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| **NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA**  **November 2-7** | | | |
| *Compiled by:* | ***Aleksandre Davitashvili*** | *Date*: | November 9, 2020 |

* **Foreign Affairs**

1. **Georgian Leaders Condemn Vienna Attack**

Georgian leaders joined the world in condemning the shooting in Vienna, Austria, on November 2, leaving at least 4 dead and 15 more injured.

Condemning the “vile acts of terror” in his tweet, **Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia** offered “deepest condolences” to the families and friends of the victims of the attack and expressed solidarity for “Austrians and the world in the fight against terrorism.”

**President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili** tweeted that “Europe woke up to face an act of terrorism,” denouncing the violence as unacceptable. “We must be united and stand together against this radical violence,” President noted *(Civil.ge, November 3, 2020)*.

1. **Georgian Leaders Congratulate Joe Biden on Election Victory**

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, and Speaker Archil Talakvadze took to Twitter to congratulate Joe Biden on winning the U.S. presidential election.

In a late-night statement on November 8, **President Zurabishvili tweeted** that “Georgia, the Caucasus region, and the world need a free, strong and democratic America. I look forward to working with you to make the cooperation and the bonds between our two nations stronger and deeper.”

The Georgian President then congratulated Vice-President-elect Harris: “As the first woman VP in United States history, I want to personally congratulate you, Kamala Harris and wish you success.”

On his part**, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia wrote**: “On behalf of the people of Georgia congratulations to the President-elect Joe Biden, a longtime friend of Georgia and Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris.”

Archil Talakvadze, Parliament Speaker also congratulated Joe Biden and Kamala Harris on their election, noting that he is “looking forward to strengthening excellent U.S.-Georgia relations and to work jointly for democracy and progress.” *(Civil.ge, November 8, 2020)*

* **Parliamentary Elections – 2020**

1. **All Opposition Parties Refuse to Enter Next Parliament**

After two-day consultations, all 8 opposition parties that passed the 1% threshold in the October 31 parliamentary elections have made up their minds to boycott the next parliament.

**European Georgia**, scoring 3,78% in the elections, was the first to announce the decision. The party added that its two majoritarian candidates will not participate in runoffs.

**Shalva Natelashvili**, leader of the Labor Party that secured 1% of the votes, soon followed in EG’s steps, saying that not only the opposition but ruling Georgian Dream members too should refuse to enter the next parliament.

**Lelo for Georgia**, the newly-emerged party that claimed 3,15% of the votes, followed the suit, with the party leader Badri Japaridze announcing they do not recognize the legitimacy of election results and will also refuse to enter the next parliament.

**Zurab Japaridze**, leader of the right-libertarian Girchi party, which garnered 2.89% of votes, also decided to boycott the parliament. Japaridze had pledged earlier to follow the lead of other opposition parties.

**Strategy Aghmashenebeli**, led by Giorgi Vashadze, which claimed 3.15% of votes, also joined the boycott in the evening.

Strength in Unity, strongest opposition force led by the United National Movement, that ended up second with 27,13%, was one of the last to announce the boycott decision. Earlier in the day, however, the bloc made known its decision to refuse mandates in the Supreme Council of the Adjara Autonomous Republic, the region’s legislative assembly that was contested alongside the general election on October 31 *(Civil.ge, November 2, 2020)*.

**Aleko Elisashvili,** leader of the Citizens party, that scored 1,33%, called on all opposition parties as early as on November 1 to boycott the parliament and demand snap elections.

**The Alliance of Patriots,** Kremlin-friendly nativist outfit, which gathered 3.14% of votes, also demands revote. MP Irma Inashvili pledged the party – traditionally distanced from the rest of the opposition elites – to start protest rallies from November 7. She vowed not to quit unless the Georgian Dream government allows snap elections.

1. **CSOs: 2020 Elections “Least Democratic, Free” Under GD**

In a statement from November 4, 25 Georgian CSOs say that 2020 parliamentary elections were “least democratic and free among the elections held under the Georgian Dream rule.”

Despite taking “a step forward” by switching to a more proportional system, the statement says that government could not ensure to conduct 2020 polls “in accordance with democratic standards.” *(Civil.ge, November 4, 2020)*

1. **Watchdogs Say Election Most Appeals Dismissed or Refused by District Commissions**

Various District Election Commissions refused to review watchdog complaints without giving grounds for such decision. Out those reviewed, most were dismissed, reads a November 4 joint statement by Transparency International (TI) Georgia and International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), two key election watchdogs for Georgia’s October 31 parliamentary election.

The two CSOs called on the district election commissions to facilitate the appeals procedure instead of posing obstacles to the process. They called on the Commissions to try and recount as many ballots on the precinct level as possible to shore up public trust in the results of the October 31 parliamentary elections.

“Otherwise they will be responsible for the political crisis in the country,” the watchdogs asserted *(Civil.ge, November 5, 2020)*.

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

**U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi**

The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi said in a statement, that the “efforts to corrupt the electoral process through voter intimidation, vote-buying, interfering with ballot secrecy, blurring of the 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 asked Georgia’s citizens to be patient and to allow the process to be conducted in a calm, peaceful and respectful manner.

**The European Union, External Action Service**

The External Action Service of the European Union said 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, adding that “ensuring the highest democratic standards throughout the entire process, including during the second round, remains key, as well as a fair, transparent and rigorous handling of all complaints and appeals.”

**The United Kingdom, Minister Wendy Morton**

British Minister for European Neighborhood and the Americas, Wendy Morton, said the UK agrees with international observers’ preliminary conclusions that the elections were competitive and freedoms were respected, albeit amid allegations of pressure on voters. “We now call for the second round of voting to be carried out in a fair, legal way, fitting of Georgia’s outward-looking global aspirations,” she added.

**Foreign Ministry of Lithuania**

Foreign Ministry of Lithuania released a statement, noting that October 31 elections were “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 Poland**

Foreign Ministry of Poland released a statement seconding international observers’ preliminary conclusions, that the elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms and international standards were respected.

However, the statement drew attention to “worrying reports” on irregularities and violations, “allegedly exceeding in numbers those registered during 2016 elections.” Foreign Ministry of Poland called on Georgian authorities to investigate all the complaints with “due scrutiny and with proper respect to institutional process, as well as according to prevailing procedures.” “That would enhance transparency and trust in electoral process, especially before the second round scheduled on November 21st,” the statement reads.

**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.” *(Various Sources, November 1-5, 2020)*

1. **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:

“We take note that these elections were found to be competitive and freedoms were respected overall, despite deplorable cases of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the State throughout the campaign and on election day. Candidates were able to campaign freely, giving voters a genuine choice between a variety of platforms. The level of interest and engagement on the part of civil society actors also constitutes a positive feature of these elections. The issue of campaign financing needs to be further addressed in line with long-standing OSCE/ODIHR recommendations,” stated the MEPs.

“We appreciate that pragmatic solutions were found to allow quarantined and self-isolated citizens to cast their ballots in special polling stations, which was a fair compromise between democratic and public health requirements,” the MEPs went on, and also added that they “very much deplore that citizens in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia were once again deprived of their right to vote.”

“Today, following the first round and ahead of the second round, we call for calm. All possible appeals and complaints, substantiated with necessary details and some element of proof, should be handled in a fair, transparent and rigorous manner,” the Members of the European Parliament highlighted.

**The Party of European Socialists**

The Party of European Socialists (PES), of which the ruling Georgian Dream party is an observer member, released a statement asserting that “the high turnout in Georgian election shows enhanced democracy.” PES shared the international observers’ preliminary conclusions that the October 31 parliamentary elections were “competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected.”

“Georgia held a highly competitive elections in such difficult times. The election results so far show that the people of Georgia have chosen to continue their Euro-Atlantic path. The election law reforms adopted in advance of this election made the election process more inclusive and more transparent. We hope that Georgia will continue on this direction after the second round of the election,” PES President Sergei Stanishev stated.

**MEP Viola von Cramon (European Free Alliance)**

MEP Cramon said in a separate comment that while the parliamentary elections were competitive and generally free, it is “regrettable to see cases of pressuring voters,” adding that “unequal access to administrative & particularly financial resources undermines democracy.” *(Civil.ge, November 5, 2020)*

1. **1 Detained over Shots near Ivanishvili Business Center**

The Ministry of Interior stated about detaining one person following reports about shots fired during a protest rally near the business center of Bidzina Ivanishvili, chairman of the ruling party, on November 6.

According to the statement, police detained the suspect hours after he allegedly fired multiple shots while driving through a traffic tunnel in Sololaki, Tbilisi, in the vicinity of the business center.

The perpetrator, previously convicted for robbery, now faces charges under Article 236 (3,4) of the Criminal Code, involving illegal purchase, storage, and carrying of firearms, and foreseeing imprisonment for a term of 3 to 7 years *(Civil.ge, November 6, 2020)*.

1. **TI Georgia Demands Annulment of Results, Recount in 42 Precincts**

Transparency International Georgia said it will demand in Court the annulment of summary protocols and recounting of 42 precincts. The watchdog stated it previously filed 62 appeals in PECs and DECs regarding the discrepancies in the final vote tallies, out of which only three were recounted, while 40 were not satisfied and 19 were not reviewed *(Civil.ge, November 6, 2020)*.

1. **TI Georgia Slams Courts for Refusing to Allow Online Hearings**

Transparency International (TI) Georgia, a key election observer, said that not a single court has accepted its request to conduct hearings for election-related complaints online. The watchdog also added that a majority of its lawyers are currently in self-isolation due to the epidemiological situation deteriorating nationwide *(Civil.ge, November 7, 2020)*.

1. **Georgia’s Security Service Investigates ‘Coup Attempt’**

The State Security Service of Georgia announced on November 6 that it launched on October 1 an investigation into a ‘state coup attempt,’ allegedly organized by “certain persons planning to violently overthrow the government in case of obtaining unsatisfying results in [October 31] parliamentary elections.”

The investigation has been launched under Article 315 (1) of the Criminal Code of Georgia, involving conspiracy intended to change the constitutional order through violence or to overthrow or seize state power. The charges envisage imprisonment for a term of five to eight years.

The State Security Service noted that said “certain persons” from the opposition intending to overthrow the government had been establishing conspirator “mobile groups comprised of former law enforcement and military servants.”

The SSG announcement came after MP Irakli Kobakhidze, the campaign chief of the ruling Georgian Dream party, stated on October 30, a day before the election, that a number of opposition leaders had been plotting “revolutionary scenario” to come to power. MP Kobakhidze accused the United National Movement-led government’s long-serving Interior Minister Ivane Merabishvili, former Education Minister Dimitri Shashkin, and retired general Devi Chankotadze, among others, of being behind the plot *(Civil.ge, November 7, 2020)*.

1. **Two Detained on Bribing, Threatening Late District Election Commission Head**

The Interior Ministry of Georgia said on November 7 that the police detained two persons on charges of offering a bribe, threatening, and coercing late Thedore Gobejishvili, Isani District Election Commission Head.

Gobejishvili, 43, passed away earlier on November 7, a week after the hotly-contested October 31 parliamentary election.

The Ministry stated that the two detainees met with Gobejishvili on November 6 on behalf of one of the political parties and offered him to announce his resignation in a public address and that elections had been rigged, in exchange for USD 50,000.

According to the Interior Ministry, after being rejected by Gobejishvili, the two detainees threatened him with retaliation and attempted to coerce him to agree to the proposal *(Civil.ge, November 8, 2020)*.

1. **Protest Rally of the United Opposition**

Major political parties like: UNM, European Georgia, Lelo, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Girchi, Labour Party and etc. have organized protest rally on November 8. They had three main demands:

* Resignation of Tamar Zhvania, CEC Chairperson;
* Appointment of repeated elections;
* Release of the political prisoners.

The government’s deadline to implement demands has expired at 20:00 and demonstrators marched to the CEC. Before they went to the place, Chairperson of CEC has left the building. Simultaneously, the special operation forces/SWAT team used water cannons to disperse gathered protesters. Later when the rest of the rally participants joined the protest, MIA used water cannon again.

The leading CSOs (TI Georgia, GYLA, ISFED, EMC, etc.) have criticized government for using the force not proportional to the rally activists.

Politicians decided to finish the demonstration and planned next rally for November 9, 18:00 *(Various Sources, November 8-9, 2020).*

1. **Public Defender: Use of Force with no Prior Warning “against Law”**

Commenting on “extremely sad developments” outside the Central Election Commission office, Public Defender Nino Lomjaria said that using force on protesters without prior loud warning “is against law.” Lomjaria noted that, even after issuing a warning, police are not allowed to use force “as long as the rally remains within the law,” calling on police to stop using “disproportionate force” on protesters *(Civil.ge, November 8, 2020)*.

1. **Interior Ministry Briefing on the Protest**

According to the briefing, 19 people were detained for disturbing public order and disobeying the lawful demands of the police. The Interior Ministry also noted that the events that unfolded outside CEC headquarters are being investigated under Article 225 (organisation, management or participation in group violence), 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

The First Deputy Minister stressed that the Interior Ministry’s decision to use water cannons against the protestors was “urgent,” as protestors continued to pursue “illegal actions” despite the police issuing several warnings in advance.

Kakhaber Sabanadze also denied allegations of police using tear gas against protestors, underscoring that the police was, in fact, using pepper spray *(TV Pirveli, November 9, 2020)*.

* **Internal Affairs**

1. **22:00-05:00 Curfew Announced in Largest Cities**

Vice Prime Minister Maia Tskitishvili announced that starting from Monday, November 9, the government will impose a 22:00 – 05:00 curfew in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi, Zugdidi, Gori, and Poti, the nation’s largest cities.

Tskitishvili added that both private and municipal preschool institutions in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi, Zugdidi, Gori, and Poti, Georgia’s largest cities, will be closed starting November 9 *(Civil.ge, November 7, 2020)*.

1. **2,927 Daily Cases, 2,470 Recoveries, 24 Fatalities**

Georgia has reported 2,927 new daily cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 60,680. In the meantime, 2,470 more patients have recovered, increasing the number of recoveries to 45,042. 24 more COVID-related fatalities were recorded, taking the overall number of Georgia’s (excluding occupied territories) COVID-related deaths to 499. The number of active cases to date stands at 15,113 *(Stopcov.ge, November 9, 2020)*.

* **Economy and Social Affairs**

1. **Finance Ministry Sells GEL 90 Mln Bonds**

On November 3, the Ministry of Finance of Georgia sold GEL 90 million (USD 28 million) worth of bonds at the treasury securities auctions.

According to the statement, the Finance Ministry sold 2-year Benchmark Bonds worth GEL 70 million (USD 21 million). Three commercial banks participated in the auction, with total demand amounting to GEL 128,620,000 (USD 40 million).

The minimum interest rate stood at 8.100%, the maximum rate at 8.200% and the weighted average rate yielded 8.171% *(Civil.ge, November 3, 2020)*.

1. **GEL Depreciates Further Against USD, EUR**

Georgian national currency, Lari (GEL) fell to 3.2988 against U.S. Dollar and to 3.8586 against Euro on November 3, despite the November 2 intervention by the Georgian central bank.

Lari slightly appreciated against U.S. Dollar and Euro at the beginning of October, remaining relatively stable throughout the month, amid the central bank’s regular interventions, with USD 260 million sold since.

GEL was being traded at 3.2327 against U.S Dollar and 3.7732 against Euro a day earlier. Some two weeks earlier, on October 20, Lari stood at 3.2117 per U.S. Dollar and at 3.7763 per Euro *(NBG.GOV.GE, November 3, 2020)*.

* + **Additional Information**

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| **November 9, 2020**  **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**  1 USD – 3.3613 GEL 1 GBP - 4.4181 GEL 100 RUB -4.3379 GEL  1 EUR - 3.9892 GEL 1 TRY - 0.3942 GEL 100 JPY – 3.2546 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) |