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# Georgian Parliament refuses to annul 51 mandates of opposition MPs



BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On February 2, the Parliamentary majority refused to satisfy the request of 51 opposition MPs, who wished to have their seats annulled in defiance to the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections. The vote was held at the first spring session of the 10<sup>th</sup> convocation of Georgian Parliament, said the chairman

of the ruling Georgian Dream party Irakli Kobakhidze.

The 10<sup>th</sup> convocation that consists of 90 out of 150 MPs unanimously refused to vote for the annulment of the opposition seats. The ruling Georgian Dream party stated that at this moment they will not support the decision of the opposition MPs. Chairman of the Georgian Dream also announced that 20 members of the

opposition parties have already expressed their intention to claim their seats. He said that the only reason why those MPs have not yet come forward to join the Parliament is the bullying and blackmailing that they are faced with from within the country's opposition bloc, however, by refusing to vote in favor of the suspension of mandates, the Georgian Dream is offering them a chance to do so.

Kobakhidze also cited the assessment of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in which the opposition's decision to boycott the seats in Parliament was referred to as an action undermining the country's democracy. According to Kobakhidze, the ruling party has taken the view of the international partners into consideration, which is why the Parliament decided to refuse the suspension of the seats.

One of the members of the United National Movement, Salome Samadashvili accused Kobakhidze of lying about the 20 MPs wishing to enter the Parliament and claimed that the Parliament's final vote is merely an attempt of the ruling party to escape responsibility for the ongoing political crisis. Similarly, another UNM member Roman Gotsiridze stated that the refusal to suspend the seats derived from the fear of the reaction from the country's international partners. He added that the political crisis in the country can only be resolved if the ruling party allows snap elections.

Head of the Strategy Agmashenebeli party and a former member of the United National Movement Giorgi Vashadze said that the ruling party will now have to make an offer to the opposition bloc.

As of now, the 10<sup>th</sup> convocation of the Georgian Parliament is mostly made up of the MPs of the ruling Georgian Dream party; the ongoing crisis is yet to be resolved.



Irakli Kobakhidze



# The Dead End of Georgian Politics

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgian politics has entered a dead end. The ruling team refuses to agree to snap elections but also can't have the opposition enter the Parliament. The opposition has no concrete plan to make the government collaborate and is unable to organise protest rallies or get international support.

The Georgian Dream needs other parties in the Parliament and is trying to make the opposition collaborate. The success is minimal - the pro-Russian political party Alliance of Patriots' members have united under the name of European Socialists and have entered the Parliament. Aleko Elisashvili's Citizens as well as some of the Girchi members might enter as well. 51 MPs are maintaining the strike. They have removed themselves from the party list a while ago and have requested to have their plenary powers halted.

The Georgian Dream is taking its time to satisfy the opposition's claims as it will seal the opposition's absence from the Parliament, which would ultimately deprive the government of any possibility to pressure the opposition. Thus, the issue will be discussed in an open format soon and the Georgian Dream may be refusing to satisfy the opposition's demands. In this way, the government can show the international partners its effort to collaborate with the opposition. So, the ruling team's attempts to pressure the opposition parties will continue while trying to 'individually' convince them to enter the Parliament.

During this tense confrontation between the government



and the opposition, the NDI published the results of its December poll last year, which made the government very happy and confused the opposition.

According to the survey, when asked which party was closest to their views, 31% of respondents named Georgian Dream, 5% - National Movement, 9% named other opposition parties. Government spokesman Mamuka Mdivaradze said that National Movement's rating is at an all-time low and is 6 times lower than that of the Georgian Dream. According to the representatives of the government, the people are dissatisfied with the actions of the opposition and demand it to enter the parliament. The opposition even explained the results recorded by

NDI, saying that given it was a telephone poll, people were probably afraid to express their point of view openly. However, according to several opposition parties, the NDI poll also shows people's dissatisfaction with the opposition and requires them to change their tactics.

The opposition has been embroiled in fruitless and hopeless negotiations with the Georgian Dream over the snap elections, and ordinary people face the task of survival, the main issue for them being extremely aggravated socio-economic problems.

The pandemic is not to end anytime soon and the government believes that the way to help is to order strict lockdowns. It has destroyed the tourism and restaurant businesses, it has

halted the economy. There is no public transport and unemployment rates have significantly increased. The business sector and ordinary citizens have started protest rallies, which are local and chaotic. Opposition parties join the protest and support it.

The opposition which is on strike is planning on organising mass protest rallies since it is the only thing they can hold against the government. The opposition is talking about "the society's accumulating rage". As Khatia Dekanoidze notes, it is "we should get angry enough to collect a lot of people for us to show the government we own our rights."

The government is afraid of mass protest rallies and calls the

opposition "destructive", blaming it for creating drama and "fattening their pockets" as well as for planning a revolution. The Georgian Dream says it is not afraid of the revolution. Gia Volsky has stated that the opposition cannot cause massive unrest as the public doesn't agree and the "government structures are stable enough".

The government considers the international events to be their advantage. Georgian Dream's Chair of the EU Integration Committee Maka Bochorishvili's assessment is the following: "Brussels has voiced the opinion that the elections were fair and held according to international standards. Our European Colleges do not understand what the boycott is about."

Pridon Injia, the parliament opposition member has also commented on this, saying that at the European Council sessions, he expected more negative feedback regarding the elections than were expressed. The opposition on strike agrees that they have more work to do in this regard by talking to our international partner countries.

The opposition has actively responded to the fact that in Joe Biden's call with Vladimir Putin, where they also spoke about Ukraine, there was no discussion regarding Georgia whose 20% Russia has occupied. The opposition parties believe that this is due to Bidzina Ivanishvili's "let's-not-upset-Russia politics." The opposition believes that Georgia should make sure it is part of "high-rank political discussions." However, it is unlikely that the Georgian Dream's firmly set foreign politics will suddenly change a path.

(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)

## Helping conflict-affected communities cope with the pandemic

UNDP provides equipment for clinic serving elderly along the administrative boundary line

TBILISI, 1 February 2021 – Medical equipment worth USD 12,500 was donated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to the outpatient clinic in the village of Nikozi in the Shida Kartli region, as part of a broader effort to protect vulnerable groups from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP Head **Louisa Vinton** delivered

a portable X-ray machine and other supplies during a visit to the clinic last week.

During her visit, Vinton signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the clinic head, **Nikoloz Dzamukashvili**, to assist the medical facility in providing local communities with better access to essential health services. UNDP support will ensure that patients can get services they need either in the clinic or at home.

Located in close vicinity to the administrative boundary line with the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region, the Nikozi clinic is the only

medical service provider to a local population of 3,000, including 1,100 older people from internally-displaced and conflict-affected communities.

With the pandemic still causing illness and death in Georgia, affordable mobile healthcare services, such as radiological examinations and blood tests, are crucially important, especially for the elderly and people with underlying health conditions and disabilities, who often have mobility problems. Yet medical facilities in rural areas often lack the equipment needed to provide patients with adequate examina-

tion and treatment.

To fill in this gap, UNDP purchased modern medical devices for the Nikozi clinic in 2020, and assisted in furnishing and equipping a clinical and biochemical laboratory and an X-ray diagnostic room.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, UNDP has been working to protect vulnerable groups from pandemic shocks," said Vinton. "While tending to urgent needs, we are also exploring how we can help build more sustainable models to ensure that at-risk communities receive vital services during the

pandemic and beyond."

Assistance to conflict-affected communities is part of UNDP's wider response to the pandemic, drawing on the organization's experience in eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and building resilience to crisis, with a focus on the elderly, women, ethnic minorities, IDPs and other vulnerable groups. Funding for this assistance comes from a UNDP-funded project to support conflict-affected women during the COVID-19 crisis, a UN-funded pandemic programme for vulnerable groups, and UNDP's Danish-funded good governance programme.

### Weather

Wednesday, February 3

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 16°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

Thursday, February 4

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 16°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

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## PM Gakharia meets new EBRD president



The EBRD president reaffirmed the bank's commitment to continue to support Georgia in overcoming the challenges posed by the coronavirus, and to promote a strong, sustainable and inclusive recovery.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia met with the new President of the EBRD, Odile Renaud-Basso. As Gakharia said during the meeting, the EBRD is one of Georgia's key development partners, and in the post-pandemic economic recovery phase, even greater importance is attached to strengthening the successful, exemplary cooperation that has made Georgia one of the biggest beneficiaries of the EBRD in recent years. He stressed the importance of the virtual visit of the

President, especially considering the challenges and opportunities related to the Covid-Pandemic.

The Head of Government wished the new President of the EBRD successful work, especially in the face of global challenges, and underlined the EBRD support for the development of the country's economy, infrastructure, and private sector, under which more than 250 projects worth more than € 4 billion were implemented.

According to Giorgi Gakharia, the role of the EBRD in supporting the private sector is particularly welcome, and the fact that,

despite the pandemic, the EBRD doubled its support to the business and financial sectors in 2020, as a strong private sector is a major driver of economic growth and sustainable development.

The most important areas that were covered were energy, transport, physical infrastructure, structural reforms. "I would like to thank our guests once again and express my hope that the strategic program of cooperation with the new Georgia in the next 5 years, which the EBRD has already started working on, will be as success-

ful as the current program," said Gakharia.

The importance of the Investor Council platform for communication between the government and the private sector was also highlighted, which helps to better identify the challenges facing the private sector and identify structural reforms that are particularly important for the business and investment environment, given the post-pandemic economic needs.

The President of the EBRD especially emphasized the efforts of the Government of Georgia and evaluated the steps taken to manage the crisis caused by the coronavirus. "I am impressed with the purposefulness of the country's government in overcoming the crisis. I would like to publicly state that the European Bank has a well-inten-

tioned commitment to promoting the future development of the country," the president stated.

According to the president, the cooperation is based on a very strong foundation, as the total amount of investment reached a record high in 2020 - with a total budget of 630 million euros for 16 projects in various sectors of the economy through partnerships with existing and new clients. The Bank's initiatives include the full range from energy to healthcare, as well as assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises, which are an important segment of the real economy.

Eurobank prioritizes the further development of the country's private sector, economic recovery, ensuring greater inclusiveness in the economy, strengthening human capital, development of infrastructure and transport, especially in the field of digitalization.



"As we prepare our next five-year strategy, which will focus on Georgia's needs and priorities, we will focus on promoting 'green economy', social equity, and digitalization of services," the EBRD President said.

## Essay contest about Georgia's European Future to be hosted by European University



The contest will be held in the framework of Europe Days

The Ambassador of France to Georgia, Mr. Diego Colas, and the Rector of the European University, Ms. Nino Taliashvili, hosted a joint press conference at the European University on February 1, 2021.

European University and the French Embassy in Georgia, within the framework of Europe Days 2021, have announced an essay contest on the topic,

Georgia's European Future.

The aim of the competition is to popularize European values and raise awareness among students about the European integration process, the importance of Georgia's rapprochement with the European family, and the understanding of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as European values.



The aim of the competition is to popularize European values in Georgia

The competition will be held on March 1, under the supervision of the specially created team. The titles of essays will be announced to the students on the day of the competition. A special commission of three will be created, one of which will be a third party.

Based on the competition, the winners of I, II, III places will be announced, who will be awarded with prizes established

by European University. All participants in the competition will be awarded a joint certificate from the European University and the Embassy of France.

First place holder will receive electric scooter, the second-place holder will receive a laptop, and the third place - Photo Camera. The favorite of the embassy will win a Day in the Embassy.