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# Mike Pompeo arrives in Tbilisi



US Secretary of State arrived in Tbilisi from Turkey. According to him, one of the main topics of conversation at the meetings in Istanbul was religious freedom.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Georgia on 17 November. Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani, Georgian Ambassador to the United States Davit Bakradze, and US

Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan welcomed Pompeo at the airport.

Within the framework of the visit, tomorrow the US Secretary of State will hold meetings with the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia, the President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili, and

the Minister of Foreign Affairs Davit Zalkaliani. During the visit, Mike Pompeo will meet with the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II. Pompeo will also hold a meeting with representatives of Georgian civil society.

The US Embassy in Georgia has re-

leased a statement regarding the visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Georgia.

"We are happy to welcome Secretary Pompeo in the beautiful city of Tbilisi. The Secretary of State is here to reaffirm the United States' strong support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as our commitment to our common values, freedom, and democracy.

"Secretary Pompeo will review the efforts needed to strengthen Georgia's democratic institutions and emphasize the importance of free and fair elections," the US Embassy said in a statement.

After arriving in the capital of Georgia, Pompeo tweeted: "Thrilled to be in Tbilisi. The United States and Georgia have a strong relationship built upon our shared commitment to freedom and independence. We are committed to helping Georgia deepen its Euro-Atlantic ties and strengthen its democratic institutions."

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani answered a journalist's question about whether the request of Georgian experts and ex-top officials for a permanent presence of the US army in Georgia will be part of the conversation with Pompeo. According to Zalkaliani, there is a constant discussion about issues related to strengthening Georgia with the help of Americans.

"Cooperation with the United States in the field of defense and security is very important and valuable for us, otherwise, we will not be able to cope with the security challenges that the country faces today. This is indicated by the concrete results we have. I am sure that we will have tangible results in this direction in the future as well."



The Georgian MFA stated yesterday that the visit of US State Secretary Mike Pompeo to Georgia "once again points to the firmness of the US-Georgia strategic partnership and reaffirms the commitment of the two countries to strengthen their cooperation."



# Pompeo plays favorites in the Georgia runoffs, David Kramer's letter regarding US Secretary of State's visit to Georgia

As Georgia gets ready for runoff elections, tensions are high. The opposition and incumbents are at odds, and calls continue for the top election official to resign. Much is at stake in the outcome of the second round. Critics of the first round are calling for recounts, if not outright new elections. For Americans, recent developments in the Caucasus nation sound awfully familiar.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is due to arrive in Tbilisi, Georgia, Tuesday evening for meetings Wednesday. Pompeo's trip, the most high-level visit to the country since Vice President Mike Pence was there in the summer of 2017, comes at a volatile time for both Georgia and the United States and risks undermining U.S. policy toward Georgia if not handled carefully.

Georgia, the most pro-Western state in the Eurasia region, has been an island of fragile democracy in a sea of authoritarianism and instability. An important strategic partner of the United States, Georgian troops have fought with Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan. Together with Ukraine, Georgia is the only country in Eurasia that aspires to join NATO and the EU. The U.S. Army and Marines have train-and-equip programs in Georgia to help its military to deploy with us, and to deter further Russian aggression. (After the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Russia still occupies about 20 percent of Georgian territory in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.) The recent fighting between Georgia's neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the deployment of a nearly 2,000-member Russian peacekeeping force to the South Caucasus, highlight the precarious position in which Georgia finds itself.

For the past two weeks, Georgia, a country of 3.7 million people, has become embroiled in a political crisis over contested parliamentary elections. The party in power, Georgian Dream, claims to have won the October 31 elections with 48 percent of the vote for their party list. (Of the 150 members of the parliament, 120 are elected by at-large party lists while 30 are elected from single-member districts.)



At the same time, eight opposition parties received enough votes to be represented in the parliament.

Opposition parties, disunited before the election, have come together to accuse Georgian Dream of rigging the election and have vowed to boycott upcoming runoff races. They have also declared that they will not take their seats in the new parliament unless Georgia Dream yields to their demands, which include holding new elections, the removal of the head of the Central Election Commission, and release of all those detained in protests in the aftermath of the election.

The October 31 elections were indeed flawed, as reflected in assessments by both domestic and international observers. According to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, "Georgia's parliamentary elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. Nevertheless, pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process."

While commending Georgians for voting during the coronavirus pandemic, the OSCE observers noted that "the dominance of the ruling party in the election commissions negatively affected the perception of their impartiality and independence, especially at the lower levels." Reputable domestic observers such as Transparency International were even harsher in their assessments. Protests over the past week

were met with an overly forceful response from the authorities, with more than 300 people arrested and a number injured by water cannons, used without any warning to disperse. Tensions in the country are running high.

The United States, of course, is in the middle of its own controversy, with President Trump refusing to concede defeat to President-elect Joe Biden. That doesn't leave U.S. officials on the strongest grounds to opine on other countries' elections. Pompeo, who is the subject of several investigations by the State Department Inspector General, didn't help matters last week when he absurdly claimed that the United States would see a "smooth transition to a second Trump administration." Such statements in defiance of the duly recognized results of the U.S. election undermine his credibility to advance democracy and human rights in other countries. He hasn't earned the swag-

ger he promised he would bring to the State Department, and should consider instead a strong dose of humility instead.

Yet Georgians will be hanging on Pompeo's every word. His schedule for Tbilisi includes meetings only with government representatives, civil society activists, and the Georgian Patriarch; he has no meetings scheduled with the Georgian opposition. This is a major mistake.

Pompeo should meet with representatives of all parties (except for the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots). Arriving as he is between rounds of a contested election—the second round for single-member district races is set for this Saturday—and failing to meet with all key political players will create the impression that Pompeo and the United States side with the ruling Georgian Dream party. Pompeo risks badly discrediting America's standing among the more than 50 percent of the population who did not vote for Georgian Dream.

He is also missing an opportunity to play a key role in encouraging the main parties toward compromise. The United States has long had outsized influence over the situation in Georgia, dating back to the restoration of its independence in 1991, and can ill afford to allow a nascent democracy in an unstable region to become a one-party government, making it even more vulnerable to Russian dictates.

It doesn't help that Georgian politics have become hyper-personalized, with the Georgian Dream faction dominated by oligarch and former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, and the main opposition party, United National Movement, centered around former president (and former governor of the Odessa Oblast in Ukraine) Mikheil Saakashvili. Indeed, the key challenges facing the country, including the pandemic, the economy, Russia's continuing threat, and Georgia's aspirations to join Euro-Atlantic institutions, are often overshadowed by just a couple of personalities (This too may seem familiar to Americans).

Over the past few days, Georgian Dream officials and representatives of the opposition parties have met at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Tbilisi, Kelly Degnan, along with envoys from the European Union, raising hopes of a compromise. Parachuting into the tense situation in Tbilisi, Pompeo can't treat his visit as part of some vain farewell tour. He needs to keep America's support for democracy foremost in mind, expand his itinerary, meet with all major political leaders, not just government representatives, and encourage all parties to reach a satisfactory resolution. American interests in Georgia and the wider region, as well as Georgia's future, are riding on it.

([thebulwark.com](http://thebulwark.com))

## NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY  
THE MESSENGER STAFF

### Online platform created to look for family doctors

An online platform <http://ambulatoria.moh.gov.ge/> has been created to simplify the search for family doctors amid

the pandemic.

Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze stated that the portal would reduce the calls to 112 for non-emergency situations, making it easier for the Health System. She added that in case the person is not aware of which clinic they are attached to, the portal would help them find out, as long as they have public health insurance. In case they have private health insurance, they should contact their company.

Director-General of the Na-

tional Center for Disease Control Amiran Gamkrelidze commented on the recent developments regarding the pandemic, saying that the total number of daily cases in Georgia is probably about 5 000-6 000, including those who haven't been tested yet. Gamkrelidze noted that serious restrictive measures are expected soon, although a full-scale lockdown is not planned.

### MORE NEWS IN BRIEF ON P. 3

## Weather

Wednesday, November 18

Day Showers

High: 8°C

Night Showers

Low: 3°C

Thursday, November 19

Day Rain / Snow

High: 5°C

Night Rain / Snow

Low: 3°C

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# How Georgian Football Development Fund spends taxpayers' money

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgian National Football team had a chance to enter the European Championship on November 12 at a home match with Northern Macedonia. Our team lost in the play-off of the European Championship qualifiers, missing the only chance to take part. Three days later the team broke the hearts of hundreds of fans when it lost in the

5<sup>th</sup> round of the UEFA League of Nations Division C, against the Armenian team.

The given defeats sparked a debate among supporters and society, in general. People started asking about funds, posing the question of the overall necessity of this sport in Georgia. The concern is legitimate, since Georgian football is receiving taxpayers' money and is completely dependent on the government, so we

suggest to take a look.

Last year, Georgian Football Development Fund (GFDF) published a report on the financing of clubs in 2019, according to which, the fund financed 78 football clubs in Georgia with a total of ₾ 33,969,200. For example, 10 clubs of the National League received ₾ 19 128 525, whilst the 38<sup>th</sup> club of the regional league got ₾ 1 860 992.

Since independence, the club



Georgian Football Development Fund started functioning on March 1, 2016.

football in Georgia existed via a mixed model - there were private clubs with private owners, as well as public ones, funded by local governments. This model was modified 4 years ago - Tbilisi mayor and ex-football player Kakha Kaladze, Minister of Sport Taniel Khechikashvili, President of Georgian Football Federation (GFF) and future Georgian Dream MP Levan Kobiashvili and Mikheil Yavelashvili lobbied the 5-year program of development of football in Georgia, which was soon approved by then PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili. ₾211 million was issued for sponsoring club football and the money was transferred from budget to clubs via GFF and GFDF - Non-entrepreneurial legal entity, instead of city halls and municipalities.

This project has resulted in creating many small clubs without infrastructure, fanbase, or finances on lower leagues that get basic funding of ₾ 50 000 in the regional league, League 3 - ₾250 000, and so on.

A journalistic investigation by Radio Free Europe / Radio Lib-

erty finds that in 2016-2019 Georgia has spent ₾ 132 million on around 70 teams from 5 leagues. The main expenses were salaries, bonuses, gas, gatherings, business trips, equipment, food, office furniture, communal fees, and even the service of banking percentage.

According to the investigation, 93% of the ₾ 211 million go to professional football clubs, of which 50% is spent on salaries and bonuses. Based on the development of football - only 7% is spent on children's football and mass football. The level of football in Georgia at the national and club level is worse than it was before the creation of the fund. The UEFA and FIFA ratings confirm this regression.

The program ends in 2021 and it is yet unknown whether it will be reconsidered or prolonged. Given the close connection of politics and footballers in Georgia, it is interesting what the future will look like for this sport and how long the large funding which hasn't yet shown any desired results will continue.



Mayor Kaladze and the guests on the match, on which the fans were not allowed

## NEWS IN BRIEF

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### Arson suspected as UNM's Nika Melia's election headquarters burns down

In the third micro-district of Gldani, the election headquarters of one of the leaders of the

opposition, Nika Melia, was burnt down.

Tamar Zerekidze, one of the members of the Nika Melia's headquarters, told IPN that stones were thrown at the office and the windows were broken. The fire was caused by Molotov cocktails thrown at the office.

"In one of the headquarters, which is located in the third micro of Gldani, two large stones were thrown in the morning and the glass was broken. Also, they

threw bottles full of cloth and gasoline, which ignited the fire. The building was burnt down, no one was at the headquarters at that time. According to our information, an investigation has been launched into the incident," said Zerekidze.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the investigation has been launched under Article 187, which stipulates damage or destruction of someone else's property.



Photo by Mtavari Arkhi

## ADB Allocates \$20 Million to Help Developing Members Access Vaccines for COVID-19

17 November 2020

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (17 November 2020) — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has allocated \$20.3 million in technical assistance to help its developing members access vaccines for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and establish systems to enable equitable and efficient vaccine distribution.

The funds will be available for ADB developing members to support vaccine-related health system assessments and the development of country readiness plans to strengthen the capacity to access, introduce, deploy, deliver, and monitor vaccines safely and effectively. Funds will help members assess and strengthen vaccine cold chain and logistics, infection control, supply and skills of health workers, risk communications, and real-time data capturing and monitoring. The technical assistance will also support the identification and promotion of innovative cold chain and vaccine tracking technologies.

"Asia and the Pacific has largely done well to limit the spread of COVID-19. Ensuring access to a safe, effective, and equitable vaccine is the next frontier in the fight against this virus," said Director General of ADB's Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department Wochong Um. "With these additional grant resources, ADB can immediately support our developing members to undertake urgent actions, including vaccine system assessments and vaccine deployment strategies, to ensure vaccines are delivered efficiently and fairly."

ADB expects to implement the technical assistance with its partners UNICEF and the World Health Organization, in coordination with COVAX, Gavi, the World Bank, bilateral agencies, among others.

The funds comprise \$20 million from ADB's Technical Assistance Special Fund (TASF) and \$300,000 from the High-Level Technology Fund financed by the Government of Japan.

ADB approved a \$20 billion expanded assistance package in April to support its developing members' COVID-19 response. Visit ADB's website to learn more about our ongoing response.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

(adb.org)