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By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

According to the 5th report of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) "One year with COVID - 19", Georgia ranks 11th in the European region in terms of Covid-19 testing per 100,000 inhabitants. In particular, according to the report, the total number of tests conducted in the country in 2020 was 1,957,395, which is 52,662 tests per 100,000 inhabitants. Luxembourg, Denmark and Cyprus are in the top 3 in

Europe in terms of tests per 100,000 inhabitants. According to this data, Georgia is ahead of countries such as Norway, Italy, Switzerland, Finland.

The report states that the first case of COVID-19 in Georgia was confirmed on February 26, 2020. A total of 228,410 people were confirmed to have COVID-19 by 2020.

"Since September 10, due to the increase in confirmed cases, the incidence rate has increased sharply and reached a maximum on December 10, and in the

subsequent period, in accordance with the expansion of preventive measures and point restrictions, the rate decreased and the average COVID-19 incidence rate as of December 31, 2020 Equal to 37.2.

NCDC report shows the percentage distribution of COVID - 19 confirmed cases in Georgia by age groups. Citizens aged 15-24 and 35-44 are distinguished by high rates of infection. 7.4% of the infected are children under 15 years old; 10.5% - people aged 65-74. 57% of infected were women and 43% - men. As of De-

cember 31, 2020, the share of the recovered was 94%, with 1.1% of the infected dying.

Document states that 70% of confirmed cases of coronavirus by PCR and antigen-based methods are in people with symptoms, and 6% are medical personnel. In 2020, 62 members of the medical staff died of COVID - 19 in Georgia, which is 0.4% of the total number of confirmed cases in the medical staff. Sex is evenly distributed among the dead. 64.5% of the deceased nurses were inpatient medical staff or employees of a fever, COVID or online clinic and all inpatient, intensive care and resuscitation departments. The data in the report is as of December 31, 2020.

Note that yesterday, 17,349 tests were performed that revealed 1,006 new cases of coronavirus infection which is a 6% detection rate of infection. Given this background, all restrictions remain active in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi and some of them were lifted in the rest of Georgia. The government says the 7-day average positive rate should not exceed 4% in order to open up the economy.

According to Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia the main part of economic activities in the country will not work until the infection rate drops. Gakharia says there is a risk of increased infection and therefore rapid restrictions will be necessary again.

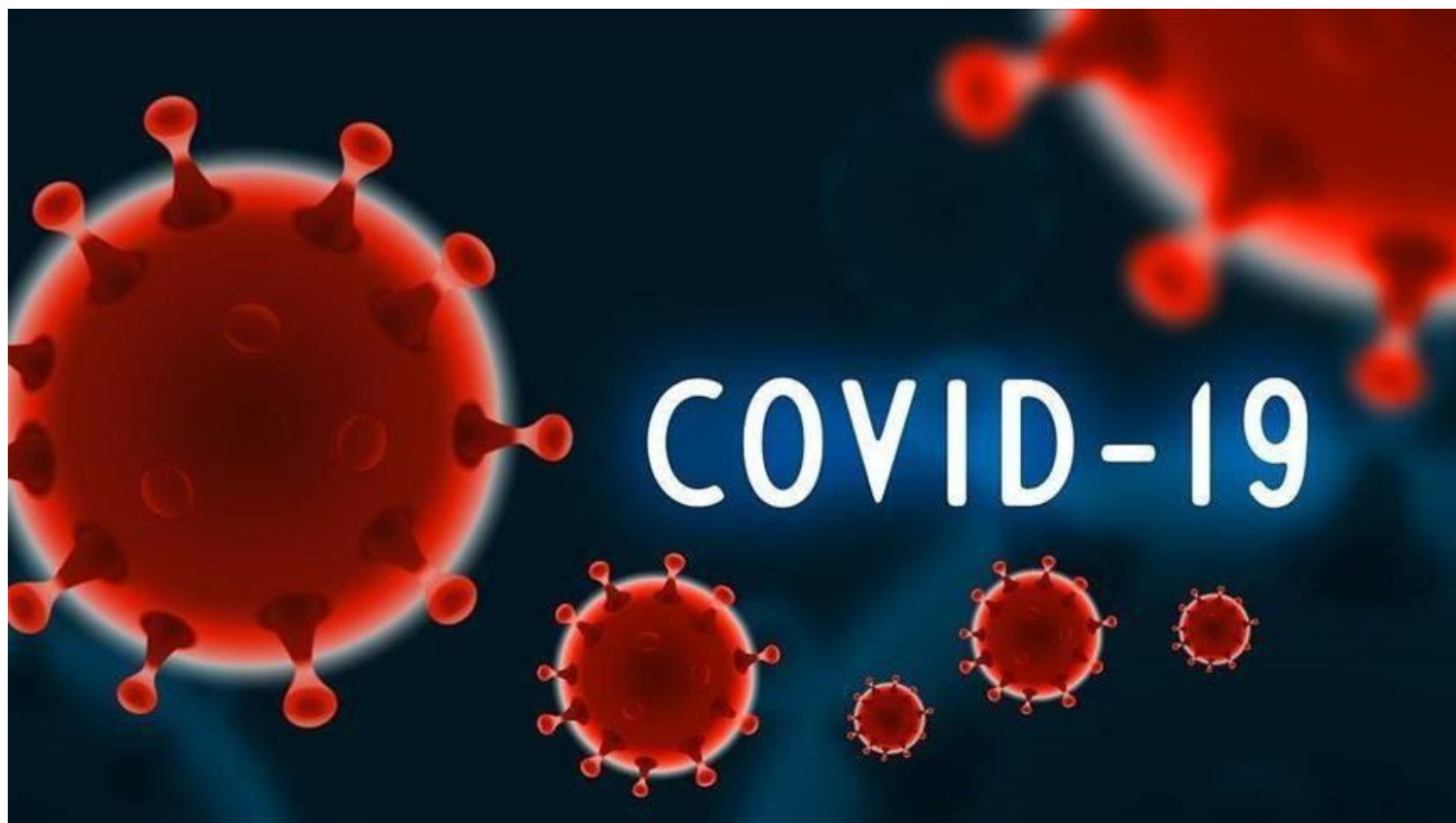
"If the positive rate is more than 4%, it is unnecessary to talk about normal functioning in the country, as well as normal economic functioning, because the risk of rapid spread is very high," he said.

The PM says that economic activities will not be opened at the same time across the country. He cited Tbilisi and Adjara

"A Year with Covid"



Tikaradze: "We have a rate of less than four percent in Adjara, but in different regions of Georgia this rate ranges from five to eight percent."



By the end of 2020, the positive-test rate was 11.6%.

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Georgia's messages sent abroad

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Last week the opposition and the government continued with the controversy over entering the parliament. In regard to this controversy we should also consider messages sent abroad, including Bidzina Ivanishvili's alleged leaving of the politics or prospects of Georgia entering NATO.

Bidzina Ivanishvili's leaving stayed a popular topic for the opposition to discuss. If in the first days they were interested whether he really left or not, now they made sensational statements about the reasons for his leaving, which they connected with the events going on in the US. This was caused by an investigation which began in the US: FBI will have to reveal which foreign governments and organizations attempted at retaining Trump's government. This was topped with sanctions against those Ukrainian politicians and oligarchs who were directly affiliated with Russia's

intelligence services.

The opposition doesn't exclude that as a result of the investigation, Bidzina Ivanishvili's role in this will be revealed as well. Those opposing the government believe that Ivanishvili is afraid of the potential sanctions which explains why he would leave the politics and transfer all the money in his possession to the charity fund he owns. One of the first people to voice the opinion is the Labour Party leader Shalva Natelashvili. "Ivanishvili was expecting Trump to be elected for the second term" for him to continue ruling Georgia smoothly. According to Natelashvili, Ivanishvili was financing Trump's election campaign through his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, whom he contacted through Shota Shalashvili, a businessman in the 9th convocation of Georgia. The latter categorically denied the allegations, noting that he has had no connection to politics for the past year.

Mikheil Saakashvili also

shares the opinion that Ivanishvili might be affiliated with Donald Trump. According to him, Vladimir Putin was interested in his victory and Ivanishvili was illegally finding Trump's election campaign through Trump's son-in-law. Saakashvili believes that Ivanishvili's name will come up in the investigation process "as he had hired a series of lobbyist companies". A part of the opposition claims the blame is exaggerated whereas the ruling team denies it categorically. Gia Volski thinks such a disinformation campaign aims at creating tension between the US and Georgian governments. Regardless, many experts have recently talked about how the new US government will be less comfortable for the Georgian Dream.

A special attention was paid to the statement of NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who says that Georgia's membership in NATO is between Georgia and the alliance and that Russia will have no say in

this. The statement coincided with the new Foreign Minister of the US Antony Blinken, saying that if Georgia meets all the criteria, NATO's door will be open and there will be no risks of war with Russia for the alliance for letting Ukraine and Georgia in. The opposition then emphasized the importance of meeting NATO's criteria and the government's inability to develop in this direction. Other than the military, NATO places standards in other areas of importance as well, including economy and democracy.

The arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny on January 17 provoked a backlash in Georgia as well, though it was more an assessment of Navalny and the Russian opposition than a protest. Navalny backed Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008, as did Putin's second opponent, Khadarkovsky. Navalny had the same position on Ukraine when Putin annexed Crimea. Navalny is a Russian nationalist and is just as impe-

rialistic as much of today's Russian society. Nevertheless, the opposition still expected a protest statement from the Georgian authorities over the arrest of Navalny, a staunch opponent of Putin.

Meanwhile, both the government and the opposition are waiting for how US-Georgian relations will change after Biden's inauguration. In this regard, Blinken recalls the statement made by Biden in September 2020 about Biden's foreign policy course: "Biden will strengthen NATO to meet the challenges in cyberspace and foreign affairs, and to help countries such as Georgia, Ukraine and the Western Balkans provide strong security."

The 46th President of the United States and his team are well aware of the problems of Georgia and the whole post-Soviet space in general. The opposition first of all expects the strengthening of support for democracy, which is crucial for Georgia.

(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)

PACE calls for all Georgian political parties to resolve the ongoing crisis and enter Parliament

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

At the winter preliminary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on January 25, the special rapporteur of Tiny Cox presented the draft report on the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

According to the report findings, the elections were overall free and carried out "in respect of the basic freedoms", and the competition was both fair and free. Nevertheless, it has been said that the issues like campaign funding would need to be resolved in the future, in order to ensure the democratic conduct of the upcoming elections.

However, several of the speakers at the session did not share a positive assessment of the October elections. For example, Jette Christensen, who visited Georgia as part of the international observation mission claimed that the country lacked a common information space, which, in turn, would be a crucial factor in restoring people's

trust in the Democracy and democratic processes.

Similarly, Laima Andrikiene stated during the PACE session that she strongly disagrees with the positive assessment of the Parliamentary elections and expressed solidarity with the Georgian NGOs that named them "the worst elections in the modern history of Georgia".

The annual report released by PACE reads that it is 'regrettable' that the opposition parties refuse to enter the Parliament, as doing so would be "in the best interest of the country", and the failure to do so would undermine the country's democratic processes.

The PACE report goes on to recommend "Georgia to fully and transparently investigate all allegations of electoral misconduct during the October 2020 parliamentary elections; the Assembly urges all political parties to take up the seats they won in the new parliament and not to undermine its democratic functioning".

"Regrettably, the opposition parties, alleging widespread fraud, announced that they would boycott the second round and the new parliament. This is especially regrettable given that the results for opposition parties



in these elections would give them a strong position to execute parliamentary oversight. Parliament is the place for the conduct of politics and debate and the Assembly has therefore consistently opposed parliamentary boycotts. In the best interest of the country all political parties

are therefore urged to take up their parliamentary mandates," the report added in the country-specific section.

Head of the Georgian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, MP Kakhaver Kuchava, responded to the criticism of the

October 2020 Parliamentary Elections. Kuchava said the 21st century is the era of misinformation, and we often fall victim to it. He added that the NGOs, which refused to accept the election results have already admitted to being mistaken about the election conduct.

Weather

Wednesday, January 27

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 12°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

Thursday, January 28

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 13°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

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UN member states addressed Georgia with recommendations

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

On 26th of January, at the United Nations, as part of the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), UN member states shared Georgia's recommendations for improving the human rights situation.

The periodic review session focused on the judiciary and the challenges in this area. The Office of the Public Defender and non-governmental organizations shared the recommendations addressed by the UN Member States in the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of Georgia.

According to the organizations, the steps taken in the direction of judicial reform in Georgia have been positively assessed by the states, but the number of recommendations indicate that this issue remains a problematic issue for the international community.

The states call on Georgia to step up its work towards judicial independence and transparency. In line with the UK recommendation, the country should heed the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. In his speech, the US representative highlighted the current situation in the judiciary, highlighting problems, including clan governance. He spoke of the need for reform, the appointment of judges according to their merits, and called on the state to take into account the recommendations.

The organizations say that the representatives of the states positively assessed the progress made by Georgia in the fight against violence and discrimination against women and gave additional recommendations in these areas.

The representative of Denmark advised Georgia to bring the definition of sexual violence in line with the Istanbul Convention. The representative of the Parliament of Georgia noted that the issue will be discussed by the Parliament at the spring session.

Other important recommendations related to the sexual exploitation of children, including the fight against prostitution (where Georgian law does not comply with the requirements of the Lanzarote Convention), childhood and forced marriage, and the provision of adequate protection and assistance to victims. The session also addressed challenges on topics such as discrimination, hate crimes and the rights of LGBTQ people.

Georgia received more specific



The organizations involved in the UN Universal Periodic Review Advocacy Campaign welcome the recommendations made by the Member States and call on Georgia to implement them.

recommendations from: Spain - regarding the abolition of the requirement for a sex reassignment operation to change the gender record in identification documents; Sweden - Amendments to the Criminal Code of Georgia and the Law on the Prevention of Violence against Women and / or Domestic Violence, Protection and Assistance to Victims of Violence, so that victims' rights are protected on any grounds, including the GOI, free from discrimination.

The recommendations also relate to identifying, preventing and properly investigating threats posed by hate, far-right radical groups, including ensuring that LGBTQ people enjoy freedom of assembly and expression.

Member States also focused on developing social programs in the field of children's rights and services for street children and working children. Recommendations were made on the implementation of the Code of the Rights of the Child. Particular attention was paid to the ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Recommendations were voiced regarding access to education for children with disabilities.

The right to sexual and reproductive health, in particular universal access to sexual and reproductive health services was also addressed: Comprehensive school education on sexual and reproductive health in accordance with UNESCO international standards; Adequate implementation of the state strategy for maternal and neonatal health and measures to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality.

It should be noted that the extension of the mandate of the Labor Inspection by the Georgian delegation was named as one of the achievements from January 1, 2021, although nothing was said about the need to equip the Labor Inspectorate with human and material resources.

In contrast to the previous cycle of the UPR, the recommendations of the states in the current discussions

included the issues raised by the EMC in its international reporting to ensure the right to adequate housing.

In particular, a general recommendation was issued to guarantee adequate housing for the homeless, and the Government of Georgia was also recommended to develop a housing regulatory framework, through relevant action plans and strategies, distributed to both the homeless and the displaced.

The Universal Periodic Review Advocacy Campaign was supported by UPR Info and the Open Society Foundations. Organizations involved in the campaign: Public Defender's Office in Georgia; Coalition for Equality; Coalition for Independent and Transparent Judiciary; Partnership for Human Rights; Center for Human Rights Education and Monitoring; Georgian Young Lawyers Association; Institute for Tolerance and Diversity; Women's Initiative Support Group; Platform salute; Association Hera XXI; Equality Now.

“A Year with Covid”

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as examples of this. According to him, in Adjara, unlike Tbilisi, the decision to launch transport was made due to the low rate of infection.

On 26th of January, several dozen cities demanded that the government administration ease

restrictions. Politicians Elene Khoshtaria and Zura Japaridze also attended the rally. Among those gathered were people who were left unemployed due to Covid-19 restrictions.

According to Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control, the percentage of the popu-

lation that agrees to be vaccinated against coronavirus varies between 50-60%, which is due to several factors. According to him there is a strong anti-vaccination movement in the country, as elsewhere and at the same time, the population is not properly informed about vaccination.

Gamkrelidze named the 4 main directions that can defeat the pandemic: reasonable and timely restrictions, mass vaccination of the population and the

use of a third so-called direct-acting antiviral drug, which he is sure, will be ready this year. “After a certain period of time the virus will end its so-called biological cycle. It will weaken somewhat and turn into a relatively weak virus throughout the year, or a seasonal virus such as the flu virus. But, as you know, all this is a matter of theoretical discussion,” Gamkrelidze added.

Minister of Health Ekaterine

Tikaradze says they are waiting for the vaccine at the end of February. According to her ministry has already sent a request to all clinics and medical facilities to provide a detailed list of all the staff working in the medical facility so that the vaccination process can be properly planned. “In addition to Pfizer, we expect half a million doses of AstraZeneca in the first quarter,” she stated.