

## Suspension of municipal transport extended for 2 more weeks, studies to commence in online format

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Public transport traffic will not resume from September 4. Giorgi Ghibradze, Chief of the Operational Staff at the Interagency Coordination Council, stated about it at a briefing held at the Government Administration.

According to him, due to the epidemiological situation in the country, the resumption of public transport traffic was not considered expedient. The movement of municipal transport will be restricted until September 13, recall that this regulation was imposed on August 14.

As for the education process in schools, it will be resumed remotely from September 15 to October 4, the same regulation will apply to higher and vocational schools. Both the state and private kindergartens will not be able to operate till October 4 either.

According to the Minister of Education Mikheil Chkhenkeli, there will be a differentiated approach. In a town or village where the infection rate will be below 4%, education will resume in classrooms, otherwise, it will continue in the remote format. In either case, parents will still have the option to choose online-schooling, like last year.

As for the universities, since they have individual start dates, the study process will start everywhere in distance mode before October 4, the decision to change the study format will be made according to the epidemiological situation on the ground.

Laboratory and clinical classes for medical university students are an exception and they will be held in-person, with the important reservation that both students and professors are vaccinated with both doses at the time of these activities.

As for the recommendations of UNICEF and WHO regarding the need to resume education in the school building, Chkhenkeli said that he had met with the UNICEF representative in Georgia and that there was full agreement on the issue of children's health.

"The specificity lies in the fact that 90% of the strains in Georgia are Delta, which targets children and young people. I am the first to support the learning process in a natural environment, i.e. in classrooms. Schools are ready in every way and for every scenario. However, the cri-



According to the Education Minister, as soon as the daily rate of infection falls below 4%, children will return to the classrooms.

teria here are completely different, at the level of pandemics, and the level of infection is very high," Chkhenkeli clarified.

The Minister of Education also focused on the issue of teacher vaccination and renewal of the attendance regime: "Even if teachers are 100% vaccinated, if the school is located in an environment, district or city where the infection rate is high, specifically above 4%, there is still a high risk of the virus re-entering the school."

Georgian health officials have warned several times that they will not recommend in-person studies until new cases of coronavirus will seriously decrease and at least 80% of school personnel are vaccinated. Recall that 46 % of Georgian teachers have been fully vaccinated as of August 30.

Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the Na-

tional Center for Disease Control, said at a briefing after the Interagency Coordination Council that the epidemiological situation in the country has started to stabilize in the last 2 weeks due to the introduction of certain restrictions, enforcement and more controls, as well as intensive vaccinations. According to him, for the first time in the last week, today, the positive rate has dropped below 10%, but the number of cases is still high.

According to the data published on the government website stopcov.ge, the positive indicator for the morning of August 31 is: Daily - 10.92 %; Last 7 days - 9.76 %; Last 14 days - 10.26 %. 79 patients with COVID-19 died overnight. According to the NCDC, 4778 cases of coronavirus were detected out of 43 741 tests performed in the last 24 hours .

The Deputy Minister of Health of Georgia Tamar Gabunia also informed that, there is a slight stabilization in terms of the spread of the virus in the country, which is evidenced by the rate of new cases. According to her the vaccination program is being actively implemented. Gabunia says that the mobile checkpoints in Tbilisi have been successful, which is why similar checkpoints are planned to be introduced in Rustavi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi as well.

A total of 1 184 306 vaccinations have been given since March 15. 790 542 people have been vaccinated with one dose, (27,7% of the adult population) and 393 764 people are fully vaccinated (13.8 %). According to epidemiologists, at least 60% of the adult population needs to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity.



Public transport will not be operational until September 13, the restriction does not apply to intercity transport.

### The News in Brief

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

**EU calls on the Georgian authorities to uphold their reform commitments, the EU's assistance to Georgia remains conditional on progress on key reforms**

The EU calls on the Georgian authorities to uphold their reform commitments, including in the justice sector, in the interest of Georgian citizens and of the future of EU-Georgia relations. The relevant

statement was made by Julien Crampes, EU Charge d'Affaires ad interim, at the briefing held at the EU Delegation Office in Georgia.

"The EU calls on the Georgian authorities to uphold their reform commitments, including in the justice sector, in the interest of Georgian citizens and of the future of EU-Georgia relations. The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation.

The EU underlines that while it remains fully committed to support Georgia's reforms in line with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the EU's assistance to Georgia remains conditional on progress on key reforms", said Julien Crampes.

MORE NEWS IN BRIEF ON P. 2

# NDI BEGINS INTERNATIONAL ELECTION INTEGRITY PROGRAM AHEAD OF GEORGIA'S 2021 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS



WASHINGTON – The National Democratic Institute (NDI, or the Institute) announced today the start of a series of high-level meetings ahead of the 2021 Georgian municipal elections. The meetings aim to demonstrate support for Georgia's democratic development and European and Euro-Atlantic integration and reinforce the international

community's expectation for adherence by all to the principles of genuine democratic elections and political processes.

Leading the high-level team are: Howard Dean, former Governor of Vermont and NDI Board Member, and Ken Wollack, Chairman of the Board of the National Endowment for Democracy and former President of NDI. Other members of the team will include Per Eklund, former EU Ambassador to Georgia; Amy English, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor, Office of Senator Jeanne Shaheen; Hannah Thoburn, Senior Professional

Staff Member on the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Kat Cosgrove, Senior Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Gerald Connolly; Ben Cooper, Staff Associate, US House Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber; Melissa Muscio, NDI Acting Regional Co-Director for Eurasia; Pat Merloe, NDI Director for Elections Programs; and Alan Gillam, NDI Resident Director for Georgia. The team will meet virtually with party representatives, government officials as well as representatives of civil society and the media.

These meetings are the first phase of NDI's multi-track program for the October 2, 2021 municipal elections. In early September, NDI will deploy a limited long-term assessment mission to Georgia. NDI's long-term analysts will focus on several key themes, including election administration, the campaign environment, the information environment, and gender and inclusion. In late September, NDI plans to organize an enhanced presence ahead of election day. NDI's team would hold a second round of discussions with party representatives, gov-

ernment and election officials, as well as representatives of civil society, media, and diplomatic community to reinforce a message of constructive engagement around the elections.

NDI's international election integrity program will be conducted in accordance with Georgian law and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This program is made possible with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS).

Media Rights monitors the activities of the Communications Commission with the financial support of the Open Society Foundations. In the framework of the project, special attention is paid to the issues of legitimacy of the broadcasters' sanctioning, observance of the requirements of the law and transparency of the regulatory process.

The weekly report of August 20-27, provides brief information on the activities of the Communications Commission. At its public hearings on August 26, the Communications Commission (GNCC) discussed a total of 13 issues. Therefore, the following decisions were made in the field of broadcasting:

GNCC Draws Protocol on Administrative Violations Due to Violation of Election Legislation to 7 Broadcasters. The lawsuit has been filed against Public Broadcaster, Public Broadcaster Adjara TV and Radio, Imedi TV, TV Pirveli, Formula, Rustavi 2 and Studio Maestro for illegal coverage of public opinion polls.

Based on the protocols of the violations, the Communications Commission states that "as a result of the pre-election media monitoring, it was revealed that the mentioned broadcasters covered the public opinion poll published by the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia party on August 23 in violation of the law. In particular, the broadcasters violated the 'Election Code of Georgia', according to which the broadcaster is obliged to indicate

## 'Media Rights' release report on Communications Commission activities

the date of the poll, the poll method, the exact wording of the poll questions and the scope of possible errors when publishing the results of the public opinion poll related to the elections."

Public Opinion Survey, one of the components of providing information on the conduct of the pre-election campaign is Article 50.5 of the Election Code of Georgia, which sets out the criteria that are important for coverage. Failure to comply with the rules set out under that article creates the preconditions for drawing up an administrative violation report.

In accordance with the rule established by the Election Code of Georgia, the process regarding the protocols should be continued in the Tbilisi City Court in accordance with the rules established by the Code of Administrative Offenses. In case of finding a violation, in accordance with the Article 82 of the Organic Law, the expected fine for each broadcaster is ₾ 5,000.

At a public meeting of August 26, the representatives of the broadcasters did not share the Commission's approach and pointed out that the research published by the political party "Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia" at the briefing was a pre-election activity and news.

According to the representative of the Public Broadcaster, this was not a pre-election program or a debate, it was only the activity of the election subject as news and the purpose of the broadcaster was not to cover a specific survey. Accordingly, given the context, the broadcaster had no obligation to make such a reference.

Representatives of Adjara TV and Radio of the Public Broadcaster expressed a similar position, adding that delayed coverage of the briefing in the future could lead to a loss of urgency of the issue. The representative of TV Pirveli believes that when 7 broadcasters with different editorial policies had identical problems in covering the issue, it would be better for the commission to listen to all of them and refuse to draw up a protocol.

The representative of Imedi TV and Maestro emphasizes that as a result of the legislative change, which obliges the broadcasters to indicate the exact date of the poll, the method of the poll, the exact wording of the survey questions and the possible errors in the coverage of political surveys, puts the broadcaster in unfair condition, since it is not the publisher of the research and its financial condition and sanction should depend on the publisher of the research, be it a political party or a non-governmental organization.

According to Article 96.1 (Investigation of the circumstances of the case) of the General Administrative Code of Georgia, the administrative body "is obliged to investigate all the circumstances relevant to the case during the administrative proceedings and to make a decision based on the assessment and conciliation of these circumstances."

No substantiated decision of the GNCC has been published so far, however, in the format of the Public Session of the Communications Commission/during the administrative proceedings the

issue of liability of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia political party was not discussed, especially regarding their responsibility to provide all the necessary information to broadcasters.

At the same time, in case of committing a minor administrative offense, the possibility of releasing the offender from administrative liability is established in accordance with Article 22 of the Code of Administrative Of-

fenses of Georgia. In view of the above factual and legal preconditions, the court is empowered to consider the issue of exemption of broadcasters from financial responsibility.

At its meeting on August 26, the Commission also granted the overall broadcasting authorization to BMG Ltd. The company intends to start joint broadcasting in Georgian and English by May 15, 2022, which will be distributed via cable network. Business Media Georgia is a multimedia resource that brings together news about business and economics in both TV and online broadcasts.

### The News in Brief

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#### Mikheil Saakashvili: They are trying to finally detach us from Europe and turn us into a Russian swamp

"Starting from Afghanistan, America and ending in Europe, all my contacts with foreigners were attempts to help Georgians, while they are hampering all this," former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili says in his video address.

"I found vaccines in Europe, but they called and said they did not want them. I found planes to evacuate people, Gakharia was the Prime Minister then and he said they would do everything without me.

My efforts are not needed for the suspension of assistance to them! Seeing Gharibashvili is more than enough for everyone to form their own opinion. I travel a lot, I meet representatives of the European Commission, a large number of MEPs. During one of the last visits to Brussels, one of the highest officials of the European Commission told me about Gharibashvili. "This is a clinical idiot."

Of course, they are lying about the EU aid, because it is free money. They have doubled the debt compared to my government, they have doubled poverty, unemployment, they dropped the exchange rate. After rejecting the EU aid, the currency will fall even more and unemployment will rise even more.

They are trying to finally detach us from Europe and turn us into a Russian swamp. These robbers should not stand between us and Europe. Georgia will be a successful, developed, European country, and we will all achieve that," stated Saakashvili.

### Weather

Wednesday, September 1

Day ☀️ Clear  
High: 35°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy  
Low: 22°C

Thursday, September 2

Day 🌧️ Partly Cloudy  
High: 33°C

Night 🌧️ Showers  
Low: 19°C

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