

EU & U.S. Embassies Release Statements Following Run-Offs

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The embassies of Georgia's strategic partners - the European Union (EU) and the United States of America have issued comments following the second round of the 2021 local elections, in which the ruling Georgian Dream party has won 19 of 20 mayoral constituencies and overall received 47% of the vote in the proportional part of the race.

The United National Movement and other opposition parties say that the elections were 'fabricated'. The opposition announced rallies in regions and a large rally in capital Tbilisi on November 7, demanding the annulment of the election results.

The Ambassador of the EU in Georgia Carl Hartzel, in coordination with EU Heads of Mission, commended once more the voters, the electoral staff, and local observers for all their efforts and engagement amid the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomed the International Election Observation Mission carried out by the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament for this second round.

This mission again concluded that the elections were generally well administered and that the campaign was competitive, it also observed an escalation of negative rhetoric, persistent allegations of intimidation and pressure on voters, and sharp imbalances in resources, which benefited the ruling party and tilted the playing field.

Hartzel recalled that following the first round, the EU stated that the reported malpractices must not become a norm in Georgia and deplored these elections as 'a missed opportunity in this respect.' The statement underscored that despite a clear assessment by the international observers, meaningful steps were not taken to address key shortcomings.

"On the contrary, further shortcomings have emerged, especially in terms of misuse of administrative resources and violent rhetoric by Georgia's political leaders, further fuelling an already deep political polarisation. Suggestions made before these elections that the central government would not cooperate with local councils, should they swing towards another majority, are of concern as they seek to restrict the electorate's choice and to limit pluralism."

The statement emphasized the importance of public trust which requires an inclusive, credible, and transparent recounting process and fair adjudication of complaints and appeals, and underlined the key responsibility of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and courts.

The EU delegation expressed hope that genuine efforts will be made by Georgian leaders to build a political climate conducive to meeting the expectations of the citizens of the country, that includes fulfilling repeated commitments on meaningful reforms, notably in the judiciary, as well as resuming the implementation of our agreed EU-Georgia agenda, based on the values of democracy, respect for human rights and upholding the rule of law.

Likewise, the U.S embassy shared



"We are particularly troubled by credible reports of violence against election observers and the media during both rounds of the election. These groups are the cornerstone of any democracy, and attacks against members of the media and election observers must be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

ODIHR's assessment and recalled that ODIHR noted concerns with the persistent practice of representatives of observer organizations acting as party supporters, at times interfering with the process, and groups of individuals potentially influencing voters outside some polling stations. While ODIHR found that the CEC organized the 2nd round professionally and transparently, concerns over the impartiality of the lower-level election commissions persisted. U.S. Embassy election observation teams witnessed similar interference and bias at several precincts.

The statement reminded me that democracy is a work in progress that re-

quires dedication to the highest international standards and vigilance to ensure citizens' rights and freedoms are protected.

Embassy emphasized that some of the reforms enacted by Georgia's political leaders through an inclusive, multiparty process earlier this year, such as automatic recounts and electronic vote counting, largely succeeded in increasing the transparency of the voting process. However, according to the statement, 'these positive steps forward were undermined, unfortunately, by wide-spread violations in the pre-election period and on both election days that adversely affected the abil-

ity of citizens to vote freely.'

"Rather than improving the atmosphere by addressing problems identified by election observers in the 1st round, intimidation, offensive rhetoric, misuse of administrative resources, and reports of blatant vote-buying and other violations continued, and a politicized media further inflamed the polarized atmosphere."

The Embassy called on the parties to use the legal mechanisms available and pursue peaceful means to adjudicate election disputes since democracy will not be strengthened by resorting to violence or pursuing solutions outside the law. The statement urged Georgian leaders 'to enact and implement all the remaining reforms recommended by ODIHR, the Venice Commission, and other international experts' that were provided at Parliament's request and would be a significant step toward ensuring the next elections are an improvement over the last.

The letter reaffirmed the American people's support to Georgia's efforts throughout the long, challenging process of building strong institutions, a robust civil society, a professional, pluralistic media, and a government that is responsive to the people.

"The recent elections and Georgia's deeply divisive political environment show much more work is urgently needed. The U.S. has offered our friendship as an honest partner to the people and government because we believe in Georgia's future as a stable, prosperous democracy that respects the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms."



"The phase of random recounts of at least 140 precincts and the adjudication of hundreds of complaints is the 'test and an opportunity for the CEC and courts, and it will be critical for these institutions to perform their duties transparently and impartially.'"

Saakashvili Calls On Opposition MPs to Leave Parliament



“Parliament has already lost the function of a government platform. No decision can and will not be made there,” ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili’s letter reads.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Following the municipal election run-offs on October 30, former President Mikheil Saakashvili has sent a letter from prison noting that he is ‘very angry and insulted.’ According to him, the UNM won the elections, and ‘the group of bandits’ stole the victory from them.

As the ex-president notes in the letter, the only thing that can be done is to “seize power and make them accountable before the law.” According to him, the result of such ‘catastrophic’ observational reports must be appealed and Georgian people should take to the streets and demand snap elections.

Saakashvili has praised the decision of Lelo Leader Mamuka Khazaradze, who announced on Sunday that he was leaving parliament and would continue fighting in the streets. The ex-president called on his comrades to do what Khazaradze did and reject their parliamentary mandates, since “the parliament has already lost the function of a government platform.”

As it became known yesterday, several MPs, including the leader of the Girchi - More Freedom party Zurab Japaridze and members of the United National Movement faction Nona Mamulashvili, Ana Tsitlidze, and Levan Varshalomidze have also decided to leave the parliament. One of the leaders of For



According to the official results of the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the 2021 municipal election run-offs in Georgia, the ruling Georgian Dream party mayoral candidates have won in 19 municipalities, while the United National Movement (UNM) candidate has won in just one.

Georgia party Natia Mezvrishvili has stated that leaving mandates and moving processes to the streets can only be beneficial to the Georgian Dream. According to her, the radicalism of the UNM helps the ruling party to maintain power.

As for the ex-president’s health condition, his lawyers, as well as his girlfriend, the Rada MP, Lisa Yasko, claim that Saakashvili’s health is deteriorating amid being on hunger strike for almost a month and

he requires ‘quality medical care’, which, as they say, can only be provided at the civil clinic.

Nika Gvaramia, the lawyer of the former president and director of the opposition-minded Mtavari Arkhi announced yesterday that the government plans to transfer Saakashvili to Gori hospital, “where he will be abducted by the so-called Ossetian special forces.” According to another lawyer Beka Basilaia, the government wishes

to hand over Saakashvili to the Russian Special Services.

Saakashvili was arrested in Tbilisi on October 1, a day before Georgian municipal elections, and he has been on hunger strike since. The opposition believes that the elections were rigged and has announced rallies in all big cities of Georgia, demanding the annulment of municipal election results and the release of the third president of Georgia.

Youth-focused vaccination campaign We Need “You” Decide! launched

Young people to help strengthen vaccine messaging and increase vaccine uptake

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on almost all countries across the world, including Georgia.

In an effort to achieve the breakthrough in vaccination process, on 1 November the Kant’s Academy and the United Nations in Georgia have kicked off the youth-focused vaccination campaign *We Need “You” Decide!* in Rustavi.

This two-month new campaign was developed with a specific focus on youth in the 18-29 demographic to increase vaccine

uptake and acceptance.

“COVID-19 has shown that if individuals are acting in solidarity to ensure that their own actions do not jeopardize others we see most benefits for all. Looking ahead, this spirit needs to continue in Georgia, in the interest of building a healthy and resilient society after the crisis,” said Sabine Machl, UN Resident Coordinator in Georgia. “By taking on shared responsibility for fighting the pandemic, we can advance the Sustainable Development Goals and build a better future for all”.

The campaign aims at connecting youth with accurate information about COVID-19, and the available vaccines, invoking a sense of responsibility to get vaccinated and motivating them to engage with older age groups where they live, work, and socialize for

increasing vaccination rates.

“We, the founders of Kant’s Academy always believed in the power of young generation. More specifically, the role of youth in global challenges and substantial changes. And today, more than ever their role in post pandemic recovery is crucial,” said Giorgi Taktakishvili, the founder of Kant’s Academy. “We’ve had many examples of how the youth have made their voices be heard. In Georgia, fairly recently, on the 13th of June, we saw unified, powerful young generation acting for their peers and their country. This showed that action does matter, that putting in the effort can lead to change.”

“In order to live in a healthier environment, we must first acknowledge a number of facts, then analyze the existing realities, challenges and opportuni-

ties and finally we need to act. Communicating the benefits of vaccination, helping others and raising their awareness, learning new skills and cognition, these are all actions to keep ourselves and others safe. Ask a lot of questions and I believe that

each of us will inevitably come to the conclusion that my actions matter,” said Nino Gogokhia, Georgia’s Youth Representative to the UN.

Throughout the campaign, whether it’s the university, the social media or the classroom, it is planned to reach young people in different parts of the country. The more people who get vaccinated and protect one another, the closer we will be to moving on from this pandemic and getting economies and livelihoods quickly back on their feet.



Weather

Tuesday, November 2

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 22°C

Night Overcast

Low: 12°C

Wednesday, November 3

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 20°C

Night Overcast

Low: 12°C

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