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Irakli Kobakhidze – newly elected leader of Georgian Dream party



By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

The new party leader was appointed on January 16 following the congress of the ruling Georgian Dream party, where the candidacy of Kobakhidze was supported unanimously. Following the appointment, Kobakhidze thanked the previous leader of the party, Bidzina

Ivanishvili, for defeating "a regime based on violence and lies", and for "restoring the democratic order" in 2012. In his speech, Kobakhidze also said that the Georgian Dream is "a progressive governmental Parliamentary team with eight years of experience, and it is ready to continue its work with a new attitude". Similarly, the speaker of the new Parliament,

Archil Talakvadze has also addressed Ivanishvili, and referred to him as the "guarantor of freedom, peace, and stability", and said that the supporters of the party are waiting to see "the next steps forward".

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the former leader of the Georgian Dream party since 2018, released an open letter on January 11, in

which he announced his decision to leave the post of the party leader, and abandon politics altogether. In his letter, Ivanishvili stated that "he accomplished [his mission]" and is now handing over the reins of the party to the team he has assembled throughout his leadership.

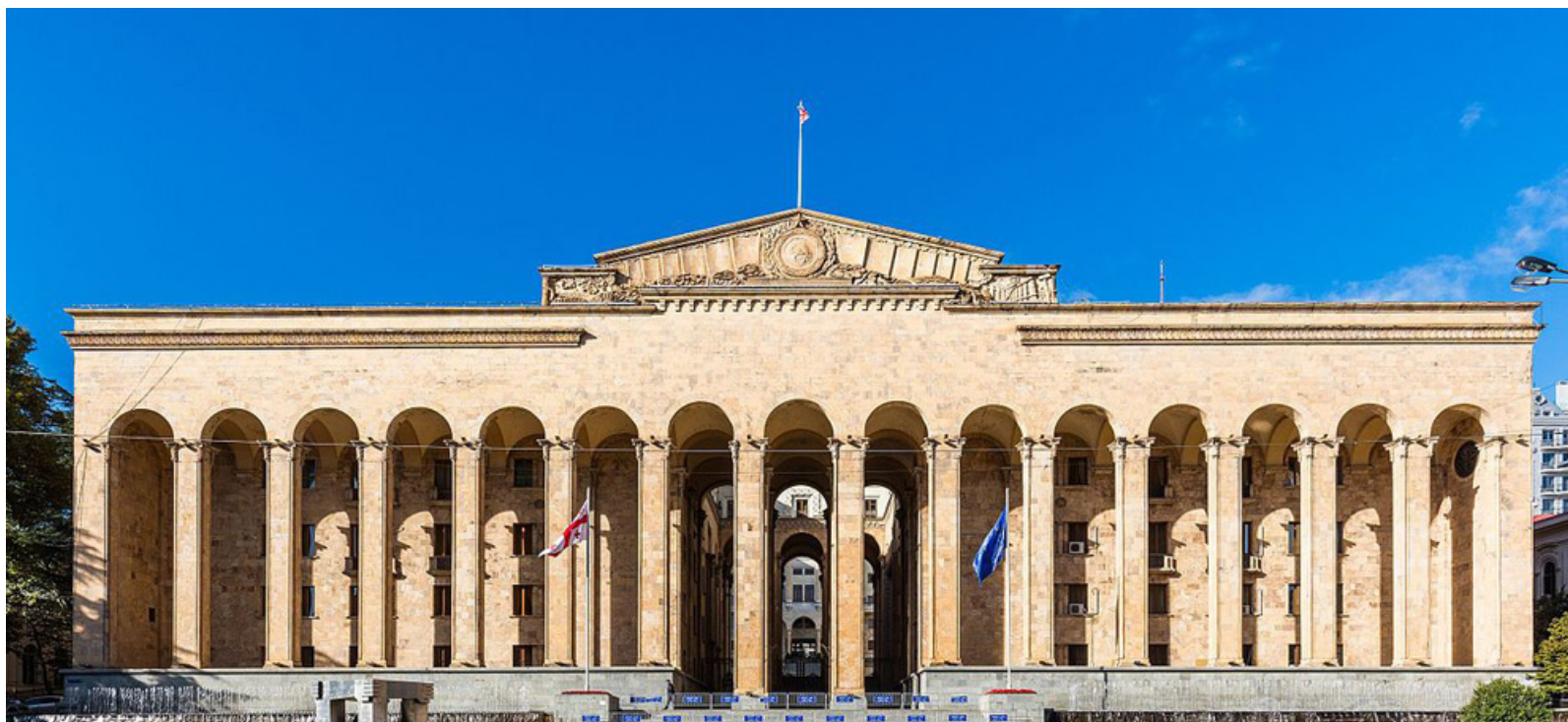
While the Georgian Dream party was deliberating the candidacy for the party leadership, some opposition activists took it to the streets to protest the results of the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections. Nine activists with the "Stolen Elections" banner were arrested on the charges of hooliganism and disobedience to the authorities, however, all the detained persons were released shortly after the party congress was over.

This is not the first time when Kobakhidze becomes the center of public unrest. In August of 2019, he was caught up in the midst of the protests, when a Russian communist MP, Sergei Gavrilov, took Speaker's, Kobakhidze's seat in the Parliament at the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy, where the incident occurred. The fact was soon followed by large demonstrations, where the riot gear was used against the protestors and approximately 300 people were injured.

On top of the appointment of Irakli Kobakhidze as a party leader, the Georgian Dream party congress has also appointed the members of the political council. Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze will continue to serve as a party's general secretary, and Vasil Maglaperidze, former director of the Public Broadcaster, will continue to act as Kaladze's deputy. Upon his appointment, Kobakhidze promised that he will do everything in his power to turn Georgia into a truly European country.



PACE calls on all political parties to claim seats in Parliament



BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On January, 11 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe released a report on the progress made by 14 countries in 2020, including that of Georgia. While the report applauded the effort made to achieve the March 2020 agreement and the shift towards a more proportionate election system, it has also noted that despite the agreement, the “politi-

cal climate in Georgia remains polarised and contentious”.

In its report, PACE is calling for all political parties to take up their seats in Parliament and to ensure its democratic functioning. PACE report also notes that the decision of the opposition bloc to boycott the seats is especially unfortunate because joining the Parliament would provide it with a much more significant political leverage. The report has also referenced the findings of the

International Society for Free and Fair Elections (ISFED), Transparency International, and the international observation missions, all of which concluded that the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections were “competitive” and were held in a way that respected fundamental freedoms and the parties’ ability to “campaign freely”. Nevertheless, the report also notes the “uneven playing field” and “abuse of the administra-

tive resource” that was determined by the international monitoring organizations.

On January, 15, Transparency International Georgia (TIG) released its own report on the campaign financing in Georgia’s 2019 Elections. According to the report, a total of 38,6 million GEL was received by the studied election subjects between September, 1 and November, 17. Georgian Dream received almost half of the aforementioned

amount – 17.3 million GEL (46%), Lelo received 6 million GEL in financing and the UNM-UOPU received 5.7 million GEL. The TIG report recommends the country to establish a new, anti-corruption agency to monitor and adequately respond to the “alleged cases of political corruption, including corrupt transactions between donors and the parties, and illegal financing schemes”.

In a recent interview, the Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze told PalitraNews that he would be very happy if the opposition parties decided to end the boycott and join the Parliament. “I want to reinstate that the current convocation of the Georgian Parliament does not only consist of one party, as one more party is also represented there. I would be very happy if the opposition parties decided to join the Parliament instead of being the hostages of one specific person – Mikhail Saakashvili”, said Kaladze.

According to the 2020 election results published by the CEC, the ruling Georgian Dream party has won the majority of seats, and, as of today, 8 political parties are yet to join the newly formed Parliament.

When will Georgia be able to get the Covid-19 vaccine?

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Many countries around the world, including the United States and EU member states, started vaccinating their citizens at the end of 2020. Georgia is still in the process of negotiations and it is unknown when will it be able to start massive vaccination.

At the moment, the country has two possibilities: waiting for the vaccine on the list of the third world countries or coming to an

agreement with the producer countries through diplomatic channels. It is believed that the process might start around February or March.

On January 17, a special meeting was held at the government administration to discuss this. As it was noted at the meeting, “the vaccination action plan is practically complete.” The meeting discussed target groups to be vaccinated in the first place, adding that that intensive work to get the vaccine as soon as possible continues.

The Interagency Coordinating Council will assess the plan next week. Recently, Amiran Gamkrelidze, director of the



According to Gamkrelidze, about 60% of the population is planned to be vaccinated against coronavirus

Weather

Monday, January 18

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 5°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

Tuesday, January 19

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 2°C

Night Overcast
Low: -3°C

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EBRD reports record 2020 investment in response to Covid-19

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EBRD, recently noted that it has invested €11 billion in 2020 through 411 projects. EBRD has taken many steps during the year to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, addressing the urgent needs of 38 economies.

The money that EBRD used for investment represents a 10 percent increase in annual business investment compared to 2019.

The EBRD was the first international financial institution to adopt emergency measures to address the economic impact of the pandemic in March last year. It focused on supporting existing clients with the provision of short-term liquidity and working capital to protect viable companies and safeguard progress towards sustainable, fair and open market economies in its countries of operations.

The bank supported a new record of 2,090 trade finance transactions worth €3.3 billion under the Trade Facilitation Programme. Examples of transactions include the import of medicines from Spain, Turkey and Switzerland into Lebanon, Georgia and Jordan.

The EU, the largest EBRD donor, also provided a €50 million guarantee for renewables investments in Eastern partner-countries.

In the Caucasus, the Bank financed over US\$ 400 million worth of investments in the energy sector, including the first renewable project Masrik Solar in Armenia and financing the transmission grid and critical energy infrastructure in Georgia.

In Ukraine, the EBRD combined investment with policy engagement with a €450 million loan to the state road agency



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Ukravtodor, supporting the government in the development of national road infrastructure and the fight against corruption. The Bank's public-private partnership (PPP) advisory activities led to the commercial close of two port PPPs at Olvia and Kherson in Ukraine.

In November, the EBRD Board of Directors approved the establishment of the International Chernobyl Cooperation Account at the request of Ukraine. The purpose of the new donor fund is to address remaining challenges at Chernobyl and to sustain the achievements accomplished through the Chernobyl Shelter Fund (New Safe Confinement) and the Nuclear Safety Account (Interim Spent Fuel Storage Facility, Liquid Radwaste Treatment Plant).

The coronavirus pandemic also accelerated the shift towards a more digital world and triggered changes in the way that the EBRD provides support to SMEs. The Bank made a rapid adjustment to deliver services aimed at the development of skills for small business owners, employees and consultants, using digital infrastructure.

For example, a Ukrainian digital platform Merezha, developed with EBRD help, allows local SMEs instant access to registered experts, case studies and the useful data necessary for their planning and development activity.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was established to help build a new, post-Cold War era in Central and Eastern Europe. It has since played a historic role and gained unique expertise in fostering change in the region - and beyond - investing more than €145 billion in a total of over 5,700 projects.

When will Georgia be able to get the Covid-19 vaccine?

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National Center for Disease Control, provided a few details on the issue. According to him, at least 60% of the population should be vaccinated to develop public immunity. Vaccination is intended for citizens over 18.

As for the vaccination costs, Gamkrelidze said that it ranges from 65 million to 170 million. He also said that while it might be hard to vaccinate 60% of the Georgian population, it is not impossible. He also noted that

Georgia will initially receive enough vaccines from the Covax platform to vaccinate 20% of the population. The Minister of Health Ekaterine Tikaradze announced on January 12 that the population of Georgia will be vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine in the near future. However, she did not talk about further details.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is used in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the European Union. It is also approved by the World Health Organization.



It is still unknown which vaccine will be used in Georgia