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GEORGIA WATCH BRIEFING

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TOPICS OF THIS ISSUE

- **Post-election developments and negotiation**
- **State official visit of Mike Pompeo**

RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Post-election political standoff urges the ruling Georgian Dream and opposition parties to come to the negotiation table

After a series of demonstrations and protest against the parliament, leaders of nine political parties that, according to the Central Election Commission's preliminary results, managed to pass the 1% election threshold started a round of negotiation processes with the ruling party. The **negotiations take place through the**

facilitation of foreign diplomats, and aim to drag the country out of the political crises created by the October 31 parliamentary elections.

On November 12, **ruling and opposition parties gathered at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador Kelly Degnan, with EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell and French Ambassador Diego Colas also in attendance.** After a four-hour-long meeting, the parties **agreed to carry on the negotiation process until some kind of agreement had been reached.** The exact details of the meeting are unclear. The speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakvadze, noted that the first round of negotiation "has been a positive beginning of political consultations," adding that nobody should have any expectations about reaching an agreement at the very first meeting. The opposition party leaders also expressed their readiness for the negotiation and compromise, though not "at the expense of the country's interests." **Opposition once again stressed their unanimity in their demands of running a fresh election and removing the chairperson of CEC, Tamar Zhvania.**

On November 14, parties met for the second time at the U.S. Ambassador's residence. After the meeting, the leaders of the ruling and opposition parties once again expressed their readiness to continue the negotiation process and to hold another meeting. David Bakradze, the leader of the European Georgia party, said that it is early to talk about specific results due to the "very different positions" of the sides. Bakradze also stated that the ruling party didn't make any specific offers, but instead discussed in detail the opposition parties' initiative of easing the crisis by holding new elections. Later, one of the leaders of the ruling Georgian Dream Party and Tbilisi City Mayor, Kakha Kaladze, commented on the issue, stating that GD will not even consider the option of rerunning the elections. This statement infuriated the leaders of the opposition parties, some of which said that the Mayor's statement practically killed the prospects of the negotiations, while others called him "incompetent" and called on Georgian Dream to attain the principles of negotiation.

Overall, the political situation remains strained in Georgia, with some having expectations that the visit of U.S. State Secretary Mike Pompeo might provide a way out of the existing political standoff.

Mike Pompeo's to visit Georgia

During the visit to Georgia, **Mike Pompeo held meetings with President Salome Zourabichvili, PM Giorgi Gakharia, FM David Zalkaliani, the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Ilia II, and the CSO representatives.** This visit was a part of Pompeo's November 13-23 [trip](#) to France, Turkey, Georgia, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

While meeting with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, President Zourabichvili thanked the Secretary for firm US support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and stated that the peaceful de-occupation of Georgia has no alternative, underscoring the importance of "effective negotiations, strengthening of the Geneva International Discussions" and all other possible formats. In addition, Zourabichvili

[expressed](#) hope that the negotiations on a free trade agreement with the US will begin.

According to the Government of Georgia [press release](#), **PM Gakharia and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "discussed the key directions of Georgia-US strategic partnership and prospects of deepening the strong cooperation between the countries", with the attention being paid "to the state of affairs in Georgia and the region, alongside Georgia-US cooperation for strengthening regional and international security"**. The PM noted that "the visit of the Secretary of State reiterated the robustness of Georgia-US strategic partnership and commitment of the two countries to continuing the cooperation in order to build on the existing partnership based on shared values". With the meeting underlining cooperation for further security, trade and economic relations, Mike Pompeo has made comments on the importance of democracy and free and fair elections in Georgia as well, stating "we will do everything we can to support your democratic process, the building up of the institutions in ways that are important for free and fair elections, and all other things that come with robust debate and democracy".

Also, [according](#) to the US Embassy in Tbilisi, Mike Pompeo discussed religious freedom with His Holiness Ilia II. The meeting comes only days after Secretary Pompeo met with Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In addition, **Pompeo met with Georgian civil society representatives to "hear their views on the rule of law, on judicial independence, and an independent judiciary as part of the integral process, free adjudication of processes in the Georgian democracy, and respect for human and economic rights."** Prior to the visit to Georgia, local security and foreign policy community and ex-top officials [addressed](#) the US Secretary with an open letter requesting the permanent presence of the US army in Georgia.

It's noteworthy that Pompeo visited Georgia shortly after the 2020 Parliamentary elections, and the run-offs are yet to be held. Following the announcement of the election results, the political developments in Georgia have been characterized with a series of street [protests](#), as the opposition parties accuse the government of rigging the elections, refuse to recognize the results, boycott the new legislature, and demand new elections.

MONITORING OF DISINFORMATION CASES

Member of the far-right party disseminates disinformation about the US Ambassador. On November 2, Georgian majoritarian candidate March Ermile Nemsadze published a post on his Facebook account noting that Kelly Degnan was among the 17 diplomats that requested an impeachment of U.S. President Donald Trump. Nemsadze also wrote that the U.S. Ambassador grossly interferes with the domestic policy of [Georgia](#). In fact, Kelly Degnan has neither featured in the initiative demanding the impeachment of Donald Trump nor is she among the diplomats that

have been questioned in connection to this case. Trump nominated Degnan as the Ambassador himself in September 2019.

Misleading quote of an opposition party member. On November 1, several news agencies published identical news regarding a statement by a member of the UNM party, Gubaz Sanikidze, about the election results. Titles of the articles employed a quote – "Disobedience or a coup d'état" and arranged the information as if Sanikidze was calling on people to overthrow the government by force. Myth Detector [revealed](#) that the disseminated quote was misleading and that Sanikidze actually stated that it was the government that carried out the coup d'état and called on the opposition to mobilize and boycott.

Video Fabrication of Georgia's Ruling Party Chairman. On October 21, a video was disseminated on the Facebook page "ქოცების დასაცინი ოფიციალური სააგენტო" (Official Agency for Ridiculing Georgian Dream), in which Bidzina Ivanishvili, the chairman of Georgian Dream Party, states "In my eyes, people from Adjara are dimwits or something." Myth Detector [revealed](#) that that the video is a fabrication and Bidzina Ivanishvili used the word "dimwits" referring to the type of society that can develop from watching "low quality" TV shows and programs. The video was published in 2019 as well, before the Khulo Mayoral Election, and was clearly a part of a pre-election counter-campaign.

The statement of the UNM party leader spreads out of context. On November 8, the Facebook page "მოგიყვანთ ოპოზიცია" (F*ck Your Opposition) shared a video of UNM leader Nika Melia in which he stated the following: "Everybody already knows that Abkhazia and Samachablo are both sovereign states and should be completely under the influence of Russia." Myth Detector [fact-checked](#) the video and revealed that Nika Melia's quote was incomplete and was disseminated without context. In reality, a complete version of the video shows that Nika Melia uses these words to demonstrate Russian Duma MP Sergei Gavrilov's attitude towards Georgia. This is one example of a campaign to discredit the opposition party leaders by anti-opposition Facebook pages.

After the November 8 rally where protesters expressed distrust in the results of the October 31 parliamentary elections, the number of citizens who came to the rally became controversial. Ruling party Georgian Dream members assessed the rally, pointing out that only a few people had gathered in front of the parliament, and that the opposition had failed to mobilize citizens. The same narrative was spread by pro-government, anti-opposition Facebook pages and anti-liberal groups. According to their estimates, the rally was attended by 4,000–7,000 people. Myth Detector used the mapchecking.com tool to calculate the approximate number of protesters on November 8. The number of protesters was estimated at 21,500 based on drone footage and the density of the rally. See more details on the [link](#).

NAMING AND SHAMING

President Zurabishvili congratulating Russia on the new Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal

On November 10, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed [a peace deal](#) to end the armed conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. The peace agreement was initiated and endorsed by Russia. The latter agreed with both sides to deploy 1,960 Russian armed peacekeepers, 90 armored personnel carriers, and 380 units of automobiles and special equipment in the disputed region. **The agreement changes the geopolitical situation and increases the Russian presence in the South Caucasus region. Surprisingly, The President of Georgia, Salome Zurabishvili, without analyzing the growth of the security risks, expressed her gratitude towards Russia and other facilitators and announced the beginning of a new era in the region.** Her [Twitter post](#) best illustrates her standpoint:

Tweets

Tweets & replies

Media

Likes



Salome Zourabichvili  @Zou... · 21h ...

A new era starts in the Caucasus. I congratulate our friends Armenia and Azerbaijan for ending a tragic war and thank all the facilitators. My sympathy to the families of the victims.

Peace and stability have no alternative!
We launch together a [#newchapter](#) of cooperation 🇧🇪 🇷🇺 🇦🇷

1,023

553

1,485



Her tweet caused dissatisfaction among the Georgian and foreign experts, Georgian opposition leaders, and former foreign officials. The former U.S. Ambassador in Georgia, Mr. Ian Kelly, [criticized](#) Zurabishvili's post. He highlighted that this agreement underpins Russian occupation in the South Caucasus and that it is surprising to hear the congratulations coming from the President of Georgia.



Ian Kelly
@ikelly731



How can a Georgian President congratulate an agreement that locks in another Russian occupation in Caucasus and locks out the West?



Jaba Devdariani @JDevdariani · 20h

This message by #Georgia president is likely to be misconstrued, but it is fundamentally correct, in my mind...

[Show this thread](#)

18:16 · 11/10/20 · [Twitter for iPad](#)

31 Retweets 13 Quote Tweets 129 Likes

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

MDF [published](#) a report about MediaCritic, Georgian National Communications Commission's web portal. After analyzing 90 articles published on mediacritic.ge between August 1, 2020, and October 31, 2020, it appeared that most of its publications in the pre-election period are dedicated to the scrutiny of media outlets with critical editorial policies towards the government, while pro-government media outlets' editorial policies were only touched upon symbolically. At the same time, media platforms with anti-Western and pro-Kremlin editorial policies were missing from MediaCritic's agenda.

On November 16, **MDF** had a presentation of the [report](#) PRE-ELECTION MONITORING 2020 - Anti-Western Messages, Hate Speech, Fake News. The monitoring focused on cases of anti-Western messages and hate speech voiced by electoral subjects and political parties, as well as fake news and discrediting campaigns.

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli

Foundation) has published an [Expert Opinion](#) regarding the Karabagh developments. Davit Batashvili, a research fellow at the Rondeli Foundation has contributed his piece on "What Russia has Gained in Karabakh".

IDFI published an [analysis](#) demonstrating the Russian media outlets' reaction to Mike Pompeo's visit to Georgia. According to the IDFI observation, Russian information space was dominated by the false information that the Secretary of State was arriving in Georgia to announce the opening of the US military base.

On November 17, **Civic IDEA** published the 4th [China Watch report](#) addressing another Chinese state-controlled company Tebian Electric Apparatus Stock Co Ltd. (TBEA). The company has already won two tenders in Georgia and is distinguished with its tainted international reputation. The report explains TBEA's origins and activities in order to expose its affiliation with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Moreover, it has revealed particular breaches in the contracts signed between the Georgian state and TBEA Shenyang Transformer Group Co. Also, the report thoroughly reviews the TBEA corruption and fraud scandals in Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, proving that its reputation is being questioned internationally. However, the research revealed that similar to other Chinese companies operating in Georgia, the state did not even try to implement the so-called "due diligence" concerning TBEA and its activities worldwide.

Online platform On.ge became the media partner of Georgian Watch Briefing. On.ge has years of experience in covering disinformation/propaganda related issue. The platform will gather all GWB issues in one space to make it easily accessible for the readers.

See all published GWB issues [here](#).

SUBSCRIBE HERE

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Office +420 608 739 902
E-mail info@europeanvalues.net
Web www.europeanvalues.net

Facebook.com/evropskehodnoty



European Values Center for Security Policy
info@europeanvalues.net

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