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| **NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA****October 26-28**  |
| *Compiled by:* | ***Aleksandre Davitashvili*** | *Date*: | October 29, 2020 |

* **Occupied Regions**
* **Abkhazia Region**
1. **Sokhumi Scolds Tbilisi, as Georgian President Talks Abkhaz Language Preservation**

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili’s remarks on the occasion of Abkhaz Language Day on October 27, angered Moscow-backed foreign ministry in Sokhumi, accusing the Georgian authorities of politicization of the Abkhaz language issue.

Georgian Presidential Administration presented Georgian-Abkhaz version of the Constitution on Tuesday, with President Zurabishvili remarking that “as the President of Georgia and Guarantor of the Constitution, I have responsibility to protect Abkhaz language.”

Noting that the Abkhaz language is in the UNESCO’s list of endangered languages, Georgian President said “preserving and developing Abkhaz language and culture is a obligation to our common past, culture and identity, as uniqueness and richness of the Georgian culture lie in our linguistic diversity.” *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*

* **Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)**
1. **98 New Cases Revealed in Tskhinvali**

Moscow-backed authorities in Georgia’s Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia reported 98 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 768 *(Civil.ge, October 29, 2020)*.

* **Parliamentary Elections – 2020**
1. **Georgian Dream Secures 45% of Campaign Donations, Audit Office Says**

According to the State Audit Office, an independent body in charge of the political finance monitoring, in the period from September 1 to October 12, political parties and independent majoritarian candidates secured donations totaling GEL 22,602,245 (USD 7 million).

According to the interim report, released on October 23, the ruling Georgian Dream party raised the largest amount of funds, GEL 10,139,707 (USD 3.1 million), which equaled roughly 45 percent of total donations.

Opposition’s Lelo for Georgia party, founded by banker-turned-politician Mamuka Khazaradze, came second with GEL 2,599,290 (USD 800,000), 12% of the total sum of donations. The United National Movement of former President Mikheil Saakashvili landed third, with GEL 2,295,309 (USD 700,000) in donations, amounting to 10%.

Strategy Aghmashenebeli led by Giorgi Vashadze received GEL 2,015,505 (USD 600,000), coming in at 9% of the total amount raised. Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots raised GEL 1,886,805 (USD 580,000), while European Georgia received GEL 1,646,295 (USD 510,000), 8% and 7% of the total sum, respectively *(Civil.ge, October 26, 2020)*.

1. **TI Georgia on Use of Administrative Resources**

On October 26, Transparency International (TI) Georgia, a local watchdog, released an interim report on alleged cases of the use of enforcement, legislative, institutional and financial administrative resources for election purposes, covering a period from July 1 to October 20.

Regarding enforcement administrative resources, the CSO said that the number of violent acts, including attacks on party supporters, has been growing since the second half of September, particularly in southern municipalities of Bolnisi and Marneuli. Police launched investigations into 59 cases, out of which 53 are still ongoing, the watchdog noted, adding that police came under criticism for low rates of investigated cases. According to the report, police were even less effective in probing the seven alleged cases of property damage against political parties.

According to the watchdog, there were also reports of three politically motivated dismissals from state-funded bodies in the reporting period.

Forming district and precinct election commissions remained a problem, as some ruling party-affiliated commission members were appointed in violation of the law, the report said *(Civil.ge, October 26, 2020)*.

1. **Former Cartu Group Official Talks Ivanishvili’s Past**

Pro-opposition Mtavari Arkhi TV aired a lengthy interview with Eldar Gogoladze, allegedly the former Vice-President of the Cartu Group.

***Ivanishvili’s Background, Health***

In the October 25 interview, aired some 6 days before October 31 general election, Gogoladze recalled alleged reports of Ivanishvili’s possible involvement with the illegal arms trade during the Angolan civil war. He stated that despite the UN Security Council’s arms embargo on Angola, Russian officials, with Ivanishvili’s involvement, illegally exported arms to the African country. “He viewed it as a regular business… most likely he handled the financial side of it, transactions,” Gogoladze said.

He then touched upon the mental health of the GD chairperson, claiming that Ivanishvili was previously admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Moscow and was allegedly diagnosed with a mental disorder afterwards.

**Entering politics**

Gogoladze said Ivanishvili had already decided to get involved in politics following the Rose Revolution in 2003. Soon after, Vladislav Surkov, then Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, tried to convince Ivanishvili that in case of participating in the Presidential elections he would “receive 80% of votes and Saakashvili only 20%,” Gogoladze stated.

**Anaklia Port**

Gogoladze said he came to know of a preceding project to the Anaklia Port – worked by the American and British experts – and introduced the topic to Ivanishvili in 2001, who supposedly took a keen interest as a potential investor.

**Relations with Orthodox Church Leader**

Gogoladze also discussed Ivanishvili’s relations with Ilia II, the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, noting that “generally, Bidzina does not like people with authority… he is not a religious person either.”

1. **Georgian Experts on October 31 Parliamentary Polls**

Civil.ge approached two Georgian experts to reflect on the context of the upcoming polls and to assess what to expect for the post-election political environment.

**Kornely Kakachia, Political Science Professor at Tbilisi State University; Director of Georgian Institute of Politics, Tbilisi-based think tank:**

“These parliamentary elections are interesting in many ways. First, it is intriguing whether Georgian voters will keep their tradition of not electing a ruling party for a third consecutive term. Although the ***pandemic may offer benefits to the ruling party***, and this election has arrived at the last gasp for the Georgian Dream, ***nothing is guaranteed when it comes to the election results***. Especially, considering the daily worsening of the epidemiological situation, the government that took pride in the successful management of the pandemic earlier, does not seem much confident lately. This perception is exacerbated by the existing severe socioeconomic conditions and mismanagement amid the COVID-19 related peak”.

**Iago Kachkachishvili, Professor of Sociology at Tbilisi State University; Head of Institute of Social Studies and Analysis:**

These elections stand out from past elections due to a new center of gravity that has emerged – in other words, these elections are not marked by bipolarity of the Georgian Dream, on one side, and the United National Movement, on the other.

We see today various political parties at the political front arena with real chances of entering the Parliament and influencing parliamentary and, in general, political processes in Georgia. This is most importantly why these elections stand out.

As a result, this Parliament will be far more diverse, far more voices will be heard, compared to the last Parliament. Respectively, there are, in fact, ***no prospects of securing one-party government through the upcoming election.*** In a positive development, the new Parliament will be designed to involve a coalition government *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

1. **NATO PA to Deploy Short-Term Observers to October 31 General Election**

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly announced on October 28 that it will deploy a team of 13 short-term election observers for Georgia’s October 31 parliamentary elections, comprised of MPs from 5 Allied countries and headed by Turkish lawmaker and Vice-President of the NATO PA, Osman Askin Bak *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

1. **PACE to Send Short Term Observers to Georgia**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) announced on October 27 that it will send a 9-member delegation led by Tiny Kox (Netherlands, UEL), to Georgia during 29 October to 1 November to observe the October 31 parliamentary elections *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

1. **President Zurabishvili Addresses Nation Ahead of Elections**

President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili addressed the nation on October 28, denouncing attacks that “serve to create a sense of instability in the country, spread fear and panic, and stir up tensions in the pre-election period.”

The President’s statement comes amid opposition’s strong criticism against the handling of the October 21 Zugdidi bank robbery, as well as the worsening COVID-19 crisis, taking place few days ahead of hotly-contested October 31 parliamentary polls.

The President highlighted the importance of holding elections in a transparent, peaceful and fair manner and called on the nation to vote on Saturday *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

1. **Girchi TV Hacked**

Right-libertarian New Political Center Girchi party’s production unit, as well as its channel Girchi TV, were hacked last night according to the party’s leader Zurab Japaridze.

The production unit and the channel, which Girchi uses for creating election content is “completely paralyzed” three days before the election, Japaridze said *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

1. **GD Campaign Chief Accuses UNM of Considering Post-Election Revolution**

During a public address, ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party campaign chief MP Irakli Kobakhidze accused opposition United National Movement (UNM) of considering the prospect of a post-election revolution, alleging that UNM has established “revolutionary headquarters” led by former Prime Minister and long-serving UNM Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili.

According to MP Kobakhidze, UNM has also been studying public opinion on acceptable forms of protesting the parliamentary election results, with “occupying state buildings and using physical or armed force” being presented as one of the possible answers in UNM’s public opinion survey *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

* **Internal Affairs**
1. **Interior Ministry Confirms Zugdidi Bank Robber’s Identity**

At a press conference on October 26, the Deputy Interior Minister Vladimer Bortsvadze confirmed the identity of the Zugdidi bank robber, who took 43 persons under hostage, as Badri Esebua.

The Interior Ministry’s announcement comes after pro-opposition Mtavari Arkhi TV disclosed the suspect’s name and occupation yesterday.

In his today’s briefing, Deputy Interior Minister Bortsvadze reprimanded media outlets for revealing the suspect’s identity, adding that the Ministry chose to confirm the information since “some of the public was already aware of it.” *(Civil.ge, October 26, 2020)*

1. **1,709 Daily Cases, 2,075 Recoveries, 20 Fatalities**

Georgia has reported 1,709 new daily cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 35,567. In the meantime, 2,075 more patients have recovered, increasing the number of recoveries to 16,904. 20 more COVID-related fatalities were recorded, taking the overall number of Georgia’s (excluding occupied territories) COVID-related deaths to 273. The number of active cases to date stands at 18,364 *(Stopcov.ge, October 29, 2020)*.

1. **PM Says Gov’t Will Reimburse Utility Fees for Next 4 Months**

According to Georgia’s Prime Minister (PM) Giorgi Gakharia, the Government will reimburse utility fees for households consuming less than 200 cubic meters of gas and 200 kilowatt-hours of electricity per month in November, December, January, and February. The reimbursement will also apply to water and cleaning bills.

“We believe this is highly important for people who lost their income due to the pandemic and the global crisis,” the PM underscored *(Civil.ge, October 29, 2020)*.

* **Economy and Social Affairs**
1. **Georgian Central Bank Sells USD 40 Mln**

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) sold USD 40 million at the foreign exchange auction on October 27. According to the NBG, the average weighted bid rate amounted to 3.2237 *(Civil.ge, October 27, 2020)*.

1. **Finance Ministry Sells GEL 80 Mln Benchmark Bonds**

On October 27, the Ministry of Finance of Georgia sold 5-year benchmark bonds worth GEL 80 million (USD 25 million) at the treasury securities auction.

The Ministry of Finance stated that four commercial banks participated in the auction, with total demand amounting to GEL 130 530 000 (USD 40 million) *(Civil.ge, October 27, 2020)*.

1. **Georgian Central Bank Keeps Key Rate at 8%**

On October 28, the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) kept the key refinancing rate at 8%.

The Monetary Policy Committee of NBG decided to keep the discount rate, since price dynamics in recent months were in line with the central bank’s forecasts, with inflation continuing to decline, reaching 3.8% in September.

The National Bank of Georgia stated that inflation, driven downward by weak aggregate demand, will have a declining trend and remain close to the target level in 2021 *(Civil.ge, October 28, 2020)*.

* + **Additional Information**

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| **October 29, 2020****OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**1 USD – 3.2338 GEL 1 GBP - 4.1997 GEL 100 RUB -4.1230 GEL1 EUR - 3.7913 GEL 1 TRY - 0.3888 GEL 100 JPY – 3.1038 GEL* **Movie Events - English Sessions -** [**Tickets**](https://www.kinoafisha.ge/engsessions)
* **Friends of Museum (Membership to access Georgian National Museums For free of charge after one payment) -** [**Membership**](https://biletebi.ge/friends-of-museum)
* **Marjanishvili Theatre –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://biletebi.ge/marjanishvili-theatre/Repertoire)
* **Rustaveli Theatre -** [**Events and Tickets**](https://biletebi.ge/rustaveli-theatre/Repertoire)
* **Opera and Ballet –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/opera)
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* **Sports –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/sport)
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