

FM Minister Zalkaliani presents 10-year action plan

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On Monday, Georgian Foreign Affairs Minister David Zalkaliani presented a 10-year action plan and 10 main goals of his ministry, focusing on western values and the country's interests.

The minister opened the event with the discussion of the 13th anniversary of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and stressed that 13 years ago Russian forces attempted to forcibly change the state borders of a sovereign country. The minister also spoke about the challenges created as a result of occupation across Georgia.

"Our Abkhaz and Ossetian citizens are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy Georgia's important achievements, and primarily of the benefits, Georgia derives from democratization, development, European and Euro-Atlantic integration," Zalkaliani noted.

As FM stated, the government of Georgia does its utmost to ensure the de-occupation and unification of the country, peaceful resolution of the conflict, and reconciliation of the communities torn apart by the occupation lines. "It is unacceptable and inconceivable that in the 21st century the occupying force is building new Berlin walls in Georgia, to the east of Europe," the FM said.

According to Zalkaliani, foreign policy focuses on Western values and the country's interests. The ministry's action plan - '10-year vision, 10 goals' includes the de-occupation process, which must begin by 2030 and 'its course should be irreversible'.

As the minister stated, the country must make an application for membership in the EU by 2024 and should re-



According to the Foreign Minister of Georgia David Zalkaliani, the goal is to apply for EU membership in 2024 and to get the status of a candidate for membership by 2030.

ceive the status of candidate for membership by 2030.

The Government of Georgia intends to ensure the implementation of a plan developed together with the Alliance to achieve Georgia's eventual membership in NATO.

As part of the 10-year action plan, Georgia aims to establish a comprehensive alliance between the United States and Georgia based on a 'firm U.S.-Geor-

gia strategic partnership, reinforced by military-political and trade-economic components'. As FM stated, it is important to promote the security of the Black Sea region on the US agenda and establish the US as the main ally in the region. He noted that the cooperation will focus on global challenges, including international health and hybrid warfare, as well as climate change and counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and the

introduction of 5G technologies.

The action plan also envisages upgrading the high-level formats of bilateral relations to a new strategic level, which will 'contribute to the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration process, ensuring security, creating a politically stable, democratically sound and economically successful state in the East European region,' Vice PM Zalkaliani stated.

The plan includes establishing the South Caucasus as an area of cooperation, good neighborhood, and dynamic development by pursuing a partnership-oriented and mutually beneficial regional policy. Zalkaliani stressed the importance of strengthening relations

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The government of Georgia plans to start the de-occupation process by 2030.

Opinion & Analysis

Self-government elections to function as referendum



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Self-government elections to function as referendum

By Malkhaz Matsaberidze

The pre-election campaign for the local self-government elections, which is to be held on October 2, officially started in Georgia on August 3. At the mention of this election, an average citizen immediately thinks of 43%, which, if the 'Georgian Dream' wouldn't be able to receive, according to the agreement of April 19, early parliamentary elections in 2022 would be called.

Even though the Georgian Dream unilaterally announced its withdrawal from the agreement, no one has forgotten this promise and will remind the ruling party in case of a lower result in the self-government elections. According to experts, the withdrawal of the Georgian Dream from the April 19 agreement was conditioned by the reservation of 43% support. All other clauses of the agreement would be 'taken care of' or 'avoided' by the ruling party.

Opposition groups called for a referendum on the ruling party, but the International Republican Institute (IRI) found that 26% of respondents, 14% of the National Movement, and 9% of the former Prime Minister would vote for the Georgian Dream. - Minister Giorgi Gakharia's party For Georgia. Another 11 parties meet the 1% threshold. Of these, one party receives 3%, five parties each receive 2%, and another five receive 1%. The rate is quite varied, but the main thing is that the Georgian Dream is far from the 43% threshold.

The Georgian Dream and its supporters say they distrust the IRI poll and say the current ruling party will win a landslide victory, but those statements are aimed more at encouraging themselves and their constituents. However, it is also clear that the Georgian Dream will do everything to remain in power. The general opinion is that Georgia's heaviest election campaign is expected, not to mention the post-election period. President Salome Zurbashvili made a statement after selecting the election day.

"These elections should be exemplary, the rights of all subjects should be protected, which excludes violence, hate speech, and insults, use of personal data, betrayal of a competitor, obstruction of professional activities for the media, dissemination of fake news and various pres-



ures." Very good, but there is a very good chance that all this will be typical for the beginning of the election campaign. Do not rule out the possibility that the election campaign will not come to an end - the scale of the spread of Covid-19 is such that epidemiologists have spoken of the need to reintroduce restrictions. However, the government is also looking at this issue in terms of receiving political benefits."

Georgian Dream Waves of Criticism from Western Friends over Statement of Withdrawal from April 19 Agreement. However, the leaders of the "Georgian Dream" categorically rule out the possibility of returning to the format of the agreement.

Pro-government and at the same time openly pro-Russian media outlets unanimously endorsed the decision, saying that Georgia had 'regained sovereignty', that developments had returned to a 'constitutional framework' and that the Georgian government could not be dictated to

the 'agenda' by the West. Such statements are made as if the European Union or the United States has occupied part of the territory of Georgia.

By withdrawing from the April 19 agreement, the Georgian Dream did not fulfill its promise and deceived its Western friends, who did everything possible to reach an agreement. The Georgian government has distanced itself from the country's strategic partners.

Instead, the incident was well received in Moscow, where they talked about restoring air traffic with Georgia, because 'Tbilisi has learned to be smart', the abolition of the visa regime, and so on. After the cancellation of the April 19 agreement, the leaders of the openly pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots wrote an open letter to Putin asking him to support and assist Georgia.

The possibility of imposing sanctions on Georgia was also discussed in the West. Opposition groups called for a boy-

cott of the country, saying 'possible sanctions should not be imposed on the country's poor.' According to the opposition, the sanctions should be directed only against personal figures and high-ranking officials of the Georgian Dream.

However, experts also point out that the introduction of sanctions in the West will only be the result of serious discussions, and it is likely that the Georgian Dream will also try to hold local self-government elections. The conformity of elections to democratic standards ultimately determines the position of the West as well. However, a possible delay in the introduction of sanctions does not mean that critical statements and actions will cease. There was a great response from the opposition to the refusal of the Baltic states to accept Irakli Gharibashvili.

It is clear that this is a serious setback to the government, however, the Georgian Dream is ready to endure criticism from the West.

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with three neighboring countries Azerbaijan, Armenia, and

Turkey.

The FM also stressed the importance of normalizing political relations with Russia under the principle of de-occupation and the territorial integrity of Georgia.

The Georgian government plans to establish the EU-Georgia connectivity dialogue, which will contribute to establishing Georgia as a regional leader with

the function to become a bridge connecting the East and the West. Zalkaliani stressed the importance of the Eastern Partnership Economic and Investment Plan of the EU which offers €3.9 billion to help Georgia improve transport and logistics connectivity.

According to Zalkaliani, up to 1.5 billion USD of foreign direct investment has been attracted to

the Georgian economy since 2012. Based on the action plan, Georgia aims to increase foreign investment opportunities and to implement national, regional, and international transport, energy, and investment projects.

Zalkaliani noted that it is important for Georgia to have further strengthened diaspora by 2030 with successful cultural and educational centers

abroad. According to him, to achieve this goal, effective communication will be ensured between the state and compatriots living abroad.

According to the Foreign Minister, this is the first time in the history of the ministry that a 10-year plan was developed to determine where Georgia should be in 10 years.

Weather

Wednesday, August 11

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 35°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 21°C

Thursday, August 12

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 36°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 21°C

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