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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On December 23, The candidate for Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia met with Georgian Dream party MPs in parliament and spoke about the government's priorities on the agenda of the next four years. Gakharia stated that given the pandemic background, 2021 would be filled with challenges and stressed that work without opposition would be complicated considering the challenges the country faces in terms of the global pandemic, economic crisis, and general political turmoil. Gakharia focused on the implementation of a program Towards Building a European State, "which will enable Georgia to make an official application for a fully-fledged member of the EU in 4 years." According to the nominee PM, to reach the goal, the country should significantly advance in several dimensions including democratization and economic security.

Gakharia pointed out that 80% of the population supports Georgia's full integration to the EU and Euro-Atlantic Institutions, which has always been the government's primary foreign policy goal. Gakharia noted that 2019-2020 have been "remarkable years for deepening and strengthening the NATO-Georgia partnership."

According to the nominee PM, the global pandemic has seriously challenged every public institution, and overcoming

the consequences of the pandemic would be a long-term process. According to him, the fundamental part of the Georgian economy is a free market and private initiative. According to him, to achieve the key goal, which is a strong Georgian business with high social responsibility, the country needs macroeconomic stability.

According to Gakharia, in terms of capital expenditure, the country's level and magnitude will be maintained in the following four years despite the economic crisis. Finances will focus on roads, water supply, and sewage infrastructure. The government of Georgia plans to invest an additional GEL 20 billion which is 8% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

"When we say that by 2024 we will need to be a full-fledged candidate to apply to the EU to become its member. National infrastructure should be in the relevant shape, especially when we talk about a systemic infrastructure," Gakharia noted.

According to the candidate for the premiership, irrespective of the global crisis, the government should do its best to proceed with implementing structural reforms to attract foreign direct investments, which has always been "one of the most significant drivers for the advancement of the national economy."

Gakharia believes that occupation remains the main challenge of the country and until this problem is resolved, the country's development in any direction will be limited. According to him, due to the global crisis, it was particularly challenging to maintain the issues of the occupation in the political agenda of this year, however, the diplomatic corps has managed to bring the issue back to the very high international level. Gakharia stressed that it is crucial to further boost cooperation with strategic partners of Georgia and primarily with the USA in fields such as security, economy, and democracy.

Gakharia also highlighted that against the background of the global pandemic, the healthcare system has become a priority. He noted that the system would continue to reform with the same approach as in the last 8 years.

Nominee Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia presents government program priorities for 2021-2024



► The candidate for Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated that the global pandemic has seriously challenged each public institution, adding that overcoming the consequences of the pandemic and global crisis will be a long-term process.



► According to Gakharia, one of the main goals of the healthcare system will be to reduce medication prices.

Parliament passes the bill in 1st reading abolishing state funding for boycotting parties

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On Wednesday, the Parliament of Georgia of the 10th convocation adopted a bill in the first reading, which envisages the abolition of state funding for boycotting parties and termination of free airtime. The amendments to the Law on Political Associations of Citizens initiated by the Georgian Dream party was approved by 84 votes. The bill provides for the halting of state funding (or suspension for a year) for political parties if at least half of MPs elected by its party list refuse to take up their parliamentary mandates, terminate their powers, and/or miss plenary sessions for no reason. According to one of the initiators of the law, the opposition parties will receive budget funding for the next six months.

The legislative package is being considered in an expedited manner, however, at yesterday's plenary session, the leader of the ruling party Irakli Kobakhidze presented an initiative to suspend the bill discussion, send the legislative package to the Venice Commission and the OSCE / ODIHR, and to hold the second reading only after their positions are known. According to him, even though everything is legally and politically in order, such an initiative will ensure that there is no room for political speculations or criticism towards the bill.

The bill has received critical reviews from the opposition parties who believe that the ruling party uses this kind of way to force the opposition into the Parliament. According to an opposition political leader Gigi Ugulava, state party funding exists for more democracy and party diversity, and its abolition would not change the opposition's decision but would make it even more consolidated. As the leader of the Georgian Labour Party Shalva Natelashvili stated when the bill was first initiated, no party or politician would enter the Parliament and would not betray people because of the



► Opposition MPs from six of eight parties that have won seats in parliament have already requested the suspension of their status, including United National Movement-Strength is in the Unity election bloc, Labour Party, Lelo, European Georgia, Alliance of Patriots, Strategy Agmashenebeli.

ban on party funding and use of free media time. According to the opposition United National Movement (UNM) member Davit Kirkitadze, terminating state funding to political parties would not normalize the current political process. He believes that such steps made by the government further alienates positions and does not facilitate easing the political crisis.

14 NGOs have published a joint statement, expressing concern over the initiative. The NGOs believe that the Georgian government bears primary responsibility for the "large-scale and multifaceted crisis in Georgia." According to the statement, the public was most hopeful for the 2020 Parliamentary Election, due to the transition to



► "everyone in the party knew that everyone was free to make their own decision, no one is forcing or asking anyone to act otherwise. I am not a member of the party, I was a free member. I will remain a friend and a supporter of this party," stated Avtandil Enukidze, number four on the list of the Patriots Alliance.

the almost proportional system. However, as a result of significant irregularities detected on the election day, NGOs describe 2020 parliamentary elections as "the least free and the least democratic elections throughout an entire period of Georgian Dream government."

"It is most unfortunate that when each of the three branches of the government should be making every possible effort to remedy the situation and seek for the solution, representatives of the ruling party make statements in regards to initiating restrictions on the activities of opposition parties. In this regard it is particularly alarming that the ruling party has initiated the draft law, that amongst others includes nullification of the budget funding and the free airtime for opposition parties for the next elections," reads the statement.

The leader of the Alliance of Patriots, Irma Inashvili, has already officially requested termination of parliamentary mandates obtained by the party at the October 31 parliamentary elections, so did six of eight opposition parties that have won seats in the Parliament. Nevertheless, it became known just yesterday that Avtandil Enukidze, number four on the list of the Patriots Alliance, plans to enter the parliament.

Concern and disapproval – the bill to strip opposition parties of state funding passed the first hearing, the outcry is mounting

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Yesterday, the Georgian Parliament passed a bill to strip opposition parties of the state funding, should at least half of their MPs refuse to claim the seats won as a result of the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections. Moreover, should the opposition parties fail to comply, they will also be denied the free media time and the consequent election registration.

The US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan has already expressed her concerns about the nature of the proposed bill. In an exclusive interview to Formula TV Channel, Degnan stated that the bill will be revised

before it receives final approval, however, she would not want it to contain any conditions under which the opposition bloc will be denied access to the local media. The ambassador added that Georgia needs a strong, and well-developed opposition, as well as an accountable and responsible ruling party.

Mrs. Degnan has also expressed her sincere hope that the political crisis that the country is currently faced with will be resolved soon, and that both sides will be able to put national interests above the interests of their respective parties.

The European People's Party has also referred to the new bill as worrisome and urged the govern-

ment to commit to the proclaimed European values and strive for healthier Democracy. EPP has also called for constructive dialogue, as opposed to the restriction of the democratic rights of the country's opposition bloc.

According to the MP of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Anri Okahanshvili, should the resignation of the opposition parties be officially approved by the Parliament, they will no longer be eligible for the state funding. He added that each vote that the opposition party candidates received equals approximately 15 GEL. Okhanshvili stressed that the MPs then receive to do their job and serve the public – in case they refuse their seat, he said,

there will be no reason for them to receive state money.

As of today, six out of eight opposition parties have already filed a request for the status of their MPs to be suspended. Nine out of fourteen parties who won the seats have already filed for the state funding, and a member of one opposition party with a reputation of being pro-Russian, Alliance of Patriots, Avtandil Enukidze, has expressed his readiness to enter the Parliament. During his interview with the Rustavi 2 TV Channel, Enukidze said that he is completely loyal to the Alliance of Patriots, but he does not approve of the course the party has recently taken and has no plans of refusing his mandate.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 24

Day  Cloudy

High: 5°C

Night  A few Clouds

Low: -2°C

FRIDAY DECEMBER 25

Day  Sunny skies

High: 6°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: -2°C

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Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze
Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

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Government demolishes houses on short notice, leaves people in the streets

MORE THAN TEN BUILDINGS WERE PREVIOUSLY DEMOLISHED IN THE AFRICA SETTLEMENT OF TBILISI.

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Yesterday morning, the Tbilisi City Hall Municipal Inspection demolished seven buildings on Tvalchrelidze Street in Samgori district, which, according to the City Hall, were illegal.

“I was asleep, it was 7 am. They kicked us out and demolished our house, I don’t even know what to say. We took everything we could, everything else was destroyed with the house,” said one of the people living in the Samgori district.

Vakhtang Pipia, a resident of Tvalchrelidze Street, whose son’s house was demolished by the City Hall yesterday, says that illegal construction in the area has a 13-year history and they

tion since 2010. According to him, step by step, they built the house, and have not received any type of warning until December 17. Another person said that a house where 7 people, including children, lived was also demolished.

At a briefing before the government session, Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze spoke about the situation and said that “we can’t justify law-breaking by the fact that people are poor.”

According to Kakha Kaladze, some of the people behind the illegal constructions in this area have the status of IDPs and own houses and land in Tbilisi and other parts of the country as well.

According to Kaladze, illegal seizure of property and placement of buildings on it is unacceptable.



► Kaladze: “We can’t justify unlawfulness by the fact that people are poor.”

have not received a warning so far. Pipia said the statement was posted on a window on December 17 and warned that if they did not submit proof of ownership within two days, the house would be demolished.

He also said that the City Hall’s representatives started demolishing the houses in the area yesterday morning, between 6 and 7 am. As Pipia says, the house has been under construc-

The Tbilisi City Hall Municipal Service said on December 18 that it would give the owners four days to dismantle seven illegal buildings near Tvalchrelidze Street, otherwise, the City Hall would start doing so itself.

On December 15, Tbilisi City Hall demolished more than 10 illegal buildings in the Africa Settlement of Samgori district which has sparked protests.



► According to Kaladze, illegal seizure of property and building houses is unacceptable.

National Bank of Georgia, NBU, and IFC hold a knowledge-sharing event on Sustainable Finance



► According to NBG, the event served as a platform for discussing the role of central banks in developing a sustainable finance framework and exchanging experiences in this regard.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

National Bank of Georgia (NBG) in cooperation with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, and the IFC-supported Sustainable Banking Network (SBN) held a knowledge-sharing session with the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU). According to the information released by NBG, the event focused on discussing the role of central banks in the development of a sustainable finance framework as well as exchanging experience in this respect.

According to the statement, NBG joined SBN in September 2017 and has been teaming with SBN in several sustainable finance projects ever since. A key step in the development of a sustainable finance framework for Georgia was the launch of The Roadmap for Sustainable Finance in Georgia, which was

implemented in close collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC). NBG states that Currently, they are collaborating with SBN/IFC to develop a Sustainable Finance Taxonomy for Georgia.

At the event, Governors of the NBG and the NBU (National Bank of Ukraine) and Jason Pellmar, IFC Regional Manager for Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine dialogued on the importance of sustainable finance and the role central banks can play in this process. In particular, helping the finance sector manage ESG risks and reveal new opportunities.

According to Koba Gvenetadze, the Governor of the NBG, IFC’s support, and knowledge sharing with other Sustainable Banking Network (SBN) members have played an important role in the process of developing a sustainable finance framework.

Kyrylo Shevchenko, the

NBU Governor stated that cooperation with partners from the Sustainable Banking Network would help them to develop a ‘green finance’ development guide in Ukraine.

“The National Bank of Ukraine is just beginning to join the global process of building sustainable financial markets. Green investments in the economy, as well as the development of new financial products that have a positive impact on the climate, will become a priority for economies and countries. We are moving in a global direction. Cooperation with partners from the Sustainable Banking Network will help us develop a roadmap for the development of ‘green finance’ in Ukraine,” Shevchenko said.

According to the statement, at the event, the sustainable finance framework development process, related challenges, and future collaboration opportunities were discussed as well.



► “The NBG has also benefited from IFC’s input when integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations into the Corporate Governance Code for Commercial Banks,” reads the NBG’s statement.