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BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On January 8, Georgian Minister of Justice Gocha Lortkipanidze announced that Russia is finally ready to participate in discussions of its obligations to repay €10 million to Georgian citizens that were illegally deported from Russia in 2006. The case Georgia v Russia concerned the arrest, detention, and consequent deportation of the Georgian nationals from Russia in autumn 2006, which occurred shortly after four Russian officers were arrested in Georgia on charges

of espionage.

In 2019, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Russia must pay out the compensation "for non-pecuniary damage suffered by a group of at least 1,500 Georgian nationals", how-

ever, the country refused to abide by the ruling, despite repeated calls from the Committee of Minister of the Council Europe.

Lortkipanidze believes that Russia's sudden change of mind can be attributed

to a more recent ruling of the ECHR on the Russia-Georgia 2008 war case. He claimed that what we are now witnessing is a slight improvement [in the bilateral relations] as Russia finally decided to participate in negotiations which will be mediated by the Committee of Minister of the Council of Europe. He added that it also shows that the approach that Georgia has chosen seems to be the right one.

Minister Lortkipanidze stated that the recent ruling of the ECHR has already changed the way in which legal and political disputes are regulated in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions:

"The EU, the USA, and an entire international community are now imposing a very clear set of political obligations on Russia and call for it to fulfil its obligations as per the decision of the ECHR."

According to the Georgian government, more than 4,600 expulsion orders were issued by the Russian authorities in 2006, 2,300 of which were detained and expelled against their will, while the others left the country on their own. Right now, two levels of the Committee of Ministers have to reinforce the court decision and force the country to meet its obligations, or else face the suspension of its membership and voting rights in the Council of Europe. Russia has already lost its voting right in 2014, amidst the annexation of Crimea, as well as protests in Georgia and Ukraine. The right was regained by Russia in June 2019, when the country agreed to pay its membership dues which it previously refused to pay, as well as the additional fines of €75 million.

Russia ready to discuss paying €10 million compensation to illegally deported Georgian citizens



Georgian Dream ready to consider zero threshold electoral system for 2024 elections

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Chairman of the Georgian Dream faction Mamuka Mdinardze stated at the February 2 plenary session that the electoral reform started on December 8, with the first meeting of the relevant working group.

Mdinardze responded to the proposal of the party Girchi, who says they will enter the parliament if the ruling team agrees to establish a natural barrier for the parliamentary elections.

Vakhtang Megrelishvili, a member of Girchi, told the media on February 6 that he had proposed to the ruling party a very favourable offer regarding a zero threshold for parliamentary elections. Girchi, for its part, says it will do its utmost to ensure that opposition colleagues enter the parliament in full force to resolve the issue. Megrelishvili stated that if Girchi cannot convince colleagues, "the party is ready to enter the parliament on its own."

Mdinardze mentioned Girchi's 'promise' to convince other opposition parties to enter the parliament, adding the party leaders have stated this in both public and private conversations. He also stated that according to the memorandum, which is open to all



Mdinardze welcomed filing a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court on the issue of maintaining the mandate.



One of the opposition's demands is to call early parliamentary elections.

parliamentary parties, the Georgian Dream has already committed itself to lowering the electoral threshold for the 2024 parliamentary elections from 0 to 3% if there are enough votes (mandates). According to Mdinardze, "all options are being considered."

The memorandum, which is currently in the process of being signed by Elisashvili's Citizens, reads: "The threshold will be specified within the framework of public-parliamentary and parliamentary discussions of the relevant constitutional bill."

At the February 2 plenary session of parliament, the Georgian Dream did not support the abolition of the mandate of opposition MPs.

Note that on February 8, Zurab Japaridze, one of the 51 opposition MPs whose request to cancel their mandates was rejected by the parliament, filed a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court on this issue.

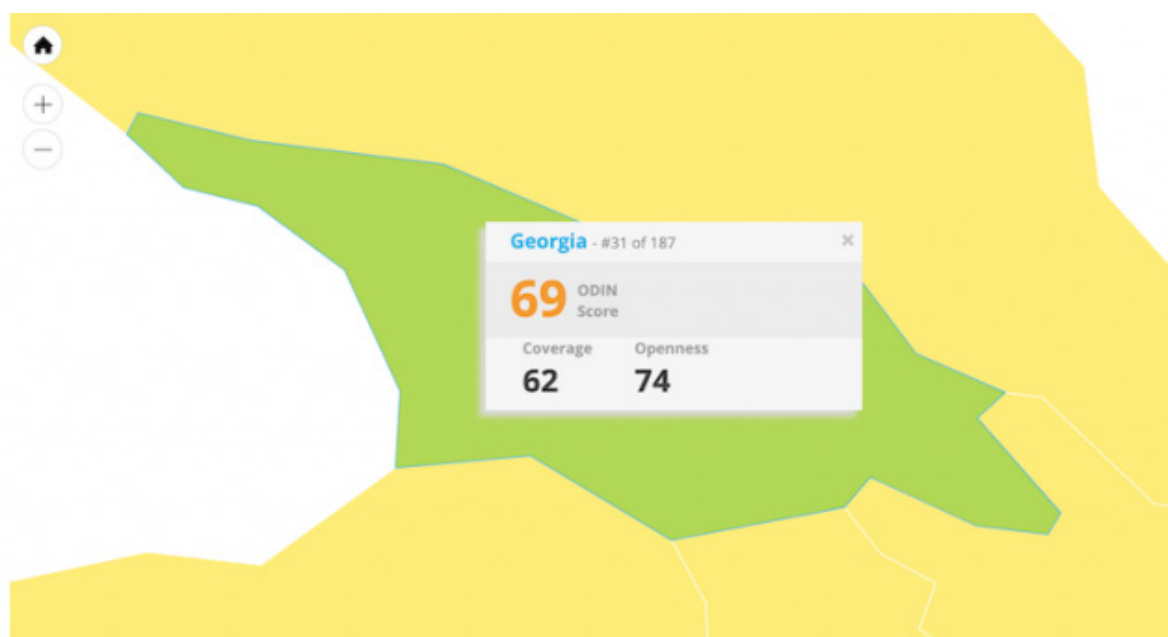
MP Mdinardze welcomed Japaridze's decision, arguing that even though Japaridze won't listen to neither international partners, nor to the Georgian Dream, he trusts the Constitutional Court. The chairperson claims that the court will reject the statement as well "since there are some judicial issues that do not leave room for ambiguity."

Open Data Inventory Report 2020 names Georgia among top 20 European countries

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

For the first time in history, Georgia was named among the top 20 European countries in

the Open Data Inventory (ODIN) Report 2020. Georgian National Statistics Office (Geostat) reports that Open Data Watch has published its fifth Open Data Inventory (ODIN) report, which evaluates the official statistics of countries around the world based on various criteria.



As the ODIN report shows, Georgia holds the leader position in the region and ranks 31st globally.

Weather

Tuesday, February 9

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 16°C
Night Clear
Low: 4°C

Wednesday, February 10

Day Clear
High: 17°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 7°C

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PM meets 40 large business employers to discuss post-pandemic recovery



“Economic growth, workplaces, and encouraging foreign direct investment are our top priorities, as all this is directly linked to rapid recovery from the global crisis,” stated Prime Minister Gakharia at the meeting.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia met with up to 40 large business employers operating in various fields. The meeting, which was held at the government’s administration, focused on the joint steps that should be taken by the government and businesses in order to maintain a competitive position and the potential for rapid economic recovery in the post-pandemic recovery phase.

The PM spoke about the outcomes of the restrictions imposed in the country since November and stressed that the stabilization achieved by the current regulations has provided the country with resources for the careful restoration of the tourism sector, which is one of the main strengths of the country’s economy. Despite the desire to re-open mountain resorts, children’s entertainment facilities, gyms, and restaurants, the government says that the re-

strictions will be lifted gradually.

As Gakharia mentioned, besides proceeding with the implementation of structural economic reforms, Georgia will increase capital expenses, accelerate state-property privatization, and the systemic reform of state-owned enterprises so that their management meets the highest standards of corporate governance.

“Economic growth, workplaces, and encouraging foreign direct investment are our top priorities, as all this is directly linked to rapid recovery from the global crisis. I am always ready to hear concrete suggestions.”

As the attending business representatives told the media after the meeting with the PM, they requested the government

reconsider the restrictions currently in effect, including the restriction on movement. According to the President of Georgian Business Association Soso Pkhakadze, in two weeks there will be a possibility to start gradual lifting of the remaining restrictions.

Yesterday, markets and public transport resumed working across Georgia on weekdays. On February 15, schools and universities in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Rustavi will resume working in person; restaurants will be able to provide their service only in open areas.

Yesterday, Georgia reported only 204 new coronavirus cases. The daily positive test rate for the last week varies between 3,09%- 3,59%.



Yesterday, Georgia reported 204 new coronavirus cases, 736 recoveries, and 15 deaths.

Open Data Inventory Report 2020 names Georgia among top 20 European countries

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As Geostat noted, the purpose of ODIN is to provide an objective assessment of the coverage and access to official statistics based on the definition of open data. Open Data Watch has been describing and evaluating data by country for the fifth year in a row.

According to ODIN, an overall rating of the Georgian Statistical System in 2020 was 69 points. The country’s rating has improved and now ranks 8 positions higher compared to the previous rating. According to the report, Georgia has moved from 39th to 31st place out of 187 countries.

Based on the report, Georgia outstrips 12 EU countries, including Italy, France, Belgium,

Portugal, Romania, Hungary, Luxembourg, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Malta. The same report shows that Georgia outperforms developed countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, China, and Indonesia. According to ODIN, the Georgian statistical system is at the same level as the ranking of countries such as Austria, Switzerland, and Mexico.

In 2020, Open data evaluations were conducted in 187 countries, covering 22 statistical categories and 65 indicators. Georgia holds first place in the region.

The assessments cover the main directions of economic, social, environmental, and demographic statistics, such as national accounts, population and demography, employment, un-

employment and price statistics, education and healthcare, gender statistics, crime statistics, poverty rates, public finances, external trade, tax balance, agriculture, environment, energy, etc.

According to the Georgian expert Soso Archvadze, naming Georgia among 20 European countries is very pleasant and deserved recognition of the consistent and complex measures that the National Statistics Of-

fice of Georgia has been implementing for many years. As he stated, the current leadership, along with previous representatives have greatly contributed to the success.



According to the report, Georgia outstrips 12 EU countries, including, (Italy, France, Belgium, Portugal, Romania, Hungary, Luxembourg, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Malta).