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OPINION & ANALYSIS

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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Government of Georgia appealed to the President to extend the state of emergency until May 10th and to address the Parliament with this proposal. Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated about it at the special briefing held at the government administration. According to the ruling party MP Mamuka Mdinardze, the parliament is likely to vote on the issue on April 21st.

According to the decision of the government, it is forbidden to enter and leave four big cities - Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi and Kutaisi from 21:00 April 15th. The

State of emergency to extend till May 10th

ENTRY TO 4 MAJOR GEORGIAN CITIES IS FORBIDDEN FOR 10 DAYS.



► PM claims that if people stick to the restrictions the government will be able to gradually remove the restrictions starting from mid-May.

restriction will last for at least 10 days. The commendants hour will presume as well. According to the PM, this step will further reduce the mobility dose in large cities. He expressed hope that there will be no need to announce a full 24 hour quarantine, however he doesn't rule out this possibility.

The PM explained that the possibility of this decision depends on 2 things: the speed with which the infection develops and the readiness of the healthcare system to quantify how many infected people can serve. He also announced that it's not planned to increase fines for violating quarantine rules, however, the enforcement efficiency will increase, referring to the celebration of Bzoba (April 12th) when the Ministry of Internal Affairs 'should have acted more effectively.'

However, despite having tightened the state of emergency, there will be exceptions made. In such cases people should call the hotline - 144.

Medical workers, local and international freight trucks, members of the diplomatic corps, international and humanitarian missions, prison staff, employees of electricity, water, gas and telecommunication fields, people providing postal services and managing waste, journalists and private guards on duty, public servants or individuals whose free movement is important will be exempt from this rule.

The people who are registered in the municipalities under the lockdown will be able to enter the municipalities, while people who are registered in other municipalities will be able to leave the municipalities which will be placed under lockdown. People will also be able to transport and bury deceased people in the cities.

Gakharia mentioned no special measures for the Easter holiday and stated that the government and the Church will act together during this time. He stated that the Church is well aware of the situ-

ation and 'we will act together to protect our citizens.'

"I hope for the wisdom and wisdom of our citizens, because the citizen understands that law enforcement and health care is a direct obligation of the state," stated the PM, adding that an existential task that the church should not be closed, is also understandable. Gakharia said that after all, 'we are an Orthodox state' with a millennial history of cooperation between church and state.

Gakharia explained that the churches will not be closed, especially on the night of Easter. Easter and such responsibility should be imposed on churches that won't prevent anyone from entering. However, it's every citizen's task to take responsibility for their own health and the PM expressed hope that 'our wise citizens' will understand this. Gakharia did not rule out that the government would decide to close the roads leading to the cemeteries for Easter in order to avoid crowds and, consequently, the danger of the spread of COVID-19. Kutaisi and Zestaponi Municipality have already announced this decision.

Head of the National Disease Control Centre Amiran Gamkrelidze has urged people not to visit cemeteries for the Easter holiday this year as the country 'has not yet reached the peak of the virus' spread.'

It's important that this decision comes after 30 new cases of the Coronavirus were confirmed that day for the first time. Among them was a priest and the guard in the Patriarchate. PM Gakharia held a meeting in the Office of the Church the previous night.

Coronavirus cases stand at 306 in Georgia as of the evening of April 15th. 71 of them have recovered, 3 other patients, elderly, and with several underlying illnesses, have died. 10 of the 232 infected individuals in the country are medical workers. 4,990 people in quarantine and 462 others in hospitals in Georgia. More than 2 million people have been infected with the Coronavirus worldwide.



► Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Rustavi were put under lockdown starting 9 p.m. yesterday.

Mayor urges citizens to stay home

REGARDING THE CURFEW, WHICH BANS ANYONE GOING OUTSIDE BETWEEN 9PM AND 6AM, THE WORSHIPERS ARE STILL DETERMINED TO ATTEND THE LITURGY AT THE LOCAL CHURCHES AND RECEIVE COMMUNION.



► The Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze.



► "The reason why people do not approach the situation seriously, is because the enemy – Coronavirus is invisible."

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze released a video message, addressing the community to take into account the issued recommendations. Especially, he called on the parishioners to avoid going to the churches on Easter eve and pray at home.

As Kaladze said, the rules of the nationwide quarantine must be obeyed by everyone without exceptions and anyone violating them will be penalised according to the law.

"We are not pleased to set any kind of restrictions since

we all struggle to live this way, however, everyone should understand that our effectiveness protects your well-being. The matter is about the most precious thing we have - life, so everyone is obliged to stay home and obey the law.

"Everyone has to consider the government's recommendations. Some do not approach the situation seriously and that is because the deadly virus is invisible. I would like to call on everybody to stay at home as much as possible. If we stick to the requirements, we will overcome the situation swiftly," said Kaladze.

Reopened market in Zugdidi might close down again

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Governor of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Aleksandre Motserelia, considers locking down Zugdidi, the main city of the region. He also talked about the possibility of shutting down the market of Zugdidi as its customers do not follow safety rules.

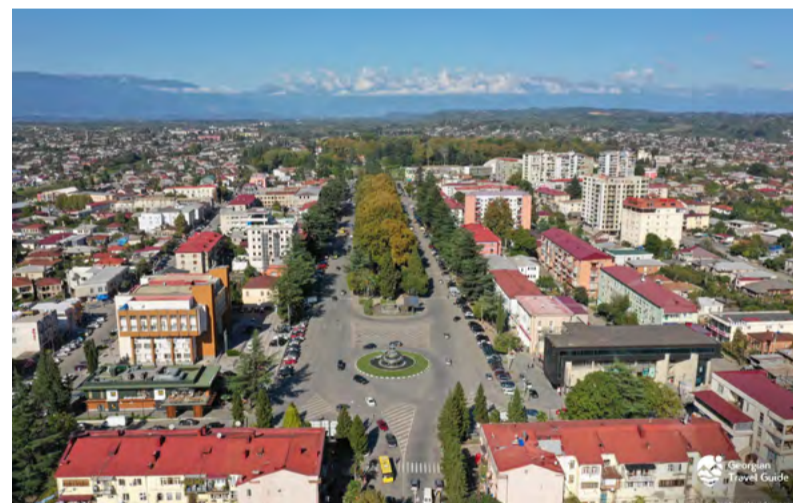
As Motserelia explained, the situation changes quickly. Noticeable crowding can be observed, therefore, the possibility of locking down the city is not excluded.

The market of Zugdidi was shut down on April 6th, because of coronavirus threats, but was reopened on April 12th.

The governor noted that due to the increased crowds and cars



► The Governor of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Aleksandre Motserelia.



► Motserelia reviews the likelihood of locking down Zugdidi.

near the market, full mobilisation of the police was demanded, who had to find some of the citizens. He explained that the market was reopened so that people would be able to purchase goods, but he finds consumers' behavior unacceptable as they do not obey

the rules. The governor discusses the issue with the police, saying that the whole resource of the police could not be operated on patrolling the market, as they have far more important issues to handle, so if the police estimate the situation as uncontrollable,

closing down the market will be inevitable.

He calls the community to consider the condition of vendors working at the markets, as their disobedience of simple rules, such as observing physical distance, will leave the traders

unemployed. Since remembering the dead by visiting the graveyards is an integral part of Easter celebration for Georgians, the Governor of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti also considers closing down cemeteries to avoid mass gatherings.

THURSDAY		APRIL 16	
Day		Cloudy	High: 17°C
Night			Low: 6°C
FRIDAY		APRIL 17	
Day		Sunny	High: 19°C
Night			Low: 8°C

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5 Business associations request Georgian government to fulfill their recommendations

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The 5 business unions, in consultation with economic experts, developed recommendations and called on the government to implement them quickly. The list of recommendations includes the suspension of a number of taxes (income and property taxes, pension contributions) for 6 months and the deferral of VAT payments from customs clearance to the stage of its sale.

Alexander Ratishvili, President of the Georgian Taxpayers' Union, one of the signatories of the petition, said in the interview with RFE/RL that the co-authors of the document include large, medium and small business organisations in almost all sectors and directions operating in Georgia, 'the vast majority of businesses.'

According to Ratishvili, the fight against COVID-19 in the healthcare sector is going well, however, as far as the economy is concerned, he sees more risks and on behalf of the currently operating businesses expresses desire to be involved in solving and planning all the areas that are called to minimise economic problems.

Among the recommendations of the business unions, the first concerns the lifting of the obligation to pay VAT in advance when customs clearance of imported goods. In order for operating businesses that supply the country with food and other primary consumer goods to continue functioning the cash flow is vital, and with the requirement to pay VAT as soon as possible, these funds are withdrawn. As a result it becomes harder to keep funds and jobs and not force people to leave either temporarily on unpaid leave, or at all.

"Our demand is that this 'yellow corridor' be abolished and that the VAT commitment be made at least 45 days after the goods are brought into the Georgian trade space and the sale of these goods begins," Ratishvili said, explaining that VAT should be paid based on the sale and not immediately at the border.

While working on the recommendations, the initiators thought that the requested benefits would reduce budget revenues, but concluded that without these steps, the losses would be much greater and it would be more difficult to revive the economy in the post-crisis period.

Ratishvili hopes that other ways to make up for the shortfall of reduced taxes can be found.



► Alexander Ratishvili is the president of the Georgian Taxpayers' Union.



► PM Gakharia: The stricter and more effective the restrictions, the faster the online shopping, Supta Sakhli, and everything else will be reopened.

According to him, the resource is within the budget, which needs to be adjusted adequately, and this needs to be done by 'mobilizing maximum funds from international financial institutions.' He added that it concerns €2 billion, which can be deducted from the budget by suspending mentioned taxes.

The president of the Georgian Taxpayers' Union thinks that if the government does not take into account the position of business unions and if radical measures are not taken, the country will face catastrophe in 2 or 3 months, speaking separately from the national currency exchange rate, which

appears to be another major challenge.

Unemployment, bankruptcy of most companies, suspension, grown gaps, drastically reduced purchasing power of now unemployed population, declined demand and stagnated economy is what the country might be facing in not so long term fu-

ture, and Ratishvili says it will require much more resources and effort, than what is on the agenda today.

"The specificity of today's economic crisis is that both supply and demand are declining simultaneously. This is a disaster for the economy," he said, adding that international experts do not remember such a crisis since WWII.

In this regard, it's interesting what the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia said about the business and social assistance at a briefing on April 14th, when he announced the closure of 4 major cities in Georgia (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi & Rustavi), as well as the extension of quarantine before May 10th, the decision that envelopes certain outcomes for economy and businesses.

According to the PM, the first obligation of the state is to help those who lost their jobs and this will be the main direction of assistance in the crisis. He added that the government will start providing targeted assistance to companies, who have not fired employees as soon as the government sees the contours to exiting the post-crisis.

The Prime Minister also assured that even though neither the gov't nor the companies have the time for that right now, all businesses that fired employees without compensating the salaries that workers deserved, will face the responsibility, adding that those companies have not only the obligation to address the government for assistance but also the obligation to employees.

"When workers are fired because of a crisis, the company has a direct legal obligation to pay them for several months and everyone should remember this, because after the crisis ends, we will take care of everyone," PM said, calling on companies to consider social responsibility.

Gakharia reiterated that Georgia has very limited resources for direct assistance and that the government considers its task to be supportive and economical in terms of spending.

He also emphasized that number one goal now due to the health interests is to limit the mobility and movement of citizens in the country, and when asked about the topic of online shopping, which has been stopped, he responded - "the task now is not to encourage trade, but to limit the speed with which the virus can spread."

George Sharvashidze - Country of Liquid Sun

The eldest son of the last Ruler of Abkhazia—poet, dramatist, publicist and public figure Giorgi Sharvashidze—was a prominent figure in the history of Georgia in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century's. All of his creative work and ideology were directed towards a deepening of relations between Georgians and Abkhazians. His policy of a unified Georgian state system made the greatest impact upon the perception of his contemporaries.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire, after having severely suppressed the many years of resistance from Caucasian highlanders, swept away the last traces of the Georgian state system, abolishing the principalities of Svaneti, Samegrelo and Abkhazia and reducing the country to two provinces, Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Disrespect and impudence came to such a level that even mentioning of the name of the country—Georgia—was officially prohibited.

The abolition of the principalities did not proceed smoothly. Media spoke of the “mincing of the Kutaisi Governor General, Gagarin, into pieces with a sword by Murzakhan Dadashkeliani” and the sentencing to death of the unfortunate ruler of Svaneti. Great efforts were required for calling the Queen of Samegrelo, Ekaterine Dadiani, to St-Petersburg.

Then the issue of the existence of the principality of Abkhazia also came upon the agenda.

Mikheil Sharvashidze, its ruler and who was highly esteemed throughout Georgia and in north-west Caucasus, was forced to obey the will of the Emperor in 1864 and call the population to submit to Russia whilst resigning without resistance.

A few years earlier, Sharvashidze, exhausted after a long illness, sent an application to the Emperor of Russia on handing over the throne to his eldest son Giorgi who, at that time, served in Tbilisi as the Adjutant to Governor General. His application was rejected with the reply: “Your son, due to his young age and lack of experience, will not be suitable for this. The covert intents of this reply were not incomprehensible for Sharvashidze and he, as a sign of protest resigned the regalia awarded to him by the Russian government; that is, the title of General Adjutant and Lieutenant General.

In the course of time, it became clear that Sharvashidze was not mistaken in choosing his eldest son. His life was tragic. Despite the fact that his father had resigned peacefully, further events brought the physical survival of Abkhazian people under risk. Unlimited despotism and the depreciating and cynical attitude of the Russian Empire exhausted the patience of the Abkhazians and rebellion broke out on 17 July 1866 with the people asking a still young Giorgi Sharvashidze, who was elected ruler,



► George Sharvashidze

to be the leader of the rebellion.

After the rebellion was suppressed, Giorgi Sharvashidze was soon after exiled to Russia and under the strict supervision of the gendarmerie. He was allowed to settle in St-Petersburg only some years later. Prince Aleksandre the future Emperor Alexander III) was carried away by the merits of the heir to the Abkhazian throne and soon made friends with him.

In early 1880, Mikhail Zich

(1827-1906), a painter of the Russian Imperial Court and a Hungarian by nationality, arrived in Georgia. This fact became an important event. By that time, the Georgian intelligentsia was preparing a new edition of the Knight in Panther's Skin and working on the identification of the full-value text of the poem. Giorgi Sharvashidze was involved in this process as well. It was Mikhail Zich who was approached for the creation of the

illustrations for the new edition.

The patrons of Georgian theatre took the advantage of the visit of the famous artists in Tbilisi and asked him to stage “live pictures” from the Knight in Panther's Skin. In agreement with Ilia Chkhonia and Shalva Dadiani, Simon Janashia stated: “Zich considered Giorgi Sharvashidze as the most handsome man and could not find a more suitable object for the embodiment of Tarel.”

The relations between the heir of the last ruler of Abkhazia and Romano imperial court were finally terminated in 1888. Prior to Alexander III's visit to Kutaisi, the Governor General asked Giorgi Sharvashidze, Niko Nikoladze, Constantine Dadiani and some other persons to leave Kutaisi for the reason of their unreliability. Sharvashidze listened to the Governor order calmly and rejected the title of the Emperor's Adjutant in an unprecedented action which astonished the Georgian aristocracy. The defense of personal dignity in this manner was a unique case. Emperor Aleksander II tried to reconcile with him several times but his efforts proved to be unsuccessful.

Giorgi Sharvashidze died on 19 February 1918. The time was restless but the people managed to fulfill his will. The heir of the last ruler of Abkhazia was buried in the Mokvi temple.

In parallel with his literary

and public activities in Abkhazia and on his own estates, Giorgi Sharvashidze was also involved in viticulture and wine making. In 1880-1895, the land in Abkhazia belonged only to Sharvashidzes. Wine making was not economically important in Abkhazia at that time but it could be very profitable if it were developed. Basically, viticulture was developed in Gudauta and Kodori. 50,000 puds of wine were made from vineyards owned by Giorgi Sharvashidze in this region of which 30,000 puds were taken by sea to Odessa and Novorossiysk.

Izabela variety grapes were planted in Sharvashidze's estate, located in Babushera, in 1895. Grafting was made by local peasants under the leadership of a viticulture list from Samegrelo who was sent by Prince Murat from the village of Salkhino. Sharvashidze had close contacts with the Princess of Samegrelo, Salome Dadiani, and her husband, Achille Murat. Upon Sharvashidze's request, the Princess distributed grafted young vines, which were grown on her estate, to Abkhazian peasants free-of-charge.

All princes, nobles and peasants who had the permission to sell grapes delivered theirs to Sharvashidze who, as the grape holders in Abkhazia, were permitted to produce wine on their own estate for their own consumption. This business was mainly led by peasants from Samegrelo who provided agricultural activities for Sharvashidze's estates.

Often, people from Ajara went to Abkhazia to buy grapes and make wine and distill vodka from chacha on site. Sharvashidze had a vodka distillery in the Gudauta district where Gurians and Greeks worked as distillers. In addition to the Sharvashidzes, the estates in Abkhazia also were bought by Prince Oldenburgsky and the Princes Kankia and Shengelia who were also granted the right of activities from the Sharvashidzes at that time.

Only 11 wine cellars operated in Abkhazia between 1836-1852 which produced 50,000 buckets of wine annually. Wine was basically consumed in Sokhumi from where it was also taken to Kerch, Anapa and Taganrog.

Before the planting Izabela grapes, those of the Amlakhu, Kachichi, Avasiskhda, Agbishi and other local varieties yielded good harvests. Wine was made and kept in kvevris, and transported in sheep wine skins.

Sharvashidze brought oak barrels for wine storage in 1875-1880. His workforce, in addition to Megrelians and Gurians, consisted of Russians, Estonians, Germans and Greeks who had been exiled to the region. Local wine and chacha vodka was drunk mainly by those employed in the Prince's estate. During feasts, which were held in Sokhumi, New Athos and Babushera, Prince Sharvashidze treated his honoured guests with expensive champagne, cognac, rum, absinthe and other liqueur.



► George Shervashidze with family, wife Maria Alexandrovna, son Dmitry and father-in-law Baron Alexander Nikolai