

POLITICS

EU on the selection process of Supreme Court judges in Georgia



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ECONOMICS/POLITICS

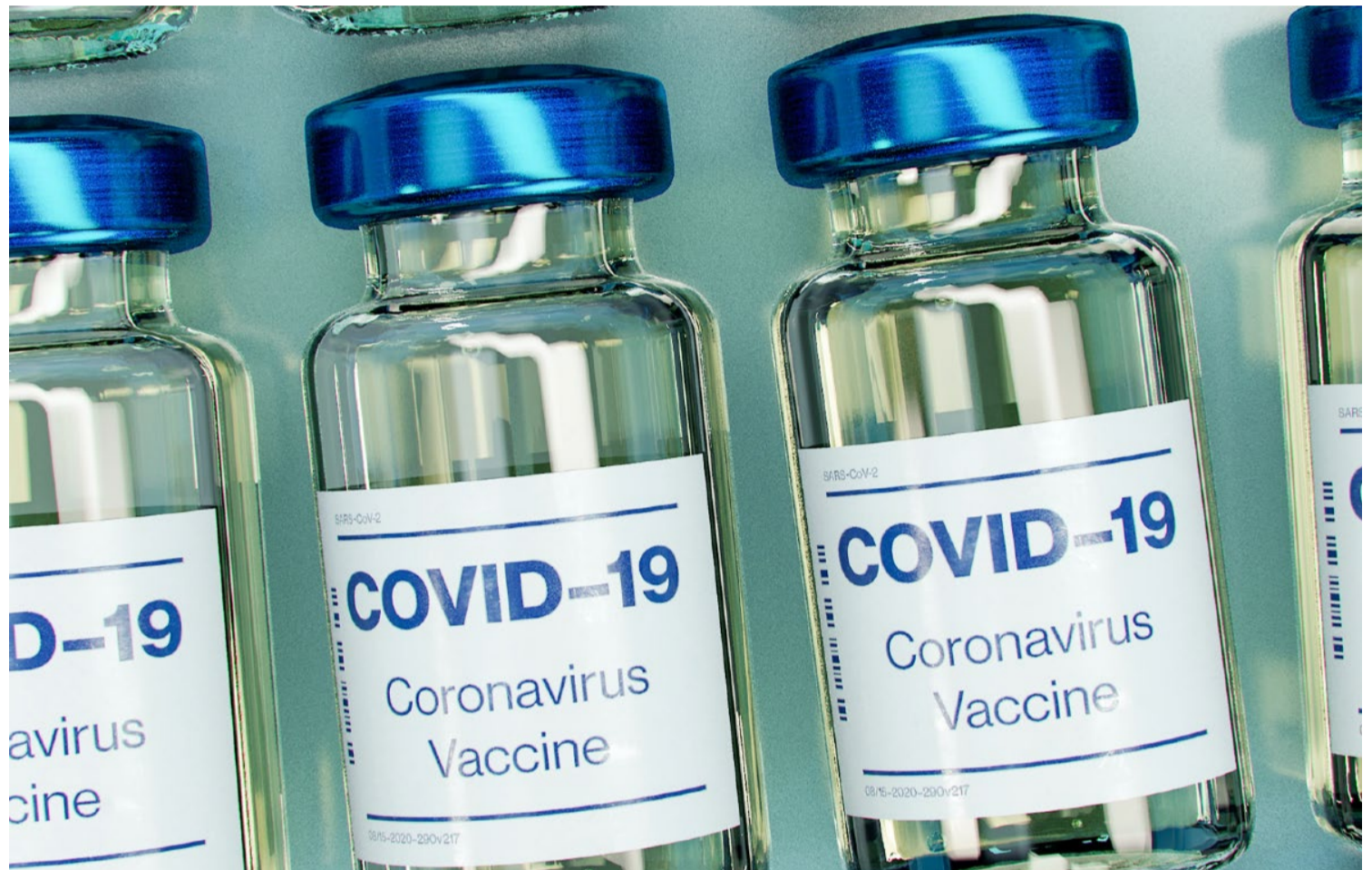
EU and MRDI visit first results of GEL 220 million territorial development programme in Georgia's regions

Georgian civil servants value e-learning opportunities but point out drawbacks, study says

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Health experts talk about possible COVID-19 third wave in Georgia

COVID-19 CASES HAVE SLOWLY STARTED INCREASING IN GEORGIA AGAIN



► Experts are saying that there is some chance for the further spread of the virus

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Fears of the potential third wave increase in Georgia as the virus spreads further. The number of daily reported cases increased last week and health experts, as well as government officials, have started talking about the possible third wave of Covid-19 in Georgia.

A number of European countries have already announced the spread of the Covid-19 third wave with the numbers increased significantly in the last few weeks.

For the past few days, members of the Coordinating Council, government officials, and the country's top infectious disease specialists have been talking about the danger of a third wave in the

country. They are also talking about the possible adoption of further restrictions in the country.

Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia has recently stated that there are no plans of a lockdown in the country at the moment, however, an adequate reaction is important to the updates.

Recently, Georgian Prime Minister

Irakli Gharibashvili discussed the possible third wave of Covid-19 in Georgia and said that everything should be done to avoid posing harsh restrictions as well as the virus.

"We have to do everything to avoid the third wave of the virus as well as harsh restrictions in the country. The only way to accomplish this is to strictly follow the regulations that are in place today. This includes wearing a face mask and avoiding crowded gatherings, among others," said Gharibashvili.

Yesterday, Gabunia also talked about the decision to limit the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine. From now on, the vaccine will only be used for those who are above 55. As for those who have received the first dose of the vaccine, they can receive the second dose as well.

The decision of the Georgian officials came after the announcement of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) confirming a possible link between Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine injection and cases of thromboembolism. It was concluded that thromboembolism might be a very rare side effect of the vaccine.

Since the vaccine rollout in the country is not that rapid, experts say the best thing to fight against the spread of the virus is to use face masks and follow the regulations that are in place in the country right now.

761 new cases of Covid-19 were confirmed yesterday which takes the total confirmed cases in the country to 286,406.



►► Georgian PM Gharibashvili said that everything should be done to avoid the third wave of Covid-19 in the country

EU on the selection process of Supreme Court judges in Georgia



► The European Union's External Action Service decried Georgia's "hastily designed and adopted" changes to the selection process of the Supreme Court Judges.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

On April 7, the European Union responded to the legislative changes adopted by the Parliament of Georgia on April 1 regarding the procedure for selecting candidates for the Supreme Court and submitting them to the Parliament by the High Council of Justice.

"On April 1, the Georgian Parliament adopted legislative amendments reviewing the selection process of Supreme Court judges. The European Union has repeatedly expressed concerns over the shortcomings in this selection process and the applicable rules," read the statement.

While the EU welcomes the initiative to amend the legal framework of the selection process, it also expresses disappointment that the Georgian Parliament hastily designed and adopted these amendments without an inclusive consultation process. We regret that previously, Georgia had already amended this legislation in a rushed process without a timely request to or awaiting the final opinion of

the Venice Commission. The European Union, therefore, strongly recommends Georgia to request as soon as possible a Venice Commission assessment on whether the adopted amendments comply

with its previous recommendations. "The new rules, once confirmed by the Venice Commission, need to apply equally to all applicants."

"It is crucial that the Supreme

Court, Georgia's highest judicial instance, is composed of judges of utmost professional competence and integrity. Revising the selection process of Supreme Court judges in line with Venice Com-

mission recommendations is also a condition for the disbursement of the second tranche of macro-financial assistance to Georgia under its current programme."

Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy of the EU Nabila Massrali wrote on her Twitter: "Disappointing that Georgia parliament hastily designed & adopted amendments reviewing selection process of Supreme Court judges without an inclusive consultation process. EU strongly recommends Georgia to request Venice Commission assessment ASAP."

Earlier, several MEPs said that the consequences of EU's aid could lead to disagreements between political parties in Georgia. MEPs have expressed their concern over the failure of the Georgian government and opposition parties to agree to a proposal by Christian Danielson, to resolve the political crisis.

The Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Common Courts in the third reading. The package of bills related to the selection of candidates for judges of the Supreme Court was considered by the Parliament of Georgia in an expedited manner and adopted unanimously by 86 votes.



► The initiators of the bill were members of the parliamentary majority: Anri Okhanashvili, Mikheil Sarjveladze, and Shalva Papuashvili.

FRIDAY **APRIL 9**

Day ☁ Mostly cloudy
High: **26°C**

Night ☁ Cloudy
Low: **8°C**

SATURDAY **APRIL 10**

Day ☁ Mostly cloudy
High: **23°C**

Night 🌧 Rain
Low: **13°C**

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

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EU and MRDI visit first results of GEL 220 million territorial development programme in Georgia's regions

Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Georgia, Sigrid Brettel visited six municipalities in Imereti and Guria to see infrastructure projects with a value of 2.5 million GEL. These are part of the first phase of the Government's GEL 220 million Pilot Integrated Regional Development Grant Programme, of which GEL 186 million comes from EU funding.

The six visited projects are part of the 11 initial projects financed by the PiRDP, which was launched in June 2020. They include:

- Rehabilitation of the road and pedestrian bridge to stimulate local business and promote tourism in Labajouri, Vani Municipality, Imereti

- Construction of a park in Sachkhere, Sachkhere municipality, Imereti

- Development of a tourist and business development service center in the village of Vartsikhe, Baghdati municipality, Imereti

- Rehabilitation of a Public Square in Samtredia, Samtredia municipality, Imereti

- Construction of 1km or road along the "Tea Route" to develop tourism in the village of Bakhvi, Ozurgeti municipality, Guria

- Rehabilitation of 2 road bridges and 100 m long riverbed wall, arrangement of 173 LED lights to develop a recreational area in Chokhatauri, Chokhatauri municipality, Gu-

ria
Video statement, video and photo materials of the visit, available here.

Additionally, see the interview on PiRDP with Ms. Sigrid Brettel, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Georgia

"The EU cares about Georgia's regions. We have been supporting the Government for many years to develop an effective regional development policy and increase the attractiveness of the regions. The PiRDP programme is the result of this long-standing cooperation. Based on lessons learned from the EU's over 50-year experience with regional development, the PiRDP takes an integrated approach looking at the big picture of local development and moves decision making from Tbilisi to the regional level. It also stimulates competition among municipalities to present the best ideas that will receive funding. We can now see the impact on the ground, and the initiatives I visited in Imereti and Guria are very promising. I had the pleasure to meet local authorities and was impressed with their energy and ambitions for this programme. I look forward to visiting the other 5 winning initiatives under this first call, as well as all the other initiatives that will be supported over the next 2 years" – says Sigrid Brettel, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Georgia.

"An EU-funded pilot pro-

gramme for integrated territorial development is underway. We are currently in the first phase of the call for projects, resulting in funding of 11 projects in four regions. Most importantly, the projects are directly selected by the municipalities and are aimed at the social and economic development of the local population as well as business incentives." – said Mzia Giorgobiani Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia

"Guria has also been selected as a pilot region meeting the latest standards of EU regional development policy. Accordingly, all three municipalities - Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri - plan to get involved in this project next year. We hope that future projects will also help improve the socio-economic situation in our region" - said Giorgi Sakhokia, State Representative in Guria Region.

"The support provided by the EU to Imereti region is significant, as we have already implemented the projects with a total budget of GEL 2,2 million and this year we plan to implement more projects worth about GEL 9 million, which will be a very important benefit for each municipality." - stated Zviad Shalamberidze, State Representative in Imereti Region.

"The PiRDP is especially important programme for our

municipalities enabling us to financially strengthen our institutions and implement new projects, while allowing us to further develop our human capital, and plan the integrated development of our municipalities for the well-being of the population." -says Ioseb Khakhaleishvili, Mayor of Kutaisi.

About PiRDP

Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (PIRDP) for Georgia 2020-2022 is a Government programme based on EU regional development policy. It aims to create a favorable environment for promoting balanced and sustainable socio-economic development through integrated territorial development initiatives in four pilot regions of Kakheti, Imereti, Guria and Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti. PiRDP has a budget of 220 million GEL, of which 186 million GEL will be provided by the EU.

The programme is managed by the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (MRDI), in the framework of the Government Commission for Regional Development (GCRD). The first set of grants with a total financial envelope 5 million GEL were awarded to 11 municipalities Vani, Sachkhere, Tkibuli, Samtredia, Baghdati, Tsageri, Sagarejo, Telavi, Akhmeta, Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri in

July 2020. More projects will be financed in 2021 and 2022.

PiRDP is based on bottom-up, decentralised approach with the appraisal and selection for funding of the municipal projects carried out by Regional Consultative Councils (RCC) that comprise municipal Mayors and Heads of Councils, as well as CSOs and business community members as observers. The funding will allow the winning municipalities to realize important projects covering various areas, such as support to SMEs, improvement of key infrastructure and municipal services, improvement of human capital, education and research institutions, increase the quality and effectiveness of institutions, etc. These initiatives, in line with ongoing sectoral EU-funded programmes and projects, will boost investment and employment in targeted regions.

The development of regional policy in Georgia is an important area of the EU-Georgia cooperation under the Association Agreement. The Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme 2020-2022, co-financed through the budget support scheme by the EU, was approved by the Government in December 2019. The programme follows the European model of regional development and is implemented for the first time among the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries in Georgia.

Georgian civil servants value e-learning opportunities but point out drawbacks, study says

UNDP RESEARCH EXAMINES ONLINE TRAINING IN CIVIL SERVICE



Research



TBILISI. 8 April 2021 – The pandemic is transforming workplace culture, pushing daily activities, including on-the-job training, to an online space. Aiming to assist Georgia's civil service in adapting to the "new normal", the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UK Government assessed the benefits and challenges associated with e-learning opportunities for civil servants.

The research conducted in 2020 by the Georgian agency PMC Research Centre together with the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), analysed the e-learning experiences of Georgian civil servants amidst lockdowns. Its quantitative part is based on the results of phone interviews

with 1,654 civil servants from 30 municipalities, while a qualitative part comes from analysing focus group discussions and the reports of the online training sessions.

The study reveals that civil servants appreciate an opportunity to study online, stating that it saves time and helps blend professional development with daily duties. 63 percent of all respondents fully or partially agreed that online training can be as effective as a face-to-face class, and 45 percent said that online training saves transportation costs.

Limited social interaction between colleagues and difficulty concentrating on learning tasks

were commonly mentioned as e-learning drawbacks. Respondents also noted that some of the training providers were not skilled in organising the engaging and interactive training sessions online. When given a choice, the same 63 percent of all respondents opted for face-to-face training. In phone interviews, 30 percent of women respondents said that e-learning is an opportunity to combine work, studies and family duties. However, the discussions in focus groups revealed that e-learning can be a challenge for those civil servants, mostly women, who carry a burden of family care.

"Professional development of civil servants is vital for the

success of ongoing reforms in public administration," said Gigi Bregadze, UNDP Team Leader for Democratic Governance. "Our research aims to help civil service and training providers to identify weaknesses in the e-learning process and design an effective training system that will meet the needs and expectations of civil servants."

UNDP and the UK research examines the gaps in digital skills and access to technology – computers and the internet. It shows that the majority of Georgian civil servants has access to computers at work (91 percent) and home (83 percent), as well as webcams (72 percent) and microphones (75 percent). Stable broadband inter-

net connection is available to civil servants both at work (74 percent) and home (77 percent).

"The success of public agencies is defined by the qualification of employees," said CSB Head Ekaterine Kardava. "We created a strong and flexible training system that equips Georgian civil servants with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their professional goals."

Professional development of civil servants is one of the requirements of Georgia's Law on Civil Service (2015) that ensures high-quality learning opportunities for all civil servants. Even during the pandemic lockdowns, over 1,500 civil servants benefited from the mandatory training courses offered by accredited providers.

UNDP and the UK are assisting professional training in civil service as part of their wider support to Public Administration Reform in Georgia, implemented in partnership with the CSB and other public agencies.

The 2020 Caucasus Music Awards Phoenix prize was given to the winning group from Turkey "Marsis" on April 7. "Marsis" is famous for singing in multiple languages, include Georgian and Laz. Due to the pandemic related restrictions, only the soloist of the group Korhan Ozyildiz arrived to attend the ceremony organized by Turkish Embassy. The prize was awarded by Lado Burduli, founder of "Phoenix" and H.E. Fatma Ceren Yazgan, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Georgia. Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center helped contacting the group regarding their visit to Tbilisi for March Award Ceremony, but since pandemic restricted musicians from traveling, the Culture Center received the prize on their behalf.

