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State Department briefs media after Pompeo's visit to Georgia



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PM Gakharia assesses Mike Pompeo's visit and discusses new reforms at Govt Administration Session



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US Acting Assistant Secretary stays to meet opposition



► Girchi leader Zura Japaridze said there was an offer from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's representative Philip Reeker for the parties to reach an agreement. Photo: Mtavari TV.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgian opposition parties, disappointed that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo didn't hold a meeting with

them scheduled on his agenda, decided to welcome him with a silent rally with 'live chain' on Rustaveli avenue.

They had two messages - to show respect for the Secretary of State's visit

and to draw attention to the 'rigged' parliamentary elections in Georgia that they didn't recognize.

On November 18, when Pompeo was holding meetings with Georgian officials

and civil society, the opposition issued the statement, related to the visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Georgia. They underscored that his arrival coincided with a time when "significant threats and new opportunities have emerged for our country, the region and the entire Euro-Atlantic area."

According to the statement, Putin's Russia and other totalitarian regimes pose a significant threat to peace in the region and the security of a free world. The Secretary of State's visit sends a clear message that the US remains in the region and stands by its partners, protecting the sovereignty and freedom of friends:

"Political breakthroughs now require a demonstration of security dynamics, which will take the US-Georgia bilateral cooperation to a new level, such as the deployment of US military infrastructure in Georgia and the transition to NATO membership."

On the state of the democratization process, opposition wrote that Putin's Russia is fighting for the sovereignty of free countries, even though the erosion of the democratic system in these countries.

"That is why what Ivanishvili is doing in Georgia is of particular concern. Election fraud, politicizing the judiciary and political prisoners, persecution of political opponents, obstruction of Western investment and refusal to build the international port of Anaklia - these are signs of Georgia's democratic regression."



► Opposition welcomed Secretary of State with a silent rally to remind him of 'rigged' October 31 parliamentary elections.

State Department briefs media after Pompeo's visit to Georgia



► "Resolve disputes, strengthening the election process rather than rejecting it."

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The US State Department released the contents of the November 18 briefing to press accompanying State Secretary Mike Pompeo in Tbilisi, discussing Georgia's post-election political impasse, state of its judiciary, and the US-Georgia partnership.

Regarding the elections, a Senior Official One, presumably Ambassador Kelly Dignan noted that Georgia has had flawed elections pretty much for the last 30 years and that "we saw similar types of violations in this election as well: vote-buying, voter intimidation, the abuse of administrative resources in terms of bringing civil servants out to vote." Dignan also criticised the lack of short-term observers due to COVID and shared others' assessment, as well as OSCE's.

"These were competitive elections, better in some ways – less hate speech, less of some of the more aggressive tactics before the elections. This one respected fundamental freedoms in terms of freedom of expression, but that they too observed violations like the vote buying



► "Election results would have had more confidence under an independent judiciary."

and the voter intimidation that unfortunately have plagued Georgia's elections for 30 years. Our statement from the embassy reflected that."

It was also said at the briefing that the US is encouraging the opposition that announced a boycott to the next parliament, to 'fight for change' within the legislative body. It was also underlined that many Georgians don't have confidence in the judicial system and the central election commission - the insti-

tutions that are 'in the process of developing.' According to Dignan, her and the EU ambassador's message to the opposition was the following: "You've been elected by your supporters to go into the parliament and make change."

"What gave many of us pause is the results, the tabulations were not that far off. The official results were very within, in some cases, percentage points of the PVTs that were done by the local observers. And so it wasn't im-

mediately clear that these were sort of fatally flawed elections," Dignan said, adding that they were encouraging everybody to use the legal processes Georgians have built over the years to adjudicate these claims. She also underlined that recounts were not handled as transparently as they should have been by the Central Election Commission, which added to the sense of suspicion of results' credibility.

Dignan reminded that some of the problems of this election

should have been included in electoral reform that was done during the summer."

The Senior State Department Official added that Georgia has been a great partner in terms of security, militarily, and so what the Secretary wants to underscore is support for Georgia's sovereignty. He mentioned that given that 20% of the country is occupied by Russia, it's important that we continue to push back against that element of instability created by Moscow.

Georgian opposition parties say they do not plan to enter the 'rigged' parliament - the boycott continues. They also refuse to take part in second round elections, which are scheduled this Saturday - November 21 in the 17 majoritarian constituencies. A total of 1914 polling stations will be opened. Organizing and conducting the second round will cost the election administration €8.6 million.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Georgia on an official visit on November 17. Next day the meetings were held with representatives of the Government of Georgia, the Patriarchate and the civil sector.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 20	
Day	Rain/Snow High: 4°C
Night	Rain/Snow Low: 3°C
SATURDAY NOVEMBER 21	
Day	Rain/Snow High: 7°C
Night	Rain/Snow Low: 1°C

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EXCHANGE RATES:

US DOLLAR – 3.2948 | EURO – 3.8971 | GBP – 4.3650 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE – 4.3109 | SWISS FRANC – 3.6088 |

PM Gakharia assesses Mike Pompeo's visit and discusses new reforms at Govt Administration Session



BY LIZA NORWICH-GERWIK

Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia assessed the visit of the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the Government Administration session.

According to Gakharia, both sides have agreed that the strategic partnership based on common values between Georgia and the US should be further deepened.

The Prime Minister noted that Mike Pompeo on behalf of the American people and government, reaffirmed to the people of Georgia their unwavering support for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty, Euro-Atlantic development, and the

further deepening of trade and economic relations.

“As you know, the visit of our strategic partner, the US Secretary of State, to Georgia ended yesterday. The main topics we discussed were, first of all, the further deepening of the strategic partnership between our countries, the issue of regional security and the importance of US-Georgia cooperation in these regional processes, and, of course, Georgia's role in the ongoing processes in the region. The most important thing is that the Secretary of State, on behalf of the American people and government, reaffirmed his unwavering support for the people of Georgia's territorial

integrity and sovereignty, our Euro-Atlantic development, and most importantly, the further deepening of trade and economic relations. Of course, the importance of sustainable development for Georgia, strengthening of democratization processes as well as institutions was underlined.

This was an extremely important visit, during which the importance of Georgia as a strategic partner, the importance of Georgia's further development, and the Euro-Atlantic course was once again demonstrated. “All this once again confirms the successful policy of the country in terms of European and Euro-Atlantic development pursued

by the government,” stated Gakharia.

Mike Pompeo arrived in Tbilisi on the evening of November 17 and the official meetings started the next day. The US Secretary of State met with President Salome Zurbishvili, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, and Patriarch Ilia II, but did not comment to the media and only made statements to the US Embassy.

Gakharia has also discussed new reforms to support economic growth during the crisis. According to the PM, based on the new reform, about 150 thousand companies will be able to automatically return VAT.

“This means that every year, about a billion Laris, without

any problem, will be immediately returned to our business. This is a reform that has not been implemented in the country for decades, and which should support the development of medium businesses to keep jobs,” Gakharia said.

He said the reform is of particularly high importance in the current economic crisis and is crucial in terms of the potential for rapid economic recovery.

The PM also discussed the importance of the second round of the 2020 Parliamentary elections to be held, saying “The second round of parliamentary elections will help return the ongoing processes in the country to the formal legal framework.”

| NEWS IN BRIEF |

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Two Lelo members attacked in Kutaisi

TV25 has released a video, depicting a physical attack on two members of the political party Lelo, Aleksandre Milorava, and Beso Kavtaradze. According to Lelo members, the son and nephew of Badri Manvelidze, a member of the Batumi Supreme Council, took part in the attack. Manvelidze is also a member of the Georgian Dream headquarters.

The attack took place near one of the buildings under construction. Milorava and Kavtaradze are currently under investigation and an investigation has started under Article 126 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates violence. Alexander Milorava says that they were protesting against the illegal construction of the company Elite House, which, according to Milorava, is

protected by the family of the head of the headquarters of the Georgian Dream, Giorgi Manvelidze.

“Representatives of the company Elite House attacked us, in particular, its lawyer Beka Tvaladze and shareholder Beka Manvelidze, who is the son of Bagrat Manvelidze and the brother of the head of the headquarters of the Georgian Dream. We were threatened with death; They blocked the exit way from the yard and threatened us that people would come who would not allow us to leave the yard,” said Milorava.

EU allows Georgia to export pet food

According to the National Food Agency, the European Union has allowed the export of pet food from Georgia. According to the agency, the European Commission has positively assessed the state control system of Georgia and Georgia has been added to the list of third countries from which the import of pet food is allowed in EU countries. “The adoption of this

regulation was preceded by the measures taken by the National Food Agency under the Deep and Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA) to bring it closer to EU legislation, which was positively assessed by a special working group of the European Commission during a special visit to Georgia,” the NFA said.

Local communication tower burnt down in Zestafoni

In Zestafoni, in the village of Sviri, one of the local communication towers has been set on fire. The Interior Ministry told the media platform Publika that an investigation has already launched into the case to determine the reason behind damaging the internet mast. According to reports, a local resident set fire to the transmitter on the grounds that the device produces radiation and is dangerous for him.

The investigation was launched under the second part of Article 187, which stipulates damaging property by setting it on fire.