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BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Yesterday, the head of the National Centre for Disease Control Amiran Gamkrelidze announced that 14,000 individuals have been selected to be vaccinated for coronavirus during the initial stage of the country's vaccination program. Gamkrelidze said that the vaccination will be carried out in Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi. He added that the vaccination of doctors, nurses, and jun-

ior medical workers will be voluntary and that the list of medical professionals will be compounded by the time the vaccine arrives in the country.

Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia stated that 9 institutions were selected to be in charge of the vaccination across the country. According to

Gamkrelidze, training of the personnel in charge of the vaccination will begin this week. Last month, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia announced that the first doses of Pfizer vaccine are expected to arrive in Georgia by late February, while 180,000 doses of AstraZeneca are to arrive by mid-March. The vaccination will

first be carried out with the medical workers and senior citizens.

According to Deputy Health Minister Gabunia, the AstraZeneca vaccine is recommended for individuals 16 years old or older, while the Pfizer vaccine is more suitable for adults. She added that the existing vaccination plan aims to vaccinate all adults regardless of whether an individual fully recovered from the virus or not. It has been found that approximately 40-42% of the country's population wishes to receive a vaccine, but the rate is expected to grow as soon as the educational campaign on the benefits of vaccination launches at the end of February or the beginning of March.

One of the leaders of the opposition Lelo party Anna Natsvlishvili called the government to be completely transparent about everything related to the country's vaccination process. She called for the government to release all the information it has about the vaccine since the failure to do so will result in Lelo's taking the matter to Court. Deputy Health Minister Gabunia responded by saying that the government cannot release the complete information about the vaccines as Natsvlishvili and her party requires because it is legally bound by the conditions of the agreement the country signed with the COVAX platform and the manufacturers of the vaccines the country is to acquire.

14,000 medical workers selected to receive the first batch of vaccine in Georgia



Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia

Georgian Dream refuses to cease opposition's plenary powers, leaves room for further negotiations

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On February 2nd, the Georgian Dream party refused to cease the plenary powers of the 51 MPs on stroke, leaving room for further discussions. In parallel to this, the ruling team is refusing to agree to snap elections, which the opposition is firmly demanding.

The fact that the Georgian Dream would refuse to take away the opposition's federal powers didn't come as surprise to most. From a legal point of view, the government was obliged to satisfy the MPs' demands regarding ceasing their federal powers but refused to do so since it would be a disadvantage to the ruling team as ceasing the opposition's plenary powers would end the possibility of future negotiations which the West wouldn't approve. Besides, the legitimacy of the Georgian Parliament might have been questioned. Parliament is required to have at least 100 MPs but, as of now, the Georgian Dream has only 90.

Even though a few members of the Georgian Dream used to make confident statements regarding their success working without the opposition, they have been actively trying to convince at least some of the opposition parties to enter Parliament. In this regard, they weren't entirely unsuccessful. Four members of the Alliance of Patriots united under the name European Socialists and entered the Parliament. On February 2nd,



Aleko Elisashvili's party Citizens entered with two members.

EU ambassador Carl Harzell approved the fact that the government refused to cease the opposition's plenary powers as a way to 'maintain the negotiation dynamic.' The US ambassador Kelly Degnan noted that there is a way out of this situation if 'the parties prioritize the interests of the Georgian people.'

As for the future possibility of negotiations, it is not looking hopeful at the moment as the opposition's main demand is holding snap elections which the Georgian Dream categorically refuses. The government claims the opposition parties are stuck in a dead-end and are behaving

self-destructively. The western friends of Georgia believe the opposition should enter Parliament as it would give them a chance to constructively negotiate with the government regarding election reforms.

The country's western partners have even mentioned how faking the results of the 2020 elections haven't really changed the final results. For example, one of the members of the European Parliament Viola von Cramon stated in one of her interviews that even though there were some violations, it couldn't have significantly altered the final results. It seems like the opposition members cannot convince the western partners that

by rigging elections, the Georgian Dream illegally obtained power.

Constructive cooperation between the Georgian Dream and the opposition is unlikely even if they do enter parliament. Davit Zilfimian, a representative of the European Socialists, noted an interesting fact: - In the previous, 9th convocation parliament, none of the opposition legislative initiatives was adopted; none of them were even fully discussed. But it should not be forgotten that at the time when Zilfimian said this, the Georgian Dream had a constitutional majority and its relations with the opposition were in a confrontational mode.

The Georgian Dream claims

that by not ceasing the opposition's plenary powers, it gave the opposition a chance to stop the radical opposition's bullying them into boycotting. According to the Parliament Chairman, the government expects 20 more opposition party members to enter parliament. This means that the Georgian Dream will try to individually convince the parties. Their main target is going to be new opposition parties that gained their seats thanks to the 1% barrier. The government claims they are being "bullied by the radical opposition parties." So far, the opposition parties stay unanimous.

In the current circumstances, the opposition's only chance to force the government into holding snap elections in protest rallies that have been announced to be held in spring. However, quite a few experts doubt the people are going to commit to the opposition's plans to protest. "We exclude revolution! There is no reason for it, no one is going to support it," stated the Georgian Dream member Irakli Zarkua.

There seems to be a lot of the same opinion among Western friends. Viola von Cramon, quoted above, says that people "need a constitutional, legislative solution" and not a Rose Revolution. The further development of events, however, depends on the society- whether the accumulated dissatisfaction will turn into mass protests or not.

(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy have published an annual report on Georgia's implementation of the Association Agreement by 2020, which outlines the reforms implemented in the country in a number of areas.

The report was published before the next meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Council, which will be held on March 16, and outlines the implementation of the reforms envisaged in the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia over the past year.

EU's annual report on Georgian implementation of Association Process

The document concludes that despite the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, Georgia has been adamantly pursuing its chosen European path. The report notes that the country has successfully continued to fulfill its obligations under the Association Agreement, including approximation with EU law and the introduction of European human rights standards.

The report highlights the government's peace initiative A Step Towards a Better Future, which has been highly praised and supported by the European Union. The report positively assesses the country's improved statistics on accession to EU



The report emphasizes that despite reduced trade, the EU, as a single trading bloc, remains Georgia's largest trading partner and that Georgia continues its efforts to have its products recognized in the EU.

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Weather

Wednesday, February 10

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 17°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 6°C

Thursday, February 11

Day 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
High: 17°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 4°C

published by
The Messenger

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All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

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The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3161; Euro - 4.0158; GBP - 4.5679; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4784; Swiss Franc - 3.7126

Microfinance sector at profit of 45 million in 2020



The size of the sector's assets increased by 7.1% last year and currently stands at 1.47 billion.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI
40 microfinance organizations operating in Georgia have already submitted the financial results of 2020 to the National Bank of Georgia (NBG). As Business Media informed, the total financial report of the sector shows that the size of their assets increased by 7.1% last year and currently stands at 1.47 billion.

Despite difficulties, the total profit of micro financial organisations in 2020 was ₾44.8 million, which is much more than the 0.1 million profit in 2019, although the main reason for the weak profit in 2019 was the write-off of unpaid loans of millions of Lari by online lenders;

and in 2020, these players left the market altogether. Among them, the liquidation process began in "Vivus", one of the largest online lenders.

According to the NBG, the number of micro financial organisations has decreased by 8 in 2020, and a total of 27 have left the market in the last 2 years.

Financial indicators demonstrate that microfinance organisations have issued loans totaling ₾1.18 billion, which is ₾55 million more than the results of the previous year. The interest income on these loans last year was ₾281 million. As for distribution, the most important loans for microfinance are pawn shop loans, which account

for 43% of their loan portfolio - ₾519 million, increase of ₾87 million compared to the previous year.

The main credit directions for microfinance organisations are distributed as follows: Consumer loans - ₾265 million portfolio, decrease of 4.1 million; Trade and services - ₾199 million portfolio, decrease of 11 million; Agriculture - ₾99 million portfolio, decrease of 4 million; Installation - ₾48 million portfolio, increase of 12 million; Loans to legal entities - ₾41 million portfolio, an increase of 6.3 million; Online loans - ₾1.8 million portfolio, decrease of 28 million.

As for non-interest income,

microfinance organisations received ₾51 million in various fees, including currency conversion fees.

The most important source of financing for microfinance organisations is loans from international financial organizations, amounting to 328 million. At the same time, micro financial organisations have received ₾283 million in credit financing from the Bank of Georgia. Last year, their debts increased by ₾118 million.

According to the information submitted to the NBG, the sector employs a total of 4.1 thousand people. In 2018, the figure stood at 4.4 thousand.



A total of 27 micro financial organisations have left the market in the last 2 years.

EU's annual report on Georgian implementation of Association Process



Oliver Varheim, European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement: "The EU has stood by the Georgian people since the beginning of the pandemic and will continue to assist it."

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foreign and security policy statements, indicating a coincidence of positions on foreign policy issues.

The document also details the

country's parliamentary elections in the autumn of 2020, which, according to international observers, took place in a competitive environment where fundamental freedoms were generally protected. At the same

time, the report positively assesses the changes in the electoral legislation, as a result of which the 2020 parliamentary elections were held under a new system and the country is firmly on the path to a transition to a fully proportional system by 2024. The report also confirms that the media environment in Georgia is pluralistic and competitive, despite its high polarization.

"Following the 2020 parliamentary elections, it is vital that all political parties act within an institutional framework to find common ground and a way out of the current political situation. This will enable the Parliament of Georgia to take decisive action for sustainable recovery after the coronavirus pandemic and to

implement a broader reform agenda," said EU High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission Joseph Borrell. He added that they are working with Georgian partners to agree on an updated association agenda to prepare for the coming years.

Work on compliance of Georgian legislation with the EU acquis and European standards has been effective. The report positively assesses the dynamics of approximation to EU norms and standards and highlights a number of legislative steps taken by the government, including welcoming substantive changes to the Labor Code and the Labor Inspection Service, Amendments to the Law on Competition, Public Procurement and Intellectual Property Law; Adoption of a new Forest Code and more.

At the same time, the report mentions there remain challenges related to electoral and judicial reforms. The situation after the 2020 parliamentary elections poses a need for further democratic consolidation, includ-

ing in line with the OSCE / ODIHR final recommendations through inclusive dialogue in a timely manner for the October 2021 local elections. In the short term, an inclusive political agreement is necessary between the ruling and opposition parties in order to enable Parliament to work on a broad reform agenda. In a larger context, easing polarization in Georgian politics and media is a priority.

Significant challenges remain in ensuring the independence and accountability of the judiciary. It is essential that the selection process for judges of the Supreme Court fully complies with all the recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, is carried out in a transparent manner and ensures that the process is conducted in a truly merit manner before further appointments are made.

The EU strongly supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within the country's internationally recognized borders, including through the efforts of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions and the EU Monitoring Mission.