

## United Opposition Drafts Declaration of Agreed Action on Parliamentary Elections

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

After the meeting of the opposition parties on 18<sup>th</sup> of August, a declaration was published in the office of the Labor Party with which the "Democratic Opposition of Georgia" declared the common task to protect the electoral votes.

According to the declaration, 'Ivanishvili's oligarchic rule poses the greatest challenge to the country and its democratic development.'

"Ivanishvili and his team are doing everything to introduce nihilism in the society, to discredit the whole political process. In these conditions, our most important task is to strengthen public trust and support for the elections," reads the statement. According to the opposition, elections, a peaceful change of government, is the only right way to enable our society to take firm steps to build a western democratic state: It is in such societies that a change of government is a normal event, which will not lead to the division and retaliation of citizens.

The opposition claims that 'a large part of both administrative and financial resources is mobilised in the hands of the Ivanishvili regime, and state institutions serve the interests of the ruling team instead of the public.' That is why it is important for the democratic opposition to work in a coordinated manner to protect each vote and to eliminate electoral manipulation.

To achieve this, the opposition intends to develop concrete mechanisms for cooperation: "Inside the country, with broad public support for the election process and coordination for vote protection, the opposition parties agree to work in concert with international observers to ensure that the legitimacy of the election is not undermined."



The opposition issued a declaration prepared to defend the votes.

The Labor Party told the media that the agreement would be signed by all opposition parties, regardless of whether or not they participated in periodic consultations in the Labor office. "Opposition parties will work in coordination in all constituencies, including those where we have nominated competing candidates," they said.

Opposition parties have agreed to work

with international observers to ensure that the legitimacy of the elections is not questioned. The task of the parties will not be to protect the votes of voters of different political tastes, but to protect the transparency of the entire electoral process and the choice of each citizen.

"With the defeat of Ivanishvili in the 2020 parliamentary elections, the harmful tradition of electoral manipulation in

Georgia must be put to an end," the declaration reads.

The leader of the Labor Party, Shalva Natelashvili noted, the consultations were very difficult, tense, and there is no second precedent in the history of world politics in which the entire opposition spectrum agreed on common majoritarian candidates, even in the capital.

"It will enter the history of Georgia in golden letters and will be included in the policy textbooks. Irakli Okruashvili, a relentless fighter with all the authorities, will be the common candidate of the opposition in Saburtalo district and we are sure that he will win there. Zurab Japaridze, whom we all know and whose activity we are always fascinated by, will be the opposition candidate in Didube-Chugureti district," Natelashvili said.

This decision shows that the parties gathered in the office of the Labor Party have agreed on common candidates in all 8 majoritarian constituencies of Tbilisi. So far, these parties have nominated the following candidates in 6 constituencies :

- Nika Melia - "National Movement" - Gldani;
- Levan Khabeishvili - "National Movement" - Samgori;
- Shalva Natelashvili - "Labor Party" - Nadzaladevi;
- Giorgi Vashadze - "New Georgia" - Isani;
- Shalva Shavgulidze - "Free Democrats" - Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi;
- Elene Khoshtaria - "European Georgia" - Vake.



Opposition Agrees on Majoritarian Candidates in Saburtalo and Didube-Chugureti.

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

# On the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of August War

12 years have passed since the August 2008 war. The next anniversary is again in the spotlight of international and local politics. The August war is not history. It is just one episode in Russia's aggressive policy against Georgia, when years of hybrid warfare escalated into direct large-scale aggression.

Russia was forced to suspend direct hostilities for several days, but the hybrid war against Georgia continued - Moscow did not fulfill the peace agreement, not only did not withdraw its troops from the territory of Georgia, but continued to intervene via creeping occupation.

The August War lasted 5 days - from August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Every year we hear new details about the August war, but many things remain unknown. Putin did not hide that Russia was carefully preparing for war with Georgia. Moscow was not going to allow Georgia to join NATO. A massive military attack on Georgia was launched as a "coercion for peace" operation, and the result should have been a change of government in Georgia. As a condition for ending the war, Putin even demanded it. Russian troops invading Georgia crossed the conflict zones, occupied Samegrelo and Poti in western Georgia, and occupied Gori in eastern Georgia and advanced on Tbilisi. Putin could not dare to attack the Georgian capital. First, the Georgian army was going to defend Tbilisi, and the attack on the city of millions would have involved huge casualties.

Putin wouldn't manage to justify this not only before the international community, but before the Russian society; Secondly, the reaction of the EU and the US was harsh, which would have become even harsher if the war had continued.

Western pressure forced Russia to withdraw its military units from the territories of Georgia, which did not include Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia. As a result of the war, Russia established control over the Kodori Gorge and the Akhgori region. The issue of Georgia's membership in NATO has become obscure.

The August 12<sup>th</sup> agreement obligated Moscow to withdraw troops from the occupied territories of Georgia, but on August 26<sup>th</sup> the Russian Federation recognized the independence of the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and con-



firmed the presence of Russian troops on Georgian territory by concluding 'agreements' with these de-facto regimes. However, Russia's victory was partial - it turned out that the full occupation of Georgia exceeded its capabilities.

The current Russian authorities who are responsible for the August 2008 war, state with anger that the consequences of the war won't be reconsidered and that Georgia will have to come to terms with the 'independent states' created by Moscow in the occupied territories. However, there will never be such a government in Georgia, no matter how much it wants to 'sort out relations' with Moscow. On the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia said on his official Twitter page that 'Russia must stop its destabilizing activities' and fulfill the '2008 ceasefire agreement.' The Georgian Foreign Ministry also

issued an extensive statement on the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war. Russia is again called upon to comply with the EU-brokered ceasefire agreement in 2008 and to withdraw its occupation troops from Georgian territory. The policy of militarization and de facto annexation of the occupied territories was underlined, and it was noted that "Russia is actively using the tools of hybrid warfare against Georgia."

Both the enemies and friends of Georgia responded to the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the August war. Dmitry Medvedev, who was President of Russia in August 2008, made a comment. He, of course, traditionally blamed then-Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili for the August war, calling him a 'criminal and a scoundrel'. He explained the invasion of the Russian army in Georgia by the "need to protect Russian citizens." He pointed that "starting a war against Russia" caused the military at-

tack from their side. We once again heard that "Russia always maintains peace in neighboring countries."

It should be noted that on the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the August war, Mikheil Saakashvili submitted a recommendation to the Hague Tribunal, prepared by well-known specialists against the August war and Russian propaganda, stressing that the current Georgian government is trying to please Moscow and not oppose the Russian version of the August war.

Medvedev's statement proves once again that Russia's current leaders are not going to abandon aggressive policies. According to the Belarusian political scientist Igor Tishkevich, Russia will actively try to clearly state its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space.

According to him, "the next 3-4 years will not be peaceful for the post-Soviet countries, including the Baltic states, which are

members of the European Union and NATO, due to Moscow's aggressive policy."

Foreign support is vital for Georgia to stop Russian aggression. The 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the August war was another example of this support.

"The failure of Russia's policy of recognizing the occupied territories shows that Georgia is not alone in facing Russian aggression and is supported by strong and loyal friends," said Viola von Cramon, an MEP.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the August war, current and future members of the UN Security Council - eight countries - issued a joint statement in support of Georgia, supporting Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia was once again called upon to implement the August 12 and September 9 agreements. Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity were once again supported by the European Union.

The US Embassy in Georgia has called on Russia to withdraw its recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to abide by the terms of the 2008 agreement.

As for the Georgian political spectrum, it is still not united in relation to the August war. Georgian Dream leaders have not blamed Saakashvili for starting the war this time, but blamed him for failing to prevent Russian aggression.

As for the pro-Western opposition, it underscores the pro-Russian nature of the current government. "Putin's Russia is the enemy of an independent and free Georgia, and there can be no other opinions regarding this," said Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of European Georgia. According to him, under Ivanishvili's conditions, Georgia will not be able to escape the Soviet mentality and the Russian orbit. Elections are ahead and the issue of the country's foreign orientation is in fact a major watershed between the parties.

(Translated by Mariam Mchedlidze)

## Weather

Wednesday, August 19

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 30°C  
Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 19°C

Thursday, August 20

Day Clear  
High: 32°C  
Night Clear  
Low: 20°C

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თბილისი TBILISI SEPTEMBER 2,4 სეპტემბერი

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