

## DRI: Russian military bases negatively affects human rights in the occupied territories



After March, the 'Abkhazian border' was opened several times for humanitarian purposes.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Russia's military bases in occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region have negative impact on human rights, according to a report by the Institute for Democracy Research (DRI) entitled "Russian military bases in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region / South Ossetia and their impact on human rights."

"The deployment of Russian FSB units along the entire perimeter line serves to control the possibility of direct contact between Georgians and Abkhazians / Georgians and Ossetians in both direct and figurative terms," the organization concluded.

The report reads that with the alliance and strategic partnership agreements signed with both occupied regions, Russia has further strengthened its positions.

"We are talking about strengthening the military bases, which, according to the 1999 Istanbul Summit of the OSCE, should be withdrawn from the territory of Georgia. Contrary to this commitment, the Russian side strengthened its existing bases in the occupied territories and began building new ones. The same fate befell the 6point agreement reached after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, which included a ceasefire and a return to pre-war status. Instead of performing it, the so-called

report reads.

The report highlights the killings of ethnic Georgians in territories controlled by the Russian Federation.

"4 Georgian citizens have been killed with special brutality in the Russian-occupied territories since 2014: in 2014 - 18-year-old Davit Basharuli, in 2016 - 31-year-old Giga Otkhozoria, in 2018 - 35-year-old Archil Tatunashvili, in 2019 - 29-year-old Irakli Kvaratskhelia."

According to the report, Russia's increased intervention has led to a sharp deterioration in the human rights situation in the occupied regions.

"The closure of most checkpoints along

the dividing line has further aggravated the social situation - significantly increased the number of arrests on charges of "illegal border crossing". Strict restrictions on freedom of movement have negatively affected the living conditions of people living in the occupied territories, access to education and health services, and contributed to discrimination against ethnic Georgians," the report said.

The de facto government of Abkhazia has established a so-called agreement with the rest of Georgia. The "border" was closed in March due to a coronavirus pandemic. After March, the 'border' was opened several times for humanitarian



Russian military exercises also covered the occupied regions of Georgia. Russia.

### Opinion & Analysis

Preparing for elections and the European warning

FULL STORY ON Page 2

NDI Launches International Virtual Long-Term Election Analysis of Georgia's 2020 Parliamentary Elections

IRI Announces Arrival of International Assessment Team Ahead of Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

FULL STORY ON Page 2

### Economics

Finance Ministry sells benchmark bonds worth ₾80mln



FULL STORY ON Page 3

purposes.

The de facto government of Tskhinvali has closed the "border" with the rest of Georgia in September 2019 due to the location of a Georgian police checkpoint near the village of Chorchana in Khashuri Municipality.

Note that Russia's strategic military exercise 'Caucasus 2020' is also underway in the occupied regions of Georgia - Tsebeli and Nagvalou training grounds in Abkhazia and the so-called In South Ossetia - at the robbery site.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, the 'Armed Forces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia' are participating in the exercise together with the Russian military.

The Strategic Command-Staff Exercise 'Caucasus 2020' started on September 21st in the Southern Military District of Russia and the Black and Caspian Seas, with the participation of up to 80,000 military personnel, including special units of the National Guard and the Ministry of Emergency Situations. In addition to Russians, up to a thousand troops from Armenia, Belarus, China, Myanmar and Pakistan are involved in the exercise.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, the exercise will address issues related to the use of coalition forces to ensure military security in Southwestern



# Preparing for elections and the European warning

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

With the elections approaching, the coronavirus epidemic in Georgia is becoming more and more widespread, the deployment of pre-election forces is becoming more pronounced, and against this background, the European Parliament reminds the Georgian government of the need to adhere to democratic standards.

In recent days, the cases of Coronavirus disease have been increasing rapidly and the data for each new day exceeds the previous day and approaches two hundred a day. It was also said that Georgia lost the status of a 'green country' in this regard and moved to the 'yellow countries' category.

However, the Minister of Economy Natia Turnava protested against this and noted that Georgia will not lose the status of a 'green zone.' Georgia remains closed to Europe, but has registered more than 50 thousand tourists from Russia, coming from the Lars border with no particular control for the virus, which would have contributed to such rapid growth in the number of cases.

The government's attitude towards the Coronavirus epidemic must first be considered in the context of elections. If before this Autumn, the government was proud of stopping the

epidemic, why does it allow the disease rates to rise now, and testing thousands every day?

According to the opposition, the government is encouraging panic in the population. Levan Koberidze, the representative of Lelo, believes that the government is pleased with the panic and fear of the population, because fewer people will go to the polls and fewer observers will arrive.

The possible reduction of the disease rates at the end of October will let the government appear in the positive light. As for the postponement of the elections, it does not suit the government, because after the expected severe winter it will be very difficult to present itself positively.

Last week, the main participants in the election campaign, the Georgian Dream and the National Movement, took important steps. On September 10, the Georgian Dream presented to the public the first platoon of its proportional list, which Natia Turnava called the 'Dream Team.' It is headed by the current Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia. According to expert Gia Khukhashvili, Ivanishvili knows that Gakharia will bring the party the most votes.

The list is followed by current and former parliamentary speakers - Talakvadze and Kobakhidze, as well as several

parliamentarians. Only Tea Tsulukiani is in the platoon of ministers, who has held this post since 2012 and is the only unchanged minister of the Georgian Dream. There are 5 women in the platoon, but the representatives of national minorities could not be included in it. Of the new faces, two famous athletes are especially noteworthy.

In addition to the proportional list platoon, all 30 majoritarian candidates of the Georgian Dream are known. According to a survey published by Transparency International Georgia on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 19 of them are involved in entrepreneurial activities. 14 of these 30 were donors to the Georgian Dream in 2012-2020. During this period, the mentioned persons, together with their business partners and relatives, donated 3.7 million GEL to the Georgian Dream. Majoritarian MPs are not represented in the proportional list platoon.

The Georgian Dream's proportional list platoon was immediately criticized by the opposition. 'Ivanishvili's obedient team,' headed by the presence of well-known faces, indicates that the ruling team is not going to change anything.

It seems that the Georgian Dream is not going to form a bloc for the elections, unlike the National Movement, which formed an election bloc on September

15<sup>th</sup> with 4 political entities. They will share majoritarian MPs. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the United National Movement launched a new campaign 'Instruct Misha.'

As part of the campaign, the population should instruct UNM candidate for Prime Minister Mikheil Saakashvili to solve their problems. Majoritarian candidates of the 'National Movement' will be engaged in collecting these tasks.

The United National Movement and Saakashvili have been under constant criticism from the government; according to Gia Volski, Saakashvili 'went mad,' adding that, recently, he has announced his return at least 11 times, with Volski's calculations.

Elections in Georgia are traditionally held with facts of cursing and physical confrontation. Therefore, election participants, as in previous elections, were again offered to sign a Code of Ethics created with the support of Western friends.

The Code of Conduct was signed by some opposition parties on September 14 and supported by the Georgian Dream. The document is offered to all subjects participating in the elections. The opposition does not believe that the government will adhere to the principles of the pre-election code of ethics. According to Tina Bokuchava, one

of the leaders of the United National Movement, the government is "violating absolutely all agreements" and "is already trying to falsify the election results."

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the European Parliament discussed the report on the implementation of the Association Agreement signed by Georgia with the European Union. The MEPs, along with expressing their support for Georgia, called on the government to take further steps towards the development of democracy. According to MEP Viola von Cramon, "in terms of domestic policy, billionaire Ivanishvili's shadow government threatens democracy, while in the foreign policy, Russia's ongoing hybrid war - military occupation, creeping annexation and cyber-attacks threatens the country."

As Gigi Tsereteli noted, in the speeches of the MEPs, 'a red line was drawn clearly,' the crossing of which is unforgivable. This red line essentially refers to the inadmissibility of violating democratic standards of elections.

Criticism from the West has irritated government officials, who say it is untrue, and for the Western-oriented opposition, it means that Georgia will still be under Western scrutiny in the upcoming elections.

(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)

## NDI Launches International Virtual Long-Term Election Analysis of Georgia's 2020 Parliamentary Elections

Tbilisi – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) announced today the launch of its International Virtual Long-Term Analysis of Georgia's 2020 parliamentary elections. The effort builds upon the findings and recommendations of the Georgia Election Watch report, released in August this year, and will continue through election day and runoffs, as needed.

NDI's team includes seven long-term analysts (LTAs) and a director of the long-term analysis program. The team is focused on a select number of key electoral themes, including: the conduct of political campaigns, the administration of elec-

tions, Georgia's media and information space, gender and inclusion issues, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on the elections. Using a variety of online information and analysis tools, each LTA works remotely in tandem with Georgia-based assistants and NDI's Tbilisi-based staff to evaluate progress and challenges in each of these thematic areas. NDI will use this data to inform recommendations in interim bulletins and post-election reports as it continues to support efforts to strengthen Georgia's electoral process.

NDI's international virtual long-term election analysis will conduct its activities in a nonpartisan, professional manner, in accordance with Georgian law and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This program is made possible with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

## IRI Announces Arrival of International Assessment Team Ahead of Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

Tbilisi, Georgia – The International Republican Institute (IRI) on September 21 announced the arrival of its international Technical Election Assessment Mission (TEAM) to assess the October 31, 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia. The mission's deployment follows an invitation from the Georgian Central Electoral Commission (CESKO) and builds upon IRI's 25-year partnership with Georgia, including previous election observations and assessments conducted over the last decade.

"These parliamentary elections represent an important step for Georgia's democracy and a litmus test for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations," said IRI Regional Director for Eurasia Stephen Nix. "IRI's mission will prioritize key issues affecting electoral integrity, including election administration, media freedom and transparency, campaign finance, political party campaigns, as well as voting safety measures being implemented during the COVID-19 crisis."

The TEAM comprises a diverse group

of five technical long-term analysts who will review all phases of the electoral process and issue a series of reports on their findings. These studies will be informed by in-depth interviews with government officials, the electoral administration, political party leaders, civil society and media representatives.

The technical assessment team will conduct its activities in accordance with the **Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers**, and will base its findings and recommendations on Georgia's laws, international standards for elections and the commitments made by political parties in the **Code of Conduct for Political Parties**.

In recognition of the risks posed by COVID-19, IRI has implemented rigorous safety and security procedures requiring the assessment team to adhere to the Georgian government's health regulations.

(SEPTEMBER 21, 2020, IRI.ORG)

### Weather

Wednesday, September 23

Day  Cloudy

High: 23°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 18°C

Thursday, September 23

Day  Partly Cloudy

High: 27°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 18°C

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.2537; Euro - 3.8267; GBP - 4.1787; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.2850; Swiss Franc - 3.5579

# Finance Ministry sells benchmark bonds worth ₾80mln



In September, the Lari depreciated by a total of 15 tetri against the dollar.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Five-year securities with a face value of ₾80,000,000 were sold at the Ministry of Finance Treasury Bill Auction.

According to the National Bank of Georgia (NBG), five commercial banks participated in the auction. The demand amounted to ₾151,500,000. The minimum interest rate was set at 8.28%, the maximum at 8.45%, and the

weighted average interest rate was set at 8.3%.

The coupon interest rate was 9.125%. The coupon will be paid twice a year, every 6 months.

The NBG will sell \$ 40 million at a Foreign exchange auction today, September 23<sup>rd</sup>. The National Bank spread information about it. This will be the 14<sup>th</sup> foreign exchange intervention by the NBG this year.

The National Bank sold the same

amount - \$ 40 million - on September 16<sup>th</sup>. The average weighted exchange rate was 3.1546.

The NBG sold a total of \$ 409,650,000 in foreign exchange reserves in 2020, including the September 16<sup>th</sup> auction.

As a result of trading on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, the national currency of Georgia depreciated by 2.42 tetri against the US dollar. The Lari also depreciated against the Euro- the exchange rate

changed to 2.17 tetri.

According to the data published by the NBG, by September 23<sup>rd</sup>, one US \$ will cost ₾3.2537, one Euro - ₾3.8267, and the British pound sterling - ₾4.1787.

Today, at the official exchange rate, one US dollar was worth ₾3.2295, Euro - ₾3.8050, pound - ₾4.150. The exchange rate obtained as a result of yesterday's trading will start on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

According to Giorgi Khishtovani, director of the PMC Research Center, the reason for the depreciation of the Lari, along with fundamental factors, is the deteriorating expectations of the population.

As he told bm.ge, all four main sources of foreign currency inflows are at a critical minimum, and, if there is an increase in remittances, this is because due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the currency can not enter the country directly.

Regarding the policy of the NBG- to help stabilize the Lari by selling foreign exchange reserves, Khishtovani says that if the NBG forecast is the further devaluation of the national currency, then postponing the process for several weeks at the expense of interventions is wrong.

"In that case, it might be better to move the Lari to a new equilibrium than to postpone the process for a few weeks, and then the exchange rate will fall immediately, and our foreign exchange reserves will decrease," he explained.

USDGEL:CUR  
USD-GEL X-RATE

+ ADD TO WATCHLIST

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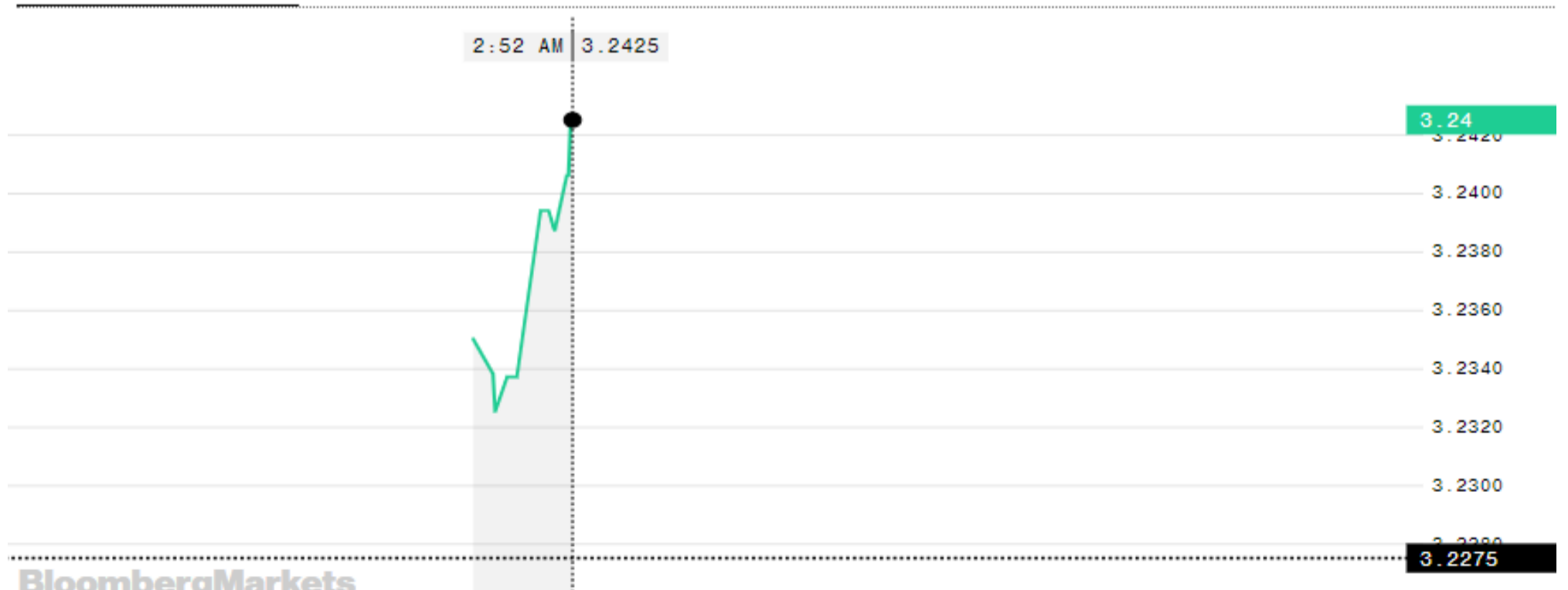
**3.2425** GEL +0.0150 +0.46% ▲

1D 1M 6M YTD 1Y 5Y

MINIMIZE CHA

Q Add a comparison

2:52 AM | 3.2425



BloombergMarkets

The official value of 1 dollar exceeded ₾3.25.