

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

## PM Garibashvili releases public letter on ex-president Saakashvili

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili has released an open letter about the former president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili stating that the most credible version behind his return to Georgia was his 'wish to overthrow the Georgian Dream government.' According to Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, the version that Mikheil Saakashvili deliberately went to prison and planned it in advance is absurd to him, as in that case, he believes Saakashvili would not have entered the country by violating the law, 'like a burglar'.

"By doing so, he would intensify his own message about being a political prisoner. And now that he has entered Georgia by committing another crime, he has made his own claim groundless. Blaming his illogical decision on drug addiction is also absurd" said the PM, adding that Saakashvili's 'revolutionary intentions to overthrow the government were destined for failure'.

According to the letter, the United National Movement (UNM) has caused many kinds of trouble to the country for nine years, including committing numerous crimes, such as seizing all media outlets to present all their failures as success. As the PM states, Saakashvili planned to arrive in Georgia and overthrow the government with exactly the same "success" as he had "successfully" ruled the country at the time. The letter reads that Saakashvili failed to take into consideration the fact that instead of the impaired state institutions of 2003, Georgia now has powerful state institutions, which hindered the ex-president from executing his plan. "For years, the UNM and its propaganda party television stations have been trying to establish a false perception of a "collapsed state". In reality, instead of a "collapsed state", Saakashvili faced a well-organized state system in Georgia," reads the latter. Garibashvili stated that Saakashvili's psychological and mental condition has changed drastically after imprisonment. However, according to Beka Basilaia, Mikheil Saakashvili's lawyer, the information spread by Garibashvili is not true, claiming that Saakashvili feels very



▶ According to Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, Mikheil Saakashvili's psychological and mental condition has changed drastically after imprisonment.



▶ Saakashvili was arrested in Tbilisi on October 1, after being in political exile for eight years.

strong, both morally and physically. He also stressed that the former president is ready to take any drug test in the presence of TV cameras and challenged Garibashvili to do the same. The third president of Georgia, now a citizen of Ukraine who chairs the Executive Committee of the Ukrainian National Reforms Council, after being in political exile for eight years, was arrested in Tbilisi on October 1, ahead of the October 2 municipal elections. Saakashvili faces several criminal charges in Georgia such as violent dispersal of anti-government mass protests on November 7, 2007, unlawful raiding of Imedi television company by riot police, exceeding official powers by using violence and appropriation or embezzlement of budget money in large quantities. He has been recently charged for illegally crossing the border from Ukraine to Georgia.

## Runoff scheduled for October 30, Gakharia refuses to give endorsements

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Current Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze, who received 45.06% of the votes in the recent local municipal elections, is heading for a runoff after falling short of the 50% threshold needed to secure a first-round victory against Nika Melia of the United National Movement, the runner-up.

"I respect the will of the voters and any decision Tbilisites make in front of the ballot box, maybe I under-delivered in the process, maybe we could not pay sufficient attention to every relevant issue during our work. I apologize."

Kaladze said he wouldn't go into detail about why he didn't win in the first round, whether it was because to the 'tense po-

litical situation' or vote splitting by other candidates, a reference to former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, who left the GD in February and ran for mayor of Tbilisi.

Georgian Dream party candidate noted this is not a tragedy and that he is ready to participate in the second round to be held on October 30, adding: "I am sure, with the backing and support of Tbilisi residents we will be able to win."

He also said that the GD received 29 seats on the Tbilisi City Council (Sakrebulo). "Practically 47% of the voters, every second citizen reaffirmed their confidence in our government," he emphasized, adding that GD has won the opposition declared so-called 'referendum'.

In the 2017 Tbilisi mayoral election,

GD's Kaladze won a close first-round win, earning 51.09% of the vote, defeating then-independent Aleko Elisashvili (17.48%) and United National Movement's Zaal Udumashvili (16.59 %).

According to the preliminary results, this year, UNM mayoral candidate Nika Melia, backed by European Georgia, Droa and Girchi – More Freedom parties, received 33.95% of votes.

"Considering that the government lost (against the opposition as a whole), there are opportunities for us to win on October 30, to finally staff the Tbilisi City Hall with different individuals who do not only report to a single person," Melia said.

Winning second rounds in all major cities, according to the UNM head, is critical

to securing a prompt legislative election in 2022. In addition to Tbilisi, the run-offs will be held in Batumi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, and Poti, as well as numerous municipalities in Samegrelo, including Zugdidi town, the UNM's traditional bastion.

Melia said he wanted to debate with Kaladze live on TV and promised to establish a coalition government made up of representatives of other parties and non-party personalities before the second round.

Remember that on October 5, the Georgian Parliament terminated Nika Melia's parliamentary mandate with 79 votes in favor out of 83 registered deputies.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1433 | EURO - 3.6453 | GBP - 4.2831 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.3286 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3912 |

# Runoff scheduled for October 30, Gakharia refuses to give endorsements

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Melia resigned as a MP in late July. He then went on to say that he plans to focus solely on self-government elections. On July 28, the Georgian Dream cancelled the EU-brokered April 19 agreement, prompting the UNM head to make the statement. According to him, the rest of the National Movement's MPs would remain in parliament to complete the issues related to the transition to the proportional electoral system to the ruling team

The ruling party stated that last year, when certain opposition MPs asked the mandate be terminated, it was sabotage of which Melia was a part of it. This time, according to GD, Melia has made his own decision and they will comply with his request.

After the ruling Georgian Dream party pulled out of the EU-brokered April 19 agreement, the UNM chair chose to quit parliament. Melia stated on July 29 that he intended to concentrate on his mayoral campaign in Tbilisi. On August 3, Melia officially requested his termination.



► Georgia is gearing up for mayoral runoffs in 15 municipalities and self-governing cities of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi and Poti. Photo: Tabula

Following the Prosecutor's Office's request, the Georgian Dream legislative majority terminated Melia's mandate for the first time in December 2019, after a Tbilisi City Court found him guilty of attempting to push the Cartu Bank into bankruptcy in 2013. Melia's parliamentary immunity was revoked in February 2021 after he failed to pay higher bail for removing a monitoring bracelet at an opposition protest in November 2020. His allegations related to the prosecution case of instigating and leading widespread violence outside the Parliament on the

night of June 20-21, 2019. Melia's immunity has been suspended by the previous convocation of Parliament in June 2019 for the same reason as well.

Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, who came third in Tbilisi mayoral race (9.35%) while his For Georgia party landed third in proportional vote across Georgia in October 2 local polls, and assessed the polls as unfair, said he won't call on his supporters to back either GD or UNM candidates in the runoffs. According to him, his supporters rejected 'the two radical powers

that form an illusion of fighting with each other.' According to the preliminary results, both parties are in need for this party's support, including to form a majority in at least Batumi and Rustavi city councils, and Senaki municipal assembly.

Gakharia aims for Georgian people to combat and defeat a two-party system between groups that are both inclined toward one-man rule. "We cannot and will not insult our voters by urging them to vote for any of them," said the former PM. He noted that For Georgia will back its candidates in



► "By itself, our voters are opposition voters who do not look on existing reality with favor, otherwise they would have voted for GD. Our voters are one of the most critical balloters".

reruns, including Tsageri mayoral hopeful.

Lelo, as announced by party secretary general Badri Japaridze, will support opposition mayoral candidates in all constituencies where they are running in the second round.

"Despite all the obstacles, all the delays, the artificial barriers, Lelo was still able to achieve a significant result and will have a representative in Sakrebulo in 25 municipalities - including 2 representatives in Tbilisi and Batumi Sakrebulo." Japaridze informed.

## MEPs, US senators assess local municipal elections in Georgia

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Marina Kaljurand, Sven Mikser and Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, MEPs who observed the October 2 local municipal elections in Georgia, have released a statement saying that the local municipal elections took place under a 'substantially improved legal framework' as voters were given a choice between a variety of political alternatives.

The statement reads that despite the extremely polarised political environment and challenging epidemiological situation, the first round of the local elections was competitive and well-managed. However, it is noted that the pre-election environment did not provide equal opportunities for the contesting parties and candidates and the



► MEPs stressed the violations that occurred during the pre-election period, such as misuse of public resources, intimidation against candidates and vote-buying.



► "This weekend's elections in Georgia were incredibly disappointing and a dramatic departure from the 2012 elections that I observed," said U.S. Senator Jim Risch.

main attention was diverted from local to national issues.

MEPs note that the elections were generally well administered and the candidates were able to campaign freely.

"The Election Day proceeded in an orderly and transparent manner, despite some procedural issues during the whole process. CEC sessions were opened to stakeholders and streamlined for the first time, which increased transpar-

ency," reads the joint statement. The statement also says that the pre-election campaign was characterised by intensified political and media polarization, which, in some cases resulted in a verbal and physical confrontation. MEPs underlined that violations that took place during the electoral campaign, such as misuse of public resources, intimidation against candidates and vote-buying, need to be investigated.

"The electoral legal framework needs to be further improved in view of future elections, taking into account pending recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission, notably when it comes to campaign financing, disputes resolution and the misuse of public resources. It is also necessary to address the underrepresentation of Georgian women in politics," reads the statement.

Ahead of the upcoming second

round of elections, MEPs call on all political parties to show responsibility and put their nation's interest above party interests.

US Senator Jeanne Shaheen has said that the Georgian October 2 municipal election day was 'well-administered and peaceful,' but added that elections are not only about election day itself. Stating that Georgian people deserve free and fair elections, she stressed that the Georgian government will not be able to avoid allegations of intimidation, vote-buying, and pressure on candidates and voters.

U.S. Senator Jim Risch has also released a statement, stressing that the elections were 'a dramatic departure from the 2012'. Risch expresses disappointment over extensive reports of intimidation and vote-buying and urges the government of Georgia to address the issues highlighted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "particularly the violence seen during the election period, and the uneven playing field for those parties challenging the ruling party."

<b>THURSDAY</b>		<b>OCTOBER 7</b>	
Day		Rain	
		High: 12°C	
Night		Rain	
		Low: 9°C	
<b>FRIDAY</b>		<b>OCTOBER 8</b>	
Day		Rain	
		High: 13°C	
Night		Rain	
		Low: 9°C	

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# Gosiya and her Horses

BY TATJANA MONTIK AND MARY ELLEN CHATWIN  
PHOTOS: T. MONTIK

Exploring the upper Caucasus Mountain regions is the chance of a lifetime. It is rich in culture and tradition, for example Racha was home to the first settlement of Jewish Georgians, over 2000 years ago, and the oldest synagogue in Georgia is found in Oni, the main city of Racha. Local wine growers even produce kosher wines, and indeed Racha is known for its rich variety of wines. Ethnic groups from various areas of the Caucasus make their home there, sometimes in very challenging conditions, both ecological and political (in 1992 part of Racha with a majority of ethnic Ossetians pulled away to become part of “South Ossetia”, today an “autonomous enclave”).

A journalist living in Georgia, Tatjana Montik, recently visited Upper Racha, and exclaimed that the wide variety of wines, the extraordinary mountains and panoramic views inspired her to seek out the unusual people who live there. She said, “They are modest, polite, and hard-working, and although they seem a bit reserved in the beginning, once they open their hearts, you will want to stay!”



Gosiya and her horse, Jamala near Ghebi, Upper Racha.

That’s exactly what one Polish citizen from Poznan did—Malgorzata (who is called Gosiya by the locals) discovered the village of Ghebi in Upper Racha, and after visiting it several times, decided to settle there five years ago. Tatjana visited her recently, and saw how the fortunes of local people changed with Malgorzata’s arrival too—as a doctor, she decided to risk all and spend even the long winter season in the difficult conditions of this remote village. In her 50s now, Malgorzata had observed first-hand in Poland, how children learn resilience in spite of the family challenges they face early on. Additionally, during her medical studies Malgorzata learned to love horses, as they were part of the therapy used to help persons recovering from addiction.

For the last five years she has remained in Ghebi to help local villagers in the most difficult circumstances. She has remained there struggling to create hope in an isolated village, a magic space year around, where guests from Georgia and abroad can come and discover a unique experience of shared beauty. She owns five beautiful horses and has renovated a guesthouse. Even under rough conditions, in a region similar to Svaneti, she remains bold, hard-working and good-humoured.

During the high season, before the heavy snows set in, Gosiya welcomes tourists for an adventure holiday in Ghebi. She cooks Georgian and Polish meals, bakes fresh bread and takes her guests hiking or on horseback to experience nature first-hand. As she loves the natural environment, and knows every trail in the local forests, visitors say their experiences have been unforgettable.

The view from the balcony is so breath-taking it is easy to understand her daring decision to exchange the comfort of an easy, European city-life for the wild beauty of the high Caucasus. In the guesthouse, the adventure continues...Rather than in plush salons guests are greeted by the cosy smell of fresh wood, as Gosiya is a self-made carpenter. She made almost all the furniture in the house! During the long winters she is busy too...she builds and renovates the house, goes hiking with her dog, cares for the horses and looks after the other villagers if they become ill.

She remains dedicated to her first profession, a trained medical doctor, and is revered by all those she helps.

Like many people working in tourism, during the pandemic Gosiya’s life was upended, and this summer was especially disastrous. Sadly, a close friend, who had become like a younger brother to her, who often travelled from Poland to participate in her mountain life, recently died in a sports adventure accident in Poland. At the same time that this occurred, the impact of the pandemic set in. Her business downturned and very few visitors travelled to Upper Racha. The low temperatures and heavy rains this year destroyed the crucial harvests of high mountain hay that she and other villagers depended on to feed their livestock. Suddenly, Malgorzata realised



Gosiya takes out her horse, Snow, and Tatjana hikes the trail with Gosiya’s dog, Bichuna

she no longer had enough food for her horses.

The harsh winter season has already set in, and soon the snow will keep any outside supplies from reaching the village. Gosiya spends sleepless nights trying to think of ways to feed her hungry animals. Other villagers have come to realize that her concern for animals was part of her commitment to heal all creatures, and today the attitudes towards animals in the village have begun to change. Horses, cows, dogs—all are companions in a difficult environment, and Gosiya has helped other villagers to become aware of this. With the help of Tatjana, she is urgently looking to find a solution. Horses are one of the most fragile animals when it comes to needing regular food—they cannot go for days without eating like wild creatures. Understandably, having observed the importance of constant care in her profession, Gosiya would like to find foster parents for her horses. She cannot bear to see animals suffer and perhaps die, and decided to stand up to this challenge and save them.

She has set up an emergency fund to procure food supplies, and offers a free stay at her guest house to donors or to those who foster a horse for the winter – including excursions and delicious food. A supply of hay for the long winter and five sacks of oats is needed for each of her five horses. Today the price of hay is GEL 1500 and five sacks of oats is GEL 250 for each horse. This amounts to approximately 425 Euro for hay and 120 Euro for oats, (approximately \$490 and \$140). Even a more modest contribution is very welcome.

For those who wish to donate, please see following accounts at the Bank of Georgia. Pay to the account (in Euro, GEL or USD) of: MALGORZATA KALINA TURKOT-JANIK

GE02BG000000100627313 EUR

GE02BG000000100627313GEL

GE02BG000000100627313USD/ Swift BAGAGE22



A sumptuous breakfast in the cosy guest house with Gosiya.