

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Government to Launch Large-Scale Employment Program in March

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili announced at the government meeting on Monday that the Georgian government will launch a large-scale employment program focusing on employing socially vulnerable citizens who are fit for work. According to Garibashvili, the program will be launched on March 1 and more than 200,000 people will benefit from it.

As Garibashvili noted, the initiative is designed to create public workplaces in Georgia, to employ socially vulnerable, employable citizens. The program will be led by the newly appointed economy minister Levan Davitashvili, and be based on European standards.

The PM emphasized that providing socially vulnerable people with jobs will not cause the termination of social assistance, noting that the families of beneficiaries will, for 4 years, receive their assistance.

"Our Government seeks to reduce poverty and create jobs. We must change the social policy, and we know that the way to tackle poverty is to create new jobs, the reason



According to the Prime Minister, what employable citizens need is employment and self-realization, not social welfare



The program will employ 200,000 socially vulnerable people.

why we must launch an active employment policy this year. This will be our main task and concern," the PM noted.

As he stressed, of the 600,000 socially vulnerable people, 200,000 are employable, noting that it is necessary for the well-being of each family, and for the country's development, to engage them in economic processes. According to the Prime Minister, what employable citizens need is employment and self-realization, not social welfare.

Garibashvili noted that at the initial stage, municipalities, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, and other Ministries, will mobilize about 50,000 job offers. The program will be implemented by the State Employment Support Agency, and beneficiaries will be able to choose between public works and vacancies offered in the labor market in line with their skills, experience, and professional development.

As the PM stated, this large-scale public works program is expected to be a major step toward overcoming poverty.

Georgia in Economist Report of Democracy Index



Georgia's average score on the Democracy Index has declined for the fourth consecutive year.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Less than half of the world's population - 45.7% live in democratic systems, says the new data published by the British magazine Economist. The number of people living in democracies of various degrees was higher in 2020 - 49.4%. Of the 167 territories surveyed by analysts, only 21 were classified as full-fledged democracies, which is only 6.4% of the world's population. Meanwhile 53% of the population lives in conditions of 'flawed democracies'.

The index is based on 60 indicators grouped into 5 categories: electoral process and pluralism, government functioning, political participation, political culture, and civil rights. Based on average points, each country is then classified as one of the 4 types of regimes. A country has to score more than 8 points to be a "full democracy" and earn greater than 6 or less than 8 points to be named as a "flawed democracy". One with more than 4 but less than 6 points is designated a "hybrid regime" and one with less than 4 points is described as an 'authoritarian regime.'

According to the 2021 data, Georgia ranks 91st in the world and 19th in the region with 5.12 points and is in the category of 'hybrid regimes'. Electoral processes and pluralism are rated the highest at 7.42 points. Functioning of the government has lowest, 3.57 points, political culture - 3.75, civil liberties - 5.29 and political participation - 5.56. In 2020, Georgia was awarded 5.31 points. Country's downward trend began after 2017,

tapering off from 5.93 year after year. Overall, since the 2006 inception of the Index, the country's highest score on the global ranking was 5.95 points in 2013, and the lowest ever - 4.59 points in 2010.

The report says that in two of the Eastern European hybrid democracies - Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina - improvements were observed, while the ratings of Georgia and Ukraine deteriorated. Ukraine has seen the most significant decline among the same category of Eastern European countries, and it is now ranked 86th with Mexico, while in 2020 it was

ranked 97th. Scholars attribute this decline to the face of Russian aggression, and say that the risks and tensions of military aggression often lead to the limitation of some democratic processes, especially in terms of the centralization of power.

Regarding Georgia in particular, the report states that several turbulent events have hampered democratic processes in the country. Tensions between the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition United National Movement culminated in the arrest of the ex-president. In the local elections, during which Saakashvili returned to

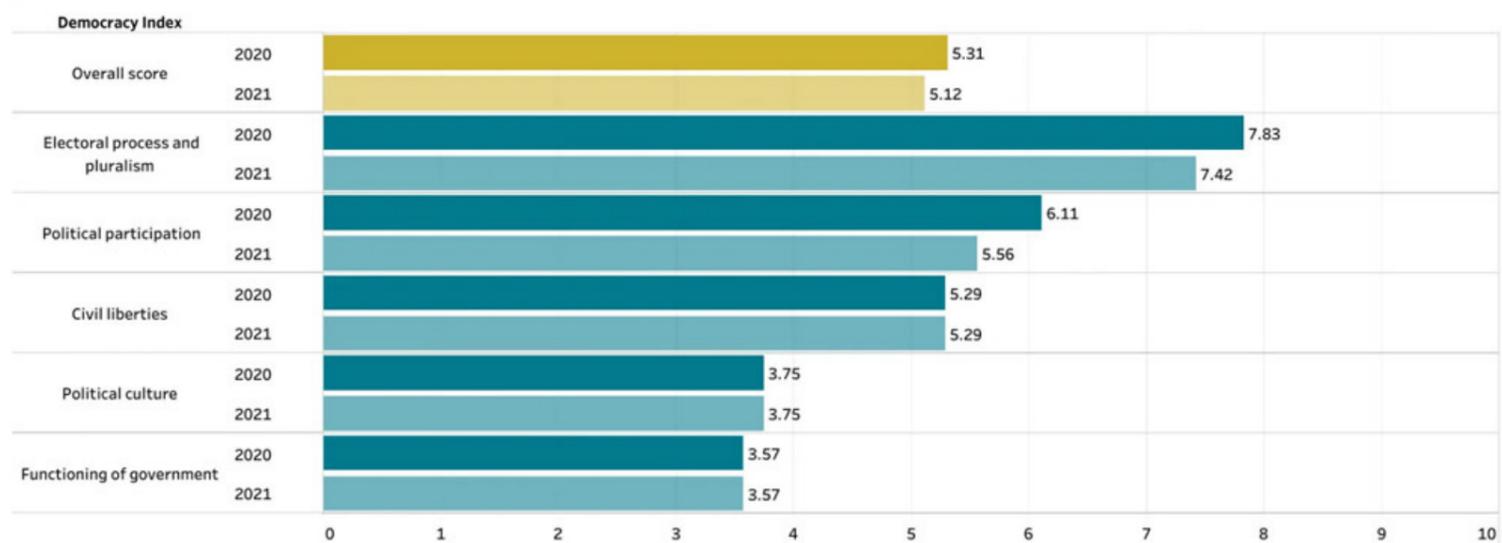
the country and was arrested, international observers observed violations. The report clarifies that the ruling party has significant financial and functional advantages, which further impedes electoral competition and transparency. Aggravated political tensions, meanwhile, deepened social divisions last year.

In 2021, positions in Eastern Europe improved by 13 countries. Among them, the biggest improvements were made in Moldova and Montenegro. Moldova, one of the Associated Trio countries working towards joining the EU alongside Ukraine and Georgia, landed in 69th place in 2021, up from 80th the previous year, entering the list of 'flawed democracies.'

Scores fell in 11 countries. There are still no full democracy countries in the region - of the 28 countries surveyed, 16 are flawed democracies, 4 are hybrid regimes (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) and 8 are authoritarian regimes (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and all Central Asian states).

At the top of the list of democracies globally are Norway, New Zealand and Finland, Sweden, Iceland. Leading among the worst democracies are: Afghanistan, Myanmar, North Korea, Laos, China. Britain ranks 18th, while the United States, which this year falls into the category of deficient democracies, is one step down from the previous year and ranks 26th. The situation among the regions of the world is most deteriorating in South America. In Asia, there are 3 countries in the category of full democracies - Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

The authors of the report write that these results reflect the negative and long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic globally. According to them, some of the restrictions imposed on the public have been used by some governments to restrict civil rights for some citizens in a pandemic situation - excessive use of emergency forces and circumstances, overstepping of some aspects of public and private life and even other aspects.



Democracy Index 2021, by regime type

Regime type	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	21	12.6	6.4
Flawed democracies	53	31.7	39.3
Hybrid regimes	34	20.4	17.2
Authoritarian regimes	59	35.3	37.1

Note. "World" population refers to the total population of the 167 countries covered by the Index. Since this excludes only micro states, this is nearly equal to the entire estimated world population.

Source: EIU.

Weather

Tuesday, February 15

Day Cloudy
High: 7°C
Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

Wednesday, February 16

Day Cloudy
High: 8°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

published by
The Messenger

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