

Public Defender and opposition start considering the postponement of October elections

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria announced that given the current epidemiological situation, while the country has 60-70 deaths from coronavirus every day, stricter regulations should be introduced. At the same time, Lomjaria believes that the representatives of political forces should discuss whether elections can be held in such a situation.

"Why no one is discussing whether elections can be held even in such a situation, what can be more alarming or more tragic than what is happening today. That is, in which case the same state of emergency can be declared, or we can consider postponing the elections," Ombudsman said.

Giorgi Vashadze, the leader of Strategy Builder, believes that a discussion should be started regarding the postponement of the elections and is ready to take part in this discussion as well. According to him, the country is in the worst epidemiological situation and 7000 people have already died of the virus, which is killing more and more people, so, in his opinion, the common, national task today should be to fight Covid and save human lives. "Postponing the elections for 2-3 weeks will not change the situation and we have a much bigger task to solve today." He believes that the regulations should be tightened as well.

Vashadze also recalled last year's elections, when the number of infected people also increased dramatically in November-December.

Badri Japaridze of Lelo has also expressed the readiness of his party to get involved in the discussions regarding the postponement of the elections.

According to another opposition MP, Tamar Kordzaia, the President of Georgia has the authority to postpone the elections, who has set the date of the elections and if she were the President, she would decide to postpone the elections.



In the last 24 hours, 5924 new cases of Covid9 have been recorded, 60 people have died.

"The rhetoric of the government, which says that the postponement of the elections is a weakness of the opposition, shows that they do not care about people's lives," the leader of the National Movement, Khatia Dekanoidze, told reporters. According to her, the party is ready for all options, because their first and foremost interest is the health and safety of the people.

The ruling party says it is not considering a possible postponement of the election at this stage.

"Last year's experience proves that it is possible to conduct the election process simultaneously, taking into account epidemiological prudence. I do not think that this alone is the reason for such statements and such an idea. It may be a lifeline for the opposition in the light of the

fact that they are practically doomed to defeat," said Mikheil Sarjveladze, a member of the Georgian Dream.

Gia Volski, a member of the ruling team, believes that the elections, both on election day and in the coming days, will be conducted in a way that minimizes the threat from an epidemiological point of view. According to him, since there is no prospect of freeing the world from the threat of viruses in the next few months, it is not right to stop the political process because of this.

"I think that the Public Defender, as well as several independent political activists, have become external speakers of the interests of the National Movement," Volski said.

According to him, the Public Defender and all others should have in-depth consultations with specialists in the field and not with political parties who have their interests.

"The only legal mechanism for postponing the self-government elections is the declaration of a state of emergency, and when the Public Defender speaks about the declaration of a state of emergency, it is an anomaly in itself," said the leader of the parliamentary majority, the chairman of the Georgian Dream party, Irakli Kobakhidze.

According to Kobakhidze, the society sees that the joint campaign of the "National Movement" has been launched today to postpone the self-government elections, which is a preliminary recognition of the election defeat and the society will give an appropriate response.

According to the Chairman of the Central Election Commission, Giorgi Kalandarishvili, the elec-

tion administration carries out all activities in close communication and coordination with the Ministry of Health.

The election administration started thinking about this challenge as soon as the elections were called. All activities are carried out in close communication and coordination with the Ministry of Health, including intensive testing of the members of the Central as well as the District and Precinct Election Commissions.

He also underscored that CEC has a high rate of involvement in the vaccination process which gives them high expectations that all 63 000 PEC members and administrators will show high civil and social responsibility. According to Kalandarishvili, the CEC follows all the recommendations and protocols that exist in the country today due to the epidemic.

As for the issue of postponing the elections, according to Giorgi Kalandarishvili, it is not the competence of the election administration. "At this stage, intensive preparations are underway for the elections from the administrative, logistical, and pandemic point of view," the CEC chairman added.



Volski believes that those who did not manage to destabilize the country, now want to stop the political process.

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Close Look at Events in Afghanistan and How They Affect Georgia



Photo: foxnews.com

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Following the withdrawal of the United States and its allies from Afghanistan, the Taliban returned to power on August 15 after a 20-year hiatus. What has happened is a significant geopolitical change not only for the region but also, consequently, for the whole world.

The Americans overthrew the first Taliban government in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks (1996-2001). The reason for the Americans' entry into Afghanistan was the presence of al-Qaeda and bin Laden there. But what was the reason for their 20-year stay there? The idea of 'democratic reconstruction of the Middle East' then became popular among American neoconservatives.

If after the Second World War it was possible to put Germany and Japan on the path of democratic development, why can't the same be repeated in Iraq, Syria, or Afghanistan?

20 years of experience have shown that this is impossible. To put aside the issue of reasons for this, and focus on the statement as a fact. US President Joe Biden noted that the Americans had spent more than \$20 trillion over 20 years building a civilian state in Afghanistan, formed the Afghan government, and left a 300,000-strong army, but found that neither the government nor the army wanted to fight.

The efforts of the Americans and their allies proved futile. Among the allies was Georgia,

which, due to its capabilities, made a significant contribution to the construction of a non-aligned Afghanistan. Georgia has suffered 32 casualties and more than 100 wounded.

Georgia was a signatory to a joint statement issued by 98 countries on August 16 calling on the new Afghan government to maintain order and ensure the safety of its citizens. Now the first task for Georgia is to evacuate the rest of the 23 citizens from Afghanistan.

As mentioned, most of them are ex-military and have served in various private structures in Afghanistan. On August 18, 6 citizens were evacuated by a Hungarian plane. Let's hope that the remaining 17 will be released soon. But the connection of the events in Afghanistan with Georgia does not end there.

One of the main topics of discussion is the future relations between Georgia and the United States. Pro-Russian forces celebrate the victory - the Americans left their allies in Afghanistan, they will do the same with Georgia, they remember the 2008 war, when, according to their interpretation, the Americans incited the then Georgian government to go to war with Russia, and then left.

The opinion of the Western-oriented forces is divided: one hopes that after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States will release huge resources that can be used to support other regions of the world, including Georgia;

Others, on the other hand, are pessimistic and believe that the isolationist sentiment in the United States will intensify and they will refuse to be active in

the post-Soviet space while losing hope of establishing democracy in Georgia.

Georgian democracy, despite Western efforts, has not been able to move forward for years, and the Georgian Dream has demonstratively canceled the April 19 agreement mediated by the European Union and the United States.

Democracy is built by all countries independently, and in this regard, it is important how the confrontation between the government and the opposition ends in the October 2 local elections.

The West enthusiastically welcomed a change of government through elections in 2012, raising hopes for Georgian democracy again through a change of government through elections.

As for the threats posed by Afghanistan, shortly, this is the emergence of an influx of refugees from Afghanistan. This will be a serious additional problem for Georgia.

The Taliban are also expected to try to export radical Islam to the Muslim population of the Caucasus. The North Caucasus may be their target in the first place, but they do not rule out their activity among the Muslim citizens of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The Taliban agency in the form of refugees may enter the country. Georgia was an active ally of the United States during the ongoing operation in Afghanistan and at the same time can not boast of strict border control.

The threat of Taliban expansion threatens Central Asia in the first place. Millions of Uzbeks and Tajiks living in Afghanistan will be good conduits for the Taliban to infiltrate these coun-

tries. This is primarily a headache for Russia. Russia sees the former Soviet republics of Central Asia as its sphere of influence, and if it wants to maintain its position, it must take care to strengthen its borders with Afghanistan.

In addition to Central Asia, the multimillion-dollar Muslim diaspora itself lives in the Russian Federation. Moscow hopes to resolve relations with the Taliban and not withdraw its embassy from Kabul like other countries.

Commentators note that for

the past 20 years, Americans have been doing Russia's job in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. This allowed Putin to 'act freely' against, for example, Georgia and Ukraine.

The Taliban arrived in Afghanistan earlier than the Americans expected. Maybe this quick victory was a surprise for the Taliban as well. Everything that is being written about the current situation is just predictions and a lot will be clear after the return of the Taliban to power reveals their real plans and capabilities.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

UNM's Melia responds to Lomjaria's advice to postpone elections

"We are losing up to 60 people a day, if professionals think that this slaughter can be stopped only by imposing a lockdown or postponing the elections, Imnadze, Gamkrelidze and Tsertsvadze should talk about it," UNM's mayoral candidate in Tbilisi Nika Melia stated about it, responding to the statement of the Public Defender Nino Lomjaria about her advice to postpone elections.

"The government, unfortunately, used the coronavirus situation for political manipulations, making decisions based on expediency and not taking real steps. So now it is really a task of national importance for the epidemiologists and doctors part of the Coordinating Council to tell the public what awaits us. At the moment there is a complete vacuum and they are practically taking a step in the dark and in this darkness we are losing up to 60 people a day, what is also important is that - if professionals believe that stopping this slaughter is only possible by imposing a lockdown or postponing elections, we are talking about professionals, right? - Mr. Gamkrelidze, Imnadze, Tsertsvadze, these people should talk about it, they know best how difficult the situation is, they should come out and tell the public, including the opposition parties, what should be done tomorrow. If this is to be done and professionals say that the health care system can no longer withstand the pressure, and based on our information it can no longer withstand - there is a serious difference of opinion between the government and epidemiologists - the discussion about it should be launched by them. Therefore, we will naturally face reality," stated Melia.

Kobakhidze says UNM admits defeat by trying to postpone elections

"We see that the United National Movement has launched a joint campaign to postpone the self-government elections, which is a preliminary recognition of the election defeat," said Irakli Kobakhidze, GD chairman of the Georgian Dream.

"This is an expression of fear for the elections, we remember the same campaign from the previous year, Nino Lomjaria started this campaign in 2020, then "Shame" continued it, this time Nino Lomjaria started and then Misha Mshvildadze from "Shame" continued this campaign. All this shows that the "National Movement" is very afraid of the upcoming elections. It was also the same in 2020, when the Public Defender launched this campaign. The National Movement, with its various branches, is a very bad phenomenon. Everyone should prepare for the elections and show the public what resources they have.

The opposition is weakened, they naturally feel it, and therefore each party, most of the opposition parties, is happy with the postponement of the elections, and this is the result of the campaign they launched today. However, this is a campaign dictated by pure political interests and has no basis. Therefore, we advise them to accept the defeat and prepare for the elections, which will probably bring them certain mandates in some of the municipalities."

Weather

Wednesday, August 25

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 33°C

Night Clear

Low: 20°C

Thursday, August 26

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 34°C

Night Clear

Low: 21°C

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