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BY NIKA GANTSEMLIDZE

Georgia has still not received any doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, which was supposed to be available in the country from the end of February. The officials of Georgia were saying that Georgia would be able to vaccinate its population using Pfizer.

Tengiz Tsertsvadze the Director General of the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center, said that Georgia either has to wait for the internationally acclaimed vaccine or go with the Chinese one.

He said that two months ago, when they started talking about the possible adoption of the Chinese vaccine, it was followed by a huge backlash from the society, which was considered by the government.

"We should not use double standards when we talk about things like this. If you want to have a good quality vaccine for the country, then we have to wait two or three more weeks. The country will receive a gradual and sufficient number of vaccines. We will follow our annual vaccination plan and will be one of the most successful in terms of vaccination, just like we were in Covid-19 management," said Tsertsvadze.

As for Paata Imnadze, he recently noted that the country has the best chances for Indian vaccine. He said that

## Georgia still waiting for the COVID-19 vaccine

FIRST DOSES OF PFIZER SHOULD HAVE ARRIVED IN FEBRUARY



► Georgia has still not received any doses of the Covid-19 vaccine

there is a huge deficit of vaccines in the world, creating some challenges for everyone. He also noted that as of now, Georgia is waiting for the vaccine from two different companies. Apart from India, Imnadze said that the Georgian representatives are also holding talks with Western and Chinese partners. He also noted that the country followed

every requirement of Covax. A special working group was set up in December in Georgia to ensure a smooth process of vaccination in the country. The main aim of the working group was to make sure that the country was ready for the vaccination process.

The first case of Covid-19 was reported in Georgia over a year ago, on February

26, 2020. Since then, the number of confirmed cases in Georgia has increased drastically, especially in the fourth quarter of 2020.

According to the official data, there have been as many as 271,872 confirmed Covid-19 cases in the country. Out of these, 266,081 have already recovered, while 3553 have passed away.



► Tsertsvadze said that Georgia either has to wait for the internationally acclaimed vaccine, or go with the Chinese one



# Freedom House: Georgia remains 'Partly Free'



By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The international human rights organization Freedom House published the report Freedom in the World 2021 on March 3, which reflects the situation in terms of political rights and civil liberties in 195 countries around the world.

Georgia remains a partially free country and has 60 points out of 100. The country's rating has been deteriorating in recent years. Georgia had 64 points in 2017 and 2018, 63 in 2019 and 61 in 2020.

According to the report, political rights in Georgia are rated 23 out of 40, and civil liberties - 37 points out of 60.

International watchdog wrote Georgia is holding regular and competitive elections, and its democracy trajectory showed signs of improvement in 2012-2013, which was due to a change of government, although it has been experiencing setbacks in recent years.

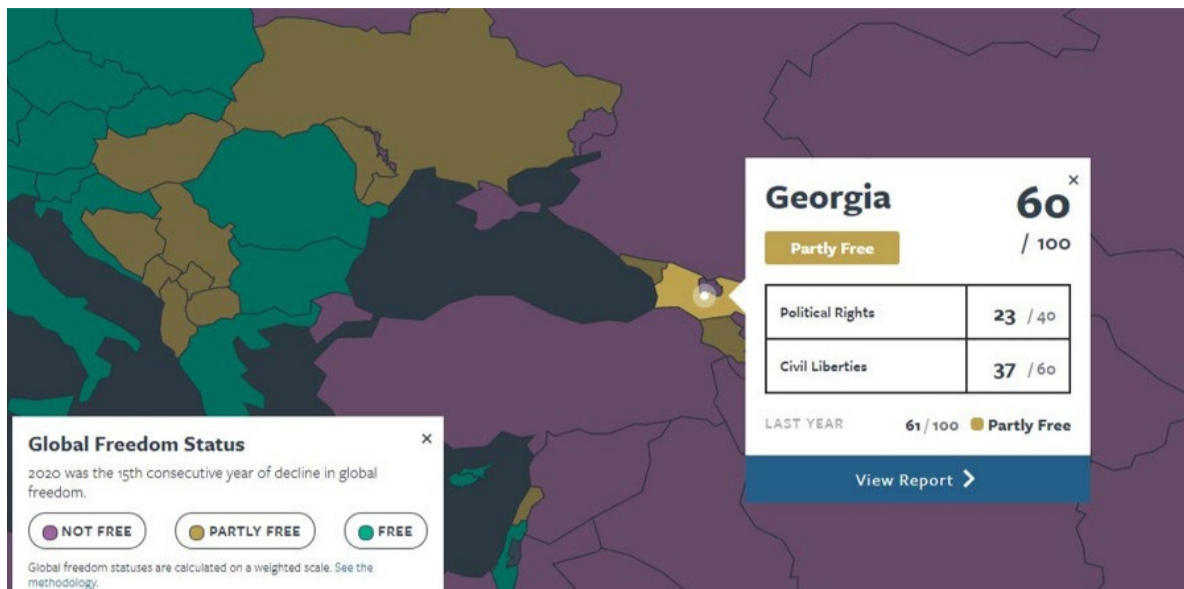
Freedom House writes that the recent parliamentary elec-

tions, in which the ruling Georgian Dream party won a third term, were overshadowed by vote-buying, incidents of violence and blatant vote-counting errors, prompting the opposition to boycott.

It also highlighted that "oligarchic influence affects the country's political affairs, policy decisions, and media environment, and that the rule of Law is politicized. Civil liberties are inconsistently protected."

The report discusses the significant informal influence of Bidzina Ivanishvili on legislative and executive decisions in Georgia and on the goodwill of the government towards the 'co-investment fund' established by Ivanishvili. According to Freedom House, even though Georgia has made significant progress in the fight against petty corruption, corruption within the government remains a problem.

The organization emphasizes that the media environment in Georgia is pluralistic, but in many cases biased, accusing the public broadcaster of favoritism



► "Georgia's democratic trajectory showed signs of improvement during the period surrounding a change in government in 2012-13, but recent years have featured backsliding."

towards the government, and several media outlets critical of the government complaining of political pressure. The report included the closure of fake pages and accounts related to the Georgian Dream government by the company Facebook.

Freedom House also writes that the Constitution of Georgia guarantees freedom of religion, however, it gives unique privileges to the Orthodox Church. Representatives of religious minorities complain of discrimination and hostility, including from the Orthodox clergy and parishioners and from being improperly protected by the state.

According to the report, freedom of assembly is mostly protected in Georgia, however, sometimes the police use exces-

sive force. The report also states that in June, the Georgian government refused to guarantee the security of the LGBT Pride planned in Tbilisi.

Despite the judicial reform implemented in Georgia, the interference of the executive and the legislature in the work of the judiciary and the problem of transparency and professionalism in litigation remain a problem. The report criticized local and international organizations, which followed the process of electing judges to the Supreme Court of Georgia.

The authoritative human rights organization also draws attention to the restrictions imposed in the spring and fall of 2020 due to the coronavirus epidemic, noting that these mea-

asures were largely proportionate to the threat, although pro-government businessmen won public health tenders.

Freedom in the World index annually measures the degree of political rights and civil liberties on a scale of 0 to 100 in 195 countries and 15 disputed territories (100 points denoting "absolutely free"). Russian occupied regions have scored 40 (partly free) and 10 points (not free), respectively. In 2021, out of 195 countries, 82 were marked as 'free', 59 as partly free and 54 as not free. The human rights organization generally indicates that global freedom has been declining for fifteen years. Out of 195 independent countries, by 2020, the overall score deteriorated for 73 and only 28 progressed.

## Ex-president Saakashvili against referendum

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgian ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili has stated that Georgian opposition parties must not accept a referendum instead of repeat parliamentary elections. In an address posted on his Facebook page, Saakashvili presented the idea of holding a plebiscite on the issue of early elections as Bidzina Ivanishvili's idea.

"Even if he loses this referendum (and he definitely will), then



► "By no means can the plebiscite model be agreed upon," Saakashvili says.

he will have a few more months before local elections to bribe, intimidate, arrest and, most importantly, expel hundreds of thousands of other active voters from the country."

Saakashvili hopes that after Nika Melia leaves prison he will make drastic decisions in this direction. At the same time, he calls on everyone for unity and activism and says that the country needs early elections, since "Ivanishvili's plan is now to make cosmetic changes in the election commission, remove Zhvania, appoint someone else, wrap himself in this plebiscite in his own way and then try all kinds of manipulations."

After a meeting between European Council President

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**FRIDAY MARCH 5**

Day Partly cloudy  
High: 13°C

Night Clear  
Low: -1°C

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**SATURDAY MARCH 6**

Day Sunny  
High: 16°C

Night Cloudy  
Low: 4°C

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US DOLLAR - 3.3252 | EURO - 3.9976 | GBP - 4.6187 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.4557 | SWISS FRANC - 3.6226 |

## Georgia to select new potential investor for Anaklia Deep Sea Port Project



financial institutions and 120 million USD from the potential investors before the expiration of the official deadline which was set at the end of 2019.

The Anaklia State Consortium later responded by claiming that the government, instead of helping the project, allegedly sabotaged it. Following the government's decision to terminate the investment agreement with the Consortium, co-founder of the TBC Bank, Mamuka Khazaradze, announced that the Consortium would take the case to the International Court of Justice.

He added that in presenting the case, the Consortium would expose all the politicians, who, according to him, were responsible for 'sabotaging' the project, including the founder and the former chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party Bidzina Ivanishvili, former PM Giorgi Gakharia and the former Minister of Infrastructure Maia Tskitishvili. The construction of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port began in 2017.

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On March 4, newly appointed Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili announced that the government will start selecting a new investor for the Anaklia Deep Sea Port Project soon. The PM explained that the government decided on canceling the agreement it had with the Anaklia Development Consortium, which won the government-issued tender to build the deep-sea port.

Garibashvili noted that the government handed over a land worth 58 million GEL to the investor, and agreed to fulfill an obligation of constructing the necessary transportation and railway routes. It will also offer 100 million USD subordinated loan to

the investor once they are able to fulfill the terms of the agreement they had with the government. The Anaklia State Consortium won a tender and signed a deal to begin the construction of the Anaklia deep-sea port in 2016, having TBC Holding as its main partner. The Consortium later faced problems with acquiring the required 2.5 billion USD which was necessary to construct the port.

The deadline for obtaining the funds has been postponed six times, and, in January last year, the Georgian government announced that it terminates the agreement it had with Anaklia State Consortium due to the latter's inability to collect the required 400 million USD in loans from the international



## Ex-president Saakashvili against referendum

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Charles Michel and leaders of opposition parties, Giga Bokeria, Chairman of the European Georgia Political Council, said that apart from minor nuances, the opposition had a fundamentally common message and one of the issues raised by the opposition was early parliamentary elections. According to him, the plebiscite was an issue raised by the initiative of European Georgia earlier and party still supports it, viewing referendum as a serious compromise.

Opposition leaders Salome Samadashvili, Davit Berdzenishvili, Elene Khoshtaria and others do not agree with Saakashvili's

announcement either, arguing that there's no use in discussing how the opposition's goal of early elections will be achieved. Khoshtaria emphasized that Saakashvili doesn't make any decisions in the process of negotiations.

The 4-point plan presented by the opposition back in December said:

Option 1. Schedule new elections in 2021;

Option 2: Prime Minister appoints a plebiscite on the conduct of the 2021 parliamentary elections. The plebiscite should be held with the question: "Should early parliamentary elections be held in the fall of 2021, along with local elections." Answer options: "Yes" and "No".

The idea of holding a plebi-



► European Georgia still supports holding a plebiscite on the issue of early parliamentary elections.

scite on the issue of early elections is not shared by government officials. The parliamentary majority is still focusing on the work of the Commission for the Study of Election Violations, saying that they will agree to hold early elections if the commission finds violations.

Part of the opposition bloc who won seats in the 10th convocation of the Georgian Parliament have been demanding repeat elections since the October 31, 2020 race. They have accused the Georgian Dream ruling party of fabricating the elections and took to the street again last week shortly after the arrest of the United National Movement (UNM) opposition party head Nika Melia (for his refusal to pay bail).