

Tbilisi condemns occupied Tskhinvali's involvement in Russian parliamentary elections

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has condemned the holding of Russian State Duma elections in occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region as 'another destructive step by Moscow that violates the fundamental norms of international law and completely disregards the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.' MFA urged the international community to give a 'due response' to the country's illegal activities in Georgia.

MFA emphasized the fact that the population of Georgia's occupied region elects majoritarian MPs in Voronezh, Leningrad, Samara districts, and Zabaykalsky Krai, as well as political parties in Russia, clearly points at the ongoing process of de facto annexation of these regions.

Since the 2000s, Russia has carried out illegal, forcible passportization in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, as well as maintaining the occupation and effective control over these regions, preventing hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees from returning home. The ministry emphasizes that a recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights shifted all responsibility on Russia for human rights violations in the regions, underlining that 'Russia is exercising effective control' on Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

"Holding any elections on the ground, especially for composing the legislature of the occupying state, is illegal and will unlikely bring any legal outcome."

In occupied Abkhazia, 9 voting stations have been opened for Russian State Duma elections, whereas in the Tskhinvali Region, 10 polling stations have been established. Russian occupying soldiers and



Moscow-backed Abkhaz leader Bzhania voted at Russian State Duma elections on September 19, while Bibilov, occupied Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia leader cast a ballot 2 days prior.

officers of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) were also entitled to vote. According to preliminary assessments, more than 25,000 people from Georgia's Tskhinvali and Abkhazia areas voted in the Russian elections.

Tskhinvali-based RES news agency said the Russian Central Election Commission attached residents of South

Ossetia with Russian citizenship to the Trans-Baikal Territory, to the Chita constituency in faraway Siberia.

Tbilisi also condemned an agreement signed between Russia and Tskhinvali 'on dual citizenship' on September 20, which allows the residents of Tskhinvali to receive Russian citizenship without losing 'South Ossetian' citizenship.

The document, greenlighted by the Russian President in August, permits citizens of one side to acquire the citizenship of the other without relinquishing their papers and simplifies the process of obtaining Russian nationality for South Ossetians. Tskhinvali or Moscow might choose to give these advantages to a dual citizen who lives in the other party's jurisdiction.

The agreement enters into force after being ratified and will be valid for 5 years and automatically renewed. The termination of the document does not entail the termination of citizenship of either party.

Russian citizens voted for the State Duma for a 5-year term, as the Kremlin's most outspoken critics were barred from participating in elections. With 99% of ballots counted, the pro-Putin United Russia party received nearly 50%, followed by the Communist Party with 19.2%, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's the Liberal Democratic Party 7.48%, A Just Russia – Patriots – For Truth – 7.43%, and New People – 5.4%. For the first time since 1993, OSCE did not send observers to Russia citing limitations from the Russian authorities.

Following the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Russia recognized Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as independent states. Only Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Syria have joined Russia in recognition since then, while the rest of the international community has urged it to leave Georgian territories.

Recall that recently, on September 19, the Syrian Arab Republic delegation headed by Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Mohammad Akram al-Ajlani visited occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, hosted by Kremlin-backed leader Anatoly Bibilov for 'republic day' celebrations on September 19.



According to preliminary official data, the ruling United Russia party retains a constitutional majority in the lower house of the legislature (49.79% of the vote). During the 3-day election, footage showing people throwing unnecessary ballots in the ballot boxes circulated on the Internet. The ruling party also used the new electronic voting to its advantage.

SSS Scandal of Secret Recordings and Compromising Materials Against Clergy

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On September 13, the already tense situation in Georgia was further aggravated by a new large-scale scandal. Local media outlets received a link leading to a huge archive of secret materials collected by the surveillance of the Georgian Security Service - thousands of files.

So far, journalists have looked through only a small part of the materials. The secret materials leaked from one of the subdivisions of the State Security Service, which monitors the Church. In this context, journalists and foreign diplomats also came under their surveillance.

The government is busy finding out who made this information public and blames the opposition for this, while the opposition accuses the government of establishing a total surveillance system.

The situation will be reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's 'Portrait of Dorian Gray.' We have a government whose representatives are talking about upholding the highest democratic standards and announcing its membership in the European Union soon, while at the same time the leaked files of the SSS show the ugly face of an oligarchic regime

behind the democratic facade that listens and watches everyone. The materials of only one subdivision for 2015-2021 became known to the public.

The organization 'Waste Detector' informed the public that more than 800 million GEL has been spent on SSS since 2015. From 2015 to 2019, the position of the head of the SSS was held by the current Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri, who was still in office in 2012.

The current head of SUS Grigol Liluashvili will visit the agency in 2019. He is in the lead and he is also from Ivanishvili's entourage. He was employed by Ivanishvili's companies before being appointed to a public position.

The disclosure of SSS secret documents has, to put it mildly, put the government in a difficult and uncomfortable position. The statements that we are dealing with thousands of file falsifications cannot be taken seriously. Especially since the journalists participating in the wiretapped conversations confirm their authenticity.

In addition to the allegations of falsification, the authorities immediately accused the "National Movement" of distributing these materials. "They recorded it themselves, edited it them-

selves. They confirm it themselves," Mamuka Mdinardze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, responded. According to him, "the UNM is trying to confront the state and the church in this way with this is an unsuccessful attempt."

However, a new addressee of the accusation soon appeared in the form of the team of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia. According to the current Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, the investigation is considering the possible involvement of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia or former Deputy Head of the SSS Alexander Khojevanishvili. According to the Minister of Culture Tea Tsulukiani, there was a betrayal within the political family of the Georgian Dream.

Gakharia's team, in turn, demands the establishment of a parliamentary commission of inquiry and the involvement of the Public Defender in the process.

The main theme in the thousands of files leaked from SSS is the church and details of the public and private lives of the clergy. The media declined to cover these details of the scandalous documents, but also noted that these details could also blackmail surveillance facilities. The official statement of

the Patriarchate regarding the scandalous documents has not been released yet.

These thousands of files contain documents related to the staff of diplomatic missions accredited in Georgia. There is nothing special in the content of the conversations, but the fact that foreign diplomats are listened to in Georgia is important. This gives the scandal a 'new dimension'.

If the Georgian Dream is looking for a source and disseminator of information from the SSS and blames the opposition for it, the opposition is outraged by the fact of total covert wiretapping and claims that this is a "well-proven method of authoritarian regimes."

The opposition promises that if it comes to power, it will put an end to this evil and the security structures will be reorganized.

Politicians and commentators are still discussing the incident in the context of the upcoming elections. According to experts, the release of these materials will not have the same effect on the public as the footage released from prison in 2012.

Some even said that they did not hear anything new from the public because they already knew that "everyone is being

watched and listened to."

Deputy Public Defender Gia Burjanadze notes that no agency in the country will properly investigate the fact of illegal wiretapping, the parliament can not control anything "under this type of total control, the elections in the country will be neither real nor anything else."

New scandalous materials are expected to be heard before the upcoming elections. Georgian Dream blames the opposition for this, while the opposition believes that it is planning to cover up the scandal by spreading compromising materials of public figures.

The leaked materials from SSS have dealt a severe blow to the ruling party's election campaign, but in the wake of the scandal, Georgian Dream leaders say they will win the election convincingly, there will be no elections until 2024.

According to Irakli Gharibashvili, after the elections, everyone who participates in the 'conspiracy' against the state and the church will be 'given a proper answer'. The organizer of any provocation is threatened with 'zero tolerance'. The opposition considers the victory in the elections and the appointment of early parliamentary elections inevitable.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY
THE MESSENGER STAFF

Tina Bokuchava says the group that attacked our supporters in Dmanisi were directly led by members of the Georgian Dream

Tina Bokuchava demands the arrest of those who stabbed opposition members in Dmanisi yesterday.

Weather

Wednesday, September 22

Day Overcast
High: 27°C
Night Showers
Low: 14°C

Thursday, September 23

Day Rain
High: 25°C
Night T-storm
Low: 15°C

"There are footages, there are a lot of witnesses, therefore, we demand the immediate arrest of the perpetrators," said Tina Bokuchava, a member of the National Movement while talking about the violence against the party members in Dmanisi.

"Very serious incident took place in Dmanisi today. During a meeting with the supporters of the opposition mayoral candidate in the village of Gantiadi, a group of 20-30 aggressive people attacked our supporters. This group was directly led by members of the Georgian Dream.

In particular, the group was led by Zurab Okmelashvili, a person who has participated in violent political acts in the past. Zurab Okmelashvili's daughter Maka Okmelashvili is number

three on the Georgian Dream list in Dmanisi.

In addition, Davit Dautashvili, the son of a local majoritarian candidate, the son of Mikheil Dautashvili, used a cold weapon to inflict severe wounds on two of our supporters.

Of course, the responsibility lies not only with those directly involved in the attack, but also with senior Georgian Dream officials, as they incite such violence through their own rhetoric, statements, campaigns, violent posters, attacks on journalists - therefore they are responsible for this heinous crime that took place in Dmanisi today.

We heard statements from Mikheil Dautashvili denying that his son was there, but it is

in the footage. Mikheil Dautashvili himself was present with a firearm, which we are sure he does not have the right to carry legally.

This candidate should be removed, as well as all persons related to him from the list. We appeal to non-governmental organizations, the Public Defender, it is very important that the diplomatic corps and observation missions respond in a timely and rigorous manner to prevent similar acts of violence," stated UNM's Bokuchava.

Nika Melia Leaves the Public Broadcaster Debates in Protest

As a statement of protest,

Nika Melia, the United National Movement's mayoral candidate in Tbilisi, walked out of the capital's mayoral debates on Public Broadcaster.

Nika Melia called the mayoral candidate of the Georgian Dream in Tbilisi corrupt and a protector of criminals during the discussion, which featured 16 Tbilisi mayoral contenders.

Melia stated that he left the studio because he did not want to be in the same room as "a violent, corrupt, nasty man who leads criminals."

Melia showed a photo of a person injured during the Dmanisi clash when addressing Kakha Kaladze and the Georgian Dream, after which he left the room.

published by
The Messenger

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