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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

After an inter-agency coordination council meeting, at the briefing yesterday, the Head of National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) Amiran Gamkrelidze talked about the increased coronavirus cases and named three hotspots of the virus as of October 14th.

According to Gamkrelidze, out of 680 new coronavirus cases, 362 are symptomatic and 167 are the contacts of the infected patients. He also noted that the number of infected medical staff has increased.

The distribution of the newly-detected cases according to the regions is following: 297 in Tbilisi (44%), 189 in Adjara (28%), 150 in Imereti (22%), 12 in Shida Kartli, 11 in Kvemo Kartli, nine in Mtskheta-Mtianeti, six in Guria, three in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, two in Kakheti and one in Samtskhe-Javakheti. As Gamkrelidze noted, in September, Adjara was the most infected region in the country, constantly recording 65-70% of the cases, however, the situation in Adjara is gradually stabilizing.

The head of NCDC said that 748 000 PCR tests have been taken in the coun-

An update on epidemiological situation



► As of October 14th, there were 680 new coronavirus cases, upping the total number of infected people to 13 521.



► Amiran Gamkrelidze, the Head of National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC).

try since the beginning. The daily rate of tests for the last few days is 8000 and the average of last month is 8500 tests(daily). Based on the changes that have been made to the testing regime, all the medical workers will be tested once every two weeks. The most critical workers such as resuscitation doctors in the clinics will be tested once a week,

emergency ambulance staff will be tested every 72 hours "to avoid shortage of medical workers."

According to Gamkrelidze, the epidemiological situation is escalating gradually.

"This was expected in Autumn, the second wave has started, which is stronger quantity-wise, but relatively lighter

severity-wise, that is to say, there are more mild and asymptomatic ongoing cases," said Gamkrelidze.

As he noted, Georgia's policy is that there will be no large-scale restricting measures, but there will be different types of 'pinpoint' restrictions.

Ekaterine Tikaradze, the Minister of Healthcare, who also attended the briefing, said that the council had had a discussion about imposing restrictions in Tbilisi, but the decision has not been made yet. She noted that the state will continue imposing local restrictions, 'since these kinds of restrictions work well,' however, as she said, discussions will proceed and if necessary, regulations will be adopted, which will ensure to 'break the infection chain.'

According to Tikaradze, the number of cases does not define whether restrictions will come into force or not.

"We will consider the number of available beds, the number of infected people as well as the patients who are in severe condition, also the number of hotels available for quarantining and will make a further decision based on the overall result," said Tikaradze.

She also stated that there are 3500 hospital beds available and 2000 more will be added if necessary.

Georgia reported 680 new coronavirus cases yesterday, which makes the total number of infected people 13 521, with 7 159 cured and 109 deaths.

Georgian PM delivers a speech at discussion organized by RUSI

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia participated in a thematic discussion organized by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI). The main topics of the PM's speech were Georgia's role in the wider Black Sea region, the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, occupation of territories, and security challenges existing in the region and hybrid threats. The information is published by the press service of the Government of Georgia.

The PM started his speech by talking about the difficult situation in the occupied territories. Gakharia mentioned that even in times of Pandemic, Georgia faces so-called 'borderization' and that the Russian Federation constantly violates the 2008 Ceasefire Agreement. He noted that there are thousands of IDPs in Georgia, who are still unable to return to their homes.

The PM also named hybrid threats as one of the most serious challenges to the country.

"Georgia is recognized as a successful country in the fight against COVID-19, but, in this regard, we became a target of a cyber-attack that has directly threatened our Healthcare system – primarily, the Lugar Laboratory, which has a crucial role in the fight against the coronavirus.



► The Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia.

One of the recent challenges that we faced was a large-scale cyber-attack against Georgian government and private sector websites in 2019," said the PM.

According to the information, Gakharia stressed the potential of the Black Sea, which presents a crucial aspect in terms of the country's security and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The PM noted that Georgia's new role regarding the Black Sea includes three main directions, which are – political, economic, and security. Georgia has a very good

relationship with the EU and owns important tools such as – DCFTA, Association Agreement, visa-free travel. The PM noted this project will be beneficial for all parties. "When it comes to the security of Black Sea, we see it as a new opportunity to cooperate with NATO and other strategic partners, that is why everything related to the Black Sea is so important to us," he said.

Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration was mentioned as the main priority of Georgia's foreign policy agenda. According

to Gakharia, Georgia is starting negotiations with the EU about the new agenda. Besides, he stated that the purpose of the country's Euro-Atlantic integration is NATO membership and stated that the country is practically ready to become a member.

While viewing the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict, Gakharia emphasized the importance of peace in the Caucasus region. According to the Prime Minister, as soon as the situation escalated, Georgia suspended permission on the transit of military cargo



► RUSI operates under the patronage of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom and is the oldest research institute in the world in the field of defense and security.

in the direction of both countries, otherwise, Georgia would have faced a risk of getting involved in the conflict one way or another, which is completely unacceptable for Georgia, according to Gakharia.

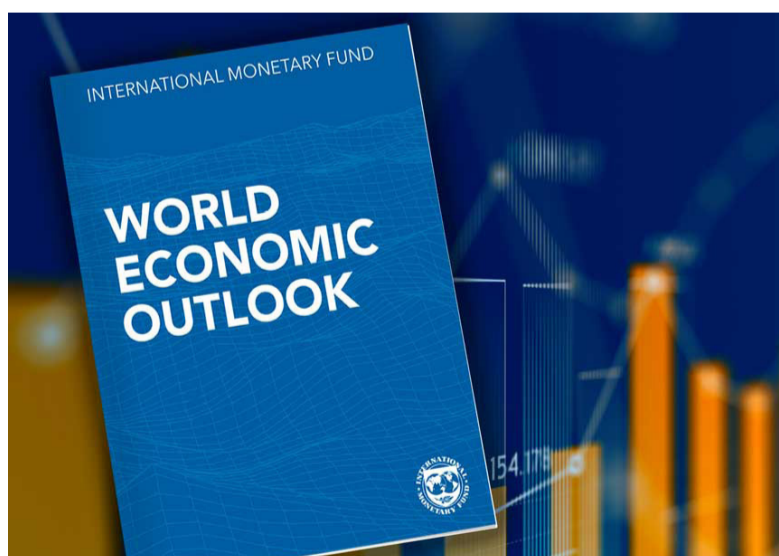
"We expressed readiness to host negotiations between sides in Tbilisi. At the same time, we understand that support from Western partners has vital importance for soothing tension in the region. Of course, the OSCE Minsk Group should play the major role here," the PM stated.

At the end, Gakharia emphasized the exceptional relationship between Georgia and the United Kingdom and thanked the British partners for supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

IMF: In 2021-25 Georgian economy will recover at highest rate in region

NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has released an updated forecast World Economic Overview (WEO) - October review of the global economy, according to which the Georgian economy in Europe and the region will grow



► According to IMF Georgia's economic growth will average 5.5% in 2021-2025, although this medium-term forecast may be adjusted in the future.

at the highest rate in 2021-2025. The Ministry of Finance of Georgia informed that according to the updated forecast of the IMF, the world economy will shrink by 4.4 % in 2020, which is 0.8% less (improvement) compared to the June forecast, and economic growth in 2021 will be 5.2 % (reduced by 0.2%).

According to the updated forecast of the IMF, the Georgian economy will decrease by 5% in 2020, in 2021 the recovery will be equal to 5%; The IMF forecast for 2022 is more optimistic with 6% growth, in 2021-2025, Georgia's economic growth will average 5.5%.

IMF forecasts that in the medium term, both 2020-2025 and

2021-2025, Georgia will have, on average, the highest economic growth in Europe and the region and the Georgian economy will recover the fastest among the countries of the region in 2021-2022. According to the forecast published in April 2020, the IMF forecasted a 4% recession for Georgia this year.

For comparison, for the countries of the region, the fund predicts that in 2020 the economy in Azerbaijan will shrink by 4%, in Armenia - by 4.5 %, in Russia - by 4.1 %, in Turkey - by 5%. In 2021, the economy will grow by 2% in Azerbaijan, 3.5 % in Armenia, 2.8 % in Russia and 5% in Turkey.

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THURSDAY OCTOBER 15

Day ☁ Partly cloudy
High: **24°C**

Night 🌙 Mostly clear
Low: **13°C**

FRIDAY OCTOBER 16

Day ☀ Sunny skies
High: **25°C**

Night 🌙 mostly clear
Low: **12°C**

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00

E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge

http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

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Democracy Index's evaluation of 2020 Parliament Spring and Extraordinary Sessions

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Democracy Index - Georgia, a local watchdog that observes activities of the parliament and determines the quality of democracy in the country since 2019. Their new report reflects the results of the observations of the spring session of the Parliament, including the activities of Parliament during the pandemic - during the emergency session, as well as the quality of the opposition's activities - against the background of the announced boycott.

According to the organization, some progressive steps were taken both in the specific legislative direction and in terms of government control. However, based on the overall picture, the autumn and spring sessions of Parliament were largely indistinguishable from each other. Problems identified during the fall session - including democratic engagement, active participation of civil society and active control of the government - also emerged during this session.

In the spring session of 2020, the Parliament positively revealed its work in several separate areas:

Parliament has adopted a number of important laws, including constitutional amendments, in order to bring it closer to EU standards, as well as to ensure democratic elections.

In terms of summoning members of the government, the spring session was more active: if a similar request was not made in the previous session in the parliament, this time the fact was revealed 6 times: 2 cases by committees and 4 by opposition members of parliament.

Involvement of civil society and relevant experts was ensured during the preparation of several bills.

Several issues that Parliament has decided on the state



► "The opposition has not been active in using government control mechanisms, such as setting up commissions of inquiry, unlike in the previous session," reads the report.

of emergency and the pandemic: the country declared a state of emergency in a timely and unanimous manner; Held a joint workshop with representatives of the executive branch on the problems related to the pandemic of Georgians living abroad; The Gender Equality Council issued recommendations to the government on the economic empowerment of women in the context of the spread of the coronavirus and the prevention of domestic violence; The opposition was active in interpellating against the Prime Minister in episodic manifestations.

Compared to the previous session, the thematic inquiry mechanism was used more actively by the committees. The situation with regard to the timely publication of activity reports by the committees has significantly improved compared to the previous session.

The following key issues were identified during the spring ses-

sion and the emergency session: The degree of accountability of individual MPs is low.

As in the previous session, the parliamentary activities of individual MPs are not public and therefore still unknown to the public. They are not documented or reflected in the current website of the Parliament.

In total, only 22 MPs used the MP's question, who, with a few exceptions (Nino Tsilosani, Zaza Gabunia), were mostly members of the opposition.

As in the previous session, in response to the problems identified by the letters of the citizens, the issues on the parliamentary agenda were neither included nor discussed by the members of parliament.

The degree of transparency of the Parliament, the involvement of the public and the consideration of their opinion is low: The discussion of the bills was mostly unreasonably accelerated, which prevented their thorough discus-

sion and proper involvement of the public.

In the preparatory phase of some bills, the problem of stakeholder involvement was identified (Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

As in the previous session, the involvement of civil society, this time too, is significantly low because their fierce protest against issues of essential importance was ignored each time. Facts of selection of persons unacceptable to civil society, or by an unacceptable procedure, have been revealed.

Alternative reports submitted by civil society are not substantially considered by Parliament.

Democracy Index - Georgia says the government control mechanism does not work:

The control of the government by the parliament is very low - the ministers, despite being summoned, very rarely appear in the parliament; and the legislature has not taken any effective action to respond.



► In 2020 Spring sessions legislative proposals submitted by individuals in no case took the form of a bill and, consequently, participation in the legislative activities of society was excluded.

The reports of the ministers are not, in fact, considered, or their hearing in different formats in the parliament is not essential. In many cases, MPs' questions / comments relate to irrelevant issues.

The work of the committees is not active: The majority of committees held only a minimum or less than the number of meetings.

Committees are passive in exercising other powers as well - such as - legislative initiatives; Law enforcement control; Study the activities of the administrative body; Establishment of temporary commissions of inquiry and other temporary commissions; Study of case law; Study of compliance of by-laws with laws.

Organisation also highlights that during the state of emergency, the Parliament did not function: In the first stage of the pandemic, it was completely incompetent - it did not take any measures in terms of legislation or oversight.

And the role of the parliamentary opposition is assessed as weak, since the prolonged boycott of the opposition further weakens the role of parliament, thus weakening the possibility of substantive and critical debate.

The opposition's participation in the legislature was thwarted despite efforts - the stage of preparation of the bills submitted by them was delayed each time, due to which they were not discussed.

IMF: In 2021-25 Georgian economy will recover at highest rate in region

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The IMF forecasts a 7.2% decline in the economy in the EU this year, and the forecast for economic recovery in 2021 is 4.7%. The report claims that the coronavirus pandemic will hit the Ukrainian economy hardest in the region. By 2020, Ukraine's GDP will decline by 7.2%, and in 2021, the country is projected to recover by 3%.

According to the available data, the Georgian economy shrank by 5.6% in the first 8 months of 2020, so in order for



► "We have implemented very important reforms that should help revive the economy from next year," said Deputy Finance Minister Gagua.

the IMF forecast to be correct, the recession in the last quarter of the year should not be more than 4%.

Like the IMF, the Georgian government expects a 5% recovery in 2021, and next year's draft budget is planned for this figure. For comparison, this is a relatively more optimistic forecast than the World Bank forecast, which expects a 4% recovery in 2021.

According to the IMF, Georgia's nominal GDP per capita in terms of purchasing power parity will exceed \$ 20,000 for the first time from 2024, and \$ 21,000 from 2025. In 2020-2025, Georgia ranks 11th in the world in terms

of nominal purchasing power parity (PPP) growth rate per capita.

"Negotiations with international financial institutions have been successful this year, which guarantees that the country's macroeconomic stability is not in doubt," said the Deputy Minister of Finance Nikoloz Gagua.

According to him, the reason for the economic recovery is the rather high rate of infrastructure construction this year - the projects that are important for the growth rate of the Georgian economy to continue and the maintained image of a reforming country will also contribute.