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| **NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA**  **October 29-November 1** | | | |
| *Compiled by:* | ***Aleksandre Davitashvili*** | *Date*: | November 2, 2020 |

* **Occupied Regions**
* **Abkhazia Region**

1. **69 New Cases, 5 Recoveries in Abkhazia**

Moscow-backed authorities in Abkhazia have reported 69 new cases of COVID-19, taking the tally of total confirmed cases in the region to 4,302. In the meantime, 5 more persons have recovered, increasing the number of recoveries to 2,314. With 42 total fatalities since the outbreak of the pandemic, the number of active cases in the region to date stands at 1,946 *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

* **Parliamentary Elections – 2020**

1. **Key Watchdogs Assess Pre-Election Environment**

On October 29, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Transparency International (TI) Georgia, and the Georgian Charter of Journalist Ethics released a joint assessment of the pre-election environment ahead of Georgia’s October 31 parliamentary elections. According to the report, supposed misuse of administrative resources, alleged activist and voter intimidation, instances of physical confrontation, polarized media environment, and possibly corrupt campaign finance remain to be key challenges to the pre-election environment.

Noting that the government carried out large-scale social projects following the declaration of the state of emergency due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the report underscores that the boundary between state and the ruling Georgian Dream party was blurred during the implementation of social projects *(Civil.ge, October 29, 2020)*.

1. **GYLA Releases Third Interim Report on October Elections**

On October 30, Georgian Young Lawyer’s Association (GYLA), a local watchdog, said in its third interim report on the October 31 parliamentary elections that the pre-election campaign in October was marked by violent confrontations, with Shida and Kvemo Kartli regions being the hotspots this time.

The report, based on monitoring conducted by GYLA’s long-term observation mission, from October 1 to October 26, included violations and negative practices perpetrated by both, the ruling party and the opposition.

GYLA identified two cases of alleged vote-buying, eight cases of alleged political pressure and violence, one case of alleged ignoring of the requirement to separate the state and political parties, two cases of possible obstruction of election campaigns and one case of the supposed misuse of administrative resources *(GYLA.GE, October 30, 2020)*.

1. **Opposition Parties Pledge to Reject Coalition Gov’t with GD**

The opposition parties, including United National Movement, European Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Girchi, Labor Party, Republican Party, European Democrats, Victorious Georgia, Democratic Movement – United Georgia, and Movement – State for People, signed an agreement, pledging to not form a coalition government with the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party regardless of the outcome of October 31 general election *(Civil.ge, October 30, 2020)*.

1. **IRI Releases Pre-Election Report**

The International Republican Institute (IRI), on October 29, released pre-election findings of its Technical Election Assessment Mission (TEAM), naming incidents of campaign violence, including against journalists, abuse of administrative resources, State Audit Office’s limited capacity to investigate corrupt campaign financing and a highly polarized media landscape as some of the key shortcomings that need to be addressed.

The report covers the pre-election period from September 30 to October 28 and it is the first in a series of publications assessing the conduct and integrity of the electoral process *(Civil.ge, October 30, 2020)*.

1. **Key Election Watchdog Heads Assess Voting Day**

**Sulkhan Saladze, Head of Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association**

According to Sulkhan Saladze, aside from routine complaints, the new element was that some observers were prevented from fulfilling their duties. One of the observers was assaulted by the head of the precinct election commission. Saladze said that interference with journalists’ work was another hallmark of 2020 elections: “unfortunately, the police opened inquests into these incidents under charges of ‘damaging property’ rather than ‘interfering with journalistic activities’ or ‘violent assault’.”

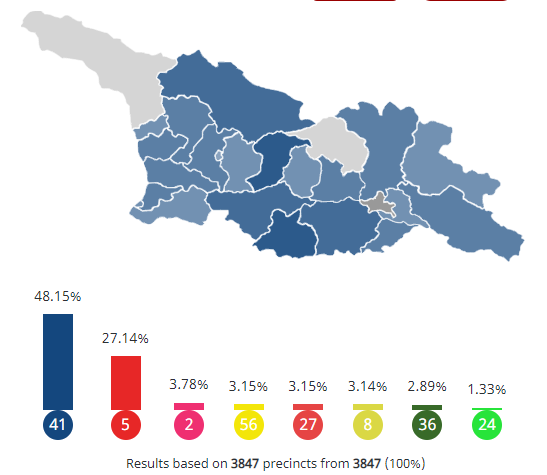
**Elene Nizharadze, Head of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)**

ISFED head listed a number of violations during the voting period, including physical and verbal assaults and mobilization of party activists outside the precincts. Nizharadze highlighted cases of interference with monitoring activities of the observers, including physical assault and psychological pressure.

**Eka Gigauri, Head of Transparency International Georgia**

According to Eka Gigauri, Head of TI Georgia, “I reckon that today’s election is worse than 2016 parliamentary elections in terms of violations and challenges.” “Overall, with respect to the quality, we did not have very good elections, there were many violations,” she added *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **Ruling Party wins General Elections with 48%**

Closest to Georgian Dream is United National Movement with 27%. In total according to the final results votes are distributed as follows:

* European Georgia – 3.78% (72,752)
* Lelo for Georgia 3.15% (60,691)
* Strategy Aghmashenebeli – 3.15% (60,592)
* Alliance of Patriots – 3.14% (60,493)
* Girchi – 2.89% (55,600)
* Elisashvili – the Citizens – 1.33% (25,534)
* Labor Party – 1% (19,281)
* United Georgia – Democratic Movement – 0.85% (16,328)

Turnout of the elections was 56% *(CEC.GOV.GE, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **GD Wins 14 Majoritarian Districts, Runoffs Expected in 16**

According to the preliminary election results released by the Central Election Commission (CEC), the candidates from the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party have secured victories in the first round in 14 out of 30 single-mandate majoritarian districts.

Run-offs are expected in the remaining 16 constituencies – including in all 8 districts in Tbilisi, and the other largest cities of Kutaisi, Batumi, and Rustavi, where none of the majoritarian hopefuls were able to garner more than half of the votes *(CEC.GOV.GE, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **Snap Mayoral Elections: GD Wins Four Municipalities, Runoff in Kutaisi**

According to the preliminary results of October 31 mayoral by-elections in five municipalities, Georgian Dream candidates secured first round victory in four – Kaspi, Oni, Kharagauli and Terjola Municipalities, while the vote goes into runoff in Kutaisi City Municipality, where GD mayoral hopeful fell short of garnering over half of the votes.

**Kutaisi Municipality**

* Ioseb Khakhanashvili – Georgian Dream – 45.7%;
* Grigol Shushania – the United National Movement – 30.62%;

**Kaspi Municipality**

* Vakhtang Maisuradze – GD – 55.47%;
* Nugzar Noniashvili – UNM – 32.23%;

**Oni Municipality**

* Davit Chikvaidze – GD – 56.66%;
* Tamaz Metreveli – the Alliance of Patriots – 20.23%;

**Kharagauli Municipality**

* Kuba Lursmanashvili – GD – 55.75%;
* Tornike Avalishvili – UNM – 28.49%;

**Terjola Municipality**

* Lasha Gogiashvili – GD – 50.42%;
* Roland Meskhi – EG – 23.9% *(CEC.GOV.GE, November 1, 2020)*;

1. **Opposition Says Results ‘Illegitimate,’ Announces Street Protests**

Georgian opposition political parties, including the United National Movement, Labor Party, Republican Party, Victorious Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, and Democratic Movement – United Georgia, among others, announced starting street protests as the preliminary results of October 31 general election shows incumbent ruling Georgian Dream party having strong lead to the opposition with over 50% of votes.

Rejecting the delayed preliminary results as “illegitimate,” the opposition parties said they kick of rallies to protest the results at 16:00, on Sunday.

1. **Rejecting Results, Opposition Consider Next Moves**

With two-thirds of precincts counted for the October 31 parliamentary election, opposition parties have again gathered at the Labor Party office on Sunday afternoon to ponder further action, before joining the rally outside the Georgian Parliament.

An idea of boycotting the parliament due to reported violations is floating in the air, but Zurab Japaridze, leader of the libertarian Girchi party confirmed that no party has yet decided to follow through with the boycott *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **ISFED Parallel Vote Tabulation Results**

The largest gap is in the share of votes received by the ruling Georgian Dream party, where the PVT result is 3 percentage points lower than the CEC result so far.

* Georgian Dream – 45,8%/ +-0,7% (CEC result at this time: 48,14%)
* United National Movement – 26,4 /+- 0,6% (CEC result at this time: 26,78%)
* European Georgia – 3,7%/ +-0,2% (CEC result at this time: 3,79%)
* Lelo for Georgia – 3,1%/+-0,2% (CEC result at this time: 3,22%)
* Alliance of Patriots – 3,1%/ +-0,1% (CEC result at this time: 3,2%)
* Strategy Agmashenebeli – 3%/+-0,1% (CEC result at this time: 3,15%)
* Girchi – 2,8%/+-0,2% (CEC result at this time: 3,00%)
* Elisashvili – the Citizens – 1,3%/+-0,1% (CEC result at this time: 1,36%)
* Labor Party – 1%/+- 0,1% (CEC result at this time: 1%)
* United Georgia – Democratic Movement – 0,9%/ +-0,1% (CEC result at this time: 0,85%) *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*

1. **Int’l Observers Release Preliminary Conclusions**

A preliminary post-election statement of four international observation missions, critical of a set of specific elements of the election process, did not question the overall integrity of the October 31 elections.

“Elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. Nevertheless, pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process,” highlighted the statement released on November 1 *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **U.S. Embassy: Violations Unacceptable; Not Sufficient to Invalidate Results**

The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi said in a statement of November 1, that the “efforts to corrupt the electoral process through voter intimidation, vote buying, interfering with ballot secrecy, blurring of party and official activities, and violence against election observers and journalists, while not sufficient to invalidate the results, continue to mar Georgia’s electoral process and are unacceptable.”

The Embassy stated that it shares ODIHR’s initial assessment on October 31 parliamentary vote that elections “were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. Nevertheless, pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process.”

“We call on all parties to address these deficiencies in advance of the second round and in future elections,” highlighted the U.S. Embassy *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **EU Statement on October 31 Parliamentary Elections**

The EU External Action Service (EEAS) said on November 1 on Georgia’s October 31 parliamentary vote, that the EU “will remain very attentive to developments during the remainder of the electoral period and in particular on the day of the second round.”

The statement seconded preliminary conclusions of international observers, according to which “the elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected.” It added that “the observers noted, however, that the conduct of the elections was impacted by pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state throughout the campaign and on election day, reducing public confidence in some aspects of the process.” *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*

1. **International Reactions to Georgia’s October 31 General Election**

**Foreign Ministry of Lithuania**

Foreign Ministry of Lithuania released a statement, noting that yesterday’s election “was competitive, and, overall fundamental freedoms were respected, democratic standards were met, although there were some irregularities and incidents, which we call to investigate.” Lithuanian Foreign Ministry called on Georgian political parties and CEC to take into account the international observers’ remarks in the run-up to the second round of the elections, to make sure that “election and future results would not cast any doubts.”

**Foreign Ministry of Turkey**

Turkish Foreign Ministry released a brief statement, wishing the parliamentary elections to be “auspicious for friendly Georgia,” adding that they were pleased to see the elections were conducted in “a peaceful and tranquil manner across the country.”

**Leading MEPs on Georgia Call for “Calm”**

Leading MEPs on EU-Georgia relations, including David McAllister (EPP, Germany), Chair of the European Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Marina Kaljurand (S&D, Estonia), Chair of the EP’s delegation for relations with the South Caucasus; Sven Mikser (S&D, Estonia), The EP’s standing rapporteur on Georgia; and Viola von Cramon-Taubadel (The Greens/EFA, Germany), EP’s lead member for democracy support activities in Georgia, released statement on October 31 general election and called for calm ahead of runoffs.

1. **President Zurabishvili Issues Post-Election Day Statement**

On November 1, following Election Day, President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili congratulated the public for the “peaceful, just, safe, and democratic” conduct of the parliamentary elections, stressing that “the country continues its uninterrupted advancement on the path of democracy and development.”

The President underscored that Georgia managed to conduct the elections under a reformed, largely proportional electoral system, which “takes into consideration practically every recommendation of OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).”

President Zurabishvili then praised Central Election Commission (CEC) members and chairperson Tamar Zhvania for securely conducting the elections despite the challenges set forth by the COVID-19 pandemic *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **Ex-PM Kvirikashvili: ‘political greed of ruling party may cost gov't and country dearly’**

Kvirikashvili accented the importance of national consolidation in the time of economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic and tense geopolitical situation in the region.

“When you have a terrible economic crisis caused by the pandemic and, consequently, difficult social conditions inside the country, hot conflict and geopolitical risks beyond the dangerous mark in the South Caucasus … and you do not take even half step towards the national consolidation, towards sharing responsibilities and reducing polarisation, this first of all frustrates people", wrote Kvirikashvili.

Kvirikashvili was the prime minister of Georgia from 2015 to 2018 *(Agenda.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

* **Internal Affairs**

1. **PM Gakharia Goes Into Self-Isolation**

PM Gakharia has gone into self-isolation according to a recent announcement. “I have moved to self-isolation and continue to work under these conditions,” the PM said *(Civil.ge, November 1, 2020)*.

1. **1,852 Daily Cases, 1,696 Recoveries, 7 Fatalities**

Georgia has reported 1,852 new daily cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 42,579 In the meantime, 1,696 more patients have recovered, increasing the number of recoveries to 26,800. 7 more COVID-related fatalities were recorded, taking the overall number of Georgia’s (excluding occupied territories) COVID-related deaths to 342. The number of active cases to date stands at 15,411 *(STOPCOV.GE, November 2, 2020)*.

* **Economy and Social Affairs**

1. **Germany Allocated Additional €20.8 Million to Georgia to Fight COVID-19**

Loan and grant agreements have been signed between Georgia and the Reconstruction Credit Bank (KfW) in the context of the social secuity during COVID-19 pandemic.

The agreements were signed by the Minister of Finance of Georgia, Ivane Machavariani, and the Director of the Regional Office of the Reconstruction Credit Bank (KfW) in the South Caucasus, Klaus Feigel.

Under the project, € 15 million of the loan agreement is allocated to provide social assistance to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The grant agreement, amounting to € 5.8 million under the targeted social assistance program, is intended to provide social assistance to people affected by extreme poverty.

The agreements are also part of the financial support that the Georgian government has received from partner international donor organizations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and further rehabilitate the country's economy *(CBW.GE, October 30, 2020)*.

* + **Additional Information**

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| **November 2, 2020**  **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**  1 USD – 3.2327 GEL 1 GBP - 3.1896 GEL 100 RUB -4.0776 GEL  1 EUR - 3.7732 GEL 1 TRY - 0.3881 GEL 100 JPY – 3.0968 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) * **Concerts –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/concerts) * **Sports –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/sport) |