



Weekly News Digest on Georgia November 2-7, 2021

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Internal Affairs

❖ Local Elections 2021 & Political Developments

1. Two Judge-Members Elected to High Council of Justice amid Criticism

The 30th conference of judges elected two judge-members for four-year terms to the High Council of Justice, the body overseeing the judiciary in Georgia, after previous holders of the seats resigned before their terms were up.

Tea Leonidze, appointed in October 2020, resigned three years early, while Tamar Oniani, appointed in March 2018, resigned some four months before her term had ended. They did not comment publicly on their reasonings for their decisions. The HCoJ announced their resignation only after the replacements had already been appointed.

The conference, coming a day after the bitterly-contested October 30 local runoffs, was attended by 266 justices, who elected Paata Silagadze and Giorgi Goginashvili to the posts. Both are judges of the Investigative Panel of the Tbilisi Court of Appeals.

Silagadze was previously nominated for a position at the Supreme Court but was voted down by Parliament in 2019. He was named again as a top court candidate shortly after, but the Parliament halted the appointments in early 2020. According to media reports, Silagadze was the justice who found inadmissible an appeal on the pre-trial detention of suspects in the controversial Cartographers' Case.

Goginashvili, before his tenure in the appellate court, was the Tbilisi City Court judge who ordered pre-trial detention for ex-mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugulava in 2014 (*Civil.ge, November 2, 2021*).

2. EU Condemns 'Fifth Setback' in Georgian Judiciary

EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell today said the recent appointment of two judge-members to the High Council of Justice was "a fifth setback in the area of the judiciary and rule of law in Georgia."

He stressed the appointments were "hasty, non-transparent and non-competitive," and at odds with Georgia's commitments to increasing the independence, accountability, quality and trust in the Judiciary, in line with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement.

The EU Ambassador highlighted that the appointments took place the day after local elections, and only four days after the agenda of the conference of judges was published. He pointed out that candidates were not announced in advance, and the posts became vacant after previous holders, two women, unexpectedly resigned before their terms expired.

The statement recalled previous four setbacks for Georgia's judiciary – the appointments to the Supreme Court on July 12, failure to fulfill the necessary conditions to receive an extra 75 million EUR in EU macro-financial assistance by September 2021, backtracking on amending rules on appointing the Prosecutor General, and "the lack – so far – of credible investigation and prosecution of the organizers of the 5 July violence targeting over 50 journalists and activists

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(*Civil.ge*, November 3, 2021).

3. Judiciary Developments: U.S. Slams 'Closed System'

The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi slammed late on November 2 the rushed appointments of two judge members in the High Council of Justice, a body overseeing judiciary in Georgia, as "neither competitive, nor transparent."

"It is disappointing that the Judiciary missed the opportunity to show transparency and failed again to elect its representatives through a competitive and democratic election process," the strongly-worded missive highlighted.

The Embassy asserted that "many qualified, professional members of the judiciary who are shut out by such a closed system deserve better."

"Judiciary leaders maintain the judiciary is unfairly criticized for the lack of transparent and merit-based appointments, promotions, and transfers," the statement went on, adding: "Yet when the Conference of Judges rushes through important decisions without competition or transparency, it demonstrates unwillingness to embrace reforms that would increase transparency, accountability and public trust in the appointment process, the candidates, and in the High Council of Justice."

The U.S. Embassy noted that there was little advance notice of the intent to fill the two seats left open by the pre-term resignations. It slammed the process over the lack of consultations or participation by a "broad range of qualified candidates," and that of meaningful engagement by civil society and other relevant actors (*Civil.ge*, November 2, 2021).

4. Kutaisi Precinct Member Accuses GD of Pressure to Falsify Elections

Iza Chirgadze, member of #90 Precinct Election Commission in Kutaisi, the key battleground where opposition hopeful narrowly lost to Georgian Dream candidate, accused the governing party of pressure to falsify the runoff vote.

In a briefing at the United National Movement's office in Kutaisi on November 1, Chirgadze said a Georgian Dream representative, named Inga, called her multiple times on Election Day on October 30 and instructed her to allow people not registered at her polling station to vote.

Chirgadze asserted she turned away two persons not registered in her precinct's list of voters, noting the individuals were "other people, with other Identification Cards." It was unclear from her remarks if the persons carried ID papers of someone else or their own.

After turning away the two, Chirgadze claimed she received another call from the alleged GD representative, reprimanding her and commanding her to "carry out" the instruction. The PEC member said she still turned away several other unauthorized voters after the call.

Chirgadze noted she alarmed Mariam Nemsadze, UNM's observer at the precinct, about the alleged pressure and set up a meeting for November 1. She said that Georgian Dream representatives, on the same day, made several attempts to meet her and also supposedly informed police that Chirgadze had been abducted (*Civil.ge*, November 2, 2021).

5. 201 Polling Stations Recounted Amid Rows over Void Ballots

29 District Election Commissions recounted the results of randomly selected 201 precincts – seven polling stations from each District – on November 1.

The process was marked by several loud quarrels between DEC members over invalid ballots, including in Batumi and Zugdidi, some of the key battlegrounds

farms creating energy
crisis in Abkhazia'

Foreign Affairs

29. PM Concludes Glasgow
Visit

30. Georgian Defense
Minister Visits Armenia

of the runoffs with narrow victories by Georgian Dream candidates.

Giorgi Kalandarishvili, Chair of the Central Election Commission, said today the recounts led to minor changes in some precincts, but have not affected the overall results.

According to the CEC Chair, results of both mayoral and majoritarian runoffs were recounted. Of the 201 precincts, mayoral runoffs were recounted in 194 and majoritarian second rounds in 33. Both races were held in some of the precincts. Of the mayoral runoff results from the 194 precincts, the tally remained unaltered in 172. In the rest, candidates lost 31 and gained 53 votes, according to the CEC chair.

As for the majoritarian runoff results from the 33 polling stations, Kalandarishvili said the results were unaffected in 27. In the rest, majoritarian hopefuls lost seven and gained five votes, he reported (*Civil.ge, November 2, 2021*).

6. Kobakhidze Says GD 'Not Obligated' to Make Constitutional Amendments

Georgian Dream chair Irakli Kobakhidze suggested today that keeping the threshold for parliamentary elections at 5% "could be better for democratic development," discussing the constitutional changes that cleared the first hearing on September 7, and would lower the barrier to 2%.

MP Kobakhidze maintained that the Georgian Dream will continue discussions about lowering the threshold, albeit noting that "even if nothing is changed in the constitution, it will not harm [Georgia's] democratic development."

The ruling party chairperson said the ruling party "has no obligation" to adopt any constitutional amendments. The proposed changes were part of the EU-brokered April 19 Agreement between the GD and opposition, which the Georgian Dream quit in July (*Civil.ge, November 2, 2021*).

7. Lelo Faction Boycotts Parliamentary Sessions

The parliamentary faction Lelo-Partnership for Georgia announced today boycott of the plenary sessions until the Georgian Dream government ensures an "adequate protection" of hunger-striking Mikheil Saakashvili's health and "neutralizes all threats" that might endanger his life.

Jailed ex-President Saakashvili has been on hunger strike since his detention on October 1. His doctors, lawyers, and Public Defender have all raised concerns over his deteriorating health and demanded his transfer to a civilian hospital. But the authorities insist Saakashvili will be transferred to a prison clinic if necessary.

"We believe that ensuring Mikheil Saakashvili's health and his right to life is today the main responsibility of the current Georgian government," MP Salome Samadashvili, deputy chair of the Faction, said in a press briefing.

Samadashvili, who broke from UNM ranks after signing EU-brokered April 19 deal, stressed both the government and Georgia's international partners should regard the decision as a "serious warning about the acute crisis the country is about to enter."

Alluding to first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia's death in mysterious circumstances in 1993 in western Georgia, she said "our country simply does not have the resources to overcome another tragic case involving a former head of state." (*Civil.ge, November 2, 2021*)

8. Opposition Rallies in Batumi

The United National Movement, Lelo, Droa, Girchi-More Freedom and European

Georgia parties rallied yesterday in Batumi, the coastal city where Georgian Dream claimed razor-thin victory in October 30 mayoral runoff, to protest “void” elections.

UNM chair, Tbilisi Mayoral candidate Nika Melia and other opposition leaders, including Lelo leaders Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, and Elene Khoshtaria of Droa, have attended the event, the opposition’s first major post-election rally in the run up to planned large-scale protest in Tbilisi on November 6.

Addressing the crowd, Nika Melia said they would follow the path of rallies and use “all available non-violent and peaceful means to return the stolen elections back.”

Defending the idea of street protests, Melia asked the crowd: “Should we let this state turn into Belarus?!” “Large-scale protests will not slow down until the truth prevails,” he stressed.

The UNM chair also asserted that the pre-election coalition with other opposition parties would expand: “It is my belief, that this country should have coalition government in the future, which is the opportunity for the country to refuse the Soviet past and proudly walk the path towards the European family. This is the reckoning of every sane person, except for the team of Bidzina Ivanishvili.” (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*)

9. State Security Service Warns Against Calls for Revolution

The State Security Service of Georgia warned on November 3 that the recent calls for a revolution and overthrow of the government, made on social networks and media outlets, constitute a criminal offense and are punishable by up to three years in prison.

The agency said, without elaborating, that it will use all legal means available to prevent a violent change of the government.

“We once again call on destructive forces to refrain from committing criminal offenses and to remain within the legal framework,” the Security Service said (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*).

10. Demanding Saakashvili’s Transfer to Civil Hospital, Khoshtaria Begins Hunger Strike

Accusing the Georgian Dream authorities of taking “sadistic and cynical revenge” against jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili, Elene Khoshtaria of opposition Droa party said today she will be hunger striking in the Parliament unless hunger-striking Saakashvili is transferred to a civilian hospital.

The development comes as the government keeps insisting on transferring Saakashvili, on hunger strike since his detention on October 1, to prison hospital if his condition worsens. The former President, his lawyers, doctor and the Public Defender reject the idea, citing multiple risks, and demand his transfer to civilian clinic.

“It is unfortunate, that we live in the country of 21st century, where institutions are cancelled and captured, and we are forced to fight with such extreme measures,” Khoshtaria noted (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*).

11. President Zurabishvili Hails ‘Peaceful Elections’

President Salome Zurabishvili has congratulated Georgians on local self-government „elections held peacefully despite unprecedented polarization and the use of hate speech.”

"Elections were held freely, and significantly improved results of the opposition is directly linked to the free expression of the will of voters," Georgian President stated in her late evening press conference on November 3.

Rebuffing the opposition's claims that the outcome in several tight mayoral races were thwarted by "vote-rigging," Salome Zurbashvili said narrow vote is characteristic for "democratic elections."

She said however that "in reality, no one shall regard themselves as winners, because neither the country, nor the society is the winner."

In her 13-minute speech, the Georgian President also said the country now needs stability and calming down "to return to the path to development."

Noting that "destabilization only helps external forces," the President noted depolarization cannot be achieved through rallies, destabilization, constant calls for new elections or quitting and boycotting the Parliament (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*).

12. Patriarch Appeals Saakashvili to End Hunger Strike

Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II has called on jailed former President Mikheil Saakashvili to end hunger strike.

Patriarch's secretary Mikael Botkoveli, who visited Saakashvili in prison today to pass on the letter penned by Ilia II, told reporters "it is an appeal and an advise of the Patriarch that [Saakashvili] finishes hunger strike."

Botkoveli also told journalists that the Orthodox Church will not appeal President Salome Zurbashvili to pardon Saakashvili "because it is the President who exercises this right." (*Civil.ge, November 4, 2021*)

13. Penitentiary service releases footage of former pres. Saakashvili eating at Rustavi prison while on hunger strike

The Special Penitentiary Service of Georgia has posted a footage and photographs on social media of the imprisoned former president Mikheil Saakashvili receiving food at the prison facility in the city of Rustavi, amid contradictory claims made by penitentiary and justice officials and opposition figures about the hunger strike and health of the high-profile inmate.

In a move aimed at rejecting claims of worsening health conditions for Saakashvili, as claimed by the former president himself as well as the political opposition holding a rally in his support outside the detention facility, the agency posted a recording of the politician eating at the prison, with the recording bearing the date of November 1 (*Agenda.ge, November 6, 2021*).

14. State Inspector on Saakashvili's Treatment, Personal Data

The State Inspector Service said that the penitentiary establishment is obliged to respect the inmate's will to refuse food, but it still has "a positive obligation to protect the life and health of the person deprived of liberty through effective and prompt actions."

Improper measures taken by relevant authorities during a hunger strike of a person deprived of liberty may otherwise "give a rise to human rights violation risks," the agency warned.

Citing case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the Service stressed the right of an inmate to receive timely and necessary medical treatment, on par with services accessible to the general public (*Civil.ge, November 5, 2021*).

15. State Security Service claims reveal of plans for "assassination", blocking of institutions directed by Mikheil Saakashvili

In brief comments for the local press on Saturday, the security agency said it had obtained "operational information" indicating "certain political groups" were "actively discussing the possibility [...] [of] assassination of one of the leaders of the opposition."

The SSS said the plans also included involvement of "former employees of the law-enforcement agencies" in rallies planned in Tbilisi as well as outside the prison facility in the city of Rustavi, located outside the capital city, as well as recruitment of "certain officers" of the current law enforcement, with the goal of "escalat[ing] the situation to the highest extent possible."

Blocking of state bodies including the parliament, administration offices of the government and the president and the interior and justice ministries are also in plans of the groups, the service's briefing said.

The security body spokesperson did not name specific groups or individuals in the comments, but said the actions - with "aim [of] overthrowing state power" - were being planned by Saakashvili via instructions issued to "opposition parties" through visitors he received at the Rustavi facility.

16. Justice minister: hearing of 2008 Imedi channel case against Saakashvili could be held at Rustavi prison

Georgia's justice minister Rati Bregadze has revealed the nearest hearings of a case against Mikheil Saakashvili could take place at the penitentiary facility in the city of Rustavi where the politician is located, as the United National Movement-led rallies are set to launch outside the prison and in capital Tbilisi on Saturday. Bregadze said on Friday the ministry recommended the hearings - for the case over a 2008 storming of Imedi channel by law enforcement, when Saakashvili headed the UNM government - to be held at the detention facility "on security grounds".

The comments followed those by the State Security Service on Friday, in which the security body said it had "operational information" over plans for "assassination" of an opposition figure and blocking of government institutions by organisers of large rallies expected on Saturday in support of Saakashvili.

In his comments, the justice minister referred to the SSS briefing, as well as an earlier release by the service that said opposition forces could mobilise and interfere if the former president was moved out of the facility for any reason (*Agenda.ge, November 6, 2021*).

17. Parliament Speaker Kuchava visits opposition leader Khoshtaria on hunger strike

Georgian Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava visited Droa opposition party leader Elene Khoshtaria, who has been on a hunger strike in the parliament building for three days, demanding former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili's transfer to a civil clinic rather than a prison hospital. Kuchava said that he visited Khoshtaria to discuss her health (*Agenda.ge, November 5, 2021*).

18. Opposition protest outside Rustavi prison with demand of moving former president Saakashvili to private clinic

Nika Melia, the chairman of the United National Movement opposition party, has given the government 24 hours to ensure the imprisoned former president Mikheil Saakashvili is moved from prison to a private clinic, as law enforcement made arrests at the opposition's rally outside the detention facility in the city of Rustavi on Saturday.

Melia said at the protest the opposition would hold a mass rally on Freedom Square in capital Tbilisi on Monday evening if the ruling party did not ensure the high-profile inmate of the No 12 prison facility was moved to a civilian clinic (*Agenda.ge*, November 6, 2021).

19. Judges Accuse EU, U.S. Embassies of Meddling in Georgia's Internal Affairs

The Administrative Committee of the Conference of Judges, the self-governing body of Georgian common courts, has lashed out at foreign diplomats, among others, in response to criticism over the recent appointment of two-judge members to the High Council of Justice.

The statement comes after the EU Delegation dubbed the appointments a "fifth setback" in Georgian judiciary, while the U.S. Embassy slammed the process for being "neither competitive, nor transparent." President Salome Zurbishvili said electing the two members was "in this form and at this time is an incomprehensible step."

Decrying "exaggerated, unjustified and contradictory" criticism, the Administrative Committee stressed all embassy employees, including the mission heads, are obligated by Article 41 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to respect the laws and regulations of the recipient state and not to interfere in its internal affairs.

"Any official or organization must realize the said decision by the Conference was neither incomprehensible nor a fifth setback," the Committee stressed, going on to argue the appointments instead demonstrated judicial independence.

The statement highlighted that the Georgian judiciary "steadfastly maintains political neutrality," and makes any decision in accordance with relevant legislation (*Civil.ge*, November 4, 2021).

20. Judges Distance Themselves from Statement Slamming EU, U.S. Embassies

Over a dozen Georgian judges have distanced themselves from the November 4 statement by the Administrative Committee of the Conference of Judges accusing the EU and U.S. Embassies of meddling in the country's internal affairs.

The Committee had lashed out at the Embassies in response to criticism over the recent appointment of two judge-members to the High Council of Justice. The election was intransparent, hasty and noncompetitive, according to the Embassies' assessments.

Ketevan Meskhishvili, justice of the Tbilisi Appellate Court, stressed in a Facebook post on November 4 that with the efforts of Georgia's international partners, "we have for years tried to create a court [system] that is more trusted and respected."

Referring to the Committee statement, she highlighted that justices addressing the international partners "in this spirit means a missed opportunity for our country and the future of our children."

In the comments section of Meskhishvili's statement, Tbilisi City Court judges Eka Areshidze and Tamar Khajomia, Kutaisi City Court judge Tsitsino Kikvadze concurred with their colleague's assessment.

Meanwhile, Tbilisi Appellate Court justice Gela Badriashvili, Tetritskaro District Court judge Badri Niparishvili and Gori District Court justice Levan Darbaidze extended gratitude and support to Georgia's Western partners (*Civil.ge*,

November 5, 2021).

21. GD Chair Sees the “Mark of the Beast” Behind the Opposition

Ruling Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze said the apocalyptic number of the beast — six hundred and sixty-six — is hidden behind the opposition’s upcoming post-election rally in Tbilisi on Saturday.

Speaking with pro-ruling party Imedi TV late on November 4, MP Kobakhidze said: “They have gathered 400-500 people in different regions. They will gather here too [in Tbilisi], on November 6, at 6pm, trying to bring 6,000 people. They have revealed their code, this is their true face.”

The Georgian Dream chairperson said the United National Movement and other protesting opposition parties “have no resources either for street [fight], or for [snap] elections, nothing.”

MP Kobakhidze expressed his conviction that his party “very soon we will switch to a completely different agenda and there will be no mention of them [UNM] from our side.” Because, the GD chairperson went on, “even making a mention of them is damaging for Georgian politics, democracy and in general, for the development of our country.” (*Civil.ge, November 5, 2021*)

22. CEC recounts votes from 274 polling stations after election run-offs, results unchanged

The Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC) has recounted the votes from 274 polling stations following the October 30 municipal election run-offs to verify their validity.

The CEC says the results remain unchanged, and the process did not affect the overall results of elections.

In accordance with recent legal changes, the CEC was obliged to recount votes from 140 polling stations, while the remaining polling station votes were recounted based on complaints.

The CEC says that it has received a total of 139 complaints to recount votes.

73 of the 139 complaints were submitted by political parties and 66 by observing organizations (*Agenda.ge, November 5, 2021*).

23. Girchi opposition submits bill to parliament requesting decriminalisation of marijuana purchase, possession

Libertarian opposition political party Girchi has submitted a bill to the Georgian parliament requesting the decriminalisation of the purchase and possession of marijuana.

Girchi MP Iago Khvichia states that people should not be prosecuted for the purchase and possession of marijuana when the consumption of it is legal per a 2018 ruling of the country’s Constitutional Court.

Marijuana use became decriminalised in 2015 in Georgia.

“[Despite the legalisation of marijuana use] the persecution of people in the country still continues. We received information from the Ministry of Justice that 311 people are on probation and 84 people are being punished for consuming, buying and storing cannabis and its products,” Khvichia said (*Agenda.ge, November 5, 2021*).

❖ COVID-19

24. Georgian medical experts: COVID daily cases may exceed 7,000

Georgian health officials and medical experts are expecting coronavirus daily cases to exceed 7,000 amid a low rate of vaccination, not adhering to mandatory

guidelines, and large political rallies across the country.

"We are facing a coronavirus genocide," medical expert, professor Devi Tabidze stated earlier today.

COVID-19 has claimed 10,185 lives in Georgia since April 2020, while 49,114 remain infected with the virus in the country.

Daily infections have ranged between 4,000-5,000 over the past several days and are maintaining an upward trend.

Overall, 1,040,022 individuals have received at least one dose of the vaccine in the country since March 2021, while 944,520 people have been fully vaccinated, out of 3.7 million (*Agenda.ge, November 3, 2021*).

25. Coordination council to specify date for COVID-19 'green passport' activation soon

The coordination council is reviewing the COVID-19 'green passport' package, proposed by the Georgian National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) in late October, and working to specify the date of its activation, Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia announced earlier today.

She noted that so far the 'green pass' mechanism has been used in the country only in several cases such as large conferences and sporting events, emphasising that it should 'be used wider.'

"The Green Pass mechanism is accompanied by a number of ethical aspects which are already being worked on and will be ready in the near future," Gabunia said.

COVID-19 'green passports' will contain information on the vaccination status of an individual, PCR test results, and confirmation of recovery from COVID-19, if such exists (*Agenda.ge, November 3, 2021*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

26. Annual Inflation Hits 12.8% in October

Georgia's annual inflation rate in October amounted to 12.8%, the National Statistics Office (Geostat) reported today. On a monthly basis, meanwhile, consumer prices increased by 1.3%.

The annual inflation rate was primarily driven by price changes in transport (19.6% increase); food and non-alcoholic beverages (18.4% increase); housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels (11.9% increase); furnishings, household equipment and maintenance (11.3%); restaurants and hotels (11.2% increase); health (8.4% increase) (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*).

❖ Occupied Territories

27. Defying Resignation Demands, Abkhaz 'Interior Minister' Returns to Work

Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania will keep Dmitri Dbar, temporarily suspended from his functions as 'the interior minister' in the aftermath of September 30 Sokhumi shooting incident, in defiance of continued calls for his resignation.

The decision was announced today after prosecution found no signs of *corpus delicti* – requisite elements of crime – in the actions of Dbar during the high-profile incident, which involved an opposition lawmaker, war veterans and policemen.

"Such incidents are unacceptable in the future," the Kremlin-backed leader told Dbar today, who will get through by disciplinary sanction only.

"I was born into the family of a veteran of the Patriotic War of the people of

Abkhazia* and grew up surrounded by veterans,” Dbar told Bzhania, adding: “From the first day I wanted to apologize to the victims of the incident and shake their hands, but I didn’t have such an opportunity.” (*Civil.ge*, November 3, 2021)

28. Democracy Research Institute: ‘bitcoin mining farms creating energy crisis in Abkhazia’

‘Bitcoin mining farms are creating an energy crisis in Georgia’s Russia-occupied Abkhazia region’, says the Democracy Research Institute (DRI).

DRI notes that even with the completion of the rehabilitation works on the Enguri HPP, the energy crisis could not be improved in Abkhazia due to the bitcoin mining farms.

In its official statement DRI says that the free supply of electricity to Abkhazia from the Georgian power system, in particular from the “shared” Enguri HPP, has prospered this sector of the shadow economy and turned it into a real disaster for the region.

“In addition to the fact that the amount of electricity consumed by mining farms causes a supply collapse and imposes an immeasurably large social burden on ordinary consumers, it also hinders the production and expansion of other types of economic activities”, reads an official statement of DRI.

DRI says that on the one hand, the power institutions are unable to regulate the illegal business of bitcoin production due to the flexibility of this sector, and on the other hand, the corrupt factors of such flexibility become impossible to be addressed for the de facto authorities.

“Due to the scale of corruption, the proceeds from the bitcoin production are divided between the owners of the illegal business, the representatives of de facto authorities, and its law enforcement agencies”, says DRI.

In its statement DRI also says that privatization of the power supply is on the agenda, which seems to be in Russia’s interests, but is delayed by the de facto government of Abkhazia (*Agenda.ge*, November 3, 2021).

Foreign Affairs

29. PM Concludes Glasgow Visit

On November 1-2, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili has participated in and addressed the World Leaders Summit at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference, held in Glasgow, the United Kingdom.

On the margins on the summit, he also held meetings with his Slovenian and Dutch counterparts, newly-appointed Austrian Chancellor, as well as the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

In his November 1 conference speech at the conference, PM Garibashvili announced that “Georgia commits to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than half compared to 1990 levels by 2030,” adding that his country plans to achieve these goals by “diversifying the renewable energy sector and increasing the share of wind and solar energy in the common energy market; by transforming the country’s urban mobility; introduction of low-carbon approaches in the fields of construction, industry and waste management; by developing climate-adapted technologies and services.”

Meetings with European Leaders

Also on November 1, the Georgian PM met with **Slovenian counterpart Janez Janša**, with the discussion focusing on the Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia. The two PMs discussed the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit and the need

to apply the differentiated approach to the partners, as well as the importance of offering more practical mechanisms to Associated Trio (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) countries.

PM Janša, on his part, emphasized the priorities of Slovenian presidency of the EU Council and expressed support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic efforts.

Georgia's EU integration and the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit was central topic for PM Garibashvili's meeting with **Austrian Chancellor** Alexander Schallenberg on November 1. The PM stressed Georgia's commitment to European integration and the effective implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

PM Irakli Garibashvili also held the meeting with his **Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte** on November 1. Georgian Government's Press Service said the parties expressed mutual interest in deepening cooperation in various fields, including trade-economic, tourism, and "maritime interaction." At the meeting, parties discussed the engagement of the Netherlands in the implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, and Georgia's goal to make a formal application for full EU membership in 2024.

At the meeting with the **EBRD President Odile Renaud-Basso**, parties discussed possible cooperation areas in various sectors and the importance of supporting small and medium enterprises, among others, reported Georgian Government's Press Service on November 1 (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*).

30. Georgian Defense Minister Visits Armenia

Georgian Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze met his Armenian counterpart Arshak Karapetyan and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan yesterday, as part of his November 2-3 visit to Yerevan.

The Georgian and Armenian Defense Ministers discussed the current and future defense cooperation between the two countries and stressed the importance of a "neighborly, friendly relationships," as well as of peace and stability in the region, Georgian Defense Ministry's press service reported.

The Ministers also talked about strengthening the partnership in areas, including military education, military medicine, and multinational exercises.

During his meeting with PM Nikol Pashinyan, the conversation revolved around defense partnership and regional issues, the Armenian Prime Minister's press service wrote (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2021*).