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RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Ruling GD claims victory in the run-offs, the opposition talks “void” elections

The second round of the local elections held on **October 30** ended with the **Central**

Election Commission (CEC) declaring the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) of oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili victorious in 19 out of 20 municipalities where the citizens voted in mayoral run-offs. Thus, the official results now show that **the GD has won in all major municipalities, including the self-governing cities of Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Poti, and the capital city of Tbilisi**, where about one-third of the country's entire population resides. Hard-to-pronounce Tsalenjikha in western Georgia is the only municipality where the opposition hopeful managed to surpass the GD mayoral candidate.

According to the CEC [results](#), GD mayoral candidate in Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze received 55.6% of the vote, while the United National Movement's (UNM) leader Nika Melia received 44.3%. In the second largest city - Batumi, UNM's Giorgi Kirtadze (49%) was beaten narrowly by GD's Archil Chikovani (51%). And in the third largest city of Kutaisi, UNM's Khatia Dekanoidze received 48.3% of the votes against GD's Ioseb Khakhaleishvili's 51.6%.

The opposition, which had anticipated victories in some of the major municipalities and especially where their candidates had won the first round of the elections (Kutaisi, Batumi, Zugdidi), **has declared that the run-offs were rigged**. UNM's leader Nika Melia [said](#) that Bidzina Ivanishvili's GD "took away and stole" victories from the opposition "in many municipalities." Giorgi Gakharia, ex-GD Prime-Minister of Georgia, whose For Georgia party, the second biggest opposition party, has been positioning itself as an alternative to GD and UNM, [has also stated](#) that the "elections were neither free nor fair," arguing that if relevant progress is not made, "voting risks becoming a meaningless show" in Georgia. **The UNM-led opposition has vowed that the political fight will now continue on the streets of the entire country.**

Election observers of the **OSCE/ODIHR** and **European Parliament** issued a joint [statement](#) regarding the run-offs: "[The election] was generally well administered but continued polarization coupled with escalation of negative rhetoric adversely affected the process". The statement also voiced concerns over 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". The US Embassy in Georgia, while assessing the elections, [stated](#) that "some of the reforms enacted by Georgia's political leaders through an inclusive, multiparty process earlier this year...were undermined, unfortunately, by wide-spread violations in the pre-election period and on both election days that adversely affected the ability of citizens to vote freely".

Both first and second rounds of the elections were held against the backdrop of the GD government [imprisoning Georgia's ex-president and the founder of the UNM, Mikheil Saakashvili, who has been on hunger strike for over a month](#), protesting what he believes to be politically motivated persecution. After the CEC released the election results, Saakashvili has called on his supporters to hold permanent rallies in different locations until the GD government is forced to schedule snap elections.



GEORGIA'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Enguri Bridge Closed Once again on the Election Day

According to the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG), freedom of movement from occupied Abkhazia to Tbilisi-controlled territory was illegally restricted during 28-30 October for every person except ones in need of medical assistance. Therefore, **citizens were prohibited to cross into Georgia-proper on election day**. The de facto government of Abkhazia announced that they closed down the crossing due to the epidemiological situation. However, the SSSG stated that the occupying regime justifies its unlawful decisions on fictional grounds. Notably, the Enguri Bridge was also closed down on October 2, during the first round of the municipal elections, as reported in the 35th issue of Georgia Watch Briefing.

Illegal detention of Georgian citizens continue

The occupying regime of Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia illegally detained two Georgian citizens near the occupying line. The fact that, over time, illegal detentions of Georgian citizens has become a norm for the occupying forces, demonstrates the devastating negative effect of the ongoing occupation on local people and on human rights in general.

Occupying regime: Georgia to “interfere” in “presidential elections”

The de facto leader of the occupied Tskhinvali region, Anatoly Bibilov stated that “Georgia will try to interfere in the presidential elections of [South Ossetian] republic”. During the meeting with the so-called “foreign intelligence service” he noted that “evil-wishing” states are interested in their political processes and are going to influence

the upcoming so-called “presidential elections” in 2022. According to Bibilov, relevant agencies conducted an analysis, according to which 36% of the negative attitude “South Ossetia” originates in Georgia and it is no longer in doubt that Georgians are active in the “Ossetian” segment of social networks, drawing attention of some of the “citizens of South Ossetia”. Subsequently, Bibilov tasked the so-called “foreign intelligence service” to minimize the effect of such “malign influence” on domestic political processes.

DISINFORMATION CASES ABOUT ELECTIONS

Old article disseminated in a coordinated manner to discredit UNM

The day before the municipal election runoffs, an [article](#) of the online news agency NSP.ge was disseminated in a coordinated manner on Facebook. According to the article, the Russian General Vyacheslav Borisov claimed that they had not planned to enter Akhagori in 2008, and occupied the district at the request of the ‘United National Movement’ leaders. Moreover, the article also claims that Vyacheslav Borisov returned war hostages on compassionate grounds, without requesting anything in exchange. In reality, the exchange of prisoners between the Georgian and Russian sides took place under the auspices of the French Embassy in Georgia and the Georgian side released five Russian war prisoners in exchange for 15 Georgian counterparts. The [false allegations](#) that Russians occupied Akhagori at the request of the chairman of the security council Kakha Lomaia is a part of Russian propaganda aiming to blame the Georgian side for instigating the war.

Disinformation about UNM members leaving the party

On election day an alleged fake Facebook profile disseminated a screenshot with the TV Pirveli logo, claiming that members of United National Movement are leaving the party. Similar information [cannot be found](#) either on TV Pirveli page or in any other reliable source.

Falsified quotes of Nika Melia and Mikheil Saakashvili

On October 30, before closing the election polls, anti-opposition Facebook accounts disseminated a fake quote of Mikheil [Saakashvili](#), the former president of Georgia, in which he called on his supporters to gather in front of the prison where he is detained instead of voting. Another falsified quotation was in the name of the United National Movement leader Nika [Melia](#) saying that it is irresponsible of Saakashvili to call for revolution every day from prison.

CHINA' S INFLUENCE

Construction of the controversial skyscraper in Batumi

Georgian Media outlet “Batumelebi” [published an article](#) about the construction of a 72-storey skyscraper, “West Tower” by a subsidiary of “Metro Holding Ltd”. The latter

is owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili's trustee, Galif Ozturk, a Turkish businessman whose hotels are currently filled with Chinese IT specialists illegally working on a crypto lab and online casino in Batumi. Moreover, the company director, Raul Kakhadze, highlighted that **the Tower would be built by [Georgia-Chinese investment](#)** without giving any details about the investors. He also mentioned that the company is going to integrate an international hotel brand - Ritz Carlton, Which has been under scrutiny for several years. One of its branches, Ritz Carlton Riyadh, was being used as a [detention center for Saudi royals](#) also involved in the tech business, accused of "[bribery, dodgy weapons deals, money laundering, tax evasion](#)," and so on.

As a reminder, **thousands of Chinese IT specialists are concentrated in dozens of hotels in Batumi**, most of which are closed for tourists until January 1, 2022. Almost all of them have a banner with a Chinese inscription on the facade. Chinese hieroglyphs also appeared on the facade of the casino "Princess", and the hotel "Intourist Palace" in Batumi opened a Chinese restaurant 25 days ago. According to the [information written in the tv25 article](#), the Chinese are constructing seven buildings on Gogoli Street, which Batumi City Hall could not prevent. We can assume that the new "West Tower" could also serve as one of their bases in the future.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) published an interim [report](#) on the pre-election monitoring of the second round of the 2021 local self-government elections. The report assesses the pre-election political environment, including the legislative initiative addressed to the parliament by 14 MPs from the parliamentary majority, which envisaged a ban on outdoor and TV advertisements that promoted a "negative disposition" towards a political subject. The report analyzes the pre-election media environment, election administration, as well as pre-election campaigns of the ruling GD and the UNM.

The Roadmap concerning the Kremlin's Policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region - an information-analytical portal integrated with the website of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS - Rondeli Foundation), published the [34th issue](#) of "Review of Kremlin Policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region". The latest issue covers recent important developments related to Russia's policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, including the holding of the 54th round of the Geneva International Talks (GID) format.

GFSIS - Rondeli Foundation published an [expert opinion](#) - "Russia's Changed Attack Tactics And Vectors In Cyberspace", which describes the major **Russian organized cybercrime groups and their connection with the Russian intelligence apparatus**. The issue analyzes the changes in attack vectors and tactics of Russian security services in cyberspace which involves the use of Russian-based organized cyber criminals instead of cyber-divisions of Russian intelligence agencies against NATO member states.

Civic Idea's [work](#) has been featured in the 2021 publication of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace - "China's Influence in Southeastern, Central, and Eastern Europe Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries". Part of the research concerns Chinese influence and the activities of notorious Chinese companies in Georgia, as well as the PRC's academic initiatives and its Covid-19 diplomacy in the country. Civic Idea's research is attributed to well-demonstrated uncertainties associated with Georgia-China economic cooperation.

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