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Opposition's plan for the first sitting of the newly elected parliament



► Lelo leader Khazaradze: We decided to challenge our parliamentary list and refuse mandates.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

On December 11, at 12:00, in the garden of the Student-Youth Palace, part of the opposition parties will sign a memorandum on the termination of party lists and powers in the Parliament of Georgia.

All the opposition parties say they will stay in the boycott mode and will not take part in the first session, although not all of them are going to take part in the event planned in the student-youth garden.

The deputies of Strategy Builder and Lelo are canceling the list and refusing their mandates. They made this decision after discussing it at the meeting of the Political Council. The United National Movement, European Georgia, and Labor Party are going to take part in the joint event together with them.

The Alliance of Patriots, which participates in the dialogue facilitated by the ambassadors but does not attend the meetings of the opposition, is boycotting entering the parliament as well. The party wants to close the parliamentary list, yet will not join the event planned by the opposition in today's ceremony and will conduct all the necessary legal procedures independently.

Zurab Japaridze, the founder of the party Girchi and number one on the list, will not take part in the joint event either. He said this does not mean that he plans to maintain the mandate until the resource for dialogue is exhausted. The Girchi member Vakhtang Megrelishvili says the other members of the parliamentary list, Iago Khvichia, Aleksandre Rakviashvili, and himself, have not yet spoken about the 'visual aspect' but are participating in the parliament's boycott.

One of the leaders of the Citizens party, Levan Ioseliani, does not like the idea of resigning from the mandates before the end of the negotiation process. According to him, this process is sabotage of negotiations. Another leader of this party, Aleko Elisash-



► Transparency International Georgia publishes an article on What Parliament Can Not Do Without Opposition.

vili claimed that the Georgian Dream has backed on all four requirements of the opposition, and added that he will only enter parliament if all of them are met.

The first sitting of the newly elected parliament is scheduled for today, December 11. Local watchdog Transparency International Georgia (TIG) released an article, discussing how the opposition's potential absence from the parliament is going to affect its work.

TIG writes that in Georgia, as a parliamentary republic, the one-party parliament will not be able to function as a representative body. It will not be able to operate properly and control the government. Parliamentary positions cannot be fully staffed and many decisions cannot be made by Parliament due to the insufficient number of votes.

According to the organization, the 90-member parliament will not be able to make decisions that require 100 or 113 votes, and it will be very difficult to mobilize 90 votes. Parliament adopts constitutional amendments by a two-thirds majority (100 votes), as well as the law on agricultural land ownership. Legislature passes constitutional law by a three-fourths majority (113 votes) within a single convocation parliament.

Parliament elects the Public Defender by three-fifths (90 votes) of the full membership, approves the constitutional agree-

ment, elects the judges of the Constitutional Court, elects the members of the High Council of Justice, and declares no confidence in the Board of Trustees of the Public Broadcaster.

Parliament impeaches the President by two-thirds (100 votes) of the full membership.

Parliament ratifies, denounces, and rescinds treaties related to the territorial integrity of the state or the change of the state border by three-quarters of the total number (113 votes).

Officials whose positions will remain vacant: the confidence group will be represented by 3 members instead of 5, as the opposition quota, according to the regulations, cannot be filled by the majority. This means that: control of the security sector, which is traditionally weak, cannot be effectively exercised; the Parliament Speaker will have two deputies instead of four, as two deputies must be elected from opposition factions; the position of one deputy chairman of the committee will also remain vacant, as one out of 3 deputy chairmen of the committee must be an opposition representative.

The Parliament will have one member instead of two members in the Prosecutorial Council since one member must be a representative of the parliamentary opposition. If there is a need to set up a competition commission for the Public Broadcaster's Board of Trustees, it will have 6 members

instead of 9 as the opposition has the right to nominate 3 members to Parliament. The Parliament will have two members instead of three in the Investment Selection Committee of the Pension Agency Investment Council, as the opposition is unable to nominate a member from among its members.

According to parliamentary regulations, opposition representatives must make up at least half of the members of the temporary commission of inquiry. Consequently, a temporary commission of inquiry cannot be set up in a parliament where there is no opposition.

According to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, the representation of the parliamentary majority in the Ethics Council should not exceed half of the number of members of the Ethics Council.

The faction is given a maximum of 15 minutes for the speech. Consequently, the debate time will be significantly reduced, and it will only take the form of expression of opinion by the majority.

Permanent parliamentary delegations will be staffed only by members of the majority, and these delegations will not be approved by international organizations.

The composition of the standing parliamentary delegations shall be determined based on proportional representation quotas. In the absence of opposition, the parliamentary delegation becomes only a delegation of the ruling party.

It should be noted that international organizations are required to require the participation of the opposition in parliamentary delegations, as well as gender balance (Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe/NATO). The permanent parliamentary delegation nominated by the country acquires power only after approval by an international organization. Consequently, the country may not have delegations to important international organizations for 4 years.

The case of Girchi - the evergreen symbol of libertarianism in Georgia

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYOM

The controversial Girchi party is faced with an internal crisis, as one of the party's co-founders, Zurab Japaridze has announced that he no longer wants to be associated with the party's other three key figures - Iago Khvichia, Vakhtang Megrelishvili, and Aleksandre Rakviashvili. The reasons are not yet specified, however, Japaridze claimed that it has nothing to do with the highly controversial statement from Iago Khvichia, who has recently expressed his views on the possession of underage pornography, saying "nobody should be punished for watching anything." It is yet to be seen how the party's leaders will come to a working compromise, without

jeopardizing years of Girchi's hard work.

Ever since it was first created in 2015, the Girchi party has been the center of public attention and a source of controversy and challenge to the country's political discourse. What started as an opposition party established by ex-members of the former ruling National Movement, has now become a new symbol of non-conventional ways of politics and social mobilization.

It seems like this party has made it its sole goal to go against every established tradition that the other political parties uphold here in Georgia. It prefers online platforms (especially Facebook) as a tool for communicating their agenda, fundraising, and enrolling new party members. Its ways of

achieving political goals are not any less unconventional (yet, in no way less effective) – from planting marijuana seeds on a New Year's Eve to opening a brothel in the party's headquarters and establishing its own church to allow young Georgian men to avoid military service – Girchi never ceases to surprise the public and the country's political establishment.

However, what is the party's role in Georgia's struggle to establish a sustainable, Western-like Democracy?

Well, that is when the controversy really kicks in. Some believe that Girchi is nothing more than a long-lasting prank, almost a form of art, that makes civil disobedience take a new, astonishing form, and challenges the traditional values that the

country holds dear. Others – supporters of Girchi- claim that it is the future of Georgian politics, and it is only the 'pinecone' and its new, liberty-oriented agenda, that will bring the country forward towards the future of welfare, Western values, and high standards of living.

During the October Parliamentary Elections, Girchi obtained a total of 4 seats in Parliament, however, following the decision of other parties of the opposition sector, it has boycotted the seats and refused to claim them. Although this decision is understandable, it is unfortunate, nonetheless. By entering the Parliament, the party could have demonstrated that it can go beyond mobilizing the public and can, indeed, show the same commitment to its

political goals, like the one that the party demonstrated during the struggle to make marijuana consumption legal in Georgia.

Ok, but what's next?

Storm in the headquarters aside, there are many other questions to be answered about Girchi's role in the country's political arena. Will the party be able to reinvent itself as an efficient political mechanism with the people's best interest in mind, or will it remain what it is today – a single-issue party, whose main goal is to cause controversy and unrest – regardless of how well-intentioned it is. This is exactly why the current Parliamentary crisis is so unfortunate and so untimely. However, if the evergreen pine cone is not a symbol of patience – then what is?



100 Georgian soldiers arrive in Afghanistan to participate in a NATO-led Resolute Support mission

FRIDAY DECEMBER 11

Day ☁️ Cloudy
High: 3°C

Night ☁️ Cloudy
Low: 0°C

SATURDAY DECEMBER 12

Day ☁️ Partly Cloudy
High: 4°C

Night ☁️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYOM

After the successful completion of the pre-deployment training program, 100 Georgian servicemen have successfully arrived in Afghanistan to participate in a NATO-led peacekeeping mission. Upon arrival at the Bagram Air Base, Georgian peacekeepers were greeted by the Commander of the 13th Battalion of the 1st Infantry Bri-

gade, Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Natenadze, and the Chief of Staff, Tengiz Gobadze, who both wished the soldiers best of luck in the pending mission.

The newly arriving servicemen will participate in the NATO-led mission entitled Resolute Support (RSM). This non-combat mission was launched on January 1st, 2015, and is focused on providing assistance, training, and consultancy of the Afghan

National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) and relevant institutions. The mission currently hosts 13 000 servicemen, 870 of which are from Georgia.

Before arriving in Afghanistan, 100 soldiers underwent an intensive, four-stage training program, and the final qualification of the Georgian peacekeepers was assessed as very high by the European branch of the US Commandment. The service-

men will be mainly tasked with maintaining the security of the members of the RSM mission.

The current deployment is a continuation of Georgia's commitment to international peace and security and partnership with NATO. As of today, the country is the largest non-NATO contributor to the RSM mission, and one of the world's largest participants in the Afghanistan peacekeeping missions.

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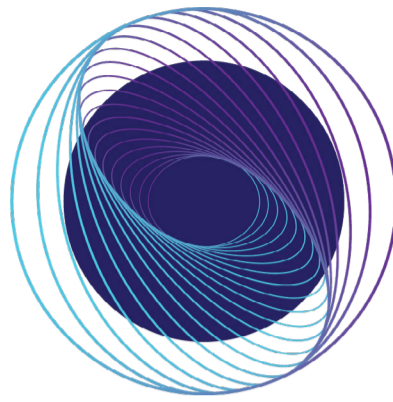
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TBILISI
ENERGY

► “To disrupt the process of purchasing and providing Tbilisi with natural gas, it is necessary to adjust its price for non-household customers.”

Business associations against increased gas tariffs for the commercial sector

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Several business associations operating in Georgia responded to the increase of gas tariffs for the commercial sector by Tbilisi Energy. According to the statement, during the severe economic crisis caused by the pandemic, such a decision is incomprehensible.

A few organisations stated their principle and sharply negative position on the issue.

“Now that almost all businesses have been shut down and the affected sectors are constantly appealing to the government for various types of assistance and benefits, Tbilisi Energy makes an unexpected and inconsistent decision and puts unjustifiable additional pressure on businesses, raising already high utility bills.”

They also emphasized that under current regulations, the setting of tariffs for the commercial sector is not regulated by a national regulator.

“In this case, we are dealing with natural monopoly, the decision of which has a drastic impact on the entire economy of the country and all entities involved in it.”

Associations claim that Tbilisi Energy’s explanation as if this does not apply to household consumers is wrong because the increase in gas tariffs for



► Tbilisi Energy says gas tariff rise for commercial customers was caused by changes in National Currency Exchange Rates.

the business sector will lead to an increase in the cost of the product. Besides, the businesses also point out that because of this decision, they will have to reduce the number of employees or their salaries:

“This process will affect the entire population and will significantly hurt.”

The signatory associations underline that they are well aware of the problems caused by the constant devaluation of the national currency, which is experienced by all enterprises involved in business activities in Georgia, and request a meeting with the management of Tbilisi Energy to clarify why is there a specific increase in the tariff by ₾0.24 (including the tariff calculation methodology; what are the components of this or that tariff and what is the cost structure in the company.

“We also urge the Government of Georgia to intervene promptly to resolve this issue and to use all available levers to regulate this highly damaging process,” the statement reads.

The signatory associations are EU-Georgia Business Council, Taxpayers’ Union, Georgian Producers’ Federation, Distributors’ Business Association, Georgian Employers’ Association, Georgian Hotels and Restaurants Federation, Restaurateurs Association.

Statement of the EU Delegation for international Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day reminds us that the promotion and protection of human rights has to remain an overarching priority for the European Union’s work here in Georgia as well as globally.

We cannot be complacent. Crises are particular tests for the realisation of human rights and the respect of democratic values. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences impact negatively on the upholding of human rights, deepen pre-

existing inequalities and increase the pressure on persons in vulnerable situations.

The EU is ready to work with our Georgian partners to address identified vulnerabilities and to mitigate further risks.

Our commitment to upholding human rights in Georgia is as strong as ever. This week we are announcing five new projects, including under our EU4 Human Rights programme.

These efforts will support

Georgian government institutions, the Parliament, local authorities and civil society organisations in the implementation and monitoring of human rights, the strengthening of child rights protection, the fight against gender based violence, the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of minorities, data protection and strengthening the accountability of law enforcement officers.

A lot of work lies ahead. The start of this new assistance co-

incides with the start of a new government and parliament, and we keenly expect the adoption of the new Human Rights Strategy beyond 2020 and its accompanying Action Plan.

Only a few days ago, the European Union adopted its own new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 -2024, which sets our level of ambition and defines our priorities in relations with all third countries.

With this Action Plan, the European Union reaffirms its

strong commitment to further advancing universal values for all. Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights will continue to underpin all aspects of internal and external policies of the European Union.

Investing in human rights, democracy and the rule of law is essential to achieve more fair, more resilient and inclusive societies. The EU reaffirms its commitment to stand by Georgia in this process.