

## Local self-government elections a day away

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgia will hold self-government elections on October 2. The opposition is calling the election a referendum and thinks that if the ruling party fails to get 43% of the vote under the April 19 Agreement, early parliamentary elections will be held. Georgian Dream has left this agreement and states that parliamentary elections will not be held until 2024.

Election observers of the European Parliament, Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, as well as expert teams of the U.S.-funded non-profits, National Democratic Institute (NDI), and International Republican Institute (IRI) arrived in Tbilisi ahead of October 2 local elections.

7 members of the European Parliament will observe the elections. Headed by Michael Gahler (EPP, Germany), the delegation includes lawmakers Miriam Lexmann (EPP, Slovakia), Marina Kaljurand (S&D, Estonia), Katalin Cseh (RE, Hungary), Marketa Gregorova (Greens/EFA, Czech Republic), Jordi Sole (Greens/EFA, Spain), and Anna Fotyga (ECR, Poland).

Kalierand called on all Georgian political parties to respect the peaceful and democratic elections and the assessment to be published by the OSCE/ODIHR. According to Gregorova, the self-government elections are at the level of parliamentary elections because they show whether Georgia is following the European path. According to her, the MEPs are in Georgia to observe whether the manipulations of the previous elections will be repeated.

According to the delegation, the MEPs will meet with the EU Ambassador, the OSCE Leading Group, the Central Election Commission, representatives of political parties, leading NGOs, and the media. The delegation will also meet with the President and Prime Minister of Georgia. As for election day, in order to ensure an effective observation process, they do not name the polling stations where observers will visit.

The CoE Congress delegation consists of 18 observers from 15 countries, headed by David Eray (Switzerland, EPP/CCE, R). The delegation will dispatch 9 teams tomorrow.

Observers are holding preparatory meetings on September 30 – October 1, with CSOs, media, diplomats, and Central Election Commission Chair Giorgi Kalandarishvili.

The delegation, alongside the European Parliament observers and OSCE/ODIHR, will hold a joint press conference after the election day, on October 3, at 15:00.

The experts will meet with government officials, leaders of the ruling Georgian Dream and opposition parties, diplomats, as well as local and international observers. They called on all political parties to uphold democratic principles by participating actively and in good faith during the elections and in the post-election period. But NDI and IRI said the experts will not make fur-



► The Council of Europe Congress will observe the elections in the country along with the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament.



► Ombudsman's office states that possible cases of human rights violations were identified during the pre-election period - the facts of alleged pressure, discriminatory dismissals, violence, bribery.

ther statements before or after the polls. The organizations will publish reports of their electoral assessments several weeks after the elections.

The international community is closely monitoring the ongoing political situation in Georgia, assigning big importance to upcoming polls. The French government has called on Georgian authorities to ensure the holding of the October 2 municipal elections in line with EU standards. The statement was released following the recent meeting of French and Georgian presidents in Paris that said that 'France, which has stood by Georgia in the most difficult times, will continue supporting the country's stability and democratic development.'

France says that it will be 'particularly attentive' to any attempt which may pose threats to the democratic institutions of Georgia and that Emmanuel Macron will be 'in close contact' with the Georgian president to strengthen ties between the countries.

Head of the United National Movement (UNM) opposition party, Tbilisi mayoral candidate Nika Melia says that 'if almost all international observers say

that the elections were held in the full line with the EU and US standards, we will accept the results.'

MEP Marina Kaljurand has stated that Georgian political parties should accept the results of the upcoming municipal elections if the OSCE/ODIHR recognizes the legitimacy of the race. According to her, when the opposition didn't do so after the 2020 parliamentary election, the country faced a long political tension.

Meanwhile, the Georgian Dream (GD) says that on October 2, the radical opposition is planning provocations and destructive actions. Mamuka Mdinardze, the executive secretary of the GD, said that "a lot of leaked information about destructive plans is coming from the offices of the UNM."

He named the submission of excessive numbers of complaints to the election administration as the main expected provocations and destructions, in order to artificially increase the number of complaints on the one hand and to create artificial obstacles to the work of the commissions on the other hand. He says it is planned to steal election in-

ventory and documents in some polling stations, artificially cause imbalances by manipulating signatures and taking out ballot papers and create artificial queues at polling stations. He added that the verbal abuse of election commission members, representatives, and observers are planned on election day in order to provoke a physical confrontation.

According to Mdinardze, the members of the commission appointed by the radical opposition are being instructed not to sign the protocols of the polling stations even if no election violations are registered. "We have information that Batumi mayoral candidate of the UNM, Giorgi Kirtadze, personally held a meeting with members of the election commission and instructed them to disrupt 20+ polling stations." Mdinardze named the numbers of those stations as well. Kirtadze explained the accusations with the GD's low rating in Batumi.

On the other hand, UNM has accused GD members and activists of fraudulently depriving their supporters of their identity cards, presenting video footage of that case in Rike, Zugdidi. The opposition party says that in this way the ruling party wants to prevent their supporters from voting and demands the prosecutor's office to launch an investigation. The ruling party simply responded that people mentioned by UNM are not GD members, nor are they involved in the election campaign.

Recall that ex-president, Mikheil Saakashvili, now a Ukrainian official and citizen, currently wanted in Georgia on multiple charges, has announced his return to Tbilisi on the evening of October 2, forcing expectations of turbulence on election weekend. Authorities say he will be arrested because he was found guilty by a Georgian court. Authorities also say they will arrest anyone who obstructs Saakashvili's arrest by law enforcement.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Dignan has commented on Saakashvili's alleged plan, saying that 'what Georgia needs now is a peaceful, calm election environment and not political instability and violence.' She said that elections should improve upon previous political races. Dignan says that improvements are a sign that a country is devoted to democratic development. She repeatedly stressed the importance of a calm environment during the election period, in addition to allowing journalists to work, as it depends on the information provided by them whether citizens will make an informed choice.

MEPs Gregorova and Caljurand believe that ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili's intention to return to Georgia on October 2 will complicate the situation and will not help overcome instability and polarization. MEP Viola Von Cramon has stated that Saakashvili's return to the country for the October 2 municipal elections 'will not serve the interests of Georgia,' noting that it will deepen the crisis and create unnecessary tension.



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# The Ministry of Defense is suing Davit Kezerashvili

THE CASE IS ABOUT THE ALLEGED SEIZING OF 5 MILLION



Kezerashvili is the owner of 51% of Formula TV.

“We were interested in the decision made by the court in the case of Kezerashvili, which was made without the court having a motivational letter. This might mean that they made a hasty decision, or the main thing was that the verdict, the decision had to be made,” said Lomjaria.

According to the representatives of the TV company Formula, Davit Kezerashvili has the only company in Georgia, it is the TV company Formula, and the management of the TV company suggests that this property may be seized, which will create prob-

lems for the broadcasting. Giorgi Targamadze, one of the journalists of Formula, said that filing a lawsuit two days before the election proves that GD is using justice for their interests. Formula Representatives also believe that the case started because of the poll that was prepared by Edison Research and was ordered by Formula TV.

On September 7, Davit Kezerashvili, former Minister of Defense of Georgia and owner of 51% of Formula TV, was sentenced to imprisonment in absentia by the Supreme Court. He was sentenced

by the court to 10 years in prison, but the sentence was halved as a result of the amnesty.

The Supreme Court panel of three members of the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Kezerashvili. They are Shalva Tadumadze, Levan Tevzadze, and Merab Gabinashvili. In 2017, the Court of Appeals acquitted Kezerashvili in his case, which was appealed by the Prosecutor's Office to the Supreme Court. Shalva Tadumadze was the Prosecutor General at that time.

Kezerashvili plans to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The Ministry of Defense of Georgia has filed a lawsuit against former Minister of Defense Davit Kezerashvili and Alexander Ninua, Head of the State Procurement Department during his tenure as Minister of Defense. According to the ministry, they are seeking compensation for “damage caused by a criminal act” against the Ministry of Defense.

The statement said that the case concerns only one case when more than 5 million euros were “seized” from the state. According to the ministry, the criminal case “is not just a case of corruption,

because the money was simply transferred to an offshore company, without the purchase and delivery of any goods.”

The statement of the Ministry also reads that such activity showcases the attitude towards the state budget, “which was displayed by the previous government.”

Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria says that the decision made by the Supreme Court in the case of former Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili raises some questions. Speaking on Formula TV, Nino Lomjaria said that the ombudsperson office would be interested in this case.



Kezerashvili was sentenced by the court to 10 years in prison, but the sentence was halved because of the amnesty.

# Georgian FM minister, German President say EU not suspending visa-free regime with Georgia

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs Davit Zalkaliani announced yesterday that the information that the EU is considering the suspension of visa-free regime for Georgia is ‘a big lie’, stressing that the country fulfils all the obligations and no suspension mechanism will be activated regarding Georgia.

Earlier yesterday EU observer, an online newspaper, reported that “unlawful residency and unfounded asylum claims from some western Balkan states, plus



According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani, Georgia is upholding its obligations related to the visa-free regime.



The EU approved visa-free travel for citizens of Georgia in 2017.

Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, is triggering discussions on suspending visa-free travel to the EU.”

EUobserver notes that they became aware of the contents of the EU internal report, which is dated September 27. According to the report, Germany expresses dissatisfaction as the number of asylum seekers from Georgia has increased by 51 per cent in the

last three months compared to the same period in 2019.

As the agency reports, France is dissatisfied with Georgia and Albania, while the Czech Republic says that there is a high rate of unreasonable demand for asylum from citizens of Georgia.

“In case of little or no improvement by third countries, COM [European Commission] should,

in our view, emphasise that triggering the Visa Suspension Mechanism is a real option,” the German delegation said in the document, reports EUobserver.

Georgian Foreign Minister Zalkaliani denied the information and said that the number of asylum seekers from Georgia to the EU did not increase, but was reduced by 75%. He under-

scored that the latest report on the implementation of visa-liberalization is extremely positive regarding Georgia.

“Our integration into the European Union, including free trade and visa liberalization, is an irreversible process. We will not turn away from any of our obligations,” said Zalkaliani.

Georgian FM stressed that German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has also denied the information, calling it fake news. As the German President stated, reading this news was unexpected to him as well since it does not correspond to the truth.

The EU approved visa-free travel for citizens of Georgia and Ukraine in 2017. Georgian citizens can travel to the EU/Schengen Zone visa-free for 90 days within 180 days using biometric passports.

FRIDAY	OCTOBER 1
Day	Cloudy
	High: 14°C
Night	Rain
	Low: 11°C
SATURDAY	OCTOBER 2
Day	Rain
	High: 13°C
Night	Rain
	Low: 12°C

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