



Weekly News Digest on Georgia

July 28-August 3, 2021

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Compiled on:
August 4, 2021

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Internal Affairs

❖ Political Developments

1. Georgian Dream Quits EU-brokered Deal

Ruling Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze announced the EU-brokered April 19 deal as "annulled," claiming it "served its mission and exhausted itself" 100 days after signing, with the majority of opposition lawmakers having refrained from joining.

"We can see our international partners do not find it necessary to strictly demand from the radical opposition to sign and participate in implementing the document," said MP Kobakhidze. "One-sided loyalty to the April 19 agreement is insulting for our party, and our voters will not forgive us this."

MP Kobakhidze pointed out that the opposition parties that signed the agreement received only 10% of the votes in the October 2020 parliamentary elections, while the electoral bloc led by the largest opposition United National Movement party, as well as the Alliance of Patriots, European Georgia and Labor party, the four opposition groups that received parliamentary mandates, refused to join the deal (*Civil.ge, July 28, 2021*).

2. Georgian Dream 'Rejected' Euro-Atlantic Course, CSOs Say

18 local civil society organizations stated Georgian Dream's withdrawal from the EU-brokered April 19 deal "constitutes a straightforward rejection of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic course and the peaceful development of the country through democratic reforms."

The CSOs argued the move serves "only a desire to retain power," alluding to a clause in the agreement that obligates holding early parliamentary elections in 2022 if the ruling party receives less than 43% of votes in the October 2 local polls in 2021.

They stressed the GD "is ready sacrifice" the country's prosperity, foreign policy orientation and relations with strategic partners to stay in power (*Civil.ge, July 28, 2021*).

3. Opposition on Georgian Dream Quitting EU-Brokered Deal

MP Tina Bokuchava, United National Movement party: "The 43% [threshold] was a very big threat [to the Georgian Dream], and they think [by quitting the deal] they avoided the obligation for holding snap elections. ... [But] our international partners are already expecting from the Georgian Dream to hold the snap elections if they receive less than 43% [in the 2021 local polls], so they are inevitable."

MP Giorgi Vashadze, Strategy Aghmashenebli: "Unfortunately Georgian Dream thinks this country is a toy in its hand. We did not expect – and probably no one else did either – that they would take such a brazen step. After this decision, I have communicated with our Western partners, and it is time to begin working on enforcing large-scale mechanisms in response to the non-fulfillment of Charles Michel's document. These could include many things, among them sanctions, as we discussed. Probably, the imposition of personal sanctions will be sped up."

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MP Levan Ioseliani, Citizens party: "I think this step by the Georgian Dream is highly irresponsible, taking into account the effort that was put into signing Charles Michel's document. The country, the political spectrum, spent unimaginable energy so that agreement could have been reached and the Georgian Dream rejected it unilaterally."

MP Khatuna Samnidze, Republican Party: "They didn't stand a chance [to garner] 43% [of votes]! Since July 5 they have been trying to intensify confrontation – they involved the [Orthodox Church] Patriarchate, radicals ... nothing helped. They tried to think of an excuse, and because they are not smart enough, they decided to blame [quitting the deal] again on the opposition. This [move] means rejecting Europe, the U.S., every partner of ours, every person in this country who has at least a flicker of hope of change! This is their aim – complete nihilism, complete control, full destruction of democracy in the country ..." (*Civil.ge, July 28, 2021*)

4. Libertarian opposition leader Japaridze leaves parliament following ruling party exit from EU-mediated agreement

Leader of opposition party Girchi - More Freedom Zurab Japaridze has left parliament after the ruling Georgian Dream party's withdrawal from the EU-mediated agreement early today, stating that the agreement was his reason for being in parliament.

Japaridze claimed the ruling party decided to leave the agreement because it has 'zero chance of receiving 43% of the vote in upcoming elections' – a condition provided for in the EU-mediated agreement, which if not met would see repeat parliamentary elections in Georgia.

He also said that the ruling party 'once again proved that they are liars' and noted that 'agreeing with them has no value at all.' (*Civil.ge, July 28, 2021*)

5. U.S. Reacts to Georgian Dream Leaving EU-Brokered Deal

U.S. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price and seven Senators of the Foreign Relations Committee on July 28 leveled criticisms against the ruling Georgian Dream party for quitting the EU-brokered April 19 agreement.

Spokesperson Price argued the withdrawal "undermines an agreed upon way forward for the country through needed reforms and risks a return to political crises." He called on all political parties to work together to "advance' Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.

The bipartisan group of Senators – Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Ron Johnson (R-WI), Jim Risch (R-ID), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Rob Portman (R-OH), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and John Barrasso (R-WY) – dubbed as "disappointing" the ruling party's decision to "unilaterally walk away" from the deal, during a "pivotal time" for Georgia's democratic development (*Civil.ge, July 29, 2021*).

6. Washington Alarmed Over 'Repeated Setbacks' to Georgian Democracy

The Embassy stressed that the U.S. "is deeply disturbed and exasperated" by the governing party's unilateral decision to quit the April 19 deal – "another deviation from the letter and spirit of the negotiations Georgian Dream participated in and the agreement they signed."

It argued that the decision to quit "only creates more political instability for the country and raises questions about Georgian Dream's commitment to achieving Georgia's democratic goals, goals that Georgian Dream itself set for the country."

- 31. NCDC Head: 99.7% among coronavirus deaths not vaccinated
- 32. Deputy Health Minister: Number of infected persons to keep high for 10 days
- 33. Locals residing across occupied territories to vaccinate without preliminary registration
- ❖ **Economy and Social Affairs**
- 34. Georgia's GDP Growth 18.7% in June
- 35. Georgian government to subsidise 2021 grape harvest due to high grape yield, post-pandemic situation
- 36. Georgian gov't to subsidise loans for families with newborn children, multi-child families starting Sep. 1
- 37. Georgian PM: 'some companies put 300-400% price tags on drugs, this is unacceptable'

Foreign Affairs and Security

- 38. Moscow Reacts to Agile Spirit Drills
- 39. Georgian PM, Turkish president discuss prospects of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey trilateral cooperation format
- 40. US House of Representatives passes bill allocating \$132 mln in aid to Georgia

The Embassy pointed out that 115 MPs from at least six of the nine elected parties had signed the deal and pledged to overcome "deep polarization," following six months of "difficult but collaborative" negotiations. Georgian Dream had cited the refusal of four elected groups, including the largest, United National Movement-led bloc, to join the agreement as reasoning to quit (*Civil.ge, July 29, 2021*).

7. President Michel to Start Consultations after GD's EU-Brokered Deal Withdrawal

European Council President Charles Michel said on July 29 consultations are starting with a number of Georgian political actors, after the ruling Georgian Dream party quit the April 19 deal.

President Michel noted he has "equally" taken note of the governing party's withdrawal, and the largest opposition party United National Movement's refusal to sign the agreement.

The European Council President said he remains convinced that the agreement, penned as a result of his mediation between Georgian political parties, "is the best way to advance a reform agenda which would strengthen the democratic institutions of Georgia and help bring about prosperity, jobs, and growth." (*Civil.ge, July 29, 2021*)

8. UNM's Nika Melia Leaves Parliament

United National Movement chair Nika Melia announced that he is leaving the Parliament, and will focus on his campaign as the Mayoral candidate for Tbilisi after the ruling Georgian Dream party's withdrawal from the EU-brokered April 19 deal. Melia said other UNM members will remain present at the legislature, as per his appeal.

Melia argued the governing party quit the agreement "afraid" of its clause that required calling snap parliamentary elections if the Georgian Dream received less than 43% of votes in the 2021 local polls.

"Georgian Dream saw very clearly ... that they are losing in these elections," stressed the opposition leader. "It does not matter whether the GD recognizes the 43% principle, we will participate in this referendum, defeat the GD, and they will have to hold snap elections."

Melia warned the opposition "not to even mention" boycotting the local elections. As for the largest opposition group's presence in the Parliament, the UNM chair said he pleaded to his colleagues to retain mandates and see through the endorsement of constitutional amendments (*Civil.ge, July 29, 2021*).

9. Opposition MP leaves parliament following ruling party's exit from EU-mediated agreement

Opposition MP Tamar Kordzaia has left the parliament after the ruling Georgian Dream party's withdrawal from the EU-mediated agreement.

Kordzaia told IPN that she signed the agreement because 'the western course is important,' noting that parliamentary cooperation with the Georgian Dream is impossible.

"I will not support the double standards of the Georgian Dream by entering the sessions of the parliament and asking critical questions," Kordzaia stated today.

Kordzaia also noted that the ruling party 'should be defeated via elections' and 'be forced to call early elections,' Kordzaia said (*Agenda.ge, July 29, 2021*).

10. Writers exit Litera Prize nominations in protest of culture minister,

appointment of jury member

A number of writers from the longlist of this year's Litera Prize, one of two major literary awards in Georgia, have dropped out of the contest in protest, citing appointment of a jury member from the culture ministry and the recent incident involving minister Thea Tsulukiani with a local reporter.

Five authors and one designer revealed on Thursday they would exit the running for the latest edition of the award after it was revealed the jury panel would, for the first time in the history of the award, feature a member appointed from the ministry.

Jaba Zarkua, Mate Saralishvili, Eka Kevanishvili, Toresa Mossy, Irakli Kakabadze and Natalia Avaliani posted on social media earlier in the day, revealing their disapproval of the appointment, a break with the tradition of the entire judge panel being chosen by the Writers' House of Georgia in a structure perceived by literary field professionals as a mark of independence from state cultural authorities.

The authors also cited an incident that involved minister Tsulukiani and a reporter from the opposition-minded Mtavari Arkhi channel in Senaki last week, with the government member snatching a microphone away from the journalist while being challenged with questions ahead of the opening show of a newly renovated theatre in the town.

Among the reactions was a Facebook post by Avaliani, a designer, who said her exit from the contest was "in protest of this shameful [minister] and not of Litera [Prize]", adding she would refuse to participate in any competition organised by the ministry while "a completely uncultured person and one of the principal figures of a government encouraging violence" was at its helm. Avaliani had been in the longlist for Book Design of the Year Award (*Agenda.ge, July 29, 2021*).

11. Litera Prize cancelled by organisers following participant, jury team protest

The 2021 edition of Litera Prize, one of two major literary competitions in Georgia, will not go ahead following mass protest by nominees in this year's longlist as well as all but one member of the jury team, organisers have announced.

In a social media post on Monday, Writers' House of Georgia said it would be "impossible" to hold the contest after 93 out of 110 works in the nominee longlist had been withdrawn by their authors and publishers since last week, in addition to an absolute majority of the jury panel resigning to join the participants in protest (*Agenda.ge, August 2, 2021*).

12. Georgia's Ex-EU Envoy Becomes Gakharia Advisor

Ex-Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said he has picked Natalie Sabanadze, Georgia's former envoy to the European Union as his advisor in international affairs.

The announcement came today after Gakharia, accompanied by Sabanadze met with Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, the Member of the European Parliament who is meeting Georgian political parties in Tbilisi.

Sabanadze stepped down as the Ambassador a few days after the ruling Georgian Dream and opposition parties failed to reach a compromise through EU-mediated talks to end the political crisis, a month after Gakharia resigned as PM (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*).

13. Two More Arrested for July 5 Media Attack

Police have arrested two persons for attacking Formula TV cameraman during the homophobic pogroms of July 5, the Interior Ministry reported today.

The Ministry said the two suspects verbally and physically attacked the cameraman, and unlawfully interfered with his professional duties near Kashveti Church in downtown Tbilisi. The journalist was covering the violent counter-rally against Pride March, an event canceled subsequently due to the outbreak of violence and lack of security guarantees by the state.

The Interior Ministry said the investigation into the incidents is ongoing on charges of participating in group violence (Article 225.2, Criminal Code), unlawful interference with journalist's professional activities (Article 154.2), and persecution using violence or threat of violence (Article 156.2a) (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*).

14. Georgian Dream Names Mayoral Candidates

Georgian Dream chair Irakli Kobakhidze announced on July 30 the party's picks for mayoral races for municipalities and cities in the nearing October 2 local elections. Incumbent Kakha Kaladze was already named as the ruling party's Tbilisi mayoral candidate.

Mayoral candidates are as follows:

Kvemo Kartli region

- Rustavi – Nino Latsabidze, MP
- Gardabani – Davit Kargareli
- Marneuli – Kenan Omarov
- Bolnisi – Davit Sherazadishvili, incumbent Mayor
- Dmanisi – Koba Muradashvili
- Tsalka – Ilia Sabadze, incumbent Mayor
- Tetritskaro – Giorgi Tsiklauri

Kakheti region

- Telavi – Levan Andriashvili
- Akhmeta – Aleksii Pitskhelauri
- Kvareli – Givi Zautashvili
- Lagodekhi – Jondo Mdivnishvili
- Gurjaani – Zurab Utiashvili
- Sagarejo – Avtandil Gulikashvili
- Signagi – Malkhaz Begiashvili
- Dedoplistskaro – Nikoloz Janiashvili, incumbent Mayor

Shida Kartli region

- Gori – Vladimer Khinchegashvili, Rio 2016 Olympic gold medallist in freestyle wrestling
- Kaspi – Vakhtang Maisuradze, incumbent Mayor
- Kareli – Zaza Guliashvili, incumbent Mayor
- Khashuri – Tengiz Chitiashvili

Samtskhe-Javakheti region

- Akhaltsikhe – Irakli Lazarashvili
- Aspindza – Rostom Magrakvelidze, incumbent Mayor
- Borjomi – Otari Arbolishvili
- Adigeni – Gocha Kimadze
- Akhalkalaki – Melkon Makaryan

- Ninotsminda – Anivard Mosoyan, incumbent Mayor

Mtskheta-Mtianeti region

- Mtskheta – Dimitri Zurabishvili
- Dusheti – Manana Narimanidze
- Tianeti – Levan Tsiklauri
- Kazbegi – Shalva Eloshvili

Imereti region

- Kutaisi – Ioseb Khakhaleishvili, incumbent Mayor
- Bagdati – Kakha Ehlukidze
- Chiatura – Givi Modebadze, incumbent Mayor
- Tskaltubo – Genadi Balanchivadze
- Sachkhere – Levan Ivanashvili
- Samtredia – Davit Bakhtadze
- Terjola – Lasha Gogiashvili, incumbent Mayor
- Tkibuli – Davit Cherkezisvili
- Vani – Aleksandre Gogorishvili, incumbent Mayor
- Kharagauli – Koba Lursmanashvili, incumbent Mayor
- Khoni – Lado Jurkhadze, incumbent Mayor
- Zestaponi – Vasil Gvelesiani

Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti region

- Ambrolauri – Lasha Chichinadze
- Oni – Sergo Khidasheli
- Tsageri – Giorgi Nemsadze
- Lentekhi – Giorgi Oniani

Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region

- Zugdidi – Mamuka Tsotseria, Local Council (Sakrebulo) Chair
- Tsalenjikha – Goga Gulordava
- Chkhorotsku – Dato Gogua, incumbent Mayor
- Khobi – Davit Bukia
- Senaki – Vakhtang Gadelia
- Martvili – Tornike Janashia
- Poti – Beka Vacharadze
- Abasha – Giga Gabelaia
- Mestia – Kapiton Zhorzholiani, incumbent Mayor

Guria region

- Ozurgeti – Avtandil Talakvadze (Archil Talakvadze’s brother)
- Lanchkhuti – Aleksandre Sarishvili, incumbent Mayor
- Chokhatauri – Davit Sharashenidze

Adjara Autonomous Republic

- Batumi – Archil Chikovani, acting Mayor
- Kobuleti – Levan Zoidze
- Khelvachauri – Zaza Diasamidze
- Keda – Roland Beridze
- Shuakhevi – Omar Takidze, acting Mayor
- Khulo – Vakhtang Beridze, incumbent Mayor (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*)

15. MEP Cramon: EU Needs to Reconsider Relations with Georgian Gov’t

“The EU will need to reconsider its relations with the Georgian Government” after the Georgian Dream quit the EU-brokered April 19 deal with the opposition, said

Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, a lead Member of the European Parliament's Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group for Georgia.

According to the MEP, the Georgian Dream's decision "benefited the Kremlin," and that "after trust is breached" parties cannot go back to business as usual.

MEP von Cramon delivered her press remarks today in Tbilisi after holding a series of meetings with the Georgian opposition parties. She said the ruling party's "unexpected" and "harmful decision for Georgian interests" prompted her to cancel meetings in the Parliament of Georgia (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*).

16. PM Garibashvili pledges implementation of reforms will continue after ruling party's withdrawal from EU-mediated agreement

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said earlier today that the implementation of reforms will continue despite the ruling Georgian Dream party's withdrawal from the EU-mediated agreement which ended the six-month political crisis caused by the parliamentary elections of 2020.

The April 19 agreement obliged all signatory parties to participate in the process of fundamental electoral and judicial reforms' implementation.

PM Garibashvili stated that the ruling party 'fulfilled all the obligations unilaterally,' noting that the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party's involvement was 'very important' for the Georgian Dream.

"You have seen that an utterly irresponsible attitude was demonstrated by the UNM under the instructions of Saakashvili. Namely, currently the most prominent actor among the opposition parties is the UNM, while the total sum of electoral votes that may be collected by all others is just above 10%. Position of the UNM - being the main opposition and destructive party - was thus very important for us. They deliberately stayed away from co-signing the agreement and completely ignored it, thereby insulting the EU and USA," underlined Garibashvili (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*).

17. US Ambassador Degnan hopes EU-mediated agreement will remain in force despite ruling party's withdrawal

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan stated earlier today that she hopes the EU-mediated agreement will remain in force despite the ruling Georgian Dream party's recent withdrawal from it.

Georgian Dream annulled its signatory status to the April 19 agreement which resolved the political crisis in Georgia caused by parliamentary elections of 2020 and proposed fundamental electoral and judicial reforms.

Ambassador Degnan noted that the idea and value of the agreement was the political parties' pledge to implement the reforms, noting that Georgia needs 'multiparty reforms that all of the leaders elected by Georgia's voters can pursue and advance,' said Degnan (*Agenda.ge, August 1, 2021*).

18. Ruling Georgian Dream party receives most donations in last three month of all political parties

The ruling Georgian Dream party has received the most donations of all political parties from May till today which amounted to 230,000 GEL (about \$73,725/€62,090), the Georgian State Audit Office reports.

Former Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's political party For Georgia, which was launched on May 29, 2021, has received 219,516 GEL (about \$70,364/€59,259) in the last three months. Among the party's donors are MPs and For Georgia members.

The opposition party Lelo for Georgia had two donors over the last three months and their donations amounted to 33,030 GEL (about \$10,587/€8,916).

The biggest opposition party United National Movement (UNM) received 26,660 GEL (about \$8,545/€7,197) from May till today.

Two more parliamentary political parties - Strategy Aghmashenebeli party and Citizens have not received any donations yet (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*).

19. Security Service Accused of Spying on President, MPs, CSOs, Businessmen, Clergy, Homosexuals

Mtavari Arkhi TV, a channel critical to the Georgian Dream government, aired late yesterday alleged memos of the State Security Service, Georgia's domestic intelligence agency, involving spying on the phone conversations of President Salome Zurbishvili, presidential and government administration officials, opposition and civil society leaders, a foreign embassy employee, as well as the alleged orders extending surveillance on intimate lives of Georgian Dream representatives, businessmen and clergy, including homosexuals.

Nika Gvaramia, director-general of the channel, gave some 30-minute-long monologue reading out the alleged memos, coinciding with the sixth anniversary of the establishment of the State Security Service.

Gvaramia said some of the alleged 2020 SSG briefs implied V., one of the Georgian Dream lawmakers having an affair with E., with the SSG aiming to extend surveillance on them, while another detailed memo referred to another Georgian Dream lawmaker asking his/her partner out.

According to Gvaramia, the Administration of the Government of Georgia has also been extensively targeted. One of the alleged memos involved tapped conversations between high-ranking government administration official M., his/her assistant M. and director of one of organizations, with the SSG being aware that M. was showing interest in his/her sexual partner's father to return to Georgia, and M. asking for help from then-Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's advisor in the return. Another alleged memo included a phone conversation of I., advisor of then PM Giorgi Gakharia with his/her sexual partner.

Mtavari Arkhi TV director also said one of the memos aimed at extending surveillance on a certain individual to expose the latter's possible homosexual relations "with Georgian Dream representatives." (*Civil.ge, August 2, 2021*)

20. New CEC Chair Elected

The Parliament of Georgia elected today Giorgi Kalandarishvili as the new chairperson of the Central Election Commission, receiving 83 votes in favor and 3 against, as the majority of opposition lawmakers did not attend the session. His opponent, Giorgi Santuriani garnered only four votes.

Kalandarishvili will serve for a six-month term as the Georgian Dream lawmakers elected him with a simple majority after Parliament's three unsuccessful attempts to choose the new chair. The distrusting opposition lawmakers, whose votes were required for the supermajority, were unwilling to back any of the two candidates.

New changes, as per the EU-mediated April 19 agreement between the GD and opposition parties, require a candidate to get 2/3 supermajority endorsement in first two votings, or 3/5 support afterwards in the 150-member legislature be elected for a 5-year term (*Civil.ge, August 2, 2021*).

21. Political Ratings, Local Elections in IRI Poll

Local Elections

Asked which party they would vote for in the upcoming October 2, 2021 local elections:

- Georgian Dream -28%;
- United National Movement - 15%;
- For Georgia (Gakharia's Party) - 9%
- 18% of respondents said they don't know;
- 6% refused to answer;
- 4% stated they would spoil the ballot.

Asked which parties they would not vote under any circumstances, 30% said the UNM, 24% named GD, and 10% named right-libertarian Girchi and Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots, each.

Public Figures, Institutions

- Patriarch Ilia II – 88%;
- Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze – 58%;
- ex-PM Giorgi Gakharia -56%;
- Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili - 40%
- UNM Chairman Nika Melia - 39%
- President Salome Zurbashvili - 31%
- Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava - 25% (15% has not heard Kuchava's name).

In terms of institutions:

- Georgian army - 85%;
- Orthodox Church – 80%;
- Public Service Halls – 76%;
- Police – 65%;
- Georgian Parliament – 39%;
- Prime Minister's Office enjoy - 39%;
- Courts - 33%.

22. Georgian Dream Names Tbilisi Sakrebulo Majoritarian Candidates

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, who is running for re-election in October local polls, presented today the ruling Georgian Dream party's 10 majoritarian candidates to 50-member Tbilisi Sakrebulo (City Assembly).

The list of candidates – all men – for 10 single-mandate constituencies are:

- Mtatsminda – Zurab Abashidze, ex-Ambassador to Kazakhstan, former Free Democrats leader
- Vake – Giorgi Tkemaladze, incumbent Sakrebulo Chair
- Samgori – Revaz Sokhadze, incumbent majoritarian
- Isani – kakha Labuchidze, incumbent Gamgebeli (district head)
- Krtsanisi – Levan Japaridze, incumbent majoritarian
- Nadzaladevi – Irakli Kheladze, incumbent Gamgebeli
- Gldani – Konstantine Zarnadze, Deputy Gamgebeli of Gldani
- Didube – Givi Chkhartishvili
- Saburtalo – Avtandil Tsintsadze, incumbent majoritarian
- Chughureti – Zurab Chikviladze, incumbent Gamgebeli (*Civil.ge, August 2, 2021*)

23. Georgia's Local Election Date Set for October 2

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili set today October 2 as the date of

holding local self-government elections in Georgia.

The setting of the election date marks the formal launch of the pre-election period, which means that the whole set of legal obligations envisaged by the election code will now go into effect (*Civil.ge, August 2, 2021*).

24. Ruling party says it won't rejoin EU-mediated agreement

Georgian Dream MP Archil Talakvadze said earlier today that 'the ruling party was the only party which was fulfilling the agreement' which had resolved a six-month political crisis following disputed parliamentary elections at the end of 2020 and proposed large-scale reforms.

Other ruling party MPs say that by withdrawing from the EU-mediated agreement the country had returned to its 'constitutional framework.'

The party says that now they may or may not fulfill a stipulation of the EU-mediated agreement which obliges the GD to accept the holding of repeat parliamentary elections if they receive less than 43 per cent of votes in the October 2 municipal elections.

Meanwhile President Salome Zurbishvili is holding meetings with the ruling party and the opposition on the future on the EU-mediated agreement, following her recent meeting with the European Council President Charles Michel who proposed the agreement back in April 2021 (Agenda.ge, August 2, 2021).

25. President Zurbishvili confirms October 2 for local self-government elections

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has confirmed October 2 as the date of local self-government elections of Georgia.

Several hours before Zurbishvili confirmed the election date, the Georgian parliament elected Giorgi Kalandarishvili as the new chair of the Central Election Commission for a six-month term on August 3.

On July 28, the ruling Georgian Dream party annulled its signatory status to the April 19 EU-mediated agreement which resolved a six-month political crisis in the country following the 2020 parliamentary elections and proposed large-scale electoral and judiciary reforms.

Head of the ruling party Irakli Kobakhidze said that the agreement 'had completed its mission' and accused opposition parties of non-fulfilment of the agreement (*Agenda.ge, August 3, 2021*).

26. Zurbishvili Scolds Georgian Dream Over Quitting EU-Brokered Deal

"We demand respect from foreigners and are annoyed by their instructions, their criticisms, their remarks. But to be respected [...] we must respect ourselves and we must respect our word," said Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili in reaction to the Georgian Dream party's unilateral withdrawal from EU-brokered April 19 agreement some six days ago.

In a special briefing, the President said "the post-facto 'discovery' that it turns out we gave up something that was unacceptable and that might harm the country is incomprehensible. In my experience, red lines are crossed before signing." (*Civil.ge, August 3, 2021*)

27. ISFED calls on ruling party to cease discrediting campaign against the organization

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) is concerned about the ruling Georgian Dream's discrediting campaign against the organisation's election monitors, reads an official statement of the ISFED.

The statement reads that on August 1, MP Irakli Beraia verbally insulted an election monitor of the organisation, who was observing the presentation of the ruling party's mayoral candidate. Beraia called the observer a 'liar' and said she was representing a 'fraudulent' and 'United National Movement-abetted' organization (*Agenda.ge, August 3, 2021*).

28. Opposition to nominate Giorgi Sioridze as CEC Deputy Chairperson

The opposition will nominate Giorgi Sioridze for the post of chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC), said MP Sandro Rakviashvili of the Girchi party.

Rakviashvili told journalists that Sioridze would be the nominee of 5 parties (Lelo, Aghmashenebeli Strategy, Citizens, European Socialists, European Democrats). However, he has the support of the larger part of opposition parties.

According to Rakviashvili, the candidate of the United National Movement and Aghmashenebeli Strategy were also considered for this position, however, finally, they agreed on the candidate of Lelo – Giorgi Sioridze.

"After two days of negotiations, we agreed on a candidate at the Girchi party office. Five parties will nominate him today and I hope the whole opposition will support him and he will be elected through the consensus. All parties were involved in the negotiations, including the United National Movement. The negotiations were constructive," Rakviashvili said (*ITV, August 3, 2021*).

❖ COVID-19

29. 3,000 registered individuals absent to receive Pfizer vaccine

3,000 individuals who had registered for the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine were absent yesterday to receive the vaccine, head of Georgia's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Amiran Gamkrelidze stated earlier today.

He said that the special agency is looking into the reasons why the people did not present.

"There is a suspicion that some people (may be anti-vaccine individuals) deliberately register to receive the vaccine (to hamper the vaccination process). The individuals who were registered for the vaccine may have also contracted the virus before the scheduled date. There are reasons and we are studying them," Gamkrelidze said (*Agenda.ge, August 3, 2021*).

30. Delta strain to become dominant, Immunologist says

Covid-19 Delta strain will become dominant in Georgia from the end of August, said allergist-immunologist Bidzina Kulumbegov.

According to Kulumbegov, management of the pandemic under the given daily number of coronavirus cases is critical while the majority of the populations remain unvaccinated. Wearing facemasks should be mandatory both indoors and outdoors.

Kulumbegov urges to prohibit public gatherings of more than 5-10 people, functioning of only open-space restaurants, expansion of testing. He noted that the current epidemiological situation was and the daily death toll might reach 50. "The situation is tragic. Steps should be taken immediately. Implementation of existing regulations requires serious supervision and monitoring," Bidzina Kulumbegov said (*ITV, August 3, 2021*).

31. NCDC Head: 99.7% among coronavirus deaths not vaccinated

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Head of the National Center for Diseases Control and Public Health (NCDC) reported that the centre analyzed the fatalities in 2021 and

determined that 99.7% of dead persons were not vaccinated. According to Gamkrelidze, the possibility of infection is 0.3% among fully vaccinated persons, while 0.9% among those who received first jabs. The NCDC Head spoke about the significance of immunization and the worsened epidemiological situation. He said control would be reinforced on wearing facemasks indoors. The NCDC recommended allowing fully vaccinated people or those with negative PCR test results at social events, festivals and receptions (*1TV, August 3, 2021*).

32. Deputy Health Minister: Number of infected persons to keep high for 10 days

The daily number of infected persons will keep high for 10 days, said Tamar Gabunia, Deputy Health Minister following the Interagency Coordination Council meeting on Tuesday. "This is the peak phase," Gabunia claimed. Deputy Health Minister reported that the imposition of additional regulations or restrictive measures were not planned. She noted that prognoses to be received from international partners would prompt future actions (*1TV, August 3, 2021*).

33. Locals residing across occupied territories to vaccinate without preliminary registration

Locals residing across the occupied territories will be able to receive Covid-19 vaccine jabs without preliminary registration, Georgian Agency for IDPs and Eco-migrants reported.

According to Agency Director Besarion Simonishvili, people from the occupied territories can inoculate at Rukhi Republican Hospital with any out of four available vaccines in the country.

"Caring about every person has utmost significance. We contribute to the immunization process across Georgia. Vaccination is the only weapon to struggle against the global pandemic," Simonishvili claimed.

Director of the Georgian Agency for IDPs, Besarion Simonishvili attended the immunization process at Rukhi Republican Hospital together with the Healthcare Ministry representative, Gvantsa Gasviani and Minister of Health and Social Affairs of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, Levan Chakvetadze (*1TV, August 3, 2021*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

34. Georgia's GDP Growth 18.7% in June

Georgia's real GDP increased by 18.7% year-over-year in June, according to the rapid estimates released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on July 30.

Geostat said growth was registered in manufacturing, financial and insurance activities, transportation and storage, trade, hotels and restaurants, real estate, and construction. A decline was posted in mining and quarrying (*Civil.ge, July 30, 2021*).

35. Georgian government to subsidise 2021 grape harvest due to high grape yield, post-pandemic situation

The Georgian government will subsidise the 2021 grape harvest due to an excess grape yield this season and the post-pandemic situation in order to financially support farmers, announced Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili earlier today.

Garibashvili stated that the price of one kilo of the Rkatsiteli wine variety will not be less than 90 tetri, noting that 'companies will receive an additional 35 tetri from the state.'

PM Garibashvili also announced that this year the country will have an excess grape harvest which will amount to 300,000 tonnes and because of that the 'demand on white grapes will decrease' and farmers may face difficulties with selling the grapes, Garibashvili noted.

He also said that about 6,400 vineyards have been planted in the last eight years, underscoring that while there were 39 wine companies in 2012, by 2020 their number had increased to 350 and revenue grew from 35 million GEL to 323 million GEL (*Agenda.ge, August 2, 2021*).

36. Georgian gov't to subsidise loans for families with newborn children, multi-child families starting Sep. 1

The Georgian government will subsidise mortgage loans for families with newborn children and multi-child families starting September 1, Economy Minister Natia Turnava announced earlier today.

Eligible families will have 12 months starting September 1 to apply for loans.

The terms of the state subsidy are:

- The state will offer a loan subsidy to families who will have a child from September 1 with a maximum loan amount of 200,000 GEL (about \$64,012 /€53,801).
- The state will subsidise six per cent of the loan if the newborn is a first or second child.
- The state will subsidise about eight per cent of the loan if the newborn is a third or fourth child.
- The state will subsidise about four per cent of the loan for families who have three or more children (without having a newborn child).
- The loan interest will be repaid within five years (*Agenda.ge, August 2, 2021*).

37. Georgian PM: 'some companies put 300-400% price tags on drugs, this is unacceptable'

"Some companies put a 300-400% price tag on drugs in Georgia, which is unacceptable", said Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili earlier today.

"We [the Georgian government] should make the right decision shortly as it affects the well-being of our population... Nothing like this is happening in any country", said Garibashvili.

Irakli Garibashvili also noted that the Georgian National Competition Agency is working on the issue and will present an interim monitoring report in the coming days (*Agenda.ge, August 2, 2021*).

Foreign Affairs and Security

38. Moscow Reacts to Agile Spirit Drills

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said today NATO activities near Russia prompt Moscow to "keep a close watch" and "take measures to ensure security," commenting on the U.S. and Georgia-led Agile Spirit 2021 exercises that kicked off in Georgia on July 26.

With 12 Allied states, as well as Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan participating, Russian President Vladimir Putin's Press Secretary claimed the drills are "another proof" that NATO and its military infrastructure "has come in contact" with Russia's borders.

"The scenarios of the drills are drawn up in NATO, and the Alliance is not hiding who the key foe is for them," the Russian state-owned TASS agency cited Peskov

as claiming (*Civil.ge, July 29, 2021*).

39. Georgian PM, Turkish president discuss prospects of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey trilateral cooperation format

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have discussed the prospects and significance of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey trilateral cooperation format during a telephone conversation, the government administration reports.

PM Garibashvili expressed his condolences to President Erdogan on behalf of the Georgian government and the Georgian people for casualties and damage caused by the outbreak of a fire in Turkey located in southwestern Asia which has been raging for several days and killed six people and pledged support.

President Erdogan thanked Garibashvili for his support.

The Georgian government administration reported that PM Garibashvili has already ordered 'assistance [be given] to the friendly and strategic partner Republic of Turkey, if necessary.'

The heads of states have also discussed PM Irakli Garibashvili's visit to Ankara on June 1.

"Prime Minister [Garibashvili] thanked Recep Tayyip Erdogan for the high-level hospitality," the Georgian government administration reported.

President Erdogan invited Georgian PM Garibashvili to Turkey once again, noting the importance of holding a high-level strategic council meeting in the near future 'which is the most important format for discussing current issues on the bilateral agenda.' (*Civil.ge, August 2, 2021*)

40. US House of Representatives passes bill allocating \$132 mln in aid to Georgia

The US House of Representatives has passed a bill on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPs) for 2022 which allocates 132 million USD in financial aid for Georgia and expresses 'strong support' for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has stated.

The bill says that no country will receive financial assistance from the US if they recognise the independence of Georgia's two Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

The bill says that within the Countering Russia Influence Fund, \$305 million will be allocated in total for countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, including for Georgia, to develop law enforcement and security capabilities and to come closer to the US and NATO.

Part of the funds will go towards ensuring the implementation of the EU Association Agreements and trade agreements and the reduction of political and economic pressure from Russia (*Agenda.ge, August 2, 2021*).