

Politics

Parliament suspends statuses of three Alliance of Patriots MPs

FULL STORY ON Page 2

Economics

Shah Deniz Field: Azerbaijan delivers gas to EU through Georgia



40 seats of fire reported in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, firefighters mobilized on the spot

FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

A non-governmental organization, Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC) | has published an assessment report of 2020 on the human rights situation in Georgia. The report reads that in 2020, the human rights situation was driven by two major political developments-pandemic-related severe social and humanitarian crises as well as electoral background.

The report highlights that the elections were held in an improved electoral system, however, the process was implemented against the background of serious shortcomings and violent incidents, which could not be effectively prevented by the police. EMC notes that due to the controversy between the ruling and opposition parties on the final election result, a severe political crisis has been created in the country. In this context, EMC stresses the destructive rhetoric and problematic approach of the government.

The report reads that in 2020, no effective steps have been taken in the direction of addressing systemic problems in the court.

As for the pandemic background, EMC believes that imposition and management of the restrictions issued by the government were problematic and in some cases exceeded the frames of democratic control and constitutional principles. The presidential decree provided the executive

EMC summarizes last year's human rights situation in Georgia

ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი

EMC

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center-EMC

body with almost unlimited powers and the parliamentary control could not be exercised on the decisions made by the government.

According to the report, the social vulnerability of the citizens was one of the most significant challenges of 2020. The economic shock caused by the pandemic further aggravated social conditions in the country, characterized by poverty economic inequality, and unemployment. The report reads that as a result of economic restrictions imposed parallel to the first wave of the outbreak, thousands of citizens lost their jobs and main sources

of income. Given the mentioned social condition, the report stresses the fact of dismantling residential buildings in the Africa settlement on December 15 and notes that the City Hall does not properly comprehend its responsibilities before socially vulnerable and homeless people.

EMC stresses that the closure of Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities during the pandemic was followed by a severe social crisis and a wave of hate speech directed at the Azerbaijani community in Georgia. The difficult social and political situation in these regions

once again revealed the experiences of exclusion of ethnic minorities and the management of these regions with less democratic practices.

The report mentioned the case of Levan Zurabashvili, who broke into a microfinance organization, demanding reduction of medication prices, limiting bank interest rates, and prohibition of gambling throughout the country. According to EMC, the case of Zurabishvili, who himself was a victim of gambling, once again highlights how uncontrolled

CONTINUED ON Page 2



According to the report, the social vulnerability of the citizens was one of the most significant challenges of 2020.

Parliament suspends statuses of three Alliance of Patriots MPs

By Veronika Malinboym

As requested, the Parliament of Georgia suspended the status of three MPs of the Alliance of Patriots opposition party. Inga Inashvili, Giorgi Lomia, and Gocha Tevdoradze are no longer members of the Parliament. Much like many other opposition parties, Alliance of Patriots has refused to recognize the results of the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections, claiming that they were fabricated by the ruling Georgian Dream party. At the end of last year, the party also submitted an official request to the Central Election Commission, to have its party lists annulled. This was done in order to prevent other candidates on the list from taking up the mandates of the MPs who have already refused them.

However, four other candidates of the Alliance of Patriots – Gela Mikadze, Pridon Injia, Davit Zilpimiani, and Avtandil Erukidze – decided to retain their names on the party list and enter the Parliament. According to the ruling Georgian Dream party, the reason why the vote on the suspension of the Alliance of Patriots MPs was held so early is that there are four candidates available to replace them in the Parliament. As of now, fifty-four out of



sixty opposition MPs in a 150-seat Parliament have already boycotted their seats and called for a re-election. The ruling Georgian Dream party claimed the vote on the status of the remaining opposition MPs will be held after the fifth round of talks between the ruling party and the opposition. Despite the continuous efforts of the foreign diplomats and repeated

calls of the international community, the country remains in a one-party state. The first session of the 10th convocation of the Parliament of Georgia was held on December 11th, and no opposition MPs were present. On December 23, the Parliament passed a bill in the first reading, which stated that the parties, whose candidates refuse to

claim their seats in Parliament will be stripped of the state funding and the free media time. The rationale behind such a decision was explained by the MP of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Anri Okhanashvili. He claimed that state funding that the MPs and the parties receive is the salary for their service to the Georgian citizens, thus,

there is no reason why such salary should be paid if the MP refuses to do their job. It is not yet clear if the country will be able to find a solution to the ongoing crisis, and whether the request of other opposition MPs will be granted with the Parliament voting in favor of the suspension of their statuses.

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

and anti-social are the systems of banking, pharmaceutical, and gambling businesses, and the extent to which the real social problems of the population are ignored in the political agenda.

According to the report, the impact of the pandemic was significantly negative on the already closed and underprivileged regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. Restrictions im-

posed on movement due to the closure of the border created an extremely harsh humanitarian crisis in the Akhgori region, which resulted in the deaths of tens of people.

The case of Inal Jabiev, who died as a result of inhuman treatment by the police in Tskhinvali, was followed by an ongoing severe political crisis in the region. EMC emphasizes the Georgian government's efforts to receive and treat patients from the conflict regions during the

pandemic. Nonetheless, the organization believes that the government did not respond with appropriate initiatives and strategies to the new political signals coming from the de facto government of Abkhazia.

The report also mentions rallies related to construction in Racha Lechkhumi, where the government plans to build the largest infrastructure project, Namakhvani HPP. According to EMC, despite the obvious legal irregularities concerning the

construction, which has been pointed out by many public organizations and specialists in the field, the process of construction of HPP by the company is still underway.

The report reads that last year, the prosecutor's office unexpectedly and arbitrarily terminated the investigation of the murder of Temirlan Machalikashvili. According to EMC, the case is now being considered by the European Court.

Last year, two scientists,

Natalia Ilychova and Valeri Melashvili were arrested and charged (cartographers' case). The report notes that after a detailed examination of the case, it became clear for EMC that charges were unfounded, which raised doubts about the case being politically motivated. According to the report, despite the baselessness of the allegations and numerous legal nonsense revealed in the case, the cartographers remain in custody to this day.

EMC summarizes last year's human rights situation in Georgia

Weather

Tuesday, January 5

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 6°C
Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: -2°C

Wednesday, January 6

Day 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
High: 5°C
Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: -1°C

published by
The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi,
0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.
Zaza Gachechiladze
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail. **The Messenger** Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.3028; Euro - 4.0605; GBP - 4.5209; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.5061; Swiss Franc - 3.7545

Shah Deniz Field: Azerbaijan delivers gas to EU through Georgia



The longest segment of the Southern Gas Corridor stretching from the Caspian Sea to Europe aims to meet the demands of the European and Turkish gas markets while diversifying the natural gas supply and reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Gas supply from the Shah Deniz field in Azerbaijan to the EU has started through the Southern Gas Corridor pipeline system.

Natia Turnava, Georgia's Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, congratulated all parties participating in this project.

"Today is a very important day for the development of the energy corridor through Georgia. The final phase of the Southern Gas Corridor Trans-Adriatic Pipeline project has been completed. Through this large regional project, natural gas was supplied to Europe from Azerbaijan through the Shah Deniz field through Georgia and Turkey," Turnava emphasized.

According to her, the project is crucial for strengthening Georgia's energy independence. The economy minister recalled that this is a logical end of the project - a year ago, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline, One of the most important components of the Southern Gas Corridor, was opened by Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, along with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

Seven European countries and ten major Turkish buyers will receive natural gas through the Southern gas corridor. The South Caucasus Pipeline project envisages the benefits of the Georgian side, specifically, the state has the opportunity to buy up to 500 million m3 gas annually for 2 times lower than the market price. Besides, according to the con-

tract that is valid until 2066, Georgia will also receive 5% of the gas volume free of charge.

As PM Gakharia noted, the Southern Corridor helps to compensate for the reduction in local gas production in Europe. An important purpose of the Southern Gas Corridor is also to strengthen competition in the common European market. At the same time, commercially attractive and environmentally friendly natural gas will be supplied to the Balkan countries which have not used it so far or are critically dependent on Russian gas imports.

Gakharia also pointed out the political effect that followed the development of the

Southern Gas Corridor.

"If until now Georgia was only a transit country for gas of regional importance - it transit of Azerbaijani gas to Turkey and Russian gas to Armenia - now it has become an international player. From today on, the gas exported on the territory of the country will play an important role in diversifying international, mainly EU energy markets and increasing security of supply."

Composed of 3,500km of pipelines, the Southern Gas Corridor consists of three pipelines - the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion (SCPX), the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).



"I congratulate everyone on the start of gas supply from the Shah Deniz field to the EU through the Southern Gas Corridor pipeline system," Turnava said.

40 seats of fire reported in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, firefighters mobilized on the spot



According to the Emergency Management Service, the forest is being monitored all this time.



According to EMC, Strong winds made it especially difficult for the firefighters to extinguish the fire.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, a fire broke out in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region of Georgia. Due to the strong wind and the danger of the massive spread of the fire, in addition to 161 firefighters from Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti main division, firefighters were mobilized on the spot from different regions, including Tbilisi, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Imereti, Guria, and Adjara. According to the press office of the Emergency Management Service (EMC), in total, 40 seats of fire have been reported in the region. As of yesterday night, firefighters eliminated 28 and localized two seats of fire.

The fire was caught by grass, and because of the strong winds, which hindered

the process of liquidation, it spread to the agricultural plots and burned hazelnuts and blueberry plantations. According to the EMC, the source of the fire is unknown.

The acting State Representative in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region Malkhaz Toria stated that strong winds uprooted perennial trees, which damaged power lines and left villages in several municipalities without access to electricity during the day. According to Toria, the electricity supply is now fully restored.

According to EMC, the liquidation process is actively undergoing and the situation is under control. According to the City Hall, a special commission will be created in the municipalities to investigate the damage and assist families affected by the fire.