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# 4 former Alliance of Patriots members enter parliament of 10<sup>th</sup> convocation



"We believe we can influence the work of the Parliament with harsh criticism" Injia said.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

On 5<sup>th</sup> of January, the Committee on Procedural Issues and Rules recog-

nized the parliamentary powers of Gela Mikadze, Fridon Injia and Davit Zilfimiani who will be so far the only deputies representing opposition in the par-

liament. These gentlemen also happen to be the sponsors of the party and as other members of the Alliance argue, 'political part' of the party remains in the boycott

regime, whilst the 'business part' enters parliament. The committee voted on the issue after the leaders of the Patriots Alliance, Irma Inashvili, Giorgi Lomia and Gocha Tevdoradze, resigned from their seats. As for the fourth mandate won by the party, Avtandil Enukidze said he was not going to relinquish his parliamentary mandate and plans to enter parliament.

Note that the Alliance of Patriots won 4 seats in the parliamentary elections. Deputies representing the 5 parties have already appealed to the parliament to revoke the mandate of the deputy. These are: "Labor Party", "Lelo", "Strategy Builder", "UNM - Power is in Unity" and "European Georgia". The five parties also canceled the list of possible replacements. 3 Girchi MPs and 2 Citizens' MPs have not applied to the parliament to cancel their mandates so far. The exception is Zura Japaridze, who was elected to the parliament by the Girchi list. He appealed to the parliament individually to cancel the mandate and then left the party for another reason.

"As soon as we enter the parliament, we will leave the Alliance of Patriots, as the representatives of the political union" European Socialists "in the Georgian parliament, will start working in the parliament," Injia said. Adding that next Saturday MPs will hold a congress of the political union European Socialists and present their political team, which will aim to preserve national traditions,



Speaker of the parliament commented that "Opposition is already represented in the session hall and from now on will take part in the parliamentary sessions."

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BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

## 2020: Life in Crisis

2020 has proved to be extremely difficult - the Covid-19 pandemic closed borders, stagnated the already crisis-ridden economy, catastrophically increased foreign debt, and impoverished the population. All of this is accompanied by the acute political crisis created after the October 31 parliamentary elections. It would be good to let all this go with 2020, but unfortunately, this legacy is taken by 2021, and today it is difficult to say that next year will really be able to pull the country out of the crisis.

The strict quarantine regime was continued on January 3 while the Covid-19 epidemic continues in full force. 2020 has become the year of the coronavirus pandemic all over the world and in Georgia. The first case of the virus in Georgia was recorded on February 26, 2020 and when the number of infected reached 47, strict quarantine was introduced in the country. The first wave of the pandemic, which hit many countries of the world, passed very easily for Georgia, it was immediately said that a second wave was expected in the fall, but virtually no one expected the severity of this wave. In a country of 3.7 million, the number of infected people exceeded 220,000 by the end of December, and the death toll was more than 2,350.

The pandemic will not only continue in 2021, but also the third wave is expected by the end of February. So far no encouraging statements have been made about the start of vaccinating the population. The scale of the epidemic and the problems associated with it have long



caused serious dissatisfaction among the population. The pandemic and related constraints have dealt a severe blow to the country's economy, according to preliminary data, the country's economy will shrink by 5.1% in 2020 and, in fact, tourism - the leading sector of the country's economy - has died.

In 2020, the country's external debt amounted to 30.68 billion GEL, of this, 6 billion is domestic debt, and 24.6 billion in foreign debt in 2016-2019 was about 41% of GDP, and by the end of 2020, this figure has reached a critical level of 60%. The lari has depreciated sharply - by 10% against the dollar in 2020.

The main event of 2020 for the domestic political life of the country was the October 31 parliamentary elections. A major controversy erupted between the government and the opposition

over the terms of the election earlier this year. A March 8 agreement was reached through the mediation of the ambassadors of the United States and the European Union, by which the country moved towards proportional elections. In the 150-member parliament, 120 were elected by proportional and 30 by majority. The opposition has been fighting for proportional elections for a long time, since Saakashvili's rule, when the National Movement was in power. However, this change alone was not enough to change the government.

The Georgian Dream achieved exactly the results of the elections that were necessary for it to stay in power for a third term and form an independent government. The 60 seats won by the 8 opposition parties sound impressive at first glance, but within parliament they can have no

real impact on either the Georgian Dream's domestic or foreign policy, especially since the Georgian Dream did not impose a 1% threshold in vain - many different parties were hit in the parliament.

After the elections, the domestic political developments in November-December were clearly unexpected for the government. All opposition parties were unanimous in their assessment of the October 31 elections - in their view, the elections were totally rigged and all opposition parties in parliament boycotted the 10th convocation parliament. The opposition demands early parliamentary elections, and the government categorically rejects this demand and tries to crack down on the opposition, agreeing to allow some opposition members to enter parliament through threats or promises. Georgian Dream immediately revised the

law on state funding of parties, and those opposition parties that do not enter parliament will not receive funding.

The pro-Western opposition claims that the Georgian Dream government is pushing the country towards dictatorship and that democratic gains are being lost. The opposition hopes for the West. At the beginning of the year, the United States and the European Parliament sent a series of critical letters to the "Georgian government", but then this criticism was effectively stopped and the opposition protest against the rigging of the October 31 elections did not provoke a strong reaction from the West.

Facilitators advise the opposition to enter parliament. In such a situation, some even claim that the Georgian Dream lobbyists have "settled relations" with the West. Meanwhile, a major geopolitical change took place in the Caucasus, with Azerbaijan's war with Armenia ending in the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, although it agreed to deploy Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh, leaving those parts of Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenian hands.

The President of Turkey initiated to create a Caucasian Peace Platform. In fact, it is an attempt to expel the West from the South Caucasus. That is why the President of Georgia happily approved the idea of creating such a platform.

Both the Georgian government and the West will have to reassess their interests in the new reality. All this is already about 2021.

*(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)*

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identity and European values, strengthen the Georgian economy and improve the well-being of our citizens.

As he noted, it is obvious that staying on the streets of the opposition today helps 2 political forces - the Georgian Dream and the National Movement. Injia believes that the UNM wants to

develop a revolutionary scenario in the country, while the Georgian Dream hopes to destroy the opposition left in the streets.

According to him, along with harsh criticism, all political forces should be united around common national goals, which are reflected in the Constitution of Georgia. He also underscored that no people could not be found in Georgia that would admit

that they were forced to vote for a certain candidate, 'which is evidence to conclude that everyone did it of their own free will.'

Enukidze, novel opposition MP explained that their decision to enter parliament was known to the party and there was no conflict. At the same time, Enukidze responded to the draft law on party financing and noted that the termination of funding

is wrong.

The leader of the Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, says that the opposition party has already entered parliament. According to him, it is important that the Russian member of the Patriots Alliance did not enter the parliament and the parliament of the 10th convocation will be one in which there will be no openly pro-Russian party.

On the other hand, opposition doesn't consider this change to be significant for the political crisis, they argue the country is in. "I do not think that the entry of corrupt officials from the time of Eduard Shevardnadze into the parliament will be a big victory for the Georgian Dream," commented Sergo Chikhladze, a member of the Strategy Builder Committee.

4 former Alliance of Patriots members enter parliament of 10<sup>th</sup> convocation

## Weather

Wednesday, January 6

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 5°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: -2°C

Thursday, January 7

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 6°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: -2°C

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## Georgian economy declined by 7.7% in November 2020

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Statistics Office (Geostat) released the preliminary estimates according to which in November 2020, compared to the same period of the previous year, the decrease in the real gross domestic product (GDP) was 7.7 %, while the average for the first 11 months of 2020 is -5.9 %.

According to Geostat, there was a downward trend, especially the decrease in the turnover of VAT-paying enterprises. In November of this year, a decrease was observed in the following activities: construction, transport (related to the functioning of air transport) and warehousing, arts, entertainment and leisure, accommodation, wholesale and retail trade; Repair of cars and motorcycles. The decline in the hotels and restaurants sector was mainly due to the decrease in the number of international visitors. The number of visits made by international visitors has decreased by about 92 %, which has had an impact on the revenues of travel agencies and tour operators. The reasons for the decline in the arts, entertainment, and leisure sector are the declining revenues of both gambling-related companies and leisure, entertainment, sports, and cultural institutions.

Gogita Todradze, Director of Geostat said that despite the economic downturn, growth was observed in the processing industry, financial activities, information, and communication, as well as water supply, sewerage, and waste management. Growth was revealed in the manufacturing sector, and the main reason for this is the developments in the metallurgical industry. In particular, the production of cast iron, steel, and ferroalloys, as well as electrical conductors and cables has increased. Compared to the same period last year, exports of ferrosilicon manganese increased by about 3.5 times.

The reason for the growth in the financial sector is the increase in the %age of commercial income of commercial banks, which was partly related to the increase in the volume of long-term loans to individuals.

The growth in the information and



**Remittances from Russia decreased in November 2020 and increased from EU countries by 23.4%. As for the distribution by countries, the main source of remittances were EU countries (40.7%) and Russia (19.4%)**



**According to the NBG, Lari depreciated by 2.8 % against the dollar in November.**

communication sector was due to the increase in the turnover of companies engaged in information and communication activities.

"As for the water supply, sewerage, and waste management sectors, the growth

trends were mainly related to waste collection, treatment and disposal activities," Todradze said.

In November 2020, exports of goods decreased by 13.4 % and imports by 12.1 %. As for the total 11-month foreign trade,

exports fell by 11.3 %, while imports fell by about 16 %. In November 2020, about 3450 new enterprises were registered in the country and this figure is 11.4 % lower than the corresponding period of the previous year. The turnover of VAT-paying enterprises used in the preliminary assessment of economic growth decreased by 4.2 % and amounted to 7.3 billion ₾.

The decrease in trade was mainly related to the decrease in trade in passenger cars. The re-export rate of passenger cars decreased by about 62 %. Also, the retail trade in construction materials and alcoholic beverages, as well as the wholesale trade in petroleum products have been reduced to some extent.

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) reported that annual inflation in November 2020 amounted to 3.8 %, and compared to October, prices increased by 0.9 %. Food is up 6.0 % year on year. From November 3.8 % inflation came 1.7 pp for food, of which only for cheese and oil - 0.6 pp. Among other products, a 10% increase in the price of cigarettes (up 0.3 pp) and a 41 % increase in the price of a marriage ring due to rising gold prices in the world market (up to 0.2 pp) are notable. Gasoline, diesel, and gas prices fell the most in November to reduce annual inflation by a total of 0.8 pp.

"Core inflation, which excludes high-volatility food, energy and tobacco prices from the consumer basket, has fallen to 4.8 %," the National Bank said in a review.

At the same time, according to the Central Bank, in November, annual inflation was 3.0 % for imported goods and 4.2 % for locally produced goods. Mixed goods rose 4.1 %.

In November 2020, the official international reserves of the National Bank decreased by \$25.9 million. The decline in international reserves was affected by the National Bank's foreign exchange interventions and government foreign exchange expenditures.

According to them, in November, the NBG carried out four interventions and sold a total of \$ 173,750,000 in the foreign exchange market. As of November 30, the total volume of international reserves is \$ 3,751 billion.

## The new strain of COVID-19 was detected in Georgia

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

A case of the new British strain of the COVID-19 virus was confirmed in Georgia. The Lugar Laboratory of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) carried out a study of three suspicious cases in the country. Genetic analysis has concluded that two out of three studied cases had no traces of the new virus strain, while one case has shown the mutation characteristics of the strain S gene.

The new strain of Coronavirus was first detected in the Southeast of England, and, according to epidemiological reports, the virus was already spreading rapidly while the United Kingdom was undergoing the second nation-wide lockdown. According to the report released by the scientists from the Imperial College London, the new strain registered a higher reproduction rate (R), which is calculated by the number of people that got infected from a single infected person. Unlike the previous strain of the COVID-19, the new strain has shown a rate of 0.7 as opposed to 0.4 which was registered before. The new strain is also considered more con-

tagious because the number of infected persons is growing despite the "high levels of social distancing" implemented during the pre-Christmas and Christmas periods. For the number of confirmed cases to start falling, the rate of virus spreading should be valued below 1, whilst the latest estimates of the R rate in the UK is currently standing between 1.1 and 1.3.

When the new strain of the COVID-19 was confirmed, over 50 countries across the world have introduced measures to restrict travel from and to the United Kingdom, however, many of such restrictions are already lifted. In Georgia, the new measures included a mandatory 12-day quarantine for the individuals arriving from the United Kingdom, including the Georgian citizens who would be subjected to an 8-day self-isolation otherwise.

The new variant of the virus was found in a male patient over 50 years old. The patient had no previous history of travel, and his contacts were already identified and put in quarantine. The virus was likely contracted from one of the contacts that have recently been traveling abroad. The patient's condition is satisfactory.



The new strain of the virus has already been confirmed in 30 countries. Over the last 24 hours, Georgia has confirmed 2,316 new cases, 382 recoveries, and 18 deaths, and the number of active

cases has reduced to 6, 620. The newly imposed healthcare regulations remain in place and might only be revisited in a week after the epidemiological situation is assessed further.