

Georgian President and Opposition Discuss New Elections Amid Political Crisis

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On December 25, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili convened a working meeting with opposition leaders and civil society organizations (CSOs) to discuss the framework for holding new elections, should the ruling Georgian Dream party agree to negotiations. The meeting also explored potential steps to intensify demands for new elections if the ruling party declines dialogue.

Nika Gvaramia, leader of the Coalition for Change, informed journalists that a joint document outlining fundamental demands is being prepared by CSOs with input from politicians. "The solution could be for the President to dissolve the 11th convocation of Parliament and announce a date for new elections," Gvaramia said, emphasizing that this action falls within the President's constitutional authority. "The decision must be made jointly... the decision must be made by both the society and the political parties," he added. He also stressed the need for readiness, stating, "We have to be ready for concrete decisions, especially from December 29."

Gvaramia also commended the President's invitation to Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder and honorary chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party, for negotiations. Nevertheless, he expressed skepticism about the ruling party's willingness to engage.

Dimitri Tskitishvili of the



Gakharia for Georgia party highlighted ongoing efforts to create a unified opposition stance. "The work is underway... and we agree that some principled issues should be agreed upon so that by [December] 29, if the government shows good sense and comes to negotiations... we should have our visions ready that will lead the country out of the crisis," he said. However, Tskitishvili added, "No one expects the government to show this good will, and there-

fore we should be ready... that after [December 29] we should also have a plan of concrete steps so that we are ready for the expected deepening of the crisis."

Badri Japaridze, leader of the coalition Strong Georgia, described the discussions with President Zourabichvili as productive. "We had a very useful and good exchange about how new elections should be held, under what conditions, in order to eliminate the irregularities

that we saw on October 26," he said. Japaridze also praised the President's openness, noting, "The President has expressed her readiness for dialogue with Bidzina Ivanishvili, I would like to emphasize this once again."

Giorgi Vashadze, leader of the coalition Unity-UNM, stressed the importance of continuing protests. "We talked about - after December 29 - what should be the organizational mechanism that will lead, together

with the legitimate President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, the political-social process in Georgia," Vashadze said. He also thanked protesters, stating, "The protest in Georgia must continue, for which we thank all those who take part in it." Looking ahead, he noted, "Tomorrow Salome Zurabishvili will talk about organizational mechanisms - what mechanism will lead the political-social process that Georgia needs."

Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs Responds to PACE Report on Election Incident

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has responded to the recent PACE (Parliamentary As-

sembly of the Council of Europe) report, which detailed an incident at a polling station in Bodbe, Signaghi district during the parliamentary elections.

According to PACE's observation team, a group of around 40 individuals allegedly vandalized the vehicle of the PACE monitoring team outside the polling station. The group reportedly punctured the vehicle's tire and then tried to make it look like an accident by crashing an old car into the damaged vehicle. The PACE report described the incident as "unacceptable," adding that the group responsible was made up of "approximately 40 unfriendly strongmen."

In response, the MIA confirmed that administrative proceedings have been launched to identify those responsible for the incident. The Ministry emphasized that the driver of the vehicle immediately reported the damage to the Public Safety Command Center at 112. Following the report, a police unit was quickly dispatched to the scene, where they conducted a site inspection and documented the case.

The MIA also provided further details, stating that the driver claimed the damage to the car was caused by an unidentified vehicle that had been driving along

the road. The driver, who requested formal documentation of the incident, did not believe the damage was intentional. Despite this, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is continuing its investigation to determine whether the damage was deliberate and to identify those involved.

On election day, PACE and OSCE/ODIHR monitors reported a number of irregularities near polling stations. PACE observers observed suspicious activity, including minivans parked outside polling stations with numerous individuals inside. The report indicated that representatives of the ruling party were trying to control activities inside the polling stations. These individuals even interfered with conversations between PACE observers and other accredited monitors, demanding that translations be made from English into Georgian.

PACE also reported that many of the so-called "citizen observers" present at the stations were aggressive and uncooperative with the monitoring teams. These observers, who were unable to properly identify the organizations they were supposedly representing, admitted that they were only working for these organizations on election day and were actually affiliated with the ruling party.

25-12-2024

STATEMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

We would like to respond to the information spread through various media based on the report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), according to which, on the day of the Parliamentary elections, on October 26, 2024, the vehicle tires of PACE observation mission were deliberately damaged and crashed in Kakheti region, Signaghi Municipality.

We would like to clarify that as soon as the notification on traffic accident was received at Public Safety Command Center 112, a patrol police crew was dispatched to the scene for appropriate legal actions.

In order to determine the cause of the incident, law enforcement officers inspected the surrounding area, after interviewing the initiator of the report, the appropriate documentation was prepared.

Georgia on the Brink: Political Turmoil Casts a Long Shadow Over Economic Prospects

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

As Georgia grapples with deepening political tensions, questions are mounting about the potential economic fallout. The ruling Georgian Dream party remains steadfastly optimistic, projecting economic growth for 2025 and dismissing concerns. Meanwhile, opposition leaders and experts are raising alarms over significant challenges already emerging, warning of looming risks tied to the government's distancing from the West.

Georgian Dream is trying to ignore the ongoing protests and plans to govern the country in a one-party mode. On December 10, the Georgian Parliament, composed solely of "Dream" deputies, approved the 2025 state budget with 88 votes. Economic growth of 6% is planned for the coming year, with an average inflation rate of 1%. The total amount of state budget allocations has increased by 895.2 million GEL compared to the previous submission, reaching 27.9 billion GEL.

According to Georgian Dream's Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, the exchange rate

of the lari will remain stable, and the country's economic development will continue at a high pace. He stated that during the first 10 months of 2024, the average economic growth rate was 10% and will maintain this high pace moving forward. Kobakhidze also noted that over the past four years, the opposition has attempted to stage a 'Maidan', or coup, four times, but all attempts failed because, in his words, the "collective UNM" are inept revolutionaries."

Despite such government optimism, the economy faces serious challenges. The adoption of the so-called "Russian Law" had a significant negative impact on the exchange rate of the lari, forcing the National Bank to sell \$168 million in a single month to prevent its sharp depreciation. By the time of the 2024 parliamentary elections, Georgia's National Bank's foreign currency reserves had decreased by approximately \$630 million and by about \$1 billion over the course of a year. Through these foreign currency sales, the National Bank managed to maintain the lari's exchange rate to some extent.

Regarding Georgia's foreign

currency reserves, the International Monetary Fund stated back in April 2024 that the level of reserves had fallen below the adequacy threshold and needed replenishment. A few days ago, the credit rating agency Fitch also noted that the size of Georgia's reserves is smaller compared to other countries with a BB rating.

Considering that, due to Georgian Dream's policies, Georgia will no longer receive aid from the U.S. and EU countries, this will affect investments and capital outflows as well. In such circumstances, experts believe that in even a minor crisis, the National Bank's reserves may no longer suffice to maintain the stability of the lari's exchange rate.

Foreign investments have already declined sharply. According to preliminary data, the volume of foreign direct investments in Georgia amounted to only \$197.7 million in the third quarter of 2024, which is 55.2% less than the revised data for the third quarter of 2023. Moreover, statistics show that investments in the third quarter of 2024 are the lowest recorded since 2006, surpassing only the figures from

the period of the war (2008) and the subsequent year (2009).

A group of economists has issued a statement regarding the ongoing developments in the country and "Georgian Dream's" suspension of Eurointegration. Along with demanding a return to the path of democratic development, they emphasize that \$9 billion enters Georgia annually from Western countries. Distancing from the West, they warn, will inevitably lead to significant economic losses.

The developments in the country, particularly the announcement by the "Georgian Dream" to suspend negotiations with the European Union for four years, have also angered business circles, prompting critical statements. "We create the wealth in this country; the 27 billion is based on our taxes. In America, the government is called an administrator tasked with solving the problems of businesses and citizens, not making businesses its vassals," stated Giorgi Abramishvili, co-founder of DATA CENTER SOLUTIONS.

In the current situation, the idea of a business strike has emerged. A few days ago, former

National Bank President Giorgi Kadagidze called on banking sector employees via social media to strike, claiming it would save the country from isolation, "which will bankrupt and collapse the banking system."

Mamuka Khazaradze, leader of "Strong Georgia," also urged businesses to strike, stating that the country needs to feel the power of business. According to him, if genuine businesses (as opposed to those colluding with the government) unite and act in an organized manner, no one will be able to oppose them.

However, the idea of a business strike has sparked outrage among some economists. They argue that business and politics should remain separate and that a business strike would constitute direct social sabotage against the state and its population.

While it may not come to a full-fledged business strike, if business leaders actively voice their demands, it could become a significant factor for the "Georgian Dream" government to reckon with. The only way out of the current crisis, however, lies in holding new parliamentary elections.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Ambassadors Not Invited to Kavelashvili's Inauguration



Diplomats accredited in Georgia have not been invited to the inauguration of President Mikheil Kavelashvili, who was appointed by the Georgian Dream party.

The inauguration of President Mikheil Kavelashvili, appointed by Georgian Dream, is scheduled to take place in Parliament on December 29.

On December 14, Georgian Dream held a one-party presidential election, appointing Mikheil Kavelashvili as president. Mikheil Kavelashvili was the sole candidate.

Turkish President Erdogan Congratulates Mikheil Kavelashvili on His Election

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has extended his congratulations to Mikheil Kavelashvili following his controversial election as President of Georgia. In his message, Erdogan emphasized the strong ties between the two countries and expressed confidence in the future of their relationship.

"On behalf of myself and my people, I sincerely congratulate

Your Excellency on your election as the President of Georgia, with which we are connected by close neighborhood and strategic partnership," Erdogan's congratulatory message reads. "I wish you success in fulfilling this honorable duty."

Erdogan further expressed his belief that Kavelashvili's presidency would continue to

strengthen the friendly relations between Georgia and Türkiye. "I am fully confident that during your term of office, we will further develop friendly relations and close cooperation between our countries, which is in line with our common interests and serves to ensure prosperity in the region," he wrote.



Weather

Thursday, December 26

Day ☁️ Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night ☁️ Cloudy
Low: 1°C

Friday, December 27

Day ☁️ Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night ☁️ Cloudy
Low: 3°C

The Parliament's press office confirmed this information to Radio Liberty, citing "a lack of seating in the session hall" as the reason.

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