

Opinion & Analysis

Georgian Dream begins election campaign

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Economics

Georgia's top trading partners in first half of 2020: Turkey, Russia, China



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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

During the last week, 24 cases of covid-19 were detected in Gardabani municipality. According to Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), the epidemiological situation in Gardabani municipality is quite significant. Epidemiologists and the members of the Georgian government held an Inter-agency Coordination Council meeting yesterday.

"6 of them are from 3 villages in the town of Gardabani, Gachiani settlement, and 4 of them are in Karatakia and 14 in Karajalari," Gamkrelidze reported, adding that the highest number of cases is recorded in the village of Karajalar with population of 4000. Note that 2% of the cases recorded in the country as of July 21st fall on Gardabani municipality. Meanwhile, there are 5 cases in Tbilisi, the sources of two have not yet been identified.

"No decision has been made on the closure, a decision has been made on thermal screening at the Gachiani entry points and also on extended testing of the population in this region and, in particular, in the Gachiani settlement," Gamkrelidze said.

Thus, the extended testing started in the villages of Karajalari and Karatakia in Gardabani Municipality yesterday. According to Gamkrelidze, as of yesterday morning about 107 people from the mentioned villages of Gardabani municipality have been examined and 24 positive cases have been registered so far. 94 people have been quarantined.

Gamkrelidze says 600-700 biological samples will be taken daily this week and the close contacts of the infected will be quarantined to timely suppress the small epidemic we have and prevent the spread of infection, "because these people are very active, they work in different

Source of 7 coronavirus cases detected in Georgia last week, still unknown

16th patient dies of coronavirus



Amiran Gamkrelidze says most of the cases in the last week are recorded in Gardabani Municipality.

Photo: RFE/RL

markets'.

NCDC head believes that the markets like Lilo, Dinamo markets and food markets should be closely monitored and thermal screening should be conducted, in order to determine cases at an early stage.

He confirmed that the family members of the 16th patient, 72-year-old man with quite severe chronic disease, who died of coronavirus in Georgia on 20th of July are also infected, their clinical condition is satisfactory.

At the same time, according to Gamkrelidze, the family members of the deceased worked at several markets, due to which the Coordination Council decided to tighten the measures at the markets at yesterday's meeting: "In particular, thermo screening is necessary, where people with relevant symptoms will be identified, tested and contacts will be found," Gamkrelidze said.

At the same time, the source of infection of the dead 72-year-old man is still unknown.

In general, 63 new cases of coronavirus have been detected in Georgia over the past week, 20 of them are truck drivers. The source of 7 out of 63 cases registered in the last week is still unknown.

Georgia has reported 10 new cases of the coronavirus earlier yesterday, bringing the total number of cases to 1,049. 903 of them have recovered, while 16 others have died.

The head of the NCDCI, also informed

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Mass testing of the population has started in two villages of Gardabani municipality. Photo: Mtavari Arkhi

Georgian Dream begins election campaign

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The ruling team has officially started the election campaign and is preparing to win the elections. Eventually, it will be confronted by a highly diverse opposition team. The main demand of both the opposition and Georgia's Western friends to the government remains unchanged - to ensure that the next parliamentary elections are held in a democratic manner.

On July 14, the Georgian Dream appointed Irakli Kobakhidze, the party's executive secretary, as head of the election headquarters. Representatives of the ruling team also said many positive words towards Kobakhidze. It was noted that Irakli Kobakhidze is an experienced professional, he feels good about the election process, his name is always associated with success and it will be the same during the next parliamentary elections. Kobakhidze is known for his harsh remarks against the opposition, and it is likely that the ruling party's election campaign will end in a similar style.

The Georgian Dream has a difficult job ahead of it to determine the list of its 30 MPs. It is also mentioned that the party will present new faces before the elections, replacing those with lower ratings. The party stated that Archil Talakvadze will remain as the head of the Parliament.

It is clear to everyone that the decisive vote in compiling the pre-election list belongs to the party chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili. It was also mentioned that Bidzina Ivanishvili was remotely involved in the

meeting of the election headquarters. This became a subject of irony on the part of the opposition, as Ivanishvili had not appeared in public for several months after the outbreak of the epidemic.

According to the comments made by the opposition and experts, Bidzina Ivanishvili will definitely be at the top of the Georgian Dream's electoral list, but they also point out that Ivanishvili's rating, unlike before, is sharply reduced. Some even think that Ivanishvili needs the mandate of an MP for immunity - if sanctions are really imposed on him, which has been talked about by a small group of US congressmen so far.

The opposition has been preparing for the elections for a long time. By July 15th, political parties that do not have a representative in the parliament have to apply to the Election Administration of Georgia - there are 68 such parties. Whatever the case, the 1% threshold in proportional elections is appetizing for many. Of these parties, 14 have already been registered, one has been rejected and 53 are under consideration.

The list of election subjects in the ballot paper given to the voters will be very long. Clearly, this will benefit the ruling party more than the opposition, which includes open or concealed allies of the government.

In the upcoming elections, the Georgian Dream and its main opponent, the United Opposition, are announcing their future victory. Irakli Kobakhidze has repeatedly mentioned the opposition with a 3% rating, which is afraid of elections and which will be easily defeated. For his part,

Giorgi Vashadze, one of the leaders of the opposition, said that the Georgian Dream cannot get more than 30% of the maximum number of votes.

One by one, the political parties in the United Opposition have stated that they do not intend to leave the union. Recently, there was a great resonance with the information that the "National Movement" was going to leave the union. The party leaders categorically denied it. United Opposition agreed that they would have a common majoritarian candidate in Tbilisi, and in other constituencies they would support the opposition candidate who won in the second round, unless, of course, the case went to the second round.

The Western friends of Georgia continue to call on the authorities to conduct the upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled for October 31st, in accordance with democratic standards. 15% of the US's aid to Georgia will be frozen in case of violations and such a sanction had never been imposed on Georgia's strategic partner before. A few days ago, MEPs also called on the Georgian government to hold democratic elections. They hope that the coming parliamentary elections will be an important testament to Georgia's democracy and that the pre-election period will end in a fair, competitive environment. The European Parliament will adopt a resolution on Georgia in September, further developments in the pre-election period will either tighten or soften the wording of the draft resolution.

(Translated by Mariam Mchedlidze)

GEL 5 Million awarded to first municipalities under Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme

11 municipalities awarded GEL 5 million in grants for local infrastructure and business development as part of programme to support integrated development of Kakheti, Imereti, Guria and Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti.

TBILISI. 8 July 2020 – The Government of Georgia, with the support of the EU, awarded the first 11 municipalities under the Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme with a total of GEL 5 million in grants in the area of local infrastructure and business development. These grants are part of the Government's GEL 220 million Pilot Integrated Regional Development Grant Programme, of which GEL 186 million will come from EU funding. The aim of the programme is to promote a more balanced territorial development and improve living standards and conditions of the population in the regions through inclusive, smart and sustainable socio-economic means. The grant programme will be implemented in the municipalities of four focal regions in Georgia: Kakheti, Imereti, Guria and Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti.

These grants are part of the programme's first phase which began in June 2020, when the first grant competition was announced in the municipalities of the pilot regions. The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (MRDI), in the framework of the Government Commission for Regional Development (GCRD), revealed the results of the first grant competition on 8 July. The municipalities of Vani, Sachkhere, Tkibuli, Samtredia, Baghdati, Tsageri, Sagarejo, Telavi, Akhmeta, Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri received funding in the amount of 5 million GEL.

"The implementation of this kind of programmes is crucially important today. The assistance to be provided by the EU for the next 3 years, is in line with the European standards for regional policy planning and implementation. With this programme, our cooperation with the EU is moving to a qualitatively new and important stage, which, I think, also implies the further enhancement and strengthening of the degree of credibility of the EU towards Georgia. It should also be noted that the programme also introduces the principles of establishing competitive relations between municipalities, which is very important in the process of decentralization and in the emergence and strengthening of new skills at the municipal level." – stated Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, Maya Tskitishvili.

"The development of Georgian regions is a priority for the EU, and with this programme the EU hopes to ensure that this development is balanced and not just focussed on the main cities of Tbilisi and Batumi. We have worked hard with the Government to put the proper structures in place and are happy to see them in action. We look forward to providing over GEL 186 million through our EU4ITD programme to make this initiative a success" - said Vincent Rey, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Georgia.

The appraisal and selection for funding of the municipal projects was carried out by the Regional Consultative Councils (RCC) that comprise municipal Mayors and Heads of Councils, as well as CSOs and business community members as observers. The funding will allow the winning municipalities to realize important projects covering various areas, such as support to SMEs, improvement of key infrastructure and municipal services, improvement of human capital, education and research institutions, increase the quality and effectiveness of institutions, etc. These initiatives, in line with ongoing sectoral EU-funded programmes and projects, will boost investment and employment in targeted regions.

The development of regional policy in Georgia is an important area of the EU-Georgia cooperation under the Association Agreement. The Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme 2020-2022, co-financed through the budget support scheme by the EU, was approved by the Government in December 2019. The programme follows the European model of regional development and is implemented for the first time among the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries in Georgia.

Source of 7 coronavirus cases detected in Georgia last week, still unknown

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the public that at this stage there are already several promising vaccines against coronavirus. He reported that one of the promising vaccines is the vaccine created by the British Oxford Group, which has passed a 3rd

stage of research. Now the research will be conducted on a larger group of about 10-15 000 people. According to Gamkrelidze, Its ability to elicit a fairly good immune response has already been established and if the safety is established as well, the vaccine may already be available.

At the same time, Gamkrelidze says that work is underway with the British-Swedish pharmaceutical giant 'AstraZeneca' and 'Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance' so that when

the vaccine appears on the market, Georgia will be among the recipients. Gamkrelidze informed that Gavi is a large international organization, the Global Alliance for Vaccines, which is funded by the Bill Gates Foundation and is one of the largest contributors to the supply of vaccines to developing countries. He added that Georgia has been in contact with Gavi for a long time, because through Gavi many new vaccines have been introduced in the country.

Weather

Wednesday, July 22

Day  Partly Cloudy

High: 31°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 20°C

Thursday, July 23

Day  Showers

High: 28°C

Night  Partly Cloudy

Low: 21°C

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Georgia's top trading partners in first half of 2020: Turkey, Russia, China

	EXPORTS		IMPORTS		TURNOVER	
	THSD. US DOLLARS	SHARE IN TOTAL (%)	THSD. US DOLLARS	SHARE IN TOTAL (%)	THSD. US DOLLARS	SHARE IN TOTAL (%)
TOTAL	1 503 442.5	100.0	3 550 477.1	100.0	5 053 919.6	100.0
Of which:						
Turkey	102 216.0	6.8	595 211.9	16.8	697 427.8	13.8
Russia	188 061.3	12.5	396 110.9	11.2	584 172.2	11.6
China	205 140.7	13.6	325 601.3	9.2	530 742.0	10.5
Azerbaijan	203 521.2	13.5	247 381.2	7.0	450 902.4	8.9
Armenia	83 767.0	5.6	198 713.3	5.6	282 480.3	5.6
Ukraine	83 420.6	5.5	166 893.4	4.7	250 314.0	5.0
United States	36 685.7	2.4	196 879.7	5.5	233 565.4	4.6
Bulgaria	162 690.8	10.8	46 347.4	1.3	209 038.2	4.1
Germany	17 787.0	1.2	180 610.0	5.1	198 396.9	3.9
Italy	11 609.7	0.8	81 828.9	2.3	93 438.5	1.8
Other countries	408 542.6	27.2	1 114 899.2	31.4	1 523 441.8	30.1

Turkey remains Georgia's largest trading partner.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office (Geostat) released preliminary figures of Georgia's foreign trade turnover on 20th of July. According to the data, it decreased in the first 6 months of 2020 by 18.2%, compared to the same period last year – reaching \$5.05 billion.

Exports from Georgia decreased by 16% year-on-year to \$1.5 billion, while imports were down by 19.1% y/y to \$3.55

billion in January-June, with a trade gap standing at \$2.05 billion.

Georgia's largest trading partner is still Turkey with \$697.4 million, followed by Russia, China, Azerbaijan and Armenia with \$584.2 million, \$530.7 million, \$450.9 million and \$282.5 million, respectively.

In the reporting period the share of the top 10 trading partners by domestic exports in the total domestic exports of Georgia amounted to 80.5%. China tops the

list of largest trading partners by exports with \$205.1 million, followed by Azerbaijan (\$203.5 million), Russia (\$188.1 million), Bulgaria (\$162.7 million) and Turkey (\$102.2 million).

In the reporting period the share of the top 10 trading partners in Georgia's total external trade turnover amounted to 69.9%.

As for imports, top trading partners of Georgia are Turkey, Russia, China, Azerbaijan and Armenia with \$595.2 million, \$396.1 million, \$325.6 million, \$247.4 million and \$198.7 million, respectively.

Cars top the list of import commodities in Georgia's foreign trade with \$289.9 million, followed by copper ores and concentrates – \$234.1 million; petroleum and petroleum oils – \$231.6 million; medicines – \$158.7 million; petroleum gases – \$157.8 million; mobile phones – \$69.8 million; wheat – \$39.6 million; precious ores and concentrates – \$38.2 million; meat – \$31.6 million; electricity – \$31

million; other commodities – \$2.3 billion.

In January-June 2020 copper ores and concentrates reclaimed the first place in the list of top export items, equalling \$332.4 million, or 30.8% of total exports. It is followed by cars with – \$184.1 million; ferroalloys – \$117.6 million; wine – \$91.4 million (8.4%); precious ores and concentrates – \$64.7 million; spirits – \$53.6 million; mineral waters – \$49.4 million; medicines – \$45.5 million; gold – \$44.9 million; nitrogen fertilizers – \$44.2 million; other commodities – \$475.6 million. Overall, Georgia's external trade turnover amounted to \$5.072 billion in January-June 2020, which is a decrease of 16.3% compared to the same period of last year, said Geostat.

The share of domestic exports (export of locally produced goods and services, including those of foreign origin that have been substantially changed through local processing) in total exports constituted 71.7% and amounted to \$1.07 billion, 3% lower than the January-June 2019.



Exports from Georgia decreased by 16% year-on-year.

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