

Politics

Rural youth find new education options online

We cannot allow the home to become a place of fear, again

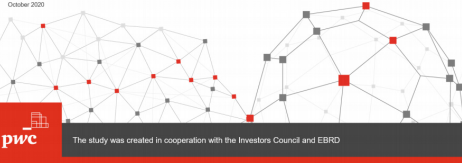
FULL STORY ON Page 2

Economics

PWC Survey: revenue fell by more than 50% in 68% of business surveyed

COVID-19

Follow-up survey of Georgian business in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic



FULL STORY ON Page 3

Bishop Jacob offers political parties to negotiate via Church



Giorgi Vashadze answers the offer of Bishop Jacob saying they already have moderators.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Bishop Jacob of Bodbe offered the Church as a negotiation place for the opposition and government at the November 24 sermon. According to him, none of the sides interfered during the parliamentary elections, and he is praying to God for a wise team to win.

"Probably, reunification should take place in the Church...The elections should unite us, instead of dividing us, and we

should try that," he said, adding that if politicians can't find a solution outside and 'going to foreigners' (meaning ambassadors) isn't enough, they can come to the Church, since it's a place where they can unite.

He noted that the role of the Church was also emphasized during the meeting of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo with them.

Giorgi Vashadze, the leader of Strategy Builder responded to the offer to

Bishop that they are not looking for negotiation platforms: "There is no problem with moderators, we already have them," he said, adding that in a secular state, such as Georgia, politics is a matter of politics, the Church is a matter of the Church.

Two rounds of meetings between the government and the opposition have already taken place with the involvement of the US and EU ambassadors. The opposition states that it does not recognize

the election results and will not enter the parliament, whilst the government considers the recognition of the election results as a necessary condition for the start of negotiations.

Salome Samadashvili, a member of the United National Movement, says that in case of unsuccessful negotiations with the Georgian Dream, the election bloc UNM - Power is in Unity is going to cancel the voter list. According to the MP, this means that not only the MPs in the parliament will leave the mandate, but also they will not have any deputies - thus, the next potential MP on the list will no longer exist.

On November 23, four leading MEPs on EU-Georgia relations issued a joint statement on the second round of the parliamentary elections held on November 21 in Georgia.

They congratulated 'a key ally of the EU', on organizing these elections despite a challenging epidemiological context and shared the evaluation by the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and the feedback from the European Diplomatic Watch, following the first round. After the second round, MEPs expect fair, transparent, and thorough handling of all substantiated appeals and complaints.

"We regret the fact that opposition candidates did not contest seats in the second round. We ask that remaining shortcomings be addressed through a new electoral reform addressing pending OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and through the active involvement of all political parties represented in Parliament," they wrote.

The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the monitoring of Georgia also called



MEPs: "All the political forces represented in the newly elected Parliament must work now in a constructive fashion, keeping in mind the greater interest of Georgia's chosen European path."

CONTINUED ON Page 2

Rural youth find new education options online

EU and UNDP weekend virtual school brings together teenagers from all over Georgia

TBILISI. 24 November 2020 – Stay-at-home regimes have put many traditional educational opportunities out of reach of young people in Georgia, but some innovative new options are popping up online. The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have launched a “weekend virtual school” for high-school students from Georgia’s regions which combines knowledge about European integration and sustainable development with extracurricular offerings featuring music and art. Over 330 participants from eight targeted municipalities – Lagodekhi, Dedoplistskaro, Kazbegi, Borjomi, Akhalkalaki, Tetrtskaro, Keda and Khulo – participated in the first online classes on 21-22 November, and

more are expected to engage in the next four sessions to be held every weekend until 20 December.

Supported by the EU and UNDP under their broader programme for agriculture and rural development (ENPARD-3), the weekend school is run in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport and a team of supporters – the National Youth Agency, the Youth Regional Centre of the Ajara Autonomous Republic, the non-governmental Youth Network “Generation,” the non-governmental association “For Each Other” and the Local Action Groups (LAGs) established in the municipalities with the assistance from the EU and UNDP.

“It is encouraging to see digital tools employed to assist young people in getting knowledge and

acquiring new skills,” said EU Ambassador **Carl Hartzell**. “The EU is committed to creating and supporting more learning opportunities for youth, especially in rural regions where educational resources are more limited than in the cities.”

“COVID-19 has a lot of downsides, particularly in disrupting classroom education,” said UNDP Head **Louisa Vinton**. “But one positive we are seeing is that digital forums can bridge vast distances and engage with anyone, anywhere, anytime.”

The list of prominent speakers lined up to address the teens included renowned European and Georgian scholars, practitioners and public figures, such as economist Vladimer Papava, Head of the National Parliamentary Library Giorgi Kekelidze, the European Commission rep-

resentative **Sigrid Brettel**, founder of a Georgian company “Spilow” Sopo Chkheidze, Research Center Head at the Caucasus School of Media Giorgi Jologua and others.

The weekend school covers a wide range of topics, including the economic and social benefits of European integration and sustainable development, historic ties between Georgia and the EU, self-governance traditions in Georgia, gender equality and non-discrimination, innovative ways of doing business and digital solutions in communication and information management. Students will also learn how to distinguish information from “fake news” and propaganda.

The training programme also includes career counselling and masterclasses in public speaking, arts, photography, cooking

and dancing. Students will take part in fun contests and practical activities to help them acquire self-confidence, develop non-cognitive skills, connect more fully to society and ultimately improve their life prospects.

The EU and UNDP are long-term supporters of rural development in Georgia. More than GEL 600 million (EUR 179.5 million) in EU assistance has been allocated to Georgia under the ENPARD programme for 2013-2022. This support is designed to improve agricultural productivity, refine rural development policies and create new economic opportunities for rural communities, both in agriculture and outside of it.

More information about ENPARD is available at www.enpard.ge

We cannot allow the home to become a place of fear, again

Statement by Marija Pejcinovic Buric, Secretary General, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November)

Strasbourg, 24.11.2020 – “The first COVID-19 lockdowns this past spring led to many Council of Europe member states reporting record increases in domestic abuse. Although current lockdowns in most countries are less restrictive by comparison, national domestic violence hotlines again are reporting dramatic increases in distress calls.

And as people stay indoors and online longer because of renewed lockdowns, we learn of increased sexual harassment, stalking, sexting, deep fake imagery and other forms of “online violence” as a result, according to a recent UN Women study.

One of our most significant international treaties, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) calls for specific measures against such violence, such as 24-hour hotlines and counselling services, access to shelters for victims, restraining and protection orders and swift police interventions.

As we mark the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in the midst of an enduring pandemic, lockdowns have proven to be a unique challenge for all of the above. We need to ensure that renewed restrictions on movement do not cause more harm to women and children. But steps can be taken to ensure that the home does not become a place of fear again.

Effective measures to prevent violence against women must be a key part of renewed lockdowns. Continued and safe access to support services such as shelters must be ensured as “essential”. Support services offer online services, from psychological counselling to online application forms for protection orders.

Creative solutions that have worked in some countries earlier this year, from rail-to-refuge schemes allowing victims free travel to support services, or information provided to victims of domestic violence by local pharmacies that are open during lockdowns, should be encouraged and adapted to lessons learnt from the spring.

If not already carried out, police officers and health professionals should be given guidelines to both identify and help victims of domestic abuse, for example by pro-actively reaching

out to women who have sought help before. Access to legal assistance and judicial remedies for women and girls at risk must be maintained.

Even before the pandemic struck, women and girls with disabilities, of migrant origin, without a permanent home or from ethnic, religious or language minorities often had difficulties accessing information on available support and protection. We need to ensure that their needs are addressed during the pandemic.

The surge in gender-based violence during the spring lockdowns propelled this issue onto the political agenda in many of our member states. We call on those states that have not yet done so to turn this heightened awareness into action by ratifying and implementing our Istanbul Convention. With monitoring by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women (GREVIO), we better ensure that states party to the Convention follow its guidelines.

Restrictions of movement, financial constraints and uncertainty cannot be allowed to embolden perpetrators – whether at home or online. For all such forms of violence, we must maintain zero tolerance.

Bishop Jacob offers political parties to negotiate via Church

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

on all political parties to accept the parliamentary seats they won in the recent elections and to enter the new parliament.

“These elections have resulted in a diverse parliament where the ruling majority will face a strong opposition that can ensure proper parliamentary oversight. The only appropriate forum for this, as well as for debating and challenging diverging political views, is the parliament,” said the co-rapporteurs.

According to them, there can be no perception of impunity for electoral misconduct in Georgia and the shortcomings noted by the observers need to be fully addressed. The co-rapporteurs intend to follow these proceedings closely in the framework of the ongoing monitoring procedure for the country.

The EU Delegation to Georgia publishes a comment on the

2020 parliamentary elections as well, calling on the Members of Parliament to use the mandates given to them by the citizens of Georgia to discuss unresolved political issues. The delegation also expressed concern about the distrust that affected the election process, as well as the fact that opposition candidates did not run in the second round of parliamentary elections.

European Georgia member **Sergi Kapanadze** responds to a statement of the delegation saying that the opposition respects the views of its international partners but does not take into account their specific friendly opinion. According to him, working with institutions proved to be futile since practically none of the claims regarding recount and cancellation were satisfied.

The third round of meetings between the opposition and the government should be held soon, the topics are yet unknown to the public.

Weather

Wednesday, November 25

Day  Partly Cloudy

High: 10°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 1°C

Thursday, November 26

Day  Partly Cloudy

High: 9°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 1°C

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NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY MESSENGER
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Health Minister refuses to name the maximum limit of healthcare resources

Minister of Health **Ekaterine Tikaradze** does not specify what is the maximum limit of medical staff and bed resources that the country has, because, according to her, it will encourage the population to care less about the restrictions.

MORE NEWS IN BRIEF
ON P. 3

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.

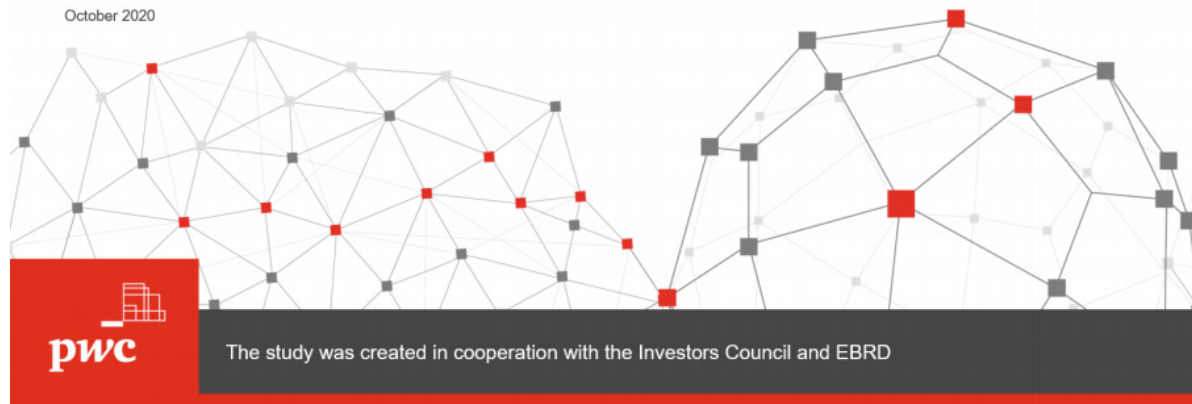
Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3193; Euro - 3.9447; GBP - 4.4329; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.3629; Swiss Franc - 3.6364

PWC Survey: revenue fell by more than 50% in 68% of business surveyed

COVID-19

Follow-up survey of Georgian business in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic

October 2020



According to the PWC, 42% of the surveyed were enterprises - micro businesses, 26% - small businesses; 11% - medium-sized business; 5% - Large Business and 17% - self-employed individual entrepreneurs.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

PwC Georgia has published the results of an updated survey that reflects the expectations of the Georgian private sector. The survey was conducted under the auspices of the Investors Council and it is an update to a report published in May. The Private Sector Survey was conducted between September 11 and October 2 through an online survey of 774 businesses.

Demand decline is the most pronounced side effect of COVID-19 for all sectors. Demand decline in 68% of companies surveyed has already led to more than a 50% drop in revenue since May 2020. That figure has changed slightly compared to 65% in the April survey. Closing the borders hit the hotels and restaurants most of the respondents, 84% of whom had significantly reduced revenues. Their expectation is positive compared to the April survey and if half of the companies in the previous survey predicted a drop of more than 50% in the next 3 months. Compared to the period, only one-

fifth of the companies have this expectation at this stage. The almost equal number of respondents (about 66%) in the hotel and food sector still expect a reduction of more than 50% in revenues.

In terms of the difficulties associated with COVID-19, the following types of issues were identified: The problem of closed borders was exacerbated for all companies, especially self-employed respondents (the issue is problematic for 39% of respondents, compared to 28% in April); Late payments from self-employed and micro-enterprises from clients (reached 22% and 33%, compared to 15% and 24% in April); Exchange rate difficulties mainly affect micro and small companies (increased to 49% and 56%, compared to 39% and 49% in April).

Supply chain delays seem to have become less of a problem for all companies as the surveyed companies began to adjust to the new reality. The number of companies that reduced supply chain difficulties because of COVID-19 was reduced from 33% to 13%.

However, when companies are asked how much they are currently experiencing delivery-re-

lated delays, almost 80% of respondents answer in the affirmative. The increased price of transportation has been named as the main problem of supply chain disruption.

Changes made by companies since May 2020 have reduced pressure on liquidity. The number of respondents who have already faced the problem of liquidity decreased from 28% to 10% at the end of September. Among companies, the most optimistic are large companies, with about 70% of respondents not expecting any liquidity problems in the next 6 months. In the April survey, business interruptions were the most common of the safeguards used by self-employed, micro, small, and medium-sized companies. In the current survey, all surveyed companies, except large companies, were forced to limit production capacity. At this point most of the time only employees of large companies were able to continue working from home.

The companies surveyed used

a variety of safeguards to address their liquidity problems. About 16% of respondents applied to the tax authorities for tax deferrals. Approximately 75% of the companies were able to defer their liabilities in full or in part. Mostly medium and large companies turn to financial institutions to restructure their loans and attract additional financing. Finally, almost half of the respondents used government-subsidized wage subsidies and income tax exemption initiatives for individuals.

Compared to the April survey, the trend of layoffs has decreased. In the current survey, more respondents indicated that they either do not plan to reduce staff or plan to reduce the number of staff. 75% of the surveyed companies that had their activities suspended during the quarantine period were able to resume their activities after the end of the quarantine. Closed borders remain a major constraint for the 51% of companies that have failed to resume operations.



Closing the borders hit the hotels and restaurants most of the respondents.

NEWS IN BRIEF

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

Tikaradze says that medical resources are measured not only by the number of beds, but also by the number of medical staff.

Asked by a Rustavi 2 journalist what the maximum limit of medical resources is, Tikaradze said that she was not going to specify it, as it would encourage the population to violate the restrictions.

"You know, naming the maximum limit of resources gives me the feeling that it makes our population more courageous, because if we see that there are enough beds, we ignore the rules. Therefore, I always avoid announcing the number of resources we have. However, of course, there is a certain amount of resources and we will definitely fight to

save all our citizens."

Today, 3,128 cases of coronavirus infection have been registered in Georgia, and 39 people have died as a result of the virus.

Radical group members send video to Tbilisi Pride, burning poster in memory of transgender people

According to Tbilisi Pride, the organization posted a video on its Facebook page of how members of a radical group burn a poster in memory of transgender people. The video released by Pride also shows a person making a Nazi salute gesture.

The organization posted the following statement on their official Facebook page:

On November 20, Transgender People Remembrance Day, we hung a poster with the caption "We Remember" in the underground passage of Heroes' Square. With this gesture we wanted to honor the transgender people who died in Georgia.

This morning, we were sent a video on the page of Tbilisi Pride, which shows how he destroys the poster, sets it on fire, and finally a representative of a radical group greets us with a Nazi salute.

The content of this video is completely unacceptable and annoying to us. We see the degradation of public space here: such a destruction of a poster of remembrance indicates that such important values as human life, mourning for the dead, respect and empathy have been devalued. The most alarming manifestation of the lack of these values is the assimilation of elements of ideologies of hatred and inequality - fascism and Nazism.

We know that there are legal ways to respond to illegal or violent actions, although we believe that this is not always sufficient or relevant. It is important for us to gain access to public space in order to create or promote the values of human dignity, equality and solidarity, and not to further reinforce a conflict or re-

pressive environment.

We must all work together, work and fight to occupy and positively transform the public space!

Ministry of education: Blind and sight impaired students will have audio format textbooks

According to the Ministry of Education of Georgia, blind and partially sighted students of IV-VII grades will have the opportunity to study with audio textbooks.

According to the Ministry of Education, all certified textbooks for grades IV-VII are integrated in the audio format. As a result, not only students but also interested persons will benefit from the sound books, as the textbooks will be posted on the official website of the Ministry.

The ministry added that more similar projects are planned for the future.