

NATO Secretary General's Special Representative Meets Georgian Officials in Tbilisi

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Spanish diplomat Javier Colomina, who took the office of the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia back in September paid his first official visit to Georgia.

On October 19-20, he met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense of Georgia, the Prime Minister, the President, and the Speaker of the Parliament. The Special Representative also visited one of the sections of the occupation line in the village of Odzisi, central Georgia, which separates the country from the currently Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region and got acquainted with the current situation. He said that he was 'shocked' by what he had seen and thanked the Georgian government for providing him with detailed information on the situation on the ground.

Colomina said that both Georgia and NATO are 'deeply concerned' by Russia's aggressive actions in Georgia and the region. "Russia is threatening regional peace and stability. In this region, Russia often uses the threat of force and threatens to maintain stability, both in Georgia and in other countries in the region, such as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova," he said.

During the meeting with President Salome Zurbashvili which was held at the Orbeliani Palace, President Zurbashvili briefed the newly appointed Special Representative of the NATO Secretary-General on the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied territories of Georgia. The importance of the forthcoming NATO Summit 2022 in the process of Georgia's



► "Georgia is one of NATO's major partners and that the country 'has used' all practical mechanisms offered by the alliance."



► Colomina also serves as Deputy Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Before Georgia, he visited Azerbaijan and left for Armenia from here.

integration into the Alliance, was also discussed. The sides discussed the situation in the region, Black Sea security issues, and opportunities for future partnership with the Alliance in this regard. According to Javier Colomina, the stability of the region is important for the Alliance. During the meeting, they discussed the new US-Georgia defense and security memorandum, and Colomina assessed the agreement as a significant success for Georgia.

At the meeting with the foreign minister, Colomina noted the significant contribution of Georgia to the NATO International Peacekeeping Mission, as well as the management of humanitarian and evacuation processes from Afghanistan, and expressed gratitude to the Georgian side.

"Georgia is NATO's extremely important partner, and it already has access to all practical tools in our hands. We are willing to have all-encompassing relations with Georgia," he said after meeting Zalkaliani. Special representative reaffirmed the alliance's support for Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. He also emphasized that Georgia plays "an important role in Azerbaijani-Armenian relations and regional peace."

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1369 | EURO - 3.6573 | GBP - 4.3355 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.4264 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4130 |

3rd President's Hunger Strike: Saakashvili's Factor in Georgian Politics

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The arrival of Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia and the start of his hunger strike in custody brought significant changes in Georgian politics, which again became bipolar. On the one hand, there is the ruling Georgian Dream, which says Saakashvili should spend many years in prison. On the other hand, there is the main opposition party, the National Movement, which is demanding Saakashvili's release from prison. The immediate task of other political parties is to find their place between these two poles. One of the main questions that has been discussed since Mikheil Saakashvili arrived in Georgia concerns the impact of his appearance on the election process. According to UNM leaders, Saakashvili's arrival has boosted the motivation of the opposition-minded electorate to come to the polls and raised hopes for a change of government.

However, pro-government experts point to the fact that Saakashvili's appearance was used by the Georgian Dream to mobilize its electorate, which it has feared for the past nine years after Saakashvili returned to power.

By returning to Georgia, Saakashvili shattered the long-held propaganda myth used by the authorities that Saakashvili would not dare to come to Georgia for fear of arrest. Not only did Saakashvili arrive, but for several days the authorities could not even hear about his stay in Georgia and were seriously proving to the public that Saakashvili was lying and was still in Ukraine. Mikheil Saakashvili, of course, was well aware that there was a great risk of his arrest and was ready for it. However, in his opinion, the 'best scenario' would be to go to a crowded rally after the October 2 elections to protect the votes. Saakashvili's sudden appearance at the protest would be a nightmare for the Georgian Dream. This did not happen; Thanks to Saakashvili's videos, the government followed him and managed to arrest him.

Prisoner Saakashvili had no choice but to start a hunger strike. His trial is set for November 10, after the election. The Prime Minister was tempted to add new accusations. This experience provoked an extremely negative reaction both in Georgia and in the West, as a confirmation of the political nature of Saakashvili's imprisonment. Saakashvili expresses the position of the part of Georgian society that believes that we should not expect fair elections by the "Georgian Dream" and no matter how many elections the current government uses, using various machinations, will always declare itself victorious. The solution, in their view, is crowded street rallies that will protect the will of the people and will not allow the government to falsify the election results. According to opponents, such rallies are already a call for revolution, an attempt to repeat the 'Rose Revolution'. Even some opposition parties are afraid of the revolution. They support the change of government through elections, but also acknowledge that election falsification is highly rampant.

Saakashvili's arrival in Georgia has put in a difficult position those opposition parties that have claimed to be a "third political force." They must either show solidarity with the National Movement and the path it has chosen, or try to find its position. This is quite difficult in the created reality. The release of Saakashvili, who went on a hunger strike before the second round of elections, became the main demand for anti-government protests. The Georgian Dream, which came to power through elections in 2012, is afraid of stepping down through elections, but the 2020 parliamentary elections and the October 2, 2021 local elections have shown that maintaining power is becoming increasingly problematic for it. Opposition parties, non-governmental organizations and friends from the West are increasingly talking about total falsification of election results. October 30 is the second round of elections. The Georgian Dream will have to fight hard to maintain control of Georgia's urban centers. There is no doubt that the second round will end with

an even more heated confrontation compared to the first round. However, the 'Saakashvili issue' has to be resolved before that. Saakashvili, who has carried out radical reforms and made many mistakes, has acquired many enemies. A torrent of disgust towards the third president of Georgia is flowing from the current government and state media. At the same time, however, there is a growing number of people who consider Saakashvili's detention to be unfair and support his release. In a country whose judiciary does not have much authority among its citizens, many do not even believe in a guilty verdict against Saakashvili.

The government is in a difficult situation. Any option related to Saakashvili is unprofitable for them: it would be catastrophic to let deteriorate Saakashvili's health in prison, it would be fruitless to extradite him by force to Ukraine as a Ukrainian citizen, and Saakashvili's release as a result of protests will be the beginning of the end of this government.

Saakashvili Agrees to Hospitalization and Receive Medical Treatment

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, who was arrested in Tbilisi on October 1 and has been on hunger strike ever since has stated that he is ready to receive medication 'to stay conscious' and 'keep sanity'. As the ex-president vowed, even though he agreed to pharmacological intervention, he will not take food in any form and will not stop the hunger strike as long as he is imprisoned. Saakashvili has stressed that despite his condition, he is 'more optimistic than ever.'

According to Saakashvili's personal doctor Nikoloz Kipshidze, the ex-president's health condition has significantly wors-



► A multifunctional group of doctors has been created to assess Mikheil Saakashvili's health condition.

ened in prison. He stated that Saakashvili has thalassemia, an inherited blood disorder in which the body makes an abnormal form of hemoglobin, and that hunger is not advised for him.

As one of the members of the med council, Zurab Paghava noted on Tuesday, the council recommends placing Saakashvili in hospital for prophylactic purposes and intensive care 'since the probability of complication is high.' After visiting

the ex-president yesterday, Saakashvili's doctor announced that he is ready to be hospitalized.

The former president of Georgia was charged with the abuse of authority in absentia back in 2018 and sentenced to six years in prison. He was also charged with four other cases such as the illegal takeover of property, embezzlement of budget money in large quantities, violent dispersal of a rally and illegally crossing of the border.

On October 19, Opposition MP



► Opposition MP Salome Samadashvili, Georgian parliament should discuss legislative changes regarding the prosecution of former high-ranking politicians.

Salome Samadashvili voiced an initiative to allow Saakashvili to appeal the verdict made in his absentia, to release him and his sentence to be postponed before the court's decision.

According to Samadashvili, per the European Convention standards, a person should have the right to attend his trial, therefore she claims that Saakashvili should be given the right to appeal the verdict as he did not attend court hearings. Samadashvili also believes

that the Georgian parliament should also discuss legislative changes regarding the prosecution of former high-ranking politicians.

Saakashvili was officially charged with illegal crossing of the Georgian state border yesterday. According to his lawyer Beka Basilaia, Saakashvili 'deliberately chose the hardest, most difficult and heroic way to return to Georgia' and it does not matter 'whether the guard checked the passport or not.'

THURSDAY OCTOBER 21

Day ☀️ Mainly sunny
High: 15°C

Night ☁️ Partly cloudy
Low: 6°C

FRIDAY OCTOBER 22

Day ☀️ Sunny skies
High: 18°C

Night ☁️ Clear
Low: 7°C

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