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#stayhome Stay home, Stay safe #staysafe

Georgian Dream ready to discuss issue of holding safe elections



"No threats are posed at holding parliamentary elections on October 31st under a new system," Kobakhidze says.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The non-governmental organisation Transparency International Georgia (TIG) believes that the issue of holding safe parliamentary elections in Georgia should be discussed.

The organisation issued a statement on the matter, emphasising that due to the pandemic of Covid-19, resolving the

virus related problems is vital and health and right now socio-economic issues is what public attention is mainly focused on, however, the issues that are necessary for the democratic development of the country in the long run should not be forgotten.

Among them TIG names the elections, which are to be held in about 6 months, and it is still unclear exactly what sys-

tem country is pursuing, what kind of changes will be made to the Electoral Code and how the ruling team intends to make constitutional and other legislative changes, since during the state of emergency, constitution cannot be changed and party hasn't provided public with specific plans on this issue.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that it seems that the fight against the pandemic will continue for the remaining months before the elections, and even on election day, in all probability, all the restrictions needed to contain the epidemic will not be lifted. TIG states it's important that the government takes concrete steps to dispel the existing ambiguity.

TIG says pre-election campaigns and holding parliamentary elections on 31st of October are important issues. NGO notes that discussions regarding this topic are underway in many countries and several methods of participating in elections are considered, including remote voting (electronically or by mail), redistribution of the voting process over several days of elections, and more.

It's noteworthy that in some cases, elections have been postponed during the pandemic, for example from February 28th to April 30th this year, with at least 52 countries postponing elections and referendums at various levels, including 17 general national elections or referendums; however, 19 countries



On March 8th, representatives of the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition signed an agreement paving the way to adopting an electoral reform for October 2020 parliamentary elections.

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The government's anti-crisis plan and Saakashvili's candidacy in Ukraine: the main issues of controversy

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Consensus between the government and the opposition regarding the coronavirus has long been broken. The opposition has been criticising the government's additional anti-crisis program. The sudden nomination of Saakashvili for the post of Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine also caused a stir.

The coronavirus epidemic continues in Georgia, and according to doctors and government officials, the peak of the epidemic will come in the first half of May. The number of infected is within the range which the Georgian healthcare system can deal with, and even in the case of a certain increase in the number of infected people, there is a reserve (to an extent).

On April 24th, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia presented the government's anti-crisis plan to the State Chancellery. The opposition demanded that the plan be presented at a parliamentary session on April 22nd, and since the government did not do so, it did not support the continuation of the state of emergency in the country. However, this was done by the supporters of the government and the state

of emergency was extended for one month - until May 22nd.

The Prime Minister began presenting the anti-crisis plan with describing the difficult situation the economy is in: this year, the country's economy will shrink by 4% instead of growth, the budget will lose ₾ 1.8 billion in revenue, and the government will reduce current expenditures by ₾ 300 million. However, the Prime Minister did not present a new version of the budget and noted that the government still has time by law. This has been criticised by the opposition as, according to them, the anti-crisis program would be real if it were based on the already introduced budget changes.

The anti-crisis plan provides for a variety of social assistance for citizens for 6 months and a package of certain benefits for businesses. ₾ 3.9 billion will be mobilised from the budget for the anti-crisis plan and 350 thousand Georgian citizens will benefit from the aid package. According to Gakharia, "this is what the Georgian government can offer to every citizen today." According to the Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze, ₾35 billion will be spent for the

care of citizens and ₾2 billion 110 million for the support of the economy and business. In total, "the state will spend ₾3.5 billion to help people."

Opposition groups harshly criticised the program. According to Giga Bokeria, this is 'delayed, superficial and harmful instincts, full of inadequate criteria.' According to Nino Burjanadze, 'the government is forced to quench the hunger of a large part of the population,' because the assistance provided by the government is miserable and does not include several categories of people in need. Davit Bakradze, the leader of European Georgia, noted that their anti-crisis plan envisages ₾6 billion in aid and is intended for 8 months.

The government considers the opposition's statements to be demagogic and populist. Irakli Kobakhidze also reminds the National Movement once again of their rule and notes that the social assistance system in Georgia was regulated thanks to the rule of the Georgian Dream.

On April 23th, more than 25 opposition parties wrote an open letter to their country's partners and supporters, stressing the

government's failure to comply with the March 8th election agreement, namely the release of political prisoners, and urging them to reconsider their agreement. The government has already received a traditional response to this. The March 8th agreement provides not for the release of anyone, but for the non-interference of politics in the court case. As for the electoral reform, it will be carried out on time and there is no danger of holding elections in October.

The news of the possible appointment of the third President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili as the Deputy Prime Minister in Ukraine caused a great stir last week. Information about this appeared on April 22nd and caused a stir on the part of the government circles of Georgia and Russia. As it turned out, Saakashvili was collecting only 140-170 votes instead of the required 248 votes in the Ukrainian Rada, and on April 28th, his candidacy was stopped.

But before that, the first persons of the Georgian government - the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament, the

President - said that it was unacceptable for them to appoint a person convicted in Georgia to Ukraine, thus threatening Ukraine's strategic partnership with Georgia. In response, opposition members said that such statements were an interference in Ukraine's internal affairs, and that the Georgian government, in the interests of the party, was endangering the country's strategic partnership with Ukraine. With the removal of Saakashvili's candidacy, the problem disappeared, but left an unpleasant feeling and question marks.

Meanwhile, the opposition is tired of the government's restrictions amid the epidemic, especially since some of them consider it completely absurd. Such a request was made on April 28th by European Georgia. Earlier, on April 26th, Labor demanded the right to hold peaceful rallies and lift restrictions. As time goes by, such a mood will increase in the opposition, especially with 6 months left before the parliamentary elections...

(Translated by Mariam Mchedlidze)

Georgian firms shift production to meet pandemic challenge

Packaging producer meets local demand for protective gear with help from EU and UNDP

TBILISI, 5 May 2020 – Nearly 40,000 protective face shields produced by the Georgian company CaucasPack will be provided to frontline healthcare staff, local civil servants and other at-risk personnel in Tbilisi and Georgia's regions through programmes implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The first 16,000 shields will be distributed this week as part of a joint programme of the European Union and the UN in support of a competitive private sector in Georgia.

"I am happy that the EU can help contribute to a further 40,000 face masks for the men and women working on the front lines of dealing with this pandemic. I am also pleased that they are produced by a Georgian company, which has adapted to meet the new challenges," said Carl Hartzell, the EU Ambassador to Georgia. "Local production is vital for the economy and to meet the continued need for protective supplies."

"With global supply chains overloaded and cross-border procurement impeded, we're delighted to see Georgian manufacturers rise to the challenge," said UNDP Head Louisa Vinton. "CaucasPack is just one example of how local producers have stepped up to provide the protective gear that healthcare workers and civil servants need to stay safe during the pandemic, rescuing jobs and livelihoods in the process."

In the coming weeks, UNDP in partnership with the Governments of Switzerland and Austria will purchase another 23,000 shields for distribution through partner civil society organizations in 23 municipalities, including those in southern and mountainous regions where the COVID-19 outbreak has hit the hardest.

The face shields manufactured by CaucasPack are produced from recycled plastic bottles and are adjustable and reusable. In normal times, the Rustavi-based company produces plastic cups and food containers. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it adjusted its production lines to make face shields. This shift enables the company to keep its staff of 99 employed despite the broader pandemic shutdown.

CaucasPack is one of an array of Georgian companies repurposing their production lines on short notice to battle the pandemic. Many, especially in the packaging sector, are supported by the EU and UN as part of the wider EU4Business programme, which promotes private sector development in Georgia.

Later in May, the EU and UNDP will release the results of a study that weighs the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Georgia's packaging value chain, offering insights and recommendations on response strategies.

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Georgian Dream ready to discuss issue of holding safe elections

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still holding scheduled elections.

NGO notes that according to epidemiologists' predictions the scale of the pandemic and the threat posed by it will be significantly reduced in October, however, some limitations are likely to remain.

TIG names multiple steps that have to be followed in order to conduct safe votes: Start working on all possible scenarios to determine appropriate measures to ensure a safe environment for elections with the involvement of epidemiologists, election administrations, political parties and public organizations; Develop appropriate normative acts for holding elections in con-

ditions of temporary restrictions, specifically writing regulations for organizing all necessary procedures; If necessary, supply the equipment and machinery for creating a safe environment for election administration and voters in terms of restrictions; Give appropriate training to the members of the election commissions; Develop the rules of election observation.

TIG calls the executive and legislative authorities on this issue to start consultations with the Central Election Commission, political parties, elections of local civil society organizations, representatives of friendly countries and international organizations.

The Georgian Dream expressed its readiness to follow TIG's call and start discussing how they will ensure safe 2020 parliamentary elections. According to Irakli Kobakhidze, Executive Secretary of the Georgian Dream, the discussion should be held freely on any topic with a

broad involvement.

Kobakhidze said that so far it's not defined what the future developments will look like, however, there's some basis for optimistic prognosis that elections will be held on 31st of October. He also commented on the electronic ballot box, expressing doubts that appropriate infrastructure can be arranged within the time left, adding that the open discussions involving opposition, NGOs and international partners, will be held regarding other mechanisms.

Former speaker of the parliament also talked about the terms for amendments to the constitution and election code, noting that the discussion of amendments will continue as soon as the state of emergency is abolished and the whole process will be finished by the end of July, regardless of when the pandemic is defeated. "Therefore, it is not a problem to hold elections under the new system in October 2020," Kobakhidze said.

Weather

Wednesday, May 6

Day Rain
High: 22°C

Night Showers
Low: 13°C

Thursday, May 7

Day Rain
High: 18°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 11°C

published by

The Messenger

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.1998; Euro - 3.4702; GBP - 3.9857; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.3176; Swiss Franc - 3.2984

Georgia's annual inflation rate in April 2020 was 6.9%



Year-on-year food prices increased by 16.1%. The prices for fruit were 45.4% higher.

for the following groups: food and non-alcoholic beverages (3% increase) and transport (3% decrease).

Prices rose for the following subgroups: fruits (17.7%), vegetables and horticulture (7.1%), fish (6.2%), coffee, tea and cocoa (4.4%), sugar, jam and other sweets (3%), Bread products (1.6%), meat products (1.2%), oil and fat (0.9%). At the same time, prices fell on the subgroup of milk, cheese and eggs (-0.3%), as well as on the operation of personal vehicles (-3.8%)

Geostat explained that to calculate the inflation rate, prices were collected on the dates between the 10th and 20th of each month in about 1,800 retail outlets in 6 major cities: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Gori, Telavi and Zugdidi. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the price collection process, since some retail outlets were not functioning; out of 1,800 outlets 1,150 had canceled all operations and as a result, only up to 40% of the total amount of price database was registered.

The state of emergency in the country has also affected the working principles of Geostat. Due to the current situation, the data needed to calculate inflation has been collected through new rules. In particular, during the price registration, the personal visit of the interviewers to the facilities was minimized, and instead an online and telephone examination was used. Geostat also announced that it has introduced modern methods of data collection - scanner data and web-scraping methods from the website.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) reported on 4th of May that Georgia's annual inflation stood at 6.9% in April 2020, while on a monthly basis prices increased by 0.9% compared to the previous month. Accordingly, the population has to pay an average of 6.9% more to receive the product or service. Annual market inflation without tobacco increased by 4.1%.

The main influence on the formation of annual inflation was the increase in prices for the following groups: food and non-alcoholic beverages (up by 16.1% compared to the same period last year) and health care (up by 4.9%).

Compared to the same period last year, prices in this commodity group increased by 16.1%, which was reflected in the overall inflation rate by 5.04%. Prices have risen sharply for fruit and grape subgroups by 45.4%. Prices have risen by 23.2% for dairy and egg products. Prices for sugar and sweets also increased (by 16.9%); On meat products (by 15.0%); On fish (14.9%); Vegetables (14.1%), as well as bread products (8.4%).

Prices have risen for the healthcare group with 4.9% and was reflected in the

annual inflation rate of 0.39%. Price increases were observed for medical products, equipment and devices by 8.4%, and

for outpatient services by 4.4%.

As for the monthly inflation rate, it was mainly influenced by the change in prices

ANNUAL INFLATION RATE IN GEORGIA
(Year-on-Year Change)



The annual inflation rate was driven by price changes in the group of food and non-alcoholic beverages and health.

UNDP, UK Government train Georgian police in human-centred and disability-sensitive service delivery

UNDP and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia signed a Memorandum of Understanding that aims to make the Patrol Police Unified Service Center more customer-focused

TBILISI. 6 May 2020 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia have joined hands to improve capacities and service delivery at the Ministry's Patrol Police Unified Service Center, formerly known as Room #12.

UNDP Head Louisa Vinton and Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Kakha Sabanadze signed a Memorandum of Understanding at an online meeting today.

"The Ministry of Internal Affairs is reforming its Unified Service Centre, aiming to provide high-quality one-stop-shop services to the citizens," Sabanadze said. "Personnel training is a critical part of this reform."

"Police work is full of stress, especially at a time of crisis like the one we are now facing," Vinton said. "Our training is de-

signed to equip the Unified Service Center staff with the tools and approaches they need to serve citizens effectively, especially those who are vulnerable or have special needs."

Launched in 2018, the Unified Service Centre of the Patrol Police provides over 50 services to citizens, most of them associated with driving penalties, suspension of driving licenses, delivery of found number plates and consent to transportation of vehicles transferred to special parking lots. With UNDP support, the Centre staff will be trained in customer relations and communication, anger management and disability-sensitive service delivery.

In addition, UNDP will help the Unified Service Centre introduce a Common

Assessment Framework (CAF), a total quality management instrument for the public sector that has been successfully applied by more than 4,500 public agencies in the EU Member States.

The Public Service Hall was the first public institution in Georgia to pilot the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in 2019. UNDP is supporting the introduction of this successful practice for Georgia's other public agencies.

UNDP's assistance to the Ministry of Internal Affairs is part of the USD 6 million (GBP 4.5 million) UK-funded support to the Public Administration Reform in Georgia, covering three major directions of the reform: policy development, civil service reform and public service delivery.

Vladimir Staroselsky - Country of Liquid Sun



Vladimir Staroselsky was born in 1860 into the family of poor nobleman from Chernihiv. His father, Aleksander Staroselsky, was in military service until 1850. After that, he served as a low-rank official in the judicial authorities of various provinces of Russia, including Armenia and Georgia. Aleksander Staroselsky, who was distinguished by his honesty and diligence, was the brother of Tadeoz Guramishvili's brother-in-law and Ilia Charchavadze's brother-in-law, Dmitri Staroselsky, and often visited Ilia Chavchavadze in Saguramo together with his family.

This circumstance connected Vladimir Staroselsky with the Georgian people since his young years which, alongside other factors, contributed to the formation of his love and selfless friendship towards Georgians, he was devoted to this feeling until the end of his life.

After finishing the Stavropol Gymnasium with honors, Staroselsky continued



his studies at the Moscow Academy of Forestry and Agriculture (now the Timiryazey Agricultural Academy) from which he graduated with honours in 1885. Immediately upon graduation, he was sent to the Black Sea District where he attracted attention by his erudition, scientific research and organizational talent.

In 1888, Staroselsky was transferred to Tbilisi as a Senior Agronomist of the Caucasian Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties. It was the period when grape vine disease-*phylloxera*-infiltrated from the West and was spreading extensively in various regions of the country, instantly devastating vineyards. The first of *phylloxera* was discovered in Georgia in 1881, in Abkhazia. The disease spread so quickly that it covered not only Georgia but its neighbouring countries within several years.

As for the idea of grafting vines on American base plants, first offered by Staroselsky, the majority of specialists, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties, treated the idea with complete distrust. This distrust was

strengthened by the negative opinion of the French Professor Morigno, the Hungarian scientist Horvaty, the Russian Professor Kovalevsky and other prominent specialists in regard to this method. They examined the vineyards diseased with *phylloxera* in the Upper Imereti districts and categorically denied every possibility for their restoration. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture of Russia invited additional scientists and specialists from Europe who studied the vineyards which were damaged by *phylloxera* and made their conclusion. In their opinion, it was already impossible to restore vineyards in Imereli. They stated that the Georgians would have to exterminate the vines and plant other vines or different crops instead. Staroselsky did not retreat from his position and insisted that the Georgian vineyards should be transplanted onto American base plants. Further, he also insisted on the necessity of the implementation of this method and the perspectives which would follow.

In 1890, Staroselsky was appointed Chief Expert of the team working to fight the *phylloxera* disease in of the Kutaisi province. By that time, the vineyards ultimately damaged by *phylloxera* were located in this area alone. The product of the hard work of the local peasants, which was their basic subsistence, was disappearing and the desperate peasants demanded help. Staroselsky began activities with his usual energy and achieved excellent success in a short period of time.

That same year, an experimental seedling farm was established in the village of Sakara, near Zestaponi, on Staroselsky's initiative and under his direct leadership. It soon turned into an important centre of scientific research and popularisation of its results. For five-to-six years, the area of the Sakara Seedling Farm grew from 2,000 square meters to 18 hectares and its supply of young plant materials also greatly improved. Staroselsky, as the founder of the experimental farm, was sent on assignment to France, Switzerland and Austro-Hungary where he fundamentally studied the current issues of viticulture and wine making which including experimental methods to fight vine diseases; making him more and where he became more confident about the advantages and future perspective of his own ideas related to the promotion of American vines.

Staroselsky enjoyed great popularity, trust and overall respect amongst the Georgian intelligentsia, public figures and, in particular, the peasants of West Georgia. For these very reasons, the newly-appointed Tsar's Governor, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, prior to his arrival in Tbilisi in March 1905, offered Staroselsky who was in St-Petersburg on occasion-the position of Kutaisi Governor. Staroselsky refused the offer. He reasoned his refusal, primarily, by the circumstance that the position would not allow him to continue his scientific research activities and that his personal qualities were not suitable for the functions of a high-positioned administrator such as a Governor. Nevertheless, Vorontsov-Dashkov's decision was firm. Influential officials, like the assistant to the of Tsar's Governor, Sultan Cringirey, who was known for his liberality, also advised favourably upon Staroselsky's candidature.

Previously, General Smagin, a devoted servant of monarchism, headed the province of Kutaisi. On 21 May 1905, he was relieved of his official duties with Vorontsov-Dashkov proposing Staroselsky's candidature to St-Petersburg on 7 June. There was quite a bit of hesitation at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Tsar's Palace. The delay lasted for more than a month but they



finally took the opinion of the Tsar's Governor into consideration with Emperor Nikolai II signing the resolution regarding the appointment of Vladimir Staroselsky as Acting Governor of the province of Kutaisi on 9 July 1905.

Under the influence of Governor Staroselsky, repressions against the revolutionist movement and party organisations were suspended step-by-step. At the beginning of August, he issued the order to prevent police authorities from taking any measures against anti-governmental meetings, manifestations with red flags and the spreading of revolutionist leaflets. On 8 January, Emperor Nikolai II sent a personal letter to the Tsar's Governor in Caucasia, advising Vorontsov-Dashkov to take extreme measures for the suppression of the revolutionist movement. The second part of the letter referred to Cringirey and Staroselsky. Vorontsov-Dashkov established a special commission under the leadership of his assistant, Senator Mistkevich. The commission went to Kutaisi, performed on-situ investigation and collected a great deal of materials about the convictions against Staroselsky. A military investigation commission performed activities at the same time. According to the conclusion of the both commissions, Staroselsky, obviously, had betrayed the Tsar's government, supported the revolutionist movement and facilitated its spreading and development.

It would be logical to impose responsibility upon Staroselsky for this crime and execute him by hanging. At the end of January 1906, however, Vorontsov-Dashkov released Staroselsky from house arrest and only evicted him from Caucasia. Later, in June 1906, the Tsar's Governor stopped the proceedings related to Staroselsky and left it for good.

There was no time for delay. Staroselsky left for St-Petersburg on the

very first train. Early in the morning, policemen rushed into his flat, but without any result. The administration, upset by the news, sent this information to Tbilisi and St-Petersburg by telegram. They were searching for the criminal Governor but there was no trace of him to be found. Staroselsky, who had changed his clothes and made himself up in disguise, was already headed by ship towards Marseille where he secretly got on board and planned to go to Paris.

Why did Vorontsov-Dashkov display such a strange mercy towards the revolutionist Governor? What caused him to even ignore the Emperor's instructions? We have to suppose that Vorontsov-Dashkov's personal sympathy towards Staroselsky played a leading role in this case.

Staroselsky's only son could not endure parting with his father and his unfair persecution in the Tsar's Russia. On 15 May 1909, Boris Staroselsky committed suicide and shocked his mother, Nadezhda Staroselskaya, who was in despair. Despite the tragedy, Staroselskaya went to Paris to join her husband and comfort and support him.

Staroselsky, left without any means of subsistence, began to work as a photographer in Paris and soon became famous although it was hardly enough to live on. Difficult work, overall difficult conditions and his concern about his family which was in a helpless situation undermined his health at an early age. Staroselsky died in Paris on 6 August 1916, a lonely man, at the age of 56.

On 29 August, the mourning columns consisting of French communists, socialists, Parisian workers and friends came to see off Vladimir Staroselsky's body to the communards graveyard. There were flower garlands with inscriptions reading "To a citizen and defender of proletarians." There also was one wreath with an inscription which read "To our Patron - From a grateful Georgia".

