

CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE MONTHLY BRIEFS

NOVEMBER 2020

DEMOCRATISATION AMIDST PANDEMIC AND REGIONAL CONFLICTS

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The Central and Eastern Europe Monthly Briefs concisely summarise the latest events and issues on a regional and international level. A group of young scholars and researchers combine their desk-research skills with data analysis in order to provide a bigger picture on different regions and their potential developments.

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DEMOCRATISATION AMIDST PANDEMIC AND REGIONAL CONFLICTS



UKRAINE. The Controversial Ruling of the Constitutional Court Spikes an International Scandal

by Kate Halushka

At the end of October 2020, Ukraine has entered a judicial crisis triggered by some controversial and unconstitutional decisions taken by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine against the widespread phenomenon of corruption.

Ukraine has a long-lasting history of the process: before the Revolution of Dignity this function was attributed to the National Anti-Corruption Committee, however, its effectiveness was consistently low. In 2014 National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) was formed with the support of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund and was called for fighting against large-scale corruption cases in Ukraine.

In the same year, Ukraine signed an Association Agreement with the European Union that outlined a number of areas where Ukraine committed to implementing reforms including banking, decentralization, energy, judiciary, etc. This agreement serves as the main tool to increase political and economic cooperation with Ukraine and develops respect for common values. Since then, Ukraine has improved in many areas according to the latest report released by the Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs on the 10th of November. However, it has also been mentioned that further work on the judiciary is necessary since this branch of power stays the least trusted till now. The pressing need for visible results of combating corruption is also needed in order to maintain support for reforms from the population.

On October 27, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine made a ruling legitimizing “inaccurate asset declaration” which benefits the interests of the judges of that same court according to the National Agency of the Corruption Prevention. The agency had earlier claimed that two judges that participated in this decision-making were found to fill false information in their declarations. This ruling repeals the Article 366-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine regarding the issue of criminal liability of the government officials. Agency drew also attention to the fact that those judges had a conflict of interest and, therefore, with no right to partake such a decision. Ukrainian Parliament envoy to the Court, Olha Sovhiria has also stressed that the Constitutional Court’s ruling was taken with severe procedural violations.

On the next day, the National Agency on Corruption Prevention closed access to the State E-declarations Register abiding by the ruling. However, soon after, they were ordered by the government to restore the access due to the international backlash. If all cases of inaccurate declarations would be closed, convicted officials would get the chance to escape responsibility.

President Zelensky proposed termination of the powers of the Constitutional Court judges and suggests to start a new process of appointment immediately. His bill No. 4288 was proposed to the Parliament where he clearly stated that the ruling of the Constitutional Court is “null and void” and that judges had a conflict of interest. On the 3rd of November, the European Union reminded Ukraine of the need to restore the proper work of the anti-corruption bodies by the 16th of December.

Representatives of the Venice Commission and GRECO signed a letter urging the Parliament and President Zelensky to restore trust in the judicial system and warned about

the harsh consequences of passing a bill for termination of Constitutional Court judges. Matti Maasikas who is the Ambassador of the European Union Ukraine commented on the issue stating that a visa-free regime and financial assistance of the EU and the International Monetary Fund is conditional on the successful implementation of the reforms including proper functioning of the anti-corruption institutions. Ukraine has already received US\$5 bln loans from the IMF and awaits to receive EUR 1.2 bln from the EU. On the 29th of October, the European Union published an official statement questioning the international commitment of Ukraine following the ruling of the Constitutional Court. This ruling has broad negative consequences on the anti-corruption strategy of Ukraine established following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. This strategy is a key factor in European cooperation with Ukraine through the Association Agreement and the Macro-Financial Assistance program. European Union appreciates the rapid reaction of the President and the Government and wishes that issue will be quickly resolved by restoring access to the e-declarations. This crisis highlighted a need for further implementation of judicial reform. Representatives of the Council of Europe also expressed concern in the ruling and urged the Ukrainian government “to take all necessary actions to restore the effective functioning of the e-declaration system”, while also maintaining long-term independence of the judiciary. Ukrainian representative also met with the ambassadors of the G7 countries as well as U.S. and Japan envoys and discussed possible resolution of the issue according to the press release on 30th of October. The controversial ruling of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine undermines efforts of the Ukrainian government at the implementation of the reforms and European integration outlined in the Association Agreement. Fast resolution of the issue is needed due to the

possibility of an international scandal and well as shading light on the judicial system in Ukraine

BELARUS. Lukashenko Militarises his Regime while Tikhanovskaya Seeks Support in Europe

by Gilles de Valk

Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus’ self-proclaimed president, has responded to the continuing protests in Belarus with more violence, as he is surrounding himself with people from the security services and the military.

Meanwhile, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the opposition leader in exile, has been visiting several European countries, seeking their support in achieving a democratic transition in Belarus. However, the European Union’s sanctions against Belarusian officials seem to have little impact on Lukashenko’s regime’s actions. There is no indication Lukashenko will leave voluntarily or will start a credible dialogue with the opposition. Instead, the most likely way out of this situation seems to be violent escalation, without any certainty about the outcome.

Demonstrations have not ceased, surprising observers, who witnessed 25.000 people getting arrested over the first three months of the protests. Furthermore, 1.500 complaints about torture and beatings have been registered at the Belarussian Investigative Committee, although the Committee is unlikely to follow up on them. In response to the authorities’ brutalities, Tikhanovskaya announced the creation of a ‘People’s Tribunal’, intending to prosecute the regime

for those crimes. On top of that, she called for ‘the most massive march’ on 20 December. Despite the continuing mass demonstrations, Lukashenko succeeded in maintaining power by appointing people from the security services (*siloviki*) and the military to powerful positions. In this way, he gains their loyalty but also makes them complicit in the regime’s crimes. As the *siloviki* risk prosecution in case of a victory for the protesters, possibilities for appeasing society peacefully are shrinking. In the meantime, Lukashenko will try to find a balance between retaining the *siloviki*’s loyalty and keeping them in check, since one of ‘his own’ could topple him if he does not get the situation under control.

Foreign actors could play a role in limiting or increasing Lukashenko’s grip on the demonstrations. Although the EU’s impact on this situation seems to remain limited, the prospect of Joe Biden becoming the US President in January might scare Lukashenko more. Biden said he would impose new sanctions and guaranteed support for the demonstrators. This might be one of the reasons Lukashenko has responded more brutally to demonstrations recently and why he is likely to continue to do so. At the same time, Russia’s support for Lukashenko will be come more costly, the longer domestic and international pressure on him persist.

The situation in Belarus is unlikely to de-escalate on the short term. Lukashenko is unlikely to give up his position and is surrounding himself with *siloviki*, while demonstrations are continuing and Tikhonovskaya is seeking support abroad. On top of that, pressure from Russia and the prospect of a more assertive response from

the West under Biden can lead Lukashenko to increase his brutal methods of repression in order to end the protests. Lukashenko probably does not see another way out. The outcome could be an even more repressive dictatorship or a breakdown of the current regime.

The EU and the Visegrad group: Dispute stalls coronavirus recovery plan

by Daniel Drury

The EU’s coronavirus response has hit an obstacle in the past week with Hungary and Poland blocking the proposed EU budget and with it, the EU’s €750 billion coronavirus recovery fund. Out of the 27 member states, the two nations, both part of the Visegrad group, used their veto power to stall the endorsement of the budget in the meeting of the 27 ambassadors. The budget and the recovery fund required unanimous support and could not be passed by a qualified majority vote. Hungary and Poland have taken issue with the agreement made back in July that member states will only have access to the money if they follow the ‘rule of law’, as this is seen as an attempt to force the two countries to abide by the policy decisions of the EU. Polish Justice Minister, Zbigniew Ziobor, has claimed that the rule of law issue may determine Poland’s sovereignty within the union. This disagreement comes against a background of the EU’s long-standing criticism of the perceived drop in democratic standards in the two countries and

investigation into the running of many of their institutions such as the courts and the media.

With many other EU member states hugely reliant on the availability of this budget to boost their economies and stimulate a recovery from the effects of the pandemic, all eyes will be on Hungary and Poland in the coming days in the hope that they can set aside their differences with the rest of the EU and endorse a budget that seems vital for the short-term prosperity of the union as a whole. German ambassador, Michael Clauss, said that the EU faced ‘a serious crisis’ if the budget was not adopted quickly. However, Slovenia are now reported to be supporting the position of Hungary and Poland meaning that the EU budget now faces opposition from three of the 27 member states. Over the next week, the other 24 states will have to ask themselves whether they should hold firm on the ‘rule of law’ stipulation in the budget or whether they should pull back from tying in their expected values and behaviours of individual governments as conditions for the allocation of this budget. On the other hand, with Poland and Hungary particularly reliant on funding from Brussels which makes up roughly 5% of their GDP, the EU may see this as an opportunity to put pressure on the two governments to conform to the agreed expectations and values of the union as they see it. This is something that Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, has described as ‘blackmail’ and Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has compared to being ‘punished like children’.

The domestic reaction in Poland was reflected in a recent poll which found that 39% of Poles were critical of the

government’s decision to veto the budget, with 28% praising it and 33% without an opinion. This trend towards disapproval was reflected in the response of the opposition party in parliament who urged the government to reach an agreement on the EU budget. The Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Visegrad partners of Hungary and Poland, have not seen fit to take the same stand against the rule of law stipulation in the budget and voted with the other EU members to approve it. Czech Finance Minister, Tomas Petricek, has expressed hope that this dispute will not delay the distribution of money to individual member states. The Czech Republic has been the hardest hit of the Visegrad countries during the pandemic and the government is therefore keen for this debate to be resolved and for the much-needed recovery fund to be released as soon as possible. The Czech Republic has seen a decrease in coronavirus cases and hospitalisations this week meaning that there are hopeful signs that cases may have reached another peak and that a decreasing death toll will follow in the coming days. Meanwhile in Slovakia, deaths and hospitalisations are rising but a slight decrease in overall cases and plans for another round of nationwide testing means that Prime Minister, Igor Matovic, is optimistic that their current strategy will continue to see cases decrease meaning a decrease in deaths and hospitalisations should follow.

Therefore, the hope from Czech Republic and Slovakia along with the other EU member states will be that this budget dispute is resolved sooner rather than later, as the money from the coronavirus recovery fund is a potentially key factor in turning the tide

back towards a regression of coronavirus and a return to economic recovery in Europe.

MOLDOVA: Politics and Elections

by Nicoleta Mirza

The month of November 2020 has become historic for the Moldovan people. The month has started with National Presidential elections on the 1st of November, which marked a new possible leadership in the small Eastern European country.

The first round of the Presidential elections consisted of eight candidates. The first on the list was the leader of the Political Party “Our Party”. The politician is known for his free concerts organized for the electorate in the first years of his political activity and disapproval of the current President of Moldova Igor Dodon and the Moldovan Oligarh Vlad Plahatniuc which has fled the country when his criminal activities were exposed.

The Second on the list is Andrei Nastase, the leader of the Political Party "Dignity and Truth Platform". The politician is mostly known as one of the leaders that led the 2015 protest Movement.

The next on the ballot list is Tudor Deliu who is somewhat unknown amongst the

Moldovan Population. Deliu is the candidate of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova for the position of head of state.¹

The fourth is Igor Dodon, the current Moldovan President. Dodon is a pro-Russian candidate who has been elected as President in 2016. Yet, the Moldovan leader has been accused by the Moldovan population of corruption. A video appeared online where the Moldovan President is depicted in a corrupt money transfer.² The leader is also known for his strong ties with the Moldovan church³ and strong beliefs and propaganda against homosexuality.⁴

The fifth on the electoral list is Violeta Ivanov, the candidate of the political party “Sor”. The Political Party is led by the oligarch Ilan Sor convicted in 2017 over the theft of 1 billion US dollars from the Moldovan Banking system. The politician has currently fled the country⁵ but is still officially counted as a deputy in the Moldovan parliament.⁶

The sixth on the list is Maia Sandu, the leader of the Political party “Solidarity and Truth”. Maia Sandu, a Pro-European candidate, has become popular amongst the Moldovan population after serving as the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova in 2012-2015.

The seventh candidate is Octavian Ticu, the candidate of the political Party “National Unity”. The candidate’s main agenda is a union with Romania.⁷

¹ (video) [Candidatul PLDM la Președinție, Tudor Deliu: „Am votat pentru scoaterea din izolare a R. Moldova, pentru un președinte care să reprezinte poporul”](#). (2020, November 1). *Unimedia*.

² „Iar umblați cu culioacele?” [Momentul în care Dodon primește o pungă cu bani de la Plahotniuc și Iaralov // VIDEO](#). (2020, May 18). Jurnal TV.

³ See [Interdicții, dar nu pentru toți: Igor Dodon, la biserică împreună cu familia sa // EXCLUSIVITATE](#). (2020, April 18). Jurnal TV. Also see Igor Dodon. (2018, June 18). [Astăzi Biserica Ortodoxă sărbătorește ziua Sfântului Cuvios Igor \[...\]](#).

⁴ See Igor Dodon (2020, November 4). [Tradițiile, valorile familiale, credința sunt lucruri sfinte pentru mine. Eu nu voi permite legalizarea căsătoriilor între persoane de același sex și organizarea paradelor gay, iar Maia Sandu nu doar că declară deschis că va permite acest lucru, dar și a participat personal la astfel de marșuri](#).

⁵ Madalin Necsutu. (2019, July 26). [Moldova Seeks Arrest of Convicted Oligarch Ilan Shor](#). *BalkanInshight*.

⁶ See Parlamentul Republicii Moldova. [Deputatii](#).

⁷ See Valentina Ursu. (2020, October 21). [Octavian Ticu \(PUN\): „Sper să fiu președintele care semnează](#)

And the last candidate on the list is Dorin Chirtoaca, the leader of the Liberal Party. He has served as the capital's mayor from 2007 to 2018.

The 1st Round

The first round of the election on the 1st of November has not been entirely peaceful. Dorin Chirtoaca, the candidate of the "Unirea" Electoral Bloc in the presidential elections, submitted a notification to the Central Electoral Center requesting the cancellation of the results from the 42 polling stations open for the citizens of the Left Bank. According to him, fraud is taking place in the electoral process at the polling stations open to the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region.⁸ Due to the long lines at the polling stations abroad the Political Party Truth and Solidarity requested the extension of the activity schedule of the polling stations abroad.⁹ The request appears to be reasonable due to the incredible activity in the election of the diaspora. The lines to the polling station had been as long as a kilometer, and some people had waited as long as six hours in order to vote.¹⁰

After processing all the votes, Maia Sandu is the candidate with the most accumulated votes. Igor Dodon is in second place, and

Renato Usatii is in third place.¹¹ Which send Maia Sandu and Igor Dodon to compete for the Presidential seat in the Second round.

The 2nd Round

Renato Usatii,¹² Octavian Ticu,¹³ Tudor Deliu,¹⁴ and Andrei Nastase¹⁵ have expressed their support for Maia Sandu and urged their electorate to vote for her.

In order to gain more votes for Igor Dodon, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova¹⁶ organized on November 13, a march in support of the independent candidate Igor Dodon. Even though there is a red code in public health in Chisinau, hundreds of people gathered for the march.¹⁷ Ultimately, the result of the second round of the 2020 presidential elections on 15th of November shows Maia Sandu as the next and first female President of the Republic of Moldova. According to the results the candidate Maia Sandu obtained 57.72% of votes and Igor Dodon obtained 42.28%.¹⁸ The new elected President Maia Sandu was congratulated by such world leaders as

[actul unirii" cu România. Radio Europa Libera Moldova.](#)

⁸ [\(doc\) Dorin Chirtoacă cere anularea rezultatelor de la cele 42 de secții de votare deschise pentru cetățenii moldoveni din Stânga Nistrului.](#) (2020, November 1). *Diez*.

⁹ See [\(video, doc\) PAS cere prelungirea orarului de activitate a secțiilor de votare din străinătate, astfel încât toți să-și poată exercita dreptul de vot.](#) (2020, November 1). *Diez*.

¹⁰ See [\(foto, video\) Cozi de un kilometru. Un tânăr din diasporă a stat aproape șase ore la rând pentru a putea vota.](#) (2020, November 1). *Diez*.

¹¹ See [\(grafic\) Maia Sandu, în fruntea clasamentului. Rezultatele alegerilor după prelucrarea tuturor proceselor-verbale.](#) (2020, November 2). *Diez*.

¹² See [Maia Sandu spune că a avut prima discuție cu Usatii și a îndemnat alegătorii care l-au votat să o sprijine.](#) (2020, November 3). *Diez*.

¹³ See video) [Octavian Ticu a anunțat că PUN o va susține în turul II al alegerilor prezidențiale pe Maia Sandu.](#) (2020, November 6). *Diez*.

¹⁴ See [Primele declarații ale lui Tudor Deliu: „PLDM anunță că în turul II de scrutin va susține candidata proeuropeană Maia Sandu”.](#) (2020, November 2). *Diez*.

¹⁵ See [\(video\) Andrei Năstase a anunțat că o va susține în turul II al alegerilor prezidențiale pe Maia Sandu.](#) (2020, November 2). *Diez*.

¹⁶ Igor Dodon is the former leader of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova.

¹⁷ See [\(foto, video\) UPDATE: Marșul în susținerea lui Igor Dodon s-a încheiat.](#) (2020, November 13). *Diez*.

¹⁸ See [Alegeri Prezidențiale în Republica Moldova.](#) Comisia Electorală Centrală A Republicii Moldova.

Volodîmîr Zelenski,¹⁹ Klaus Iohannis,²⁰ Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya,²¹ and Vladimir Putin.²² Consequently, Maia Sandu became one of the only 11 female Presidents in the world²³ and one of the most popular politicians in the Moldovan history.²⁴

ARMENIA. The Political Defeat of Pashinyan?

by Alice Griffon

On November 10th, the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a peace agreement under the mediation of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, for ending the violent conflict that erupted at the end of September in Nagorno-Karabakh. Both counterparts reached such agreement shortly after the takeover of the city of Shusha (*Shushi* in Armenian language) which was determinant for the Azerbaijani side. The deal concedes to Azerbaijan a majority of territory inside the Nagorno-Karabakh proper, in addition to those southern districts occupied during the conflict. Therefore, at the end of November and in December, Armenia should surrender the cities of Aghdam and

Lachin and their surroundings. Russia will also deploy 1960 peacekeepers in the region in order to supervise and implement the ceasefire agreement on the ground. Some were already sent to Stepanakert/Kankendhi on November 12th.

Armenians immediately reacted to the truce by gathering and protesting in the streets of Yerevan, despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law. On November 12th, the authorities arrested ten prominent political figures of the opposition for organizing illegal and violent mass disorders. On November 14th, the leader of the opposition party Homeland, Artur Vanetsyan, was arrested for plotting to overthrow the government and kill the Prime Minister. Vanetsyan is the former head of the National Security Service. He resigned in September 2019 and since then publicly criticize the Prime Minister.

During the protests against the peace agreement and the Prime Minister, seventeen opposition parties have demanded his resignation. This demand was asserted by the Armenian President Armen Sargsyan. Indeed, during a public allocution made on the 16th of November, the President called for Pashinyan's resignation and snap parliamentary elections. On the same day, Pashinyan published comments on social

¹⁹ Vladimir Zelinski.(2020, November 16). [Congratulations to @sandumaiamd on winning the presidential elections in Moldova. I look forward to further strengthening relations between #Ukraine Flag of Ukraine and #Moldova Flag of Moldova for the European future of our nations.](#)

²⁰ Klaus Iohannis, (2020, November 16). [O felicit pe @sandumaiamd pentru câștigarea alegerilor prezidențiale din #RepublicaMoldova! Cetățenii Flag of Moldova au ales continuarea drumului european și democratic, un drum al progresului! RO va rămâne alături de Flag of Moldova în eforturile reale de modernizare, democratizare și apropiere de UE.](#)

²¹ Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. (2020, November 16). [Expressing my sincerest congratulations to](#)

[@sandumaiamd on her victory at the presidential election in #Moldova. I am deeply impressed with her bravery & dedication. I believe under her leadership Moldovan people will prosper, & relations between our nations will be developing.](#)

²² Vladimir Putin. (2020, November 16). [Поздравление Майе Санду с победой на выборах Президента Молдавии. Президент России.](#)

²³ Liubomir Guțu. (2020, November 16). [Lista celor 11 șefi de stat din întreaga lume. Maia Sandu este cea mai proaspătă președintă aleasă. Diez.](#)

²⁴ Alexandru Lebedev. (2020, November 16). [În top 3 cei mai populari politicieni din istoria Moldovei. Maia Sandu obtine mai multe voturi decât Petru Lucinschi în 1996. Diez.](#)

media about the protests that were perceived as inciting violence. This development caused Pashinyan the loss of allies. Indeed, after the resignation of the Foreign Minister, members of the parliament and the party Civil Contract stepped down.

According to the Prime Minister, this internal crisis is the revenge plot of the former regime, following the Velvet revolution. Pashinyan dismissed the calls for his resignation and presented in the National Assembly on the 18th of November his road map for the six months to come. He did not mention his potential resignation or the hold of elections. The opposition parties boycotted the session, claiming that they solely want to debate Pashinyan's resignation.

In practice, the National Assembly could hold a vote of no confidence. According to the Armenian constitution, in order to proceed to a vote of no confidence, at least a third of the National Assembly must present a draft decision. Thereafter, the decision must be adopted to a majority. Currently, the Prime Minister's coalition My Step is holding a majority of 88 on 132 seats. If a decision was to be voted, at this point, it would have more chances to fail. However, with the recent scrutiny the Prime Minister is facing, even among his ranks, a shift could occur.

GEORGIA's (Post-)Election Days

by Luca Dilda

On the 31st of October, Georgia held the parliamentary election with a new electoral system, shifting from a majoritarian to a proportional one. As the polls predicted²⁵, the ruling Georgian Dream party obtained the around 48% of the preferences, winning the elections for the third time in a row.²⁶

At the same time, the opposition, led by the United National Movement (UNM) party, harshly criticised the outcome of the election, claiming that the results have been altered. Inviting Georgian citizens to take the streets against apparently rigged elections,²⁷ thousands of people responded to the call by gathering in front of the Parliament. Members of the opposition demanded and called for new elections, declaring that the votes were manipulated.²⁸ In this regard, Transparency International Georgia stated that there had been numerous obstruction during the voting procedure, including the violation of vote secrecy, COVID 19 safety rules and issues during the counting.²⁹

On the other hand, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) stated that, during the elections, the fundamental freedoms were respected. Overall, the institutions declared

²⁵ Aljazeera (2020), Ruling party leads in Georgia's parliamentary vote: Exit polls. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/31/georgia-goes-to-polls-in-tense-elections>

²⁶ ANSA (2020). Georgia:elezioni,opposizione chiama a protesta contro brogli. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/topnews/2020/11/01/georgiaelezioniopposizione-chiama-a-protesta-contro-brogli_818ac37b-18e1-489f-a448-59d7f9ea8282.html

²⁷ Aljazeera (2020). Georgia opposition rejects election results, stages protest. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/1/georgia-ruling-party-declares-victory>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Agenda.ge (2020). TI Georgia: '31 October elections were a step back compared with 2016 parliamentary elections'. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/3428>

that, despite the several challenges (a new electoral system and the COVID 19 pandemic), the elections were handled efficiently. However, they acknowledge that in a few polling stations, there were problems related to social distancing and activists advocating for their political beliefs.³⁰

The opposition parties did not recognise the legitimacy of the election; therefore, they decided to sign a joint statement stating they would not be part of the formed Parliament. Furthermore, they asked for new elections and for more electoral controls to avoid any fraud.³¹ Georgian Dream claimed that the election was legitimate and there was no proof of vote-rigging.

However, the general dissatisfaction with the outcome of the election grew steadily. On the 8th of November, various demonstrations took place in Tbilisi, where the protesters accused the government of fraud and asked to vote again.³² In order to scatter the demonstrators (around 45.000), the Georgian police used fired water cannon, injuring several people. Moreover, some TV channels stated that the police also used tear gas; however, the police sent the accusation back to the sender. The use of fired water cannon has been censured; on the one hand, the

police affirmed that their actions were proportional to the protesters' violence. On the other hand, Nino Lomjaria (public defender), stated that the degree of violence was not justifiable.³³

On the 14th of November, the opposition's supporters gathered again to continue their protests, received the blessing of the UNM's leaders, including the former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, which stated he is ready to establish a coalition group with the other opposition parties.³⁴

In order to solve the quarrel between the opposition and the ruling party, the US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan, and other international relevant figures acted as mediators. However, the meetings between the parts were not successful; the government refused to call for new elections whereas the opposition kept denouncing ballot rigging, and so the need to vote again.³⁵ Furthermore, the OSCE PA solicited the opposition and the government to work together to find a solution to solve the political impasse, stating it is mandatory to respect the electors' will.³⁶ The negotiations are still in progress.

³⁰ OSCE PA. (2020). Fundamental freedoms respected in competitive Georgian elections, but allegations of pressure and blurring of line between party and state reduced confidence. Retrieved from <https://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2020/fundamental-freedoms-respected-in-competitive-georgian-elections-but-allegations-of-pressure-and-blurring-of-line-between-party-and-state-reduced-confidence-international-observers-say>

³¹ Jam News, (2020). Opposition parties in Georgia sign joint statement renouncing their seats in parliament. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://jam-news.net/georgia-document-nika-melia-opposition-parliament-boycott-national-movement-lelo/>

³² BBC, (2020). Georgia protests: Tbilisi police fire water cannon at demonstrators. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54868053>

³³ Antidze, M. (2020). Georgian police fire water cannon at protesters who say polls were rigged. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-protest-idUSKBN2700MV>

³⁴ Bellamy, D. (2020). Thousands rally outside Georgia's parliament in protest at election. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://www.euronews.com/2020/11/14/thousands-rally-outside-georgia-s-parliament-in-protest-at-election>

³⁵ Pipia, D. (2020). Georgian street protests, negotiations running simultaneously. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://jam-news.net/protest-in-tbilisi-news-rigged-parliamentary-elections-georgia-georgian-dream-kelly-degan-photo/>

³⁶ Civil.ge (2020). OSCE PA Leaders Call for Overcoming Political Deadlock in Georgia. Retrieved 19 November 2020, from <https://civil.ge/archives/382902>

The Karabakh Conflict in Georgia

On the 9th of November, the hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region ceased. The two parties (joined with Vladimir Putin that acted as mediator) signed an armistice that entered into force the following day. Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili congratulated both Armenia and Azerbaijan for reaching an agreement and ending a conflict that was weighting on the civilians living in the region.³⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia welcomed the truce between Yerevan and Baku; it stated that it is a great accomplishment that will help to de-escalate and resolve the conflict.³⁸ Furthermore, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia declared he with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, emphasising the importance of the truce for the economic development of the South Caucasus region.³⁹ Overall, Georgia supports the talks between Yerevan and Baku, as they contribute to building long-term peace.⁴⁰

In order to face these adversities, in October, Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili declared Georgia's availability to help the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Tsibili stated its neutrality in the conflict and the will to help both countries to reach an agreement.⁴¹

³⁷ Georgia.ge (2020). Georgian President on Nagorno-Karabakh Deal: New Era Starts in the Caucasus. Retrieved 20 November 2020, from <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/22992/Georgian-President-on-Nagorno-Karabakh-Deal%3A-New-Era-Starts-in-the-Caucasus>

³⁸ Civil.ge (2020). Georgian Foreign Ministry Reacts to Karabakh Deal. Retrieved 20 November 2020, from <https://civil.ge/archives/381766>

³⁹ Agenda.ge (2020). PM Gakharia talks with Armenian, Azerbaijani leaders following Karabakh truce. Retrieved 20 November 2020, from <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/3546>

⁴⁰ Dumbadze, A. (2020). Georgia Hopes Nagorno-Karabakh Deal will Contribute to Full-scale Resolution of Conflict. Retrieved 20 November 2020, from <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/22993/Georgia->

Tbilisi decided to contribute actively in the ceasefire agreement; the peace in the region is vital both in terms of economy and geopolitics. Georgia has economic ties both with Armenia and Azerbaijan that range from gas industries and trade exports to tourism.⁴² Furthermore, a few communities of Armenians and Azerbaijani peacefully live in Georgia; a conflict in the neighbouring countries could exacerbate their relationship, bringing new security issues, weakening and destabilising Tbilisi's authority.⁴³

POST-SOVIET ASIA: The Struggle for Food Security

by Maximilian Feske

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan aiding Kyrgyzstan

From the five states that make up the region of Central Asia, the Kyrgyz Republic was hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of deaths per million inhabitants, it ranks 42nd on the OECD list of the worst-hit countries, followed by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, ranking 61st and 109th respectively⁴⁴. The containment measures which are being implemented since August

Hopes-Nagorno-Karabakh-Deal-will-Contribute-to-Full-scale-Resolution-of-Conflict

⁴¹ Civil.ge (2020). *Georgian President Talks Nagorno-Karabakh, Tbilisi's Neutrality*. Retrieved 20 October 2020, from <https://civil.ge/archives/373210>

⁴² Seskuria, N. (2020). The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Challenge for Georgia. Retrieved 20 November 2020, from <https://rusi.org/commentary/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-and-challenge-georgia>

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ OECD (2020): COVID-19 crisis response in Central Asia, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-response-in-central-asia-5305f172/>, rev. 2020-11-19.

seem to be proving effective, with a clear stabilization in number of deaths and a slower increase in the number of confirmed cases⁴⁵. Nonetheless, the closed border situation with its neighbouring states created a new obstacle and worsened the economic situation of Kyrgyz labour migrants. While gaining control of one crisis, the sudden ousting of its government in early October has added a new political crisis to Kyrgyzstan's uncertain path.

The new Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbaev has been visiting and requesting help from Kazakhstan on October 29th and Uzbekistan on November 6th, after the Kremlin had frozen \$100 million in financial aid that were promised to the former Kyrgyz government of Sooronbay Jeenbekov⁴⁶. These funds would have been necessary in mitigating the state's growing budgetary deficit. In fact, and perhaps surprisingly, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan agreed to aiding Kyrgyzstan financially to support its budget and ensure food security, without mentioning details, however. Additionally, they agreed to sending hospital equipment and medicine for the battle against the coronavirus⁴⁷. Uzbekistan even went so far as to declare its readiness to construct a medical and health institution.

Over two decades ago, in early 1997, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed an Eternal Friendship Treaty in Bishkek – a document, which failed to unfold a measurable impact on the intraregional

relations in the past. It remains to be seen whether the planned aid delivery coupled with recent rhetoric on regional security and stability herald a new era of cooperation among Central Asian countries⁴⁸.

FAO encouraging digitalization for agricultural development

The cooperation in the field of food security extends beyond the region. From November 1st to 4th, Uzbekistan hosted the 32nd session of the Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) Regional Conference for Europe, this time virtually⁴⁹. Leading representatives of 51 governments, international organizations, civil society, young farmers and the private sector from Europe and Central Asia discussed the connection between digital technologies and agricultural innovation⁵⁰. The member states called on the FAO to support them, especially in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and strengthening long-term resilience of food systems. The FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Program was launched in July to specifically achieve these goals. With a call for initial investments of \$1,2 billion, the program aims to assist the most affected countries and could therefore provide the Central Asian states with region-tailored programmatic solutions to the evolving socio-economic and environmental consequences of the global health crisis in the food and agriculture

⁴⁵ WFP (2020): Impact of COVID-19 in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe. Update #6,

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000120508.pdf>, rev. 2020-11-19, 6.

⁴⁶ Pannier, B. (2020): New Kyrgyz Leadership Gets A Cold Reception From The Kremlin, <https://www.rferl.org/a/new-kyrgyz-leadership-gets-a-cold-reception-from-the-kremlin/30926407.html>, rev. 2020-11-19.

⁴⁷ Pannier, B. (2020): A New Era Of Central Asian Cooperation? Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan Help A Neighbor In Need, [https://www.rferl.org/a/new-era-](https://www.rferl.org/a/new-era-of-central-asian-cooperation-uzbekistan-kazakhstan-help-a-neighbor/30950079.html)

[of-central-asian-cooperation-uzbekistan-kazakhstan-help-a-neighbor/30950079.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/new-era-of-central-asian-cooperation-uzbekistan-kazakhstan-help-a-neighbor/30950079.html), rev. 2020-11-19.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ FAO (2020): FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC 32),

http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/erc32/en/?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news, rev. 2020-11-19.

⁵⁰ Mirage (2020): Innovation and digitalization key for agriculture development in Europe and Central Asia, <https://www.miragenews.com/innovation-and-digitalization-key-for-agriculture-development-in-europe-and-central-asia/>, rev 2020-11-19.

sector⁵¹. However, concrete projects are yet to be identified, which makes an implementation and impact on the ground before Spring 2021 rather unlikely.

⁵¹ FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia: FAO Regional High-level Dialogue for Europe and Central Asia - Multi-Partner Response to COVID-19

in the food and agriculture sector,
<http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/1308398/>, rev. 2020-11-19.

