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Georgia will receive another \$ 113.9 million from IMF



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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian parliamentary majority leader Irakli Kobakhidze announced on December 17 a new bill package that envisages suspending state funding for the boycotting opposition, as well as a set of other measures against the Georgian Dream's political rivals.

According to him, the current legislation does not provide an effective mechanism for responding to this unconstitutional action; thus, the bill aims to amend the constitutional requirement. The €2,000 fine imposed by the current Electoral Code for its unconstitutional involvement in election agitation is not enough to offset the negative impact that this fact may have on the election process. Accordingly, the initiated draft law aims at correcting the shortcomings in the Election Code and proper implementation of the constitutional requirement.

"This bill, along with the implementation of the constitutional requirement, will successfully reduce the degree of polarization in Georgian politics and strengthen healthy opposition political forces," Kobakhidze said. According to him, this does not mean banning the party, which is the right of only the Constitutional Court of Georgia. The draft law is about the abolition of election registration, which will take effect at the next elections - for the first time, it will affect local self-government elections.

"The Constitution sets 4 election cen-

New regulations for parties - Draft Law against Parliamentary Sabotage



► Kobakhidze explained that the package envisages the suspension of state funding for those political parties that do not fully assume parliamentary seats or miss the plenary sessions of the Parliament.

sors. One is the criterion of citizenship, the other - of conviction. There is also an age limit and also the so-called legal capacity, which now has a different name. If a person, who is involved in the pre-election campaign for 2 months as the leader of the election subject doesn't satisfy the requirement for the realization of election right, the corresponding subject will not be able to register for elections, thus it does not envisage banning parties," GD leader clarified. He said at a special briefing on December 9 that they would pass a law abolishing the party's election registration if the leader of the United National Movement, Mikheil Saakashvili, was involved in the election process.

Kobakhidze announced that the main source of polarization in Georgia is Mikheil Saakashvili, who still manages to create problems with money stolen from the people and 3 televisions.

"In the newly convened Parliament, we will register a bill to revoke the registration of a political party whose leader is unconstitutionally elected: This change will ensure not only the implementation of the constitutional requirement but also a significant change in democratic development."

Participation of a foreign citizen in the election agitation is also prohibited by the existing legislation, however, the sanction imposed on it does not provide state prevention.

During the 2020 parliamentary elections, Mikheil Saakashvili was the UNM's candidate for Prime Minister. The party believes that the ruling party rigged the election and that new elections should be held.

The package that was also registered this week envisages the suspension of state funding for political parties that refuse from mandates or deputies miss the plenary sessions of the Parliament for illogical reasons.

According to the bill, a party whose members will lose their parliamentary mandates or who will not be involved in parliamentary work will have their state funding suspended or suspended for a year. According to the amendments to the Electoral Code, the same parties will not be able to enjoy free airtime for municipal and parliamentary elections. The amendment to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament provides for the abolition of remuneration for those Members of Parliament who do not attend any of the plenary sessions during the month.

"Parliamentary sabotage, which is being used by members of the radical opposition and other political unions under their blackmail and bullying, is an action against the state and its democratic institutions, which requires a proper legal response," Kobakhidze said. According to him, the bill will be approved by the parliament by the end of next week.

The cessation of state funding for political parties will not apply to funding obtained as a result of the October 31, 2020, parliamentary elections.

Asked whether funding would be cut to those parties that received state funding in the 2017 local elections, Mamuka Mdinardze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream faction, said the new changes had nothing to do with old regulations, including when funding was tied to a qualified entity.

"In general, the legislative package is directed against parliamentary sabotage in a positive sense, to force the parties to leave the sabotage regime, to which the voters voted for parliamentary activities. The political boycott is their legally guaranteed mechanism, but sabotage is not a right," the chairman stated.

According to Mdinardze, the damaging parties should take responsibility for the fact that there are still 9 electoral subjects in the parliament. "They are so attached to perceptions that they did not even know that there were 14 parties in the parliament," he said.

Mdinardze claims that opposition rejects to enter parliament, to form a commission, investigate and hold early elections in case of one percent error because 'they know that no rigging of the parliamentary elections, not even serious misconduct, has taken place.

According to Khatia Dekanoidze, one of the leaders of the United National Movement, the statements made today by the leader of the parliamentary majority, Irakli Kobakhidze, were blackmail and threats.

According to Dekanoidze, the ruling party wants to introduce the opposition in the Parliament, which is why it does not shy away from such ways.

Sergo Chikhladze, a member of the Strategy Builder, assesses the statement of the leader of the parliamentary majority as an attempt of threat, and believes that "such initiatives start the formulation of a one-party dictatorship, and the adoption of this law is against the constitution."



► Non-governmental organizations say expected sanctions are perceived as a threat to opposition parties.

PM Gakharia: We have managed to slow down the spread of Coronavirus

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Yesterday, PM Giorgi Gakharia stated that for the first time in a few months, the country saw a decrease in the number of daily reported Coronavirus cases. As of the last 24 hours, less than 3'000 cases were confirmed, as well as 2'001 recoveries and 31 deaths.

Gakharia attributed the reduction in the number of new cases to the "timely measures undertaken by the government." The Prime Minister added that despite this small improvement in the overall situation, the main task that the government and the country's healthcare officials are facing is the preservation of the current achievements and meeting the overarching goal of returning the country to its regular life by February. Gakharia urged the citizens to refrain from big gatherings during the New Year and Christmas festivities.

It has been reported that the government is currently considering a temporary lifting of the existing COVID-19 related regulations during the New Year and Christmas period. Several healthcare officials have called on the government



► PM Giorgi Gakharia

to reconsider the decision, as it could potentially lead to a new, stronger wave of the virus.

The government is yet to announce the precise list of restrictions that will be temporarily lifted in the upcoming

holidays. 17,029 tests have been conducted during the last 24 hours in Georgia. The country has reported 201, 368 cases since February, with a total number of 1,953 deaths. 201, 368 patients have made a full

recovery, and 30, 107 individuals remain infected today, 1,130 of which are in critical condition, and 430 patients are currently on artificial ventilation.

To this day, a total of 1,690,000 tests have been carried out, and

2,247 patients are currently located in the hotels that have been re-equipped to host them (in an attempt to ease the strain off the country's hospitals). 471 are currently in quarantine, and 47,764 are self-isolating.

Prosecutor's Office: Bachaliashvili committed suicide, the case is closed

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

According to the decision of the Prosecutor's Office, the case of Tamar Bachaliashvili is closed. The decision was announced by the Prosecutor's Office at a special press conference.

"The evidence obtained shows that no crime was committed against Tamar Bachaliashvili and that she has committed suicide," reads the statement of the Prosecutor's Office.

According to the Prosecutor, the information from Bachaliashvili's computer shows that a

THE RESULTS WERE ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY, ON DECEMBER 17



► The decision was announced by the Prosecutor's Office at a special press conference

month before her death, Bachaliashvili has searched Google for ways to commit suicide.

The prosecutor also noted that from the search results, Tamar Bachaliashvili went to the links, which provide detailed information on the results of an overdose of one of the drugs, including - acute heart failure and cardiac arrest.

"The empty plates of this particular medicine, on which only Tamar Bachaliashvili's DNA was found, were removed from her car, and the composition of the medicine, according to the conclusion of the chemical examination, along with other drugs, was found in her body," added the prosecutor.

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FRIDAY DECEMBER 18

Day Sunshine
High: 10°C

Night Clear
Low: 0°C

SATURDAY DECEMBER 19

Day Cloudy
High: 5°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 1°C

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Georgia will receive another \$ 113.9 million from IMF

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has completed the 7th review of Georgia's economic reform program, after which approximately \$ 113.9 million will be made available to Georgia.

According to the IMF, this will help Georgia meet the immediate balance of payments needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic and fund increased health and social care costs. According to the IMF press release, "after this write-off, Georgia's total write-off will be about \$ 585.4 million."

According to Tao Zhang, Deputy Managing Director of the IMF, "Georgia's economy has slowed sharply due to the pandemic. Despite the successful containment of the first wave of pandemics, the recent increase in cases has called for new measures that could weaken the recovery process. The risks are great and, for the most part, negative."

According to him, the National Bank of Georgia has maintained a moderately strong monetary position to meet inflation expectations and, at the same time, ensured exchange rate flexibility. Inflationary pressures decreased as the difference between potential and actual output widened and the nominal effective exchange rate stabilized. Strict monetary policy and foreign exchange interventions may be necessary to prevent the market from malfunctioning and to approach the 3% inflation target. With macroeconomic policy discipline and donor support, foreign exchange reserves will be maintained at an adequate level.



▶ IMF completes 7th review of extended fund facility.

"Proactive monitoring of financial risks before the recovery of the economy and actions aimed at maintaining bank capital will contribute to the recovery of the economy."

Tao Zhang said that structural reforms convincing implementation importance of economic growth will help reduce the loss caused by: "investments, education reform implementation, a new framework for the implementation of the local capital market development and the reforms will improve the business environment and promote growth where the leading private sector will be."

The Board of Directors of the IMF approved the updated macroeconomic parameters of Georgia. According to the new forecast, the Georgian economy will grow by 4.3% in 2021, which is 0.7 percentage points less than the forecast presented in

October. The updated macroeconomic parameters also take into account the increased debt size agreed with the Government of Georgia. In 2021, the budget deficit of Georgia is set at 7.5%.

Zhang also said that Georgia needs to pursue structural reforms, including the management of state-owned enterprises, to reduce the negative risks to the state budget from these companies.

The fiscal response to the pandemic has helped mitigate the damaging economic and social consequences of this challenge, increase healthcare spending, targeted and temporary assistance to households and businesses, and maintain capital investment. The 2021 budget will continue to support economic recovery. "Proactive monitoring of fiscal risks by the government stemming from electricity procurement contracts and state-owned enterprises will help debt sustainability. The state-owned enterprise reform plan will improve public sector efficiency," said the IMF Deputy Managing Director.

The loss of state-owned enterprises in 2019 amounted to €231 million. In 2018, their loss was €816 million.

As of November 30, 2020, Georgia's foreign exchange reserves amount to \$ 3.75 billion. The volume of reserves has decreased by \$ 180 million compared to August of this year- its peak period, due to foreign exchange interventions carried out by the NBG. In 2020, the National Bank of Georgia conducted 25 foreign exchange interventions to mitigate the fluctuations of the GEL exchange rate, as a result of which \$ 843 million was sold.



▶ IMF: reform of state-owned enterprises in Georgia will improve public sector efficiency.

Prosecutor's Office: Bachaliashvili committed suicide, the case is closed

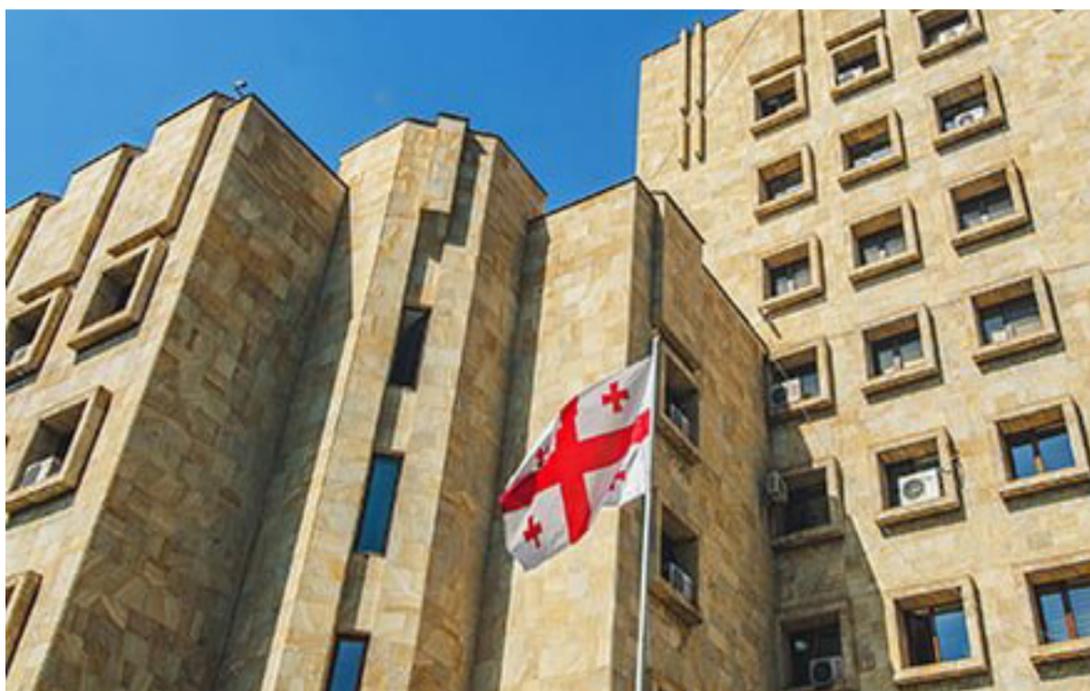
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The version published by the Prosecutor's Office is unacceptable for the family of Bachaliashvili. Bachaliashvili's mother, Teona Tamazashvili says that there are some questions regarding the investigation.

The lawyers of the deceased's family say they will appeal against the decision to close Tamar Bachaliashvili's case.

"We will appeal against this decision and we also hope to address the European Court of Human Rights, to tell them that the right to life has not been protected and the case has not been fully investigated," said Eka Kobesashvili, one of the lawyers.

According to her, they have not decided about other steps, because the official written decision of the Prosecutor's Office



▶ The version published by the Prosecutor's Office is unacceptable for the family of Bachaliashvili

has not arrived yet.

According to one of the lawyers, Mikheil Ramishvili, the case was specially closed after the elections. He said that the whole press conference was about files and information on the computer.

The family distrusted the investigation and involved an independent expert was involved in the case. It is unclear to the family how a shepherd found the car but the police failed to do so after a four-day search with a drone.

23-year-old Tamar Bachaliashvili went missing on July 18. After a 4-day search, on July 22, her body was found in her car, several meters away from the road, in the uninhabited area of the village of Matsevani, Tetritskaro Municipality. The case was initially investigated as an unlawful deprivation of liberty.