcome state failure and successfully battled the Soviet legacy of corruption. The Georgian people do not take genuine American friendship for granted. Over 90 percent of Georgians hold a favorable view of the U.S. and Georgian soldiers have proudly served in the U.S.-led missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We express our profound appreciation for America's strong support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We believe that a key step forward to support the Georgian people in our struggle for freedom, while advancing U.S. regional and global interests, would be:

- **A permanent presence of American armed forces in Georgia.** Such a policy may include allied (U.S./European) forces on a rotational basis, as well as logistical and air patrolling elements that would provide a wide range of options for American and allied forces to operate uninterrupted in the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. At the same time, the U.S. military presence in Georgia would enjoy overwhelming popular support, deter imminent threats and help

Georgia move closer to NATO membership.

At this point, Georgia's capacity to meaningfully contribute to our strategic partnership will be further enhanced by the resilience and vibrancy of its democratic institutions. In this light, we welcome the valuable U.S. engagement in mediating a solution to Georgia's current political crisis. We are likewise grateful for the momentous and sustained efforts that the U.S. has made over the years, to help strengthen Georgia's democracy.

We fully support the process of strengthening the U.S.-Georgia alliance, inclusive of the presence of the U.S. military on the ground, to the benefit of shared Euro-Atlantic security.

Sincerely,
Zviad Adzinbaia
International Security and Digital Diplomacy Fellow, The Fletcher School, Tufts University Founder, LEADx Change
Eka Akobia
Dean, Associate Professor, The School of Governance, Caucasus University
Irakli Alasania
Former Minister of Defense Former Ambassador to the United Nations
Irina Arabidze

National Security and Foreign Policy Analyst

Phikria Asanishvili
Associate Professor of International Relations, Tbilisi State University

Giorgi Astamadze
Doctoral Candidate in History, University of Karlsruhe

Nato Bachiashvili
Chairperson of International Centre for Geopolitical Studies

Giorgi Badridze
Senior Fellow, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation)

Zurab Batiashvili
Former Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain Research Fellow, Rondeli Foundation

Zaza Bibilashvili
Chairman, The Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education

Levan Bodzashvili
Former Deputy National Security Assistant to President

Eto Buziashvili
Former Deputy Foreign Minister Research Associate, Atlantic Council

Former Adviser to the National Security Council

MORE NEWS IN BRIEF ON P. 3

Weather

Tuesday, November 17

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 13°C

Night Showers

Low: 6°C

Wednesday, November 18

Day Showers

High: 9°C

Night Showers

Low: 3°C

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
 Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze
 Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
 E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
 http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
 Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
 Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
 Layout Designer, Photographer

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NGOs respond to rally dispersal against Namakhvani HPP by using police force



According to a statement published by the organizations, as of November 15, residents of village Zhoneti had been protesting the construction of the Namakhvani HPP cascade for 21 days.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Non-governmental organizations - Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Green Alternative and Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center - EMC respond to the dispersal of protest against the construction of Namakhvani HPP by using police force on November 14. According to the NGOs, instead of conducting dialogues with the locals, who are concerned with the HPP's high environmental impact, the government ignores the community's interests and uses police force and repressive methods to suppress the protest. The organizations urge the government to stop using repressive methods against peaceful protesters and to provide suspension of construction works until they present proper documentation and research on the potential impact of HPP.

According to the statement published by the organizations, as of November 15, residents of village Zhoneti were protesting the construction of the Namakhvani HPP cascade for 21 days. They still demand halting of the building process, which is underway with a status of pre-

paratory works. As the NGOs note, the so-called preparatory works involve considerable intervention and significantly convert local natural and social environments. However, substantial documentation and expert studies about the impact of HPP under construction is yet to be submitted. The local people demand an opportunity to meet with the relevant authority officials and share their concerns, but as the statement reads, instead of starting dialogues, up to 100 police officers were mobilized at the rally, and protesters, including elderly, women and children, were forcibly removed from the road. According to the locals, some of the activists were injured in a clash with the police.

The project of Namakhvani HPP is being carried out in the valley of river Rioni by the Turkish company ENKA. NGOs note that a tunnel of Shuakhevi HPP, which had been built by the same company, demolished soon after commissioning.

Constructing the Namakhvani HPP cascade is planned in Tskaltubo and Tsageri municipalities. The statement reads that the Namakhvani HPP cascade is

one of the largest energy projects with an installed capacity of 433 MW. The Namakhvani HPP Cascade Project encompasses the building of two separate HPPs on the Rioni River, therefore "due to its massive scale, the potential impact and possible risks on the local social and natural environment are high."

As the NGOs state, based on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report prepared by the company (ENKA Renewables), the implementation of the lower Namakhvani project alone will be associated with the loss of a significant amount of land, which is mainly caused due to the arrangement of a reservoir with a 610hectare mirror surface. There are also high risks existing in the context of physical and economic resettlement, in particular, if the power plant is built, 100 families will be subject to dispossession as their settlement will be under a risk of inundation. The statement reads that the project is accompanied by serious seismic risks as well. As experts say, cascades of Namakhvani and Tvishi dams will not withstand a 5 magnitude earthquake, whilst there was a 7 magnitude earthquake in Racha in 1991.

According to the statement, the construction permit issued by LEPL Technical and Construction Supervision Agency (TCSA) of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia provides some documentation that should be submitted by the company before the construction starts. Respectively, the NGOs state that at this stage, the company is carrying out the construction without having submitted substantial documentation and research required by the construction permit.

The statement reads that against the background when the local population, the community, and specialists in the field have several critical conclusions and questions regarding the le-

IRI publishes technical election assessment mission interim report

The International Republican Institute technical election assessment mission published an interim report yesterday, which includes the analysis of 31 October parliamentary elections and recommendations for the second rounds of 21 November.

"Conducted elections in Georgia did not satisfy the constitutional and electoral changes imposed by the new standards and reduced the trust of election administration. It's of vital importance for the government to be able to improve the credibility and transparency of the future elections in the upcoming round and correct the flows that were observed on 31 October," said Stephen Knicks, Director of Eurasia at the International Republican Institute.

Even though the 31 October elections were held in a more or less peaceful environment, following the legislation, the pre-election period and election day revealed violations, negatively impacting the reliability of the full process. The notable violations that were recorded by observers were the use of administrative resources, vote-bribing, pressuring voters and observers, the figure manipulations and results management processes in summary protocols of district election commissions, which lacked transparency to meet international standards.

Given the second tour scheduled on 21 November and background of ongoing negotiations among nine parliamentary opposition parties, the report of the mission offers the government, political parties, civil society, and the media to improve trustworthiness for the next election based on the developed recommendations.

gality of the construction of HPP, as well as its severely high impact and risks, the large-scale construction is 'proceeding smoothly' with the lack of transparency and ignorance to the critical questions and opinions.

"In response to the local community's concerns and peaceful protest, the government uses repressive methods and tries to suppress the local's protest by using police force, grossly violating the fundamental rights of the people under the influence of the project," reads the statement.

Considering the above mentioned, the NGOs call on the government of Georgia to:

- Stop using repressive methods against the fair and peaceful protest of the local community and immediately create a format of real and continuous dialogue with the community and the specialists in the field.

- Ensure a halt to construction of Namakhvani HPP until adequate consultations are conducted with the community and prior to submitting documents

and researches by the company on the potential impact of the HPP

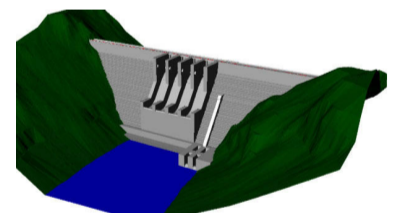
NGOs call on the court to:

- Ensure timely and impartial review of the submitted complaint to enable the locals to resolve their problems through legal means.

The NGOs call on local and international organisations, diplomatic missions and media organisations to:

- Become actively interested in the legality of Namakhvani HPP construction and its possible impact.

- Use all available resources to support the worries of local people and put the problems of Namakhvani plat construction on the agenda.



The project of Namakhvani HPP is being carried out by a Turkish company.

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Mikheil Darchiashvili
Former Deputy Defense Minister
Member of the Governing Board,
Atlantic Council of Georgia

Davit Darchiashvili
Professor, Director, Center for Russian Studies, Ilia State University

Jaba Devdariani
Founder, the United Nations Association of Georgia & Civil.ge
Paata Gaprindashvili
Director, Georgia's Reforms Associates
Former Ambassador to Austria

Kakha Gogolashvili
Director of European Studies at Rondeli Foundation (GFSIS)

Giorgi Gogvadze
Assistant Professor of International Affairs, Caucasus University

Tornike Gordadze
Former Minister of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia
Professor, Paris Institute of Po-

litical Studies (France)

Giorgi Gvalia
Professor of Politics and International Relations, Ilia State University

Shota Gvineria
Senior Fellow, Economic Policy Research Center
Former Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Gia Japaridze
Senior Fellow, Ilia Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education. Former Charge d'Affaires to Portugal and Cyprus

Tedo Japaridze
Former Ambassador to the United States
Former Foreign Minister

Nino Kalandadze
Director, The Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education

Nodar Kharshiladze
Founding Director, Georgian Strategic Analysis Center

Former Deputy Minister of Defense

Tinat Khidasheli
Chairperson, Civic Idea
Former Minister of Defense

Beka Kobakhidze
Chair, MA Program in Modern History of Georgia, Ilia State University

Batu Kutelia
Vice-chair, Atlantic Council of Georgia
Former Ambassador to the United States

Khatuna Lagazidze
Senior Fellow, Georgian Strategic Analysis Center
Former Senior Advisor to the National Security Council

Ekaterine Metreveli
President, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation)

Grigol Mgaloblishvili
Former Ambassador of Georgia to NATO

Khatuna Mshvidobadze
Professorial Lecturer, The

George Washington University
Senior Fellow, Senior Fellow, Rondeli Foundation

Giorgi Muchaidze
Executive Director, Atlantic Council of Georgia

Sophia Petriashvili
Former Associate Professor of International Relations, Tbilisi State University

Alex Petriashvili
Former Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration
Former Ambassador to Turkmenistan and Afghanistan

Tengiz Pkhaladze
Associate Professor, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs
Former Foreign Policy Advisor to the President

Mirian Popkhadze
Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute
Former Representative of Ministry of Defense to the United Nations

Irakli Porchkhidze

Vice President, the Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies (GISS)

Datuna Rakviashvili
Secretary, National Security Council, 2016-2018

Giorgi Rukhadze
Senior Fellow, Georgian Strategic Analysis Center

Tornike Sharashenidze
Professor of International Affairs, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs

Vasil Sikharulidze
President, the Atlantic Council of Georgia; Former Ambassador to the United States

Tornike Turmanidze
Professor of International Relations, Tbilisi State University

Gela Vasadze
Regional Program Manager, Georgian Strategic Analysis Center

Temuri Yakobashvili
Ambassador of Georgia to the United States (2010-2013)