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BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

The survey was conducted from June 23rd to July 13th, using a face-to-face survey method. The study surveyed 2,000 people aged 18 and over living in Georgia (excluding the occupied territories).

According to the results of the public poll of 'Edison Research,' the Chairman of European Georgia is the leader among the probable candidates for the Prime Minister from the opposition.

Citizens answer the question about who they think should be the prime ministerial candidate of the opposition coalition in case of victory. David Bakradze is the leader with 26% of the voting, Giorgi Vashadze follows with 20% of the voting, Grigol Vashadze – with 18%, Mikheil Saakashvili – with 7%, Nika Melia – 5%, Shalva Natelashvili – 4%, Irma Inashvili – 2, and Mamuka Khazaradze – with 2%.

In addition to party ratings, the Edison Research survey focused on the majoritarian constituencies in Tbilisi where the opposition has nominated common candidates. Opposition parties gathered at the Labor Party office to nominate candidates in six of Tbilisi's eight constituencies (excluding Saburtalo and Didube-Chugureti).

Elene Khoshtaria, a mayoral candidate in Tbilisi for the Movement for

Liberty - European Georgia, has the best rate out of 6 districts of Tbilisi with 46% of the voting.

The citizens also answered the question: if the elections were held today, who would you vote for? Georgian dream got 39% of votes, the United National Movement – 16%, European Georgia is supported by 5% of the voting, and 20% of respondents have not yet made a decision. These results show that the Georgian Dream will not be able to form a government on their own. Per the constitutional amendments passed earlier this month, an election bloc or party which receives less than 40.54% of votes in the proportional elections will not be able to form a government. The ruling Georgian Dream party says that they do not trust in the polls commissioned by opposition channels.

"Much has been written about the July results of the Edison Research study although a comparative analysis between the data from these waves is not publicly available. We have tried to do a little analysis based on public information," stated Giorgi Abramishvili, a member of the party reformer, analyst and marketer.

The data of the first two waves were published in the media, both as natural and as a result of allocation data. In other words, the interested public had the opportunity to easily see the share of voters who at the time of the poll had not decided

Edison Research pre-election survey results

ON JULY 16TH, THE RESULTS OF THE THIRD WAVE OF EDISON RESEARCH'S PRE-ELECTION POLL WERE RELEASED.



► Georgian Dream is not able to form its own government, according to the survey results.

increased significantly in the last 6 months, especially after the March data, and the number of 'undecided' voters decreased to 20% according to the July results. The ratings of the main rivals of the ruling party, the National Movement and European Georgia also decreased slightly. It's possible to come to the logical conclusion that a part of the 'undecided' voters, almost a third, decided to vote for the Georgian Dream. What could've caused this? COVID-19. Georgia managed to keep the rate of infected and deceased at a very low level. As a 'green zone,' which, obviously, had a logical reflection in the citizens, the activities of the opposition parties were excluded during the quarantine and curfew hours, the meeting with the voters, and the media was completely covered with information related to the coronavirus. As a result, the balance of power, as well as the ratio of communication between the government and the opposition, has changed dramatically in favor of the ruling party.

The above conclusion is supported by another fact. On July 20th, the presentation of the majoritarian candidates of the Georgian Dream was held, which was attended by Tengiz Tsertsvadze, Amiran Gamkrelidze, Levan Ratiani, Paata Imnadze - now well-respected people who have made a great contribution to the fight against coronavirus in Georgia. There were two more people from the medical field in the list of MPs directly - the Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Adjara Zaal Mikeladze as a majoritarian candidate in Kobuleti and Zaza Lominadze as a majoritarian candidate in Kutaisi.

It is also interesting to look at the results of the three waves of pre-election research conducted by Edison Research using the allocation method already. The trend of change is the same, though already more pronounced. The Georgian Dream is supported by almost half of the allotted voters, its closest rival, the National Movement - one-fifth of the electorate.

Despite such results, the representatives of the Georgian Dream still expressed dissatisfaction and an ironic attitude towards the study. They say that the rating of the Georgian Dream is actually higher. At the same time, statements from the media and various officials are increasingly heard about the deterioration of the coronavirus-related situation, which may give rise to suspicions that we can expect another 'curfew' and 'quarantine' in late August or early September.

Since 2004, as the sole provider of Election Day Polling data to the National Election Pool, Edison has conducted exit polls to project and analyze results for every major presidential primary and general election.



► Giorgi Abramishvili's response to the survey.

who to vote for in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Clearly, it is impossible to predict with 100% accuracy how a voter will behave on the election day. Thus, allocation is fully justified. However, it is interesting why the media 'grabbed' the results of the allocation on the first and second waves, but did not emphasize the same in the case of the July results.

At first glance, it is noticeable that the rating of the Georgian Dream has

UN and EU launch ambitious initiative for gender equality in Eastern Partnership

EU LAUNCHES NEW PROJECT TO TARGET ORGANISED CRIME IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

With support from the European Union (EU), the two UN sister agencies will work with government bodies and civil society partners in 6 countries to challenge deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, increase men's involvement in domestic work and childcare, and engage with potential perpetrators to prevent gender-based violence.

UN Women and UNFPA, together with the EU, have launched a 3-year regional programme to tackle gender stereotypes and gender-based violence in six countries of the Eastern Partnership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The programme, entitled "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence," ultimately seeks to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for women and men by challenging perceptions about men's and women's roles in the family and in society and working to eliminate gender-based violence.

"This is our first regional programme covering gender equality in the Eastern Partnership region and we are intensely proud of it," said Lawrence Meredith, Director for Neighbourhood East in the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations at the European Commission.

"We can and we will do more to develop this underused economic and social potential with our Eastern neighbours. As we emerge from the pandemic, we will propose that the future Eastern Partnership be more inclusive," she added.

A first of its kind, the programme has been informed by an in-depth situation analysis and intergovernmental consultations with the 6 countries. It is designed to engage a wide



► Photo: EEAS

range of government bodies, civil society organizations, and individuals.

Alia El-Yassir, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia informed, that it's planned to work closely with governments and civil society organisations in the 6 countries to ensure the success of the programme: "This work is even more crucial now as the COVID-19 crisis has put into stark relief the imbalanced distribution of responsibilities based on traditional gender stereotypes."

The programme aims at achieving real behavioural change. It relies on strategies designed to challenge structural gender barriers and norms, with particular emphasis on transforming gender-stereotyped behaviour, strengthening men's involvement in parenting and domestic responsibilities, increasing men's access to parental leave, and reducing the number of people affected by gender-based violence through prevention interventions with potential perpetrators.

The programme has a budget of €7,875,000 and is anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, launched by the UN in 2015, and the EU Action Plan 2016-2020 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Trans-



► Photo: Europol

forming the Lives of Girls and Women Through EU External Relations. It provides a unique opportunity for the EU and the participating countries to affect social discourse, perceptions, and practices related to gender equality with the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality and related SDGs.

A new Europol-led project, funded by the European Commission will focus on strengthening the capacity of the above mentioned 6 countries' to fight organised crime more effectively. The project will contribute to reducing crime and creating a safer living space for citizens in the region.

Catherine De Bolle, Executive Director of Europol, highlighted that this initiative is an important step in developing strong operational cooperation

and trust between the law enforcement authorities of the EU Member States and our Eastern partners. "Our aligned efforts will bring a stronger response to the common challenges and cross-border threats we face. Working together is crucial to connect the dots between criminal networks in the EU and the neighbourhood region," she said.

Lawrence Meredith stated that organised crime networks operate across national borders and destabilise the entire region and Tackling serious and organised crime is a shared challenge by the EU and its partner countries. "By strengthening the strategic and operational cooperation between Europol and partner countries, we are proud to contribute to joint investigation successes," she added.

Through this 4 year-long initiative, Europol will support the cooperation between involved law enforcement authorities both on a strategic and operational level. Special funding will enable the Eastern Partnership countries to participate in operational activities against some of the ten most significant threats to the EU security listed under the EU Policy Cycle. Eastern Partnership countries will potentially be able to take part in operations in the framework of the annually updated EM-PACT action plans, which target criminal groups active in the ten priority crime areas for the EU. Existing networks for information sharing and operational cooperation may be further extended into joint investigations to improve the effectiveness in fighting transnational organised crime.

"Located along the Black Sea and forming part of the 'heroin route' from the Middle East to Europe, all Eastern Partner countries are threatened by organised criminal groups active in the area," says the Europol press release. These groups are involved in migrant smuggling, organised property crime, trafficking in human beings, firearms and drug trafficking, money laundering, and other related crimes such as document fraud. These criminal syndicates threaten not only the safety and security of people but also the stability of the Eastern Partnership region and the whole EU. More cooperation between law enforcement authorities of the EU Member States and the Eastern Neighbourhood countries is crucial to improving the effectiveness of the common response to organised crime across borders.

As part of a larger €10 million EU cooperation initiative, the EU has dedicated €2.5 million to support the project that will run for the next four years. Two other components are focused on law enforcement training and threat assessment (a project led by Cepol with the participation of Europol) and on criminal asset recovery (managed by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute - UNICRI).

FRIDAY JULY 24

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 30°C
Night Partly Cloud
Low: 21°C

SATURDAY JULY 25

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 29°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 21°C

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Georgian government maintains contract with Frontera

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Georgian government has decided not to terminate its contract with Frontera and to allow the company to resume operations in the part of the original contract area where oil production has been underway since Soviet times.

According to the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, about 1% of the state's exploration territory is in question, as about 99% of this territory has already been returned to the state by Frontera, according to an arbitral award.

The official statement of the Ministry says that the decision of the state is conditioned by the strategic tasks facing the country:

"It is important for Georgia to have an international reputation related to the country's investment environment, which constantly receives high marks, and despite the absolute position of the state in the dispute with Frontera, it is inadmissible to cast a shadow on this feature in any way."

According to the document, relations with the United States, which is our country's main strategic partner, are fundamental for the country. And although the issue of Frontera is not a topic of discussion in official relations at all, it is unequivocally undesirable for Georgia to have an excuse in the highly diverse political spectrum of the United States to use this absolutely routine commercial dispute to the detriment of strategic relations between our countries.

"Georgia's investment image and close relationship with the United States are important, first and foremost, for its relationship with the American business community, because special attention is always paid to attracting American investment to Georgia," reads the statement

According to the Ministry of Economy, the government's decision allows Frontera Resources Georgia Corporation to stop mobilizing and dealing with lobbyists, instead of concentrating on fulfilling its obligations to employees. With multiple lenders and pursuit of search engine optimization, the Ministry emphasizes Georgia's



► Frontera has already agreed to return 99% of the search area, while the state decided to allow the company to continue its activities on the remaining 1% of the area. Photo: State Agency of Oil and Gas



► "Relations with the United States are important for us, which in no case should be overshadowed by the defense campaign launched by one company," Economy Minister said. Photo: Itv.ge

sincere desire to have an open and transparent relationship with Frontera.

According to Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, Natia Turnava, a liquidator was appointed in Frontera Group some time ago, there are signs of insolvency and the company has a lot of creditors. According to her, a few days

ago the Georgian State Oil and Gas Corporation received a message that one of the creditors of the Frontera won the lawsuit and now the execution of its property at the auction begins.

"It seems that this is the general style of Frontera's activity, it is not fulfilling its obligations, and this is a problem not only in Georgia but all

over the world," Turnava said.

According to Turnava, the decision regarding Frontera was not easy, since the state had full grounds to terminate the contract on July 27th because the contract was due to expire and these territories could be returned to the state. However, the opposing decision was made in the sake of strategic partnership between countries. The Minister also stated that Georgia is an attractive place for foreign investors in all ratings.

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, the decision of the Government of Georgia related to Frontera was first of all dictated by the strategic tasks of the country. According to the Minister, it is important for Georgia to have an international reputation related to the investment environment and relations with the United States, a key strategic partner.

The Government of Georgia announced the termination of the contract with Frontera in April 2020 and named the arbitral award as the basis. According to the Ministry of Economy, on April 17th, the International Arbitration Tribunal ruled in a dispute between the Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation and the

State Oil and Gas Agency, as well as Frontera Resources Georgia Corporation and Frontera USA, which is based on the contract of distribution of products and processing plant of June 25th, 1997. Georgia had accused the company of violating the terms of their contract signed in 1997. They claimed that Frontera refused to return state land they were no longer using for extraction.

Frontera, along with a number of other companies, has been cited by US politicians in Georgia or in numerous letters to US authorities as an example of harassment of American business in Georgia.

In early June, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Frontera Resources Corporation, and President of the company, sent a letter to the PM Giorgi Gakharia, stating that anti-American sentiments were growing in Georgia, investment and business environment were deteriorating.

A number of protests against Frontera itself have been held by dismissed employees who accuse the company of violating their rights. The American gas and oil company has been operating in Georgia, in particular, in Dedoplistskaro and Marneuli since 1997.

EU4Energy helps Georgia to develop frameworks for generating low-carbon electricity

The 'EU4Energy Governance' project will support Georgia in developing a standard form and template for a contract for difference – a market-based mechanism for supporting the generation of renewables-based electricity.

The contract for difference aims at accelerating investments in renewable energy by providing stability to project developers. It protects them

directly from financially unsustainable low wholesale prices, while ensuring that support is granted via a competitive bidding process. The contract for difference also protects consumers from paying increased support costs when electricity prices are high.

Georgia introduced a provision on contracts for difference in its recently adopted Renewable Energy Law, however, the neces-



sary contractual framework for its implementation is not yet developed.

The technical assistance was launched on 21 July 2020 with the participation of Energy Community experts and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia and the Electricity System Commercial Operator.