

PM chairs another Coordination Council meeting



Inter-Agency coordination council meeting.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

At the inter-agency coordination council meeting on September 28th, council members made a decision to reopen kindergartens and resume the education process in the auditoriums of higher and vocational education institutions. Members also discussed epidemiological conditions in the Adjara region as well as new recommendations for assessing the recovery status of asymptomatic individuals.

According to the decision of the Coordination Council, chaired by the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia, students of higher and vocational education institutions will be able to attend lectures in auditoriums from October 19th and from October 12th, kindergartens will reopen for pupils, however, these changes does not apply to the region of Adjara, where education process will continue remotely.

As for schools, according to the spread information, the education process will resume in classrooms for primary school students (grades 1-6) in Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, and Zugdidi from October 1st, while the education process will be fully resumed (grades 1-12) in Gori and Poti.

Considering the epidemiological situation in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, the ban on the public and inter-city transport still remains in force, and restaurants are allowed to operate until 10 pm.

At the meeting, council members discussed new recommendations on assess-

ing the recovery status of asymptomatic individuals. As the Government of Georgia informs, according to public healthcare experts, relevant recommendations in these terms have changed worldwide. In particular, according to the statements issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, individuals are practically unable to spread the infection after 8 days pass since the onset of symptoms, meaning that a test might give a positive result, however, an ability of the virus to infect other people is minimal and practically nonexistent. Thus, a person who was tested 12 days ago and no longer

shows any symptoms of the virus, will be considered to have recovered from the infection.

As for the symptomatic patients, the minimum duration of hospitalization until recovery is 13 days, which includes ten days of exhibiting symptoms and three days of asymptomatic period.

As of September 28th, there are 5552 confirmed cases of the Coronavirus in Georgia, 2055 patients have recovered and 31 persons have died. According to the epidemiologists, the situation is manageable so far and patients are being treated properly, however, detection of 200-500 cases daily is expected shortly.



The scheme of granting recovery status to asymptomatic persons will be reflected in the guidelines of the Ministry of Healthcare.

Politics

Armenia, Azerbaijan clashes over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region

According to the Armenian PM, the South Caucasus is on the verge of a large-scale war.

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NGOs publish statement condemning criticism towards Ombudsman

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Economics

Opposition parties agree on education and economic reforms

A few opposition parties have signed an agreement on the principles of economic and education reform on September 28th, 2020.

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Armenia, Azerbaijan clashes over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region



On September 21st, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that Armenia was preparing for a war. A few months earlier, on July 22nd, Armenia accused Azerbaijan of attacking the border region of Tavu. Photo: OC Media archive, 2018.

BY NATALIA KOCHASHVILI

Fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh continues despite international calls for restraint. On September 28th, Armenian Defense ministry reported intense overnight fighting. According to reports from Baku, Armenian forces built shells in the city of Terter, which borders Nagorno-Karabakh.

According to the de facto government of Nagorno-Karabakh, on September 28th, 32 of its soldiers were killed in a clash with Azerbaijani forces.

Official Armenia and official Azerbaijan have reported on renewed hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh on September 27th. Opposing parties deployed military helicopters, drones, tanks and artillery. The clashes erupted in the morning of September 27th, with civilians bombed, including in the capital, Stepanakert, according to Vagram Poghosyan, spokesman for the president of the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Footage of military equipment moving on the streets was spread on social media.

According to the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijan has launched a military attack in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the historical province of Artsakh. The PM called on the population to be ready to defend the homeland.

The Ministry of Defense of Armenia first spread information about the destruction of 2 helicopters and three unmanned aerial vehicles belonging to Azerbaijan as a result of the fighting on the territory of Karabakh, something Baku denied.

A state of emergency was declared in Armenia and the

breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is controlled by Armenian militias. Military mobilization has also been announced in Armenia. Armenian PM said that the government was considering recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh's independence. Even though Armenia provides military assistance to the breakaway republic, neither Armenia nor any other country has officially recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia accuses Azerbaijani forces of opening fire on Nagorno-Karabakh settlements, Baku says Armenian forces have attacked Azerbaijani military and civilian positions. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have blamed the other side for the resumption of hostilities; Both sides report casualties.

The Parliament of Azerbaijan has decided at a special session to declare a state of emergency in certain parts of the country due to the resumption of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. The curfew is in effect in several cities, including Baku.

President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev said that the operation carried out by Azerbaijani forces should bring 'liberation from occupation,' 'Armenia must stop and Azerbaijan will definitely stop it.' Pashinyan accused Azerbaijan of starting a war against the Armenian people and stressed that Yerevan is a guarantor of the security of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Aliyev made statements a few days ago, on September 21st, about how Armenia was preparing for a war. The Russian service of the BBC reported in the previous days that the sudden recruitment of reservists and military exercises had begun in Azerbaijan. A few months earlier, on July 22nd, Armenia accused Azerbaijan of attacking the border region of Tavu.

A statement from the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan said that 5 members of one family were killed in an artillery fire by the Armenian military in the Naftalan region. Earlier, 19 wounded people were reported from

villages in Azerbaijan.

As reported by the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan in the morning of September 28th, about 10 villages in the direction of Fizuli-Jebrail have been liberated and control has been established at significant heights.

According to the Azerbaijani side, more than 550 Armenian servicemen were killed and wounded near Talish. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry says that 22 enemy tanks, 15 anti-aircraft missile systems, 18 unmanned aerial vehicles, 8 artillery pieces and 3 ammunition depots were destroyed in various directions. According to the Azerbaijani side, the commander of the airborne battalion Lernik Babayan was killed.

The Armenian side also claims casualties among the Nagorno-Karabakh militias - reportedly killing 16 people and wounding up to 100. The self-proclaimed republic claims that the Azerbaijani side has a great loss.

For its part, the Armenian Defense Ministry says that on Sunday, about 200 Azerbaijani servicemen were killed and 30 enemy tanks and 20 unmanned aerial vehicles were destroyed as a result of hostilities.

The leadership of self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh reports that dozens were killed and in the shooting, including civilians. The President of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Arai Arutunyan, said that it is not Azerbaijan, but Turkey fighting against them. According to Arutunyan, not only Turkish drones and planes are involved in the hostilities, but also military units and mercenaries and volunteers from other countries, while Nagorno-Karabakh uses only its forces and the volunteers will be only from Armenia.

"Armenia has deployed fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Nagorno-Karabakh," Azerbaijani Ambassador to Turkey, Khazar Ibrahim said in an interview with the Turkish news agency Anadolu. According to the Azerbaijani diplomat, the Armenian authorities have also deployed a terrorist group in the conflict zone, the so-called Fighters of the Secret Armenian Army for the Liberation of Armenia.

Armenian PM called on international structures to suspend Turkish interference in the Karabakh conflict, since it may eventually shake the situation in the region.

"The large-scale war in the South Caucasus, which we are now on the brink of, could have the most unpredictable consequences. It can go beyond the region and become larger, endangering international security and stability," he said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged support for

Azerbaijan, urging the world to stand with the country in its 'battle against invasion and cruelty.' He advised the Armenian people to "take hold of their future against their leadership that is dragging them to a catastrophe."

Russia, traditionally seen as an ally of Armenia, called for an immediate ceasefire and talks to stabilize the situation. Russia FM Lavrov said Russia would continue its mediation efforts to stabilize the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The renewal of the clashes was followed by an international reaction. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia responded to the ongoing process in Karabakh, expressing Georgia's readiness to contribute in any way to de-escalation and peace in the region.

Georgia called on the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, international actors, to make every effort to ensure an end to the escalation and the resumption of a constructive dialogue, and expresses its readiness to promote de-escalation in any way possible and to establish peace in the region.

The President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili expressed concern over renewed hostilities on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and called on the parties for peace.

James Appathurai, NATO Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia and Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General expressed deep concerns and called for both sides to stop fighting.

President Donald Trump said the US was seeking to stop the violence. State Department spokesman Morgan Ortogus said the U.S. 'in the most powerful way' condemns the escalation of violence.

The US presidential candidate Joe Biden says he is concerned about the ongoing military confrontation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Former US vice president noted that the Trump administration needs to strengthen its diplomatic services, along with the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, to enable a peaceful resolution of

the conflict.

"The United States should call for more observers on the ceasefire line, and urge Russia to stop cynically supplying weapons to both sides as it evaluates our security support programs to ensure that military resources are not used anywhere for attacks," Biden said.

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell has issued a statement on the matter: "It is urgent that, under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, return to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict talks without preconditions." The President of the European Council, Charles Michel released the statement with the same points.

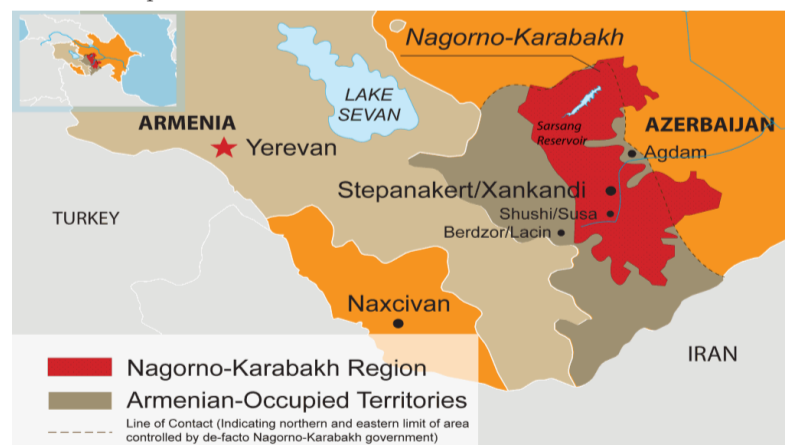
"We strongly condemn the use of force and express our grief over the deaths of civilians. "The Co-Chairs call on the parties to immediately end the violence and resume talks to find a lasting solution to the conflict," the OSCE said in a statement.

Germany and France, which has a large Armenian community, called for an immediate ceasefire and dialogue. Iran, which borders both Azerbaijan and Armenia, offered to broker peace talks.

The 1988-1994 war between the two neighboring countries was over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The separatists, with the support of Armenia, occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and 7 surrounding districts of Azerbaijan and declared independence. The war claimed the lives of at least 30,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands of refugees.

After a fragile Russian-brokered ceasefire in 1994, there have been periodic clashes in the region between the Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces. At least 200 people were killed in a flare-up of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in April 2016. There are frequent skirmishes and at least 16 were reported killed in clashes in July.

Peace talks under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, led by the United States, France and Russia, have failed to make progress in resolving the conflict. Since 1994, the conflict has been, in fact, frozen. Recently, the ceasefire regime has been violated more and more often.



The conflict in the Caucasus Mountains has remained unresolved for more than 3 decades, with periodic bouts of fighting.

Weather

Tuesday, September 29

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 22°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 13°C

Wednesday, September 30

Day Overcast

High: 20°C

Night Overcast

Low: 14°C

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NGOs publish statement condemning criticism towards Ombudsman



A joint statement is signed by 14 non-governmental organizations.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

14 Non-governmental organizations publish a joint statement, calling on the government representatives to refrain from making offensive statements towards the Public Defender (ombudsman) of Georgia, Nino Lomjaria. The statement of the NGOs primarily refers to the Executive Secretary of Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, who recently 'attacked' Lomjaria and called her 'irresponsible, shameful and subjective in favor of the opposition.'

Lomjaria received criticism from Kobakhidze in response to her statement, according to which, opposition members are being threatened during the

pre-election period. Kobakhidze noted that Lomjaria has been making such statements for several years already, however, she has never been able to name who she is referring to, which, according to the Executive Secretary of Georgian Dream, 'is irresponsible and raises doubts.'

NGOs express extreme concern over the criticism of Public Defender and note that making 'unfounded' and 'insulting' statements towards the Ombudsman has become a habit of the government representatives. In their joint statement, organizations remark that the only purpose of such criticism is to discredit constitutional institutions and

divert attention from the actual challenges and problems.

The NGOs emphasize that the Public Defender of Georgia is a constitutional body, which is entitled by the law to monitor and oversee the protection of human rights in the country. As the statement reads, monitoring of the pre-election environment, as well as informing the society and international community about the detected violation is the direct and most important responsibility of the Public Defender.

According to the organizations, as in the previous years, within the framework of her mandate, the Public Defender of Georgia is observing the 2020 Parliamentary elections. The statement reads that the severe violations such as intimidation, threatening to disseminate materials of private life, and retaliation against political opponents by forceful methods are issues that have never been adequately dealt with by the state. The statement also notes that investigation on many violent acts that took place during the pre-election period in recent years has not been completed to date or has not been commenced at all.

"It is noteworthy that the unhealthy and violent pre-election environment in Georgia has been repeatedly pointed out by



The Public Defender of Georgia, Nino Lomjaria.

international missions, as well as NGOs operating in the country. Thus, obvious and direct attacks of the representatives of the ruling party on the Public Defender of Georgia is unsupported and is aiming to discredit the major institute of the country," the statement reads.

The signatory organizations call on the political group of Georgian Dream to abstain from making offensive statements to the Public Defender explicitly or implicitly and to stop attempts of obstructing the activities of the institute.

The statement is signed by the following organizations: Open

Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF); Transparency International (TI); Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA); International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED); Rights Georgia; Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI); Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI); Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center – EMC; Partnership for Human Rights (PHR); The Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC); Georgian Media Club for Freedom; Democracy Research Institute (DRI); Green Alternative; Sapari.

By ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

Opposition parties agree on education and economic reforms

The agreement, signed by several opposition parties, including Girchi, European Georgia, National Movement, Strategy Builder and United Georgia, states that after the defeat of the Georgian Dream in the 2020 parliamentary elections, extraordinary reforms will be carried out in the fields of economy and education in order to bring the economy out of the severe crisis and create new opportunities.

The main directions of the agreement are:

Economy - return of state property to citizens in private ownership;

1. Unregistered land plots, which are owned by people and

no one disputes, will be registered as the property of the owner;

2. Unregistered land plots, which are, in fact, in the common ownership of a rural community or rural population and there is no claim of other people towards these plots, will be registered as property of the village/community;

3. State property - enterprises, land and minerals (except in exceptional cases), will be transferred to private ownership of citizens. All citizens will have an equal right to participate in

this process.

Reducing government and bureaucracy

4. By the end of 2024 at the latest, the size of government will be reduced to 20% of GDP;

5. Mechanisms to prevent the devaluation of the national currency shall be developed within 100 days of coming to power.

Education

6. Private education will be exempt from state regulations;

7. Public schools will receive financial and governance autonomy.

The parties also signed a similar agreement on the judiciary and the justice system.

Strategy Builder's leader, Giorgi Vashadze, highlights several important issues, such as decentralization in education, relieving the sector of political pressure, property rights, and so on.

"Education needs to be decentralized, teachers should be valued, we should release them from political pressure, we should register property and people, people should not have



Several issues are emphasized in the agreement, such as decentralization in education and strengthening the national currency.

land registration problems," said Vashadze.

As for the opinion of Girchi leader Zurab Japaridze, he said that the factor of privatization and exemption of private institutions from state regulations is crucial.

"In the education system, it is important to agree that private educational institutions should be exempt from state regulation, and what remains public should have maximum autonomy, including financial autonomy," said Japaridze.

Tina Bokuchava, a member of the United National Movement,

says it is important to strengthen the national currency and reduce bureaucratic costs in the country.

The document sets out the vision for how to consolidate the national currency, which is depreciating daily.

The agreement is the third stage of the signing of a joint document by the opposition. The first was held in March and concerned the reorganization of the courts. The second was on September 16th, when the parties agreed on reforms in the SSU, the prosecutor's office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

ოპოზიციური პარტიების შეთანხმება ეკონომიკისა და განათლების სფეროების რეფორმირების პრინციპებზე

ქვემოთ ხელმოწერილი პარტიები შეთანხმდებიან, რომ 2020 წლის საპარლამენტო არჩევნებში „ქართული ოცნების“ დამარცხების შემდეგ, ეკონომიკის მიმდებარე კრიზისიდან გამოყვანის მიზნით, ქვეყნის მომავლის რწმუნის დასაბრუნებლად საქართველოს მოქალაქეებში და უცხოელ ინვესტორებში, ახალი შესაძლებლობების შესაქმნელად ეკონომიკის და განათლების სფეროებში განახორციელებული ექსტრაორდინალური რეფორმები: ეკონომიკა მოქალაქეებისათვის კერძო საკუთრებაში სახელმწიფო ქონების დაბრუნება

1. დაურეგისტრირებელი მიწის ნაკვეთები, რომელიც ადამიანების ფაქტობრივ მფლობელობაშია და არაა რეგისტრირებული, დაურეგისტრირდება მფლობელის საკუთრებად;

2. დაურეგისტრირებელი მიწის ნაკვეთები, რომელიც ფაქტობრივად სასოფლო თემის ან სოფლის მოსახლეობის საერთო მფლობელობაშია და ამ ნაკვეთების მიმართ არ არსებობს სხვა ადამიანების პრეტენზია დაურეგისტრირდება სოფლის/თემის საკუთრებად;

3. სახელმწიფო საკუთრება - სანარმოები, მინა და ნიაღვისეული (გარდა განსაკუთრებული გამონაკლისი შემთხვევებისა), გადავა მოქალაქეების კერძო საკუთრებაში. ყველა მოქალაქე შეძლება ამ პროცესში მონაწილეობის თანაბარი უფლება.

Five parties sign the third part of the agreement at the NDI meeting in Borjomi, which includes economic and educational solutions.