

POLITICS

MIA: We have arrested the killer of Shanae Brooke



FULL STORY ON Page 2

POLITICS | ECONOMICS

Georgian Parties Can Enhance Confidence In Elections By Focusing On Citizen Priorities And Adhering To Democratic Principles

Changing waste management practices in Georgian cities

FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan arrived in Tbilisi on September 8 for a 2-day official visit, during which he held meetings with PM Irakli Gharibashvili - both, face-to-face and extended format meetings as well as with President Salome Zurbashvili who hosted him at Orbelian Palace. During the visit, the PM of Armenia, together with the members of the delegation, laid a wreath at the Heroes' Square who died in the battle for the unity of Georgia.

In a joint press conference of PMs, officials discussed the security environment in the South Caucasus and stressed the need for the peaceful development of the region. In his address, the Georgian PM named Pashinyan's re-election in June 'an opportunity for Armenia to begin a new era.' He asserted that after getting to know the Armenian PM's vision, he believes that the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a difficult challenge for the region' can lead to new possibilities.

The Georgian and Armenian PMs have pledged in Tbilisi to intensify ties and cooperation to create new opportunities which will decrease tension and risks of conflicts in the region. They also highlighted the importance of utilizing regional economic and transit opportunities and enhancing cooperation.

Gharibashvili stated that stability in Armenia is crucial for Georgia and regional peace.

"The Karabakh war was certainly a real challenge for our region, but now that I know what Mr. PM's new vision is, I believe that this challenge will be transformed into a new opportunity. An opportunity that will bring prosperity to Armenia and the Armenian

## Armenian PM pays an official visit to Georgia



► PM reaffirmed to Pashinyan the full readiness of Georgia to continue mediation to restore trust between Azerbaijan and Armenia.



► The meeting with President Zurbashvili focused on the issues of stability and security in the region, the importance of using and developing the future potential of regional cooperation.

people. I would also like to say that the stability of Armenia is very important for us, both politically and economically, and it is directly related to the stability of our country and the region in general." Gharibashvili said.

"Peace, stability, and prosperity are the 3 words I would use to describe our joint regional goals," the Georgian PM said at a press conference with Pashinyan. He emphasized that Pashinyan's vision is for the sustainable development of Armenia and that 'he will bring success and development' to the Armenian people'.

According to the Georgian PM, joint efforts should be targeted for ensuring new opportunities, development, and peace for the region. He said that economic, trade, transport, communication, and connectivity issues, as well as the possibility of large projects, have been discussed with Pashinyan.

Pashinyan thanked Gharibashvili 'for his personal contribution' for the recent release

of 15 Armenian war prisoners held in Azerbaijan and stated that the communication at that time 'created an even better atmosphere in the 2 countries' friendly relations. He described Georgia's mediation efforts in June as a new foundation for facilitating more productive cooperation, adding that collaboration will continue after the new Armenian government is formed.

"Unfortunately, there are conflicts and tension in our region. We are trying to support each other and focus on the opportunities which will decrease the risks," Pashinyan said.

He stated that since the formation of the new government in Armenia, intergovernmental cooperation between the countries will become more intense. Pashinyan also expressed hope that economic ties between the countries would be further strengthened.

He stated that the Georgian and Armenian peoples are linked by a centuries-long friendship. He also spoke about the coopera-

tion in the field of health in the conditions of the coronavirus pandemic, in particular, the cooperation of specialists.

Pashinyan also presented the proposals on regional issues and solutions that have emerged in the Armenian government program and their ideas to his Georgian counterpart.

The Armenian PM stressed the existence of a large Armenian diaspora in Georgia and said that ethnic Armenians living in Georgia will continue to contribute to the unity of Georgia and will be important actors in its development. He also thanked the government for promoting the preservation and development of the identity of Armenian citizens in Georgia.

Georgia was the first country that Pashinyan paid an official visit to on May 11, 2018, a few days after his first election as PM of Armenia. The second official visit of Pashinyan to Georgia took place on March 3-4, 2020. During the first and second official visits, he was hosted by the then PMs of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, and Giorgi Gakharia. The current PM Gharibashvili paid an official visit to Armenia in May 2021.

Pashinyan resigned as PM of Armenia on April 25, 2021, preceded by a crisis over a peace agreement signed with Azerbaijan. The opposition accused him of capitulation and betrayal of state interests and demanded his resignation in November 2020, when Russia and Armenia mediated an agreement to end hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh and deploy a Russian peacekeeping contingent there. With this document, several districts lost in the '90s were returned to Azerbaijan. Pashinyan's party won a landslide victory in a snap election on June 20, 2021, following the resignation of the PM, and the newly convened parliament re-elected him as Prime Minister.



# MIA: We have arrested the killer of Shanae Brooke

THE MAN ACCUSED OF THE MURDER IS A 33-YEAR-OLD GEORGIAN CITIZEN

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has detained a Georgian citizen living in Tbilisi, accused of murdering Australian citizen, Shanae Brooke. The information was announced by a representative of the agency at the special briefing.

According to the information of the MIA, the 33-year-old Georgian citizen was arrested on September 8. According to the statement of the MIA representative, biological samples were taken from several dozen citizens who were thought to be involved in the crime.

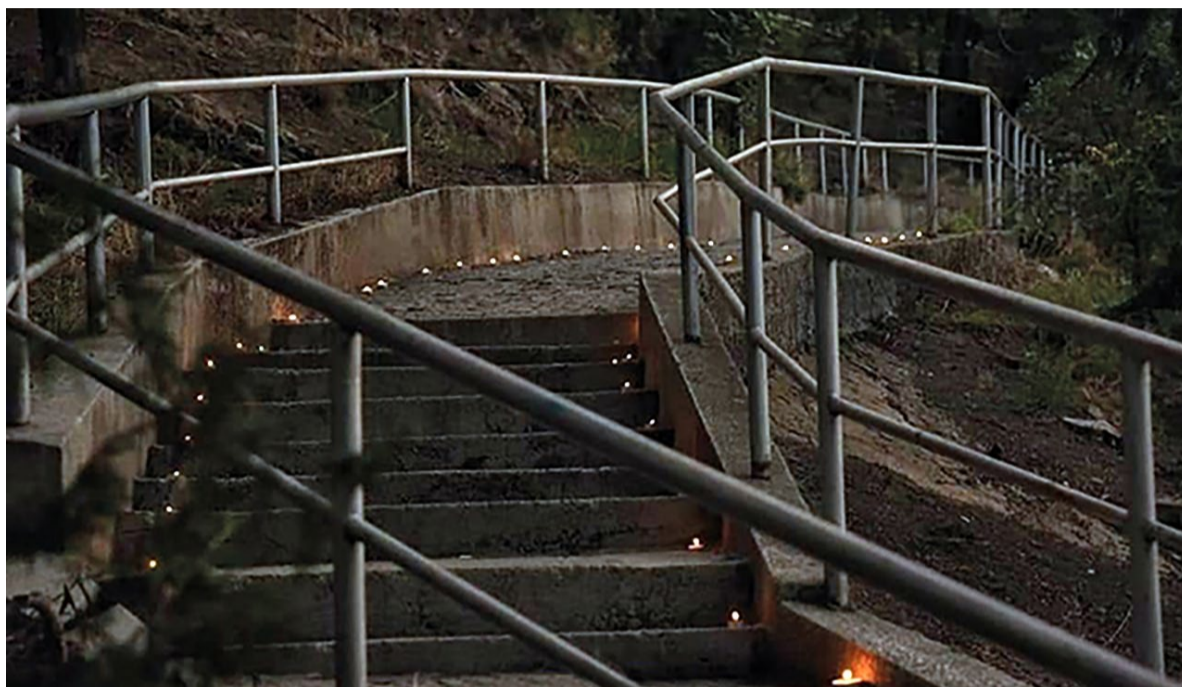
After a detailed interrogation of each of the individuals and complex investigative measures, as the MIA says, the circle of the above-mentioned persons was reduced to a minimum. "According to the conclusion of the genetic examination, the identity of the accused was unequivocally confirmed," announced the MIA representative.

The Ministry did not talk about the details of the murder, but the Deputy Head of the Tbilisi Police Department, Kakha Muradashvili said that the body of the young woman was found with traces of violence. It was also reported that the investigation found the weapon of the crime.

Rafael Mursakulov, the man accused of the murder, was detained and taken to a temporary detention facility. The information about this was confirmed by his lawyer. After the announcement was made about the arrest, information spread on social media about other possible crimes committed by Mursakulov. One of the Facebook users wrote that a few months back, her friend was attacked by Mursakulov and one other person on Mtatsminda.

"Although the police knew who he was, nothing was done about it. Maybe, if they did something back then, this young woman could have been alive today," wrote one of the Facebook users.

The person who spread this information talked with RFE/RL and said that she wrote the post with her friend's consent. After contacting the MIA, RFE/RL says



► The body of the Australian citizen was found on July 31

that no further information about the case was given because it contained "personal information".

In addition, several people, including news outlets, talked about a possible connection between Georgian Dream and Mursakulov, however, the ruling party representatives said that Mursakulov might have been just an activist. A photo of him with some of the GD representatives was also spread on Facebook.

According to Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, Rafael Mursakulov has taken photos with Melia and Rurua as well, but this topic should not be raised at all. According to him, no matter who the murderer is, he will be punished with the full force of the law.

Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua spoke about the same



► 31-year-old Australian citizen was an English teacher in Tbilisi

issue. He says the party "has tens of thousands of members and hundreds of thousands of supporters" and GD can't be held accountable for the thoughts and intentions of individual supporters. Australian citizen Shanae Brooke disappeared on July 30. The information about this was spread on the social network by her friend, who said that when Shanae Brooke was talking on the phone, she was on Mtatsminda, taking a walk. During this time, she was attacked.

The body of a young woman was found on the slope of Mtatsminda on July 31. The investigation of the case was initiated under Article 108 of the Criminal Code. This article provides for imprisonment from seven to fifteen years.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

**Kakha Kaladze: They are trying to bring some uncertainty and destruction with dirty methods - we will provide information to the diplomatic corps in this regard**

No one will be permitted to destabilize the nation, - Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze said today to reporters, in response to claims from the governing party that several CEC-registered NGOs were linked to opposition political groups.

They are attempting, as Kaladze indicated, to introduce dirty tactics and destabilize the voting process.

The CEC has registered 62 observer organizations, 15 of which are associated with the opposition, according to the ruling party.

At today's briefing, Givi Mikanadze claimed that "12 out of 15 groups are associated with the National Movement" and "three with European Georgia."

**The robber at the Bank of Georgia branch in Kvareli arrested**

The robber of the Bank of Georgia branch in Kvareli has been arrested.

According to the available information, the law enforcers have left the area.

"Several hours of special operation have been successfully completed. The officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs detained and neutralized the person who was in the bank and who had taken hostages," said Ketvi Kovziashvili, the head of the public relations department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

**FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 10**

**Day** ☁ A few clouds  
High: **26°C**

**Night** 🌙 Clear skies  
Low: **15°C**

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**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 11**

**Day** ☀ Sunshine  
High: **28°C**

**Night** 🌧 Rain  
Low: **19°C**

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## Georgian Parties Can Enhance Confidence In Elections By Focusing On Citizen Priorities And Adhering To Democratic Principles

The political rivalries that have consumed Georgian politics threaten to unravel 30 years of democratic progress.

WASHINGTON – This week, the National Democratic Institute (NDI, or the Institute) sponsored an international team of experts to conduct a series of online, high-level meetings with political parties, government officials, civil society, and local media to demonstrate continued support for Georgia's democratic development and reinforce the international community's expectation that all parties will adhere to the principles of genuine democratic elections and political processes.

The team was led by Madeleine K. Albright, former US Secretary of State, and current NDI Board Chair; Howard Dean, former Governor of Vermont, and NDI Board Member; Per Eklund, former EU Ambassador to Georgia; and Kenneth Wollack, Chairman of the Board of the National Endowment for Democracy and former President of NDI. Other members of the team included United States Congressional and senior NDI staff listed below.

Over the last three decades, Georgia has served as a model to other countries in the region, undertaking political reforms in its pursuit of a democratic, European, and Euro-Atlantic future. Recent electoral reforms have yielded a legal framework that will lead toward a proportional representation, consensus-driven system. Civil society organizations have played a vital and active role in political life, including impartial observation of electoral and political processes. Most importantly, the vast majority of Georgians, as demonstrated by NDI's February 2021 public opinion poll, expect their political leaders to cooperate and deliver on the Georgian people's democratic aspirations.

"Democracy is a work in progress and healthy political competition is a hallmark of any democratic system," said Secretary Madeleine Albright. "Destructive rivalries, however, take a significant toll on a

country, its institutions, and its citizens. Dialogue, participation in institutions, and compromise are vital to strengthening Georgia's democratic credentials. The people of Georgia set higher standards for their country as does the international community."

As Georgia approaches municipal elections on October 2, a protracted political crisis and recent attacks on civil society and media raised concerns among the Georgian public and international community about the Georgian government's continued commitment to a democratic, Euro-Atlantic path. According to NDI's July 2021 poll, a majority of Georgians do not believe they currently live in a democracy. The breakdown of the April 19 agreement, which established a roadmap to advance long needed reforms, further undermined confidence. These elections provide an opportunity for Georgia's political leaders to demonstrate their commitment to the democratic path by adhering to democratic principles and focusing on the political and economic priorities of its citizens.

"Constructive dialogue is critical to a responsive and representative governing system. Attacks on Georgian media and civil society are unacceptable," said Governor Howard Dean. "The government must bear the weight of ensuring accountability for those who seek to disrupt the work of these organizations, including their independent monitoring, analysis of the electoral process, and sharing the perspectives of marginalized communities. That is the burden of leadership."

While the foundations of Georgia's electoral framework and administration are largely in place, NDI's meetings revealed several ongoing challenges, many of which have been present over successive elections and governments. Campaigning is expected to heighten in the

lead up to the elections and, at present, not all parties are doing enough to reach citizens and speak to their concerns. Organization and participation in debates is notably absent, and citizens are left with little substantive information about their electoral choices. Georgian interlocutors raised concerns about lax or selective enforcement of electoral regulations, and abuses of state resources and prosecutorial authorities. Following the violent events of July 5, there were also elevated concerns about the ability of civil society and media to operate freely and express diverse viewpoints, as well as harassment and intimidation of opposition party members and candidates. Failure to protect these fundamental freedoms can only undermine trust in the elections. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on all political parties and electoral candidates to participate in the political process in good faith. At a time of instability in the region and rising authoritarianism across the globe, these issues must be addressed in order to solidify Georgia's position in the European family of nations, enhance its security, and strengthen transatlantic partnerships.

"Unfortunately, the challenges facing Georgia are not new. These problems have plagued the country across different governments," noted Ambassador Per Eklund. "All political leaders have a responsibility to ensure that these challenges do not continue to be passed onto future administrations. While the ruling party has a higher burden of leadership that comes with elected office, opposition parties must also engage in good faith."

With approximately three weeks until election day, and in the spirit of international partnership, NDI offers the following recommendations that can strengthen democratic institutions and processes in Georgia:

- All stakeholders should respect the rights of election

observers and media organizations to conduct their oversight functions without harassment or obstruction, as well as the rights of those engaged in campaigning and voting. The government should ensure that law enforcement bodies are properly instructed and equipped to safeguard these rights.

- Authorities should conduct a swift, thorough, and unbiased investigation into and timely prosecution of alleged cases of violence, intimidation, and vote buying.
- Electoral authorities should make extra efforts to swiftly and properly adjudicate submitted electoral complaints and conduct appropriate subsequent action.
- All party supporters must refrain from political violence and intimidation. Political parties should institute and deploy internal sanctions in a timely manner for those who violate these principles.
- Political parties should run issue-based, citizen-focused campaigns and take all opportunities provided by broadcasters to engage in debate and present their policy agendas to the public.
- All political parties should participate in the political process before, during and after the elections and commit themselves to establishing constructive dialogue to implement reforms in line with the spirit of the April 19 agreement. Such a course of action could reassure voters that the upcoming elections would be a precursor to genuine political reform.

Active in Georgia since 1995, NDI is a long-time friend of Georgia and remains committed to supporting the country's continued democratic journey. The Institute will continue to closely assess developments on the ground in the lead up to, and after election day. These meetings represented the first phase

of NDI's multi-track program for the October 2, 2021, municipal elections. On September 6, NDI announced the arrival of a limited long-term assessment mission to Georgia. NDI's long-term analysts will focus on several key themes, including election administration, the campaign environment, the information environment, and gender and inclusion. In late September, NDI plans to follow up on this week's high level meetings, as it assesses progress ahead of election day.

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NDI wishes to express its appreciation to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which has supported these online, high-level meetings through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS).

In addition to Secretary Albright, Governor Dean, Ambassador Eklund, and Kenneth Wollack, other members of the team included: Amy English, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor, Office of Senator Jeanne Shaheen; Hannah Thoburn, Senior Professional Staff Member on the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Kat Cosgrove, Senior Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Gerald Connolly; Benjamin Cooper, Staff Associate, US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber; Melissa Muscio, NDI Acting Regional Co-Director for Eurasia; Pat Merloe, NDI Director for Elections Programs; and Alan Gillam, NDI Resident Director for Georgia.

*NDI is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all.*

## Changing waste management practices in Georgian cities

UNDP Accelerator Lab conducts a behavioural experiment to support waste separation in Batumi and Tbilisi

TBILISI. 8 September 2021 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed memorandums of understanding with the Batumi and Tbilisi municipalities, to assist the two largest Georgian cities to introduce plastic waste separation practices and promote sustainable lifestyles.

Through its Accelerator Lab, UNDP will study household waste behaviour to find out what measures would stimulate people to separate waste and how municipal authorities could

support this process. UNDP's behavioural experiment will reveal whether adequate infrastructure and public awareness has a notable impact on waste management practices. Up to 40 separation bins for plastic waste will be installed in several districts of both cities. In the pilot districts, UNDP will organize an educational campaign to inform people about the environmental and other benefits of waste sorting, while in the other districts, no additional information will be provided to the residents.

Changes in household waste behaviour will be compared in both groups to measure the effectiveness of public awareness activities.

The USD 34,000 project will be implemented from September through December 2021 in close partnership with the Batumi and Tbilisi municipalities and in cooperation with the Ltd Sandasuptaveba in Batumi and Ltd Tbilservicegroup in Tbilisi.

"Georgia's fastest-growing cities, Tbilisi and Batumi, are struggling with a waste man-

agement issue. Separation is the first critical step towards a circular economy that benefits people and the environment," said UNDP Deputy Head Anna Chernyshova. "Understanding household behaviour will help reveal decisive factors to change a widespread social practice and promote waste sorting through effective policies and other mechanisms."

Around 900,000 tons of waste is generated annually in Georgia and more than 75 percent ends up in landfill sites increasing

pollution and posing long-lasting threats to the environment and human health. Georgia's National Waste Management Strategy for 2016-2030 provides a target timeline for recycling certain types of waste. For example, the country should be recycling 50 percent of plastic waste by 2025 and 80 percent by 2030. To fulfil this ambitious goal, Georgia must implement a complex set of measures to prevent excessive waste generation and stimulate the transition to sustainable waste management.