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OSCE releases final report on the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia



BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On March 6, The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released its final reports on the conduct of the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia. The report concluded that despite the challenges posed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, the elections were carried out with full respect to the principles of competitiveness and were overall "administered efficiently".

Although the report found that "the freedoms of assembly, association, and expression were mostly respected, and contestants were generally able to campaign freely and without undue restrictions", it did note some areas that needed improvement.

The OSCE report highlighted that "vibrant" campaigning in a "pluralistic media environment" ended up being quite polarized and some of the "private broadcasters were visibly partisan". The OSCE observation mission also noted

that despite the Georgian Constitution separating the government from the Church, as well as the country's Election Code forbidding religious organizations from campaigning, the ruling party did use some religious imagery to appeal to their voters, and various clergymen were seen attending its events.

Finally, the mission observed the

blurring of the lines between the Georgian government and the ruling Georgian Dream party, especially in the instances when the city mayors campaigned for the candidates. Overall, the final report by the OSCE concluded that to improve the overall conduct of the elections, Georgia must revise the legal framework of the elections, investigate the alleged voters'

and staff intimidation, clarify the process of vote recount, review the regulations regarding the free on-air time and reconsider the overall composition of the election administration to ensure that it is impartial at all times.

The US Embassy to Georgia welcomed the final report of the OSCE and released its statement in which it claimed that the report further highlighted the need for democratic reforms urged the Parliament to "continue a transparent and inclusive reform":

The report underscores the continued need for important reforms, particularly in the areas of campaign finance, electoral administration compositions, dispute resolution. The United States shares these concerns and urges the government to continue a deliberative and inclusive reform process that addresses these longstanding ODIHR recommendations. These important reforms will strengthen political pluralism and democracy, and help Georgia achieve its goals for increased Euro-Atlantic integration", the statement reads.



Opposition “Lelo” and “European Georgia” parties demand PM Garibashvili’s resignation

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Leader of the opposition Lelo for Georgia party and co-founder of the TBC Bank Mamuka Khazaradze recently released a statement in which he called for the immediate resignation of the newly appointed Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili as well as the head of the Special Service of the State Security, Anzor Chubinidze.

The statement came shortly after the Pirveli TV Channel has claimed to have acquired a secret audio tape in which one can, allegedly, hear Bera Ivanishvili and PM Garibashvili (son of the former prime minister and founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili) discussing the possible punishments of the individuals who criticized the current government.

“Lelo demands an immediate investigation of the facts mentioned in the audio tape and ensure that the investigation is conducted in partnership with the relevant, reputable international investigation agencies. In order to make sure that the investigation is put under no external pressure, we demand an immediate resignation of the Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, as well as the Head of the Special Service of State Security, Anzor Chubinidze. As of right now, Lelo is not going to participate in any negotiations that the PM Garibashvili will be joining,”



read Mamuka Khazaradze’s statement.

Similarly, shortly after the TV Pirveli aired its coverage of the ‘secret tape’, leader of the opposition European Georgia party posted on his social media and called for an immediate resignation of the acting prime minister: “Before the early elections are finally held, this [unpleasant] person who calls himself a prime minister, must leave”, Ugulava posted.

One of the members of the opposition United National Movement party, Zaal Udumashvili,

also commented on the TV Pirveli investigation. He said that the only thing that the “tape” shows is that the people who are currently in power “are no better than the members of street mafia gangs.”

“Those tapes contain some signs indicating a serious crime. I believe that the investigation into them must be launched as soon as possible. Meanwhile, those individuals who appear on the tapes should resign before the investigation results are released”, said Zaal Udumashvili.

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria also addressed the issue of released tapes. On her Facebook page she posted that for many years now, Georgian public has been calling for the timely and efficient investigation of some of the illegally obtained and released tapes:

“For many years now, it has become a normal practice in Georgia to illegally obtain, or even fabricate various tapes for the purpose of discrediting or harming the political opponents on various levels. For many years now, the general public has been calling for the timely investigation to be launched by the country’s judicial institutions, and for the adequate treatment of those responsible for obtaining or producing such tapes. Unfortunately, none of such cases have been investigated properly, which makes every citizen of this country vulnerable to such practices”, Lomjaria wrote.



Ministers arrive in Namakhvani to have a meeting with activists

MINISTERS VISITED THE SITE AFTER PM’S ORDERS

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

It has been more than 135 days since the activists started protesting the construction of Namakhvani HPP. On Friday, Ministers of Georgia arrived in Namakhvani to meet the protestors and discuss the situation.

The meeting, which was called delayed by the ‘gorge guards’, was preceded by a two-hour-long meeting with Tsageri residents over the construction of the Namakhvani HPP, where the government officials tried to persuade people that the Namakhvani HPP would not pose a threat to the gorge.

The meeting was not attended by Riony Valley guards due to the initial reports saying that the meeting would be held behind closed doors. The attendance of the media was not planned either, however, after the protest of journalists, the



► The Minister of Economy, Natia Turnava said that people lack information about the HPP

Minister of Economy decided to open the meeting.

It was after Tsageri’s meeting that the ministers decided to go to Namakhvani and talk about the future meeting and format with the Rioni Valley guards.

The activists were straightforward; one of them, Maka Suladze, told the Ministers that their arrival was delayed. She said that the Ministers were so late that the police managed to dismantle the riots twice, “which was very insulting to us – people who tried to guard our own country.”

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MONDAY		MARCH 8
Day		Cloudy with snow
		High: 2°C
Night		Partly cloudy
		Low: -3°C
TUESDAY		MARCH 9
Day		Mainly sunny
		High: 10°C
Night		Clear skies
		Low: -1°C

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Georgia ranks 12th in Economic Freedom Index 2021

GEORGIA RANKS 7TH IN EUROPE

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The Washington-based Heritage Foundation, which has been publishing an in-depth economic freedom index for 27 years, has released its 2021 report. This study evaluates 12 types of freedom in 184 countries around the world.

According to the 2021 Economic Freedom Index published by the Heritage Foundation, Georgia, with a total score of 77.2, is ranked 12th in the world and 7th among 45 countries in the European region.

The 2021 report was discussed by Mamuka Mdinardze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream, in the parliament. According to him, as the Index shows, the business in the country is free, and the investment environment is very attractive.

“This is a key factor in overcoming the difficult economic crisis caused by the coronavirus because, with the end of the pandemic, Georgia needs to attract additional investment and start new businesses on the road to economic recovery, which will ultimately reduce poverty, increase incomes, employment, and prosperity,” noted Mdinardze.

The Minister of Economy also



► Mdinardze: As the index shows, the business sector in the country is free, and the investment environment is very attractive

talked about the Economic Freedom Index and noted that “we are all together doing a great Georgian job.” She said that all this “was made possible through the hard work of the country towards transparency, openness to the economy to foreign investors, development of production, and many other aspects.”

Compared to the last year’s

index, the country has advanced by improving its score in the ranking’s 5 components: judicial effectiveness (59.3 points), tax burden (89.1 points), government spending (76.9 points), fiscal freedom (94.9 points), and trade freedom (76.7 points).

The score awarded to Georgia exceeds the average scores for both Europe and the world

as well. For example, the list shows that Georgia is behind only 6 European countries, such as Switzerland, Ireland, Estonia, Denmark, Iceland, and the UK.

In terms of the tax burden, Georgia is among the countries with a low share of the tax burden in GDP, as well as in profit and revenue taxes.

The Heritage Foundation published its annual 2021 Economic freedom Index on March 4, 2021. This report, published for 27 years now, is one of the most reputable and noteworthy rankings in the world. The index includes assessments in 4 key groups in turn consisting of 12 different quantitative and qualitative parameters to assess economic freedom in 184 countries around the globe.



► The score awarded to Georgia exceeds the average scores for both Europe and the world as well.

Ministers arrive in Namakhvani to have a meeting with activists

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The meeting was scheduled for March 12, but as one of the protesters, Varlam Goletiani says a large rally scheduled for March 14 will still take place.

Before the meeting in Tsageri, the Minister of Economy Natia Turnava noted that she was ready to answer all the questions. She also said that everyone who asks questions is protesting sincerely, however, “they might not fully understand the situation.”

She also said that the government would try to make sure that everyone understands that Namakhvani HPP, and other HPPs as well, have to be built in Georgia.” It should be said that because of the ongoing pandemic, we were not able to give full information to the people, that’s why there are so many questions,” added Turnava.

The government’s meetings with the population on the Namakhvani HPP were planned after Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili instructed the ministers to visit the site.



► Another meeting was also scheduled on March 12; however, the activists are saying that the protests will still take place on March 14