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Mtavari Arkhi accuses SSG of illegal surveillance of MPs, journalists, clergy, and opposition leaders

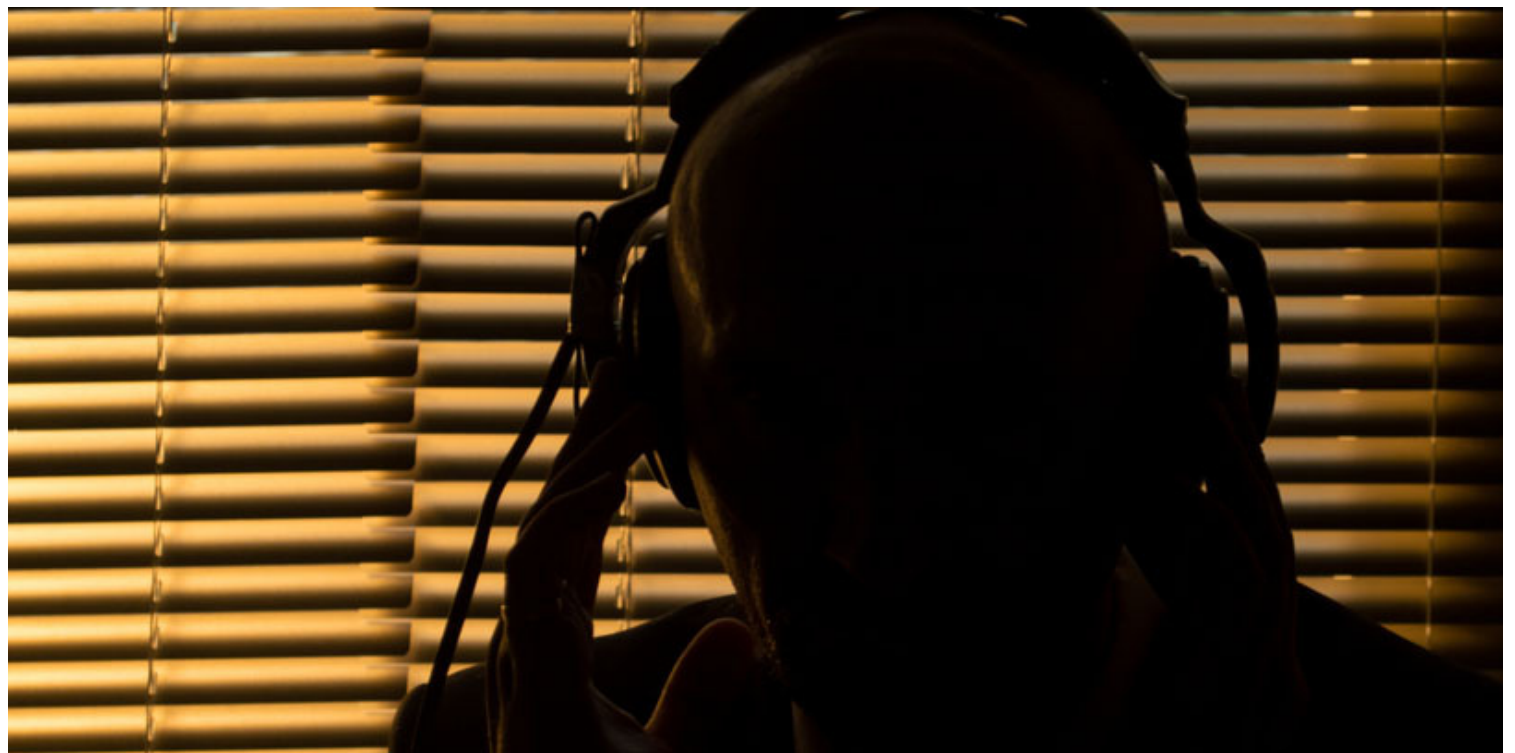
By Khatia Bzhalava

Nika Gvaramia, founder and CEO of opposition-minded Mtavari-Arkhi TV channel has accused the State Security Service of eavesdropping on politicians, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and journalists. Gvaramia released alleged memos of the SSG, involving spying on telephone conversations of President Salome Zurbishvili, current and former employees of the government office, opposition and civil society representatives, foreign diplomats as well as the alleged surveillance of the intimate life of GD representatives, businessmen and clergy.

Gvaramia claims that the SSG is collecting the illegal data for Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party. He warned Georgian Dream that if any of the information on private citizens is leaked, the blame is upon the Georgian Dream. According to Mtavari Arkhi, all information reflects the pre-election period of 2020 and the current year.

According to the Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakvadze, the information spread by Mtavari TV is 'another fake news'. Talakvadze ruled out the existence of recordings, claiming that "these are texts that any person can write".

Yesterday, the State Security Service released a statement in response to the



Journalists, as well as representatives of civil society organizations, state that they recognize their conversation in the scripts provided by Mtavari Arkhi and confirm their authenticity.

allegations. As the statement reads the agency carries out its activities in full compliance with the constitution and the spread of misinformation serves to deliberately discredit the SSG and mislead the public.

"As part of the information war, specific media outlets are using all means to use current situation in the country to

achieve their own political goals and to make the society more polarized," reads the statement, adding that the discrediting, disinformation campaign against state agencies is an anti-state action.

NGOs have released a statement saying that the government is using SSG as a total control mechanism. According to the statement, Giorgi Mgeladze, investi-

gative journalist of RFE/RL, as well as Giorgi Oniani, Guram Imnadze, and Giorgi Mshvenieradze, representatives of civil society organizations mentioned in the script, confirm the authenticity of the conversation provided by Mtavari Arkhi.

"The information published in the media yesterday once again shows that no one is protected from the control of the SSG in the country, including representatives of non-governmental organizations, media, political groups," reads the statement signed by 9 organizations.



According to the State Security Service, the spread of misinformation serves to deliberately discredit the SSG.

Politics

Parliament elects Central Election Commission head for 6 months



FULL STORY ON Page 2

Politics/Economics

Government to subsidize wine sector and offer subsidies on loans for families with newborns

FULL STORY ON Page 3

Parliament elects Central Election Commission head for 6 months

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Parliament of Georgia elected Giorgi Kalandarishvili as the new chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC) in a fourth vote, receiving 83 votes in favor and 3 against, following the resignation of the body's former chair Tamar Zhvania in late June. The majority of opposition lawmakers did not attend the session. His opponent, Giorgi Santuriani garnered only 4 votes. Gia Tsatsashvili and Maia Zaridze were elected members of the commission who received 81 votes each, their opponents who had Civil Society Organisation backgrounds, received 8 votes each.

After 3 unsuccessful attempts by Parliament to elect a new chair, Kalandarishvili was elected with a simple majority by Georgian Dream parliamentarians for a 6-month tenure. The distrusting opposition legislators, whose votes were needed for a supermajority, refused to support any of the 2 nominees. Recall that the CEC chair can now only be elected by the Georgian parliament with the Georgian president's nomination, rather than by the CEC itself, as per the amendments envisioned by the EU-mediated April 19 deal between the GD and opposition parties. To be elected for a 5 year-term, a candidate must receive a 2/3 supermajority endorsement in the 2 two votings in the 150-member legislature, or 3/5 support afterward. In the previous 3 votes, none of the candidates received either 100 or 90 votes, therefore the newly elected candidates have been appointed to the posts for six months, instead of five years.

Zhvania's resignation was preceded by electoral amendments proposed by the ruling party and the opposition Citizens party, which were revised in accordance with the EU-mediated agreement that ended the political standoff caused by the 2020 parliamentary elections and



The new head of the CEC Kalandarishvili has worked in the CEC for 13 years. Since 2019 he has been appointed as the head of the HR Management Department.

then adopted in the Georgian parliament. She has been chairing the Central Election Commission of Georgia since 2013 and resigned to allow the parties to choose a new candidate as part of a "broader political compro-

mise". Zhvania's resignation has been demanded by the opposition for a long time, accusing her of manipulating the parliamentary elections on October 31, 2020. Both Zhvania and the GD administration denied the claims.

Meanwhile, as new rules increased the number of "professional" CEC members from 6 to 8, 2 membership seats became available. Earlier on July 27, local watchdog Transparency Inter-

national Georgia accused the Georgian Dream leadership of refusing to elect a new chair and members based on a broader political consensus, citing the

CONTINUED ON Page 3



CEC

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION OF GEORGIA

The CEC will be composed of 17 members, where the opposition will have 8 representatives

Weather

Tuesday, August 3

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 35°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 19°C

Wednesday, August 4

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 36°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 21°C

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Government to subsidize wine sector and offer subsidies on loans for families with newborns

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

As Economy Minister Natia Turnava announced yesterday, the Georgian government will subsidize mortgage loans for families with newborns and large families starting September 1. According to her, families with newborns will have 12 months to apply for loans. The subsidy project will continue for five years.

According to Turnava, families that will have children from September 1 will be eligible to receive a loan subsidy from the state with a maximum loan amount of 200,000 GEL. The state will subsidize 6% of the loan interest rate if the newborn is a first or second child in the family and eight percent if the newborn is a third or fourth child. The state will also subsidize four percent of the loan for those families who do not have newborns but have three or more children. Turnava expressed hope that this program would contribute to the well-being of families and the improvement of their living conditions. "Each newborn child will bring not only great joy but also special benefits," Turnava noted.

As Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili stated at the briefing on Monday, through this assistance program, families will be able to buy both an apartment or a private house. The PM also focused on subsidizing the 2021 grape harvest due to an excess grape yield this year, amounting to 300,000 tonnes. As PM noted the price of 1 kg Rkatsiteli wine variety will be no less than ₾ 0,90, adding that the wine companies will receive an additional ₾ 0,35 (per kg) from



According to Economy Minister Natia Turnava, the loan subsidy project for multi-child families or families with newborns will last for five years.

the state.

The Prime Minister stated that in the last eight years 6,400 vineyards have been planted and the number of wine companies increased from 39 to 350, with revenue growing from ₾ 35 million to ₾ 323 million.

Garibashvili also expressed concern over the drug price rise, underlining that some drugs have 300-400% price tags, which, according to him, is unacceptable. "Nothing like this happens in any other country. We need to make relevant decisions shortly as the situation affects the well-being of our population," he noted. According to him, the Georgian National Competition Agency will present an interim monitoring report on this issue in the coming days.



According to Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, the 2021 grape harvest will be subsidized due to an excess grape yield this year.

Parliament elects Central Election Commission head for 6 months

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

parliament's reduction of the 4-week interval between votes to a 1-week interval, in violation of the EU-brokered April 19 agreement. Recall that recently, the Georgian Dream quit the deal on July 28.

NGOs and the majority of opposition political parties did not support Kalandarishvili's candidacy for the post and expressed their distrust, questioning his independence.

Tamar Kordzaia, an opposition MP said that now, any CEC chairperson in our country will be weak and incompetent. According to her, the candidate presented by Georgian Dream really does not deserve anyone's trust in the current political reality, given the annulment of the April 19 agreement and that's why her party didn't participate in the voting.

MP of opposition party Girchi, Iago Khvichia thinks that no chairman can become a guaran-

tee in this situation.

"We must be careful not to find ourselves in the same mess as in the October 31 elections."

According to Khvichia, Georgian Dream nominated its candidate and brazenly climbed in such a way that no one needed consent.

The chairman of the Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze says that CEC is staffed with competent personnel who can conduct self-government elections properly. According to him, every-

one can observe upcoming elections, and be reminded that the parliamentary committee that investigated 2020 elections concluded that no systematic problems occurred last year.

"I think that after the annulment of the agreement on April 19, the self-government elections will be held in a much calmer situation than in the previous case, when the opposition tried its best to polarize the situation," he said.

Irakli Kadagishvili, Chair-

man of the Parliamentary Committee on Procedural Issues responded to the opposition's stance: "The attitude of the opposition, if a person works in the state or other public service, automatically means that he should not deserve trust, it once again shows their attitude towards the state and public service." According to him, Kalandarishvili is a conscientious and deeply knowledgeable person about the election process.