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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Tbilisi with his wife, Suzanne Pompeo, on the evening of November 17 as a part of his official seven-nation tour of Europe and the Middle East. He held meetings with Georgia's top officials, Patriarch Ilia II, and representatives of the NGO sector.

On behalf of the United States, Pompeo reaffirmed his commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and its significant contribution to the fight against global terrorism at a meeting with Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili.

"It was confirmed how close America and Georgia are. How strong is the US's support for Georgia, for this region, especially today, when changes are taking place," stressed the Georgian president. According to Zurbashvili, Georgia remains a strong pillar of American policy in the region. During the meeting, she said that our region and the world need a peaceful, stable, and the democratic Caucasus.

According to the press service, the president thanked the US Secretary of State for strong support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and noted that achieving peaceful de-occupation has no alternative and that this requires effective negotiations, the strengthening of Geneva and other possible formats.

At the meeting with Pompeo, Zurbashvili expressed hope that the existing cooperation between Georgia and the United States will move to a new level and start negotiations on free trade.

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and the US Secretary of State discussed the main directions of the strategic partnership between the two countries and the prospects of deepening strong cooperation as well as

US State Secretary meets leadership and non-governmental sector



► Mike Pompeo reaffirmed the US's commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity. "When we talk about more US involvement, we mean more US support for Georgia in terms of NATO integration and strengthening defense and security," Zalkaliani said.



► The President noted that the friendship between the two countries, which spans three decades, has never been called into question as it is based on shared values - democracy, the rule of law, and, most importantly - freedom.



► Mike Pompeo left Georgia after he met with non-governmental organizations.

subjects of strengthening security in Georgia and the region.

Gakharia called Pompeo a true friend of Georgia and personally thanked him and the US for supporting the strategic partnership: "This is the most important partnership we have."

Gakharia assured that the moment has come to deepen cooperation on defense and security, economic and democratic consolidation, to strengthen partnership, as well as the enhanced American representation in this region.

Gakharia spoke about the importance of the Lugar Laboratory as the US's excellent

assistance in supporting Georgia through the pandemic.

"The whole world, including Georgia, is facing the challenge of the virus from China. We will deal with it together, take care of our people and develop the economy, which is very important for the well-being of your country, region, and the world," responded the US Secretary of State.

Pompeo stated that the US and Georgia have been excellent friends for 30 years, the US supports Georgia in democratic issues and works together on the difficulties arising from the occupation:

"We will do everything in the future to

support the democratization process of your country, to strengthen the institutions that are important for free and fair elections, and all that comes from healthy discussion and democracy."

According to the American embassy, the Secretary of State also stressed the importance of electoral and judicial reforms. The meeting highlighted cooperation in further strengthening trade and economic relations and the democratic development of the country.

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Davit Zalkaliani, there wasn't 'any direct interference' regarding the election topic at the meeting. The minister stated that the elections are Georgia's internal political process, and the United States is the main strategic partner, which calls on all political actors in Georgia to go through the political process and stay within the legal framework.

Opposition parties in Georgia have called the October 31 parliamentary elections rigged and are requesting a re-run. During Mike Pompeo's visit, opposition activists and activists rallied on Rustaveli Avenue against election fraud.

After the meeting with the patriarch, Pompeo tweeted: "It was my great pleasure to meet with His Holiness, Georgian Orthodox Church Patriarch Ilia II today. As a member of the International Religious Freedom Alliance, Georgia's role in promoting and protecting religious freedom around the world cannot be overstated."

Pompeo also met with representatives of civil society. After the meeting, members of the NGOs spoke about the problems of the judiciary, informal governance, the case of Giorgi Rurua, the case of cartographers, the Anaklia project, and the October 31 parliamentary elections. As reported, the conversation about the elections was only in the context of the judiciary.

According to the Head of the Center for Economic and Political Research Nino Evgenidze, organizations touched upon the problems with the rule of law and reversing democratic rule, focusing on informal governance, as well as the topic of Anaklia deep-sea port.

Gia Gvilava, a representative of Transparency International-Georgia said that high-profile cases such as the case of 'cartographers', Anaklia, Philip Morris, and others were also discussed at the meeting with Pompeo. According to him, the US Secretary of State asked about the 'clan' in the court and the meeting mostly focused on judicial issues.

Gvantsa Tsulukidze, a representative of the Georgian Democratic Initiative, said that she spoke about specific cases, "which prove that the court is used as a political tool to neutralize political opponents."

"Of course, I could not bring all the cases to prove it, but I paid special attention to the case of Giorgi Rurua, the case of cartographers, the case of civil activists, and finally the case of the two monitors accused of leading a friend to suicide," Tsulukidze explained.

According to Tsulukidze, it was also noted that there are election disputes, most of which are left unresolved.

Political actors in Georgia should resolve deadlock and participate in the work of the new parliament, OSCE PA leaders say

COPENHAGEN, 17 November 2020 – Amidst demands by the opposition for repeat parliamentary elections in Georgia and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to the South Caucasus country today, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's political and security Chair and the leaders of the OSCE's recent election observation mission reiterated that political deadlock must be overcome in order to ensure that the voters' will is respected.

"Despite the grave challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, up to two million citizens of Georgia went to the polls on 31 October to make their voices heard," said Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE election mission Elona Gjebrea Hoxha (MP, Albania) today. "The highest voter turnout since parliamentary elections in 2012 was a testament to the importance of these elections and the strong democratic commitment of all Georgians."

Hoxha noted the importance of ensuring an inclusive process of reviewing complaints. "Such a process is critical to maintaining Georgian voters' confidence in the electoral processes developed



in recent years," she said. "Now that this process is concluded all political parties elected should take their mandates, enter parliament, and continue their work within the institutions."

Finnish parliamentarian Pia Kauma, the Head of the OSCE PA's delegation of observers, recalled that the 31 October elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. "The observers found that Georgia, after long consultations facilitated by its international partners, had implemented important democratic reforms to advance its democracy by amending its constitution, improving the parliamentary governance model and setting in motion the transition towards a new electoral system," Kauma said. She urged stakeholders to overcome the current polarization and to work together for a stable political framework.

"The parties involved in the political deadlock of this moment need to find a way to overcome it," said United States Con-

gressman Richard Hudson, who serves as Chair of the OSCE PA's Committee on Political Affairs and Security. "While the complexity of this task is clear, a positive outcome is vital for Georgia's democratic future."

Hudson added that Georgia can continue to count on the support of its partners, including those on the ground who are doing an admirable job in trying to help the parties reach agreement, even if it ultimately remains up to Georgians themselves to address the current situation, defuse the political crisis and restore trust in the electoral process.

The opposition is responding to a statement from the OSCE PA that "political actors in Georgia need to get out of the impasse and get involved in the work of the new parliament."

As Nino Burjanadze, the leader of United Georgia, says, "No one can order the opposition to enter a parliament that is

rigged." She reminded, that she was once OSCE Vice-President herself, thus knows the Charter and its functions well enough to argue that the OSCE is not a body that can order anything to the political spectrum of any sovereign state. According to her, the Georgian government will definitely have to compromise because a one-party parliament is such an anachronism in the 21st century, even if such a parliament is formed, it will not work for more than 2-3 months.

Davit Bakradze, one of the leaders of European Georgia, says that "breaking the deadlock is not entering a falsified parliament." Bakradze says OSCE's statement was not surprising, since they are practically repeating what they said on October 31st, adding that unfortunately, this year the pandemic created a situation where the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other missions were represented on a very limited scale, with a small number of observers, small locations and for a short time.

"Therefore, unlike other elections, this time they had much less factual material, which we continue to deliver. As for getting out of the impasse, yes, the country needs to get out of, but it doesn't mean legalizing lawlessness. Breaking the deadlock is not entering a rigged parliament. Breaking the deadlock in this country is holding elections and deciding who should run the country" he announced, noting that if the Georgian people give a mandate of confidence to the Georgian Dream in fair elections, it's up to them, but the country needs a government that has the mandate of the people and not Tamar Zhvania.

Khatia Dekonoidze, one of the leaders of the United National Party, also responded to the statement: "I want to tell you that all this is an interim assessment of the OSCE, we continue to work with our international partners. It is very important to understand that in parallel with the protest, we have not left a legal loophole, including negotiations, which means that we want to get out of the crisis, so when there are free elections, the Georgian people will definitely use this mandate, but not now."

German Development Cooperation has donated new office equipments to the Municipalities of Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti

On November 18, 2020 at 14:00, four municipalities of Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti region were presented with the donation of new office equipments on behalf of the German Development Cooperation, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Regional Fund for Public Administration Reforms operated by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and with the organizational support of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (MRDI).

The initiative to donate new office equipments from the German side can be seen as an alternative assistance for delays



in project activities due to COVID 19 and for additional needs determined during the pandemic period, which will significantly improve the conditions for distance working of the mayor's representatives in the administrative units of municipalities.

"The new office equipment will serve as an effective implementation of the ongoing project

in the municipalities in the future, which drives at the introduction of a Unified Electronic Services in all the municipalities of Georgia" – said Nikoloz Rosebashvili, the Head of Department of Local Self-governance and Policy of MRDI.

The handing over was attended by the representatives of the Ministry, Ambrolauri Mu-



among other areas. Since 2016, the GIZ EaP Regional Fund has been implementing projects to support the administrative reform processes in all six EU Eastern Partnership countries. One of the main activities of EaP Regional Fund is the sharing of best practices in the area of E-Governance, development of joint innovative solutions and the establishment of effective regional cooperation network between the participating countries.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, as well as with various agencies working on E-governance issues, through the improving administrative services at central and local levels, the EaP Regional Fund supports the citizen-oriented and transparent administrative processes of Georgia as well as of other participating countries.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 19

Day Cloudy/Rain
High: 6°C
Night Rain
Low: 2°C

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 20

Day Rain/Snow
High: 4°C
Night Rain/Snow
Low: 3°C

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Georgia ranks 53rd on the Legatum Prosperity Index 2020

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 17th, the London-based organization Legatum Institute introduced the Legatum Prosperity Index 2020 report. The annual report, which presents the prosperity index of 167 countries, including Georgia, assesses political, social, economical, and environmental fields in the country.

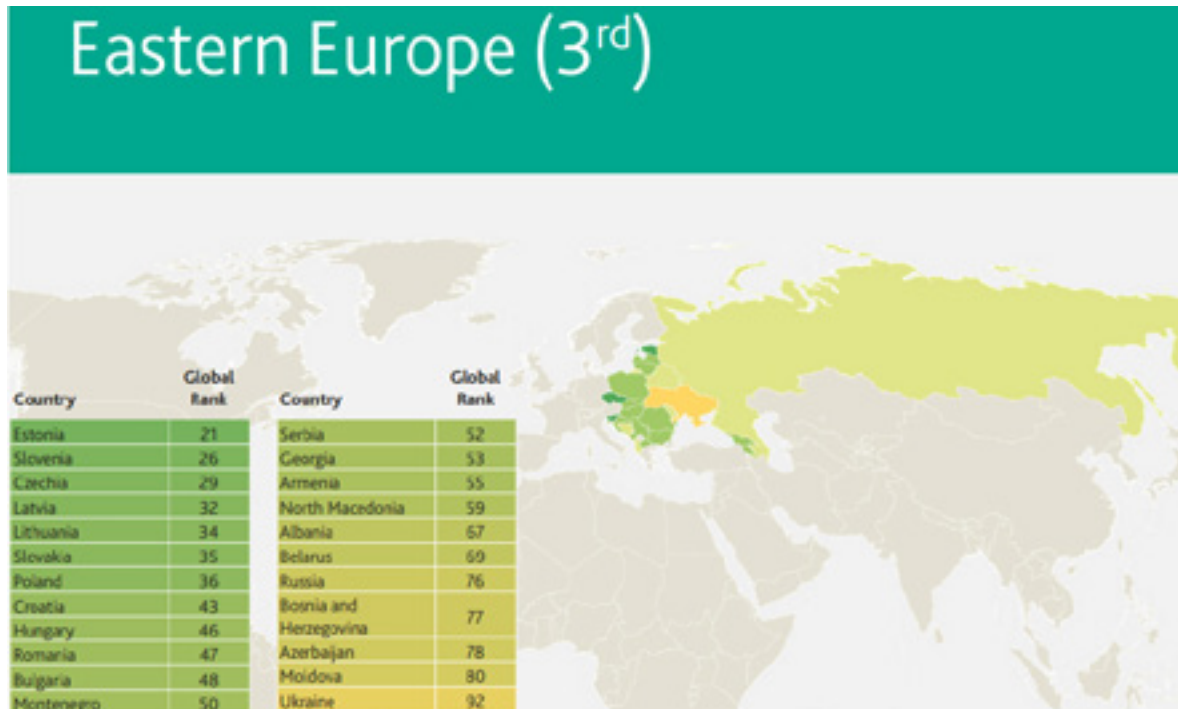
Georgia ranks 53rd on the Prosperity Index 2020 and according to the report, Georgia has made significant progress over the past decade as the country has moved up the ranking by 11 places compared to 2009. The progress is particularly noticeable in the areas of safety and security.

Georgian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Sophie Katsrava attended the online presentation of the report as a special guest. According to the ambassador, today, Georgia is recognized worldwide as a successful example of a country committed to a liberal economy and free trade as well as a stable and safe country, "which is a precondition for progress and development." Katsrava noted that Georgia is the only country in the region with a free trade regime simultaneously with the EU and China and added that a free trade agreement with Britain will enter into force in January 2021.

According to the Prosperity Index 2020, Georgia is one of the most compelling recent examples of progress in addressing challenges. The report reads that the levels of extreme poverty in



► Over the past decade, Georgia has moved up the ranking by 11 places compared to 2009.



► "Eastern Europe is the second most improved region over the last decade."

Georgia have declined by almost three-quarters, life expectancy has increased by approximately six percent, and real per capita income has almost tripled.

"This transformation is the consequence of consistent and careful management of the country's economy, which has enabled it to reap the rewards of average annual GDP growth of almost five percent since 2010, and seen it rank amongst the ten most improved nations across the Index's Open Economies domain over the past decade."

According to the report, Georgia's progress is encouraging and should be seen as an example for addressing many challenges in terms of creating open, resilient, and competitive economies. It is also mentioned that Georgia stands in sixth place worldwide (above both the United Kingdom and the United States) in the latest Doing Business report of the World Bank.

"Such success highlights how nations can successfully create the pathways from poverty to prosperity, by creating an economy that is well-managed and resilient to shocks," read the report.

Ranking of Georgia according to the Prosperity Index 2020: Safety and security - 73rd; Personal freedom - 61st; Governance - 51st; Social capital - 111th; Investment environment - 41st; Enterprise conditions - 53rd; Market access and infrastructure - 56th; Economic quality - 82nd; Living conditions - 89th; Health - 82nd; Education - 55th; Natural environment - 115th.

More reported Coronavirus cases in Georgian than in China



► According to the recent data, in total, Georgia has reported more coronavirus cases than China.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 18, Georgia recorded 3443 new coronavirus cases, 2539 recoveries, and 37 deaths, bringing the number of total confirmed cases to 89 395 and the number

of recovered patients to 71 468. Given that there are a total of 86 369 cases confirmed in China, based on the recent data, Georgia has reported more coronavirus cases than China. As of yesterday, 17,086 individuals remained infected



► The government does not plan to impose a full lockdown but considers tightening the restrictions.

with Covid-19 in Georgia.

According to the Interagency Coordination Council, 1318 new cases were reported in Tbilisi, 562 in Imereti, 512 in Adjara, 368 in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, 178 in Shida Kartli, 163 in Kvemo Kartli, 106 in Samtskhe-

Javakheti, 85 in Kakheti, 64 in Guria, 54 in Mtskheta-Mtianeti and 33 in Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti. Yesterday, the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia and the Minister of Health Ekaterine Tikaradze met with the repre-

sentatives of clinical groups and talked about ways to improve clinical management of Covid-infected people.

According to a statement published by the government of Georgia, it was mentioned during the discussion that treating mild Coronavirus cases at home is important to avoid overcrowding of the hospitals. As the clinicians stressed, to use the resources rationally and improve the clinical management process, it is crucial to hospitalize only severe cases.

The government of Georgia does not plan on imposing lockdown and will proceed with the strategy of targeted restrictions.

Paata Imnadze, Deputy Head of National Center for Diseases Control noted after the meeting that the acting restrictions are not sufficient anymore. As Imnadze said, full lockdown is not considered as the country's economy is vulnerable, however, as he noted, the targeted restrictions should be expanded and tightened.