

UNM Stops Mass Hunger Strike



The former president claimed that if the hunger strikers did not stop, he would resort to an extreme form of protest himself.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Following the former president Mikheil Saakashvili's request on January 1, 200 protesters seeking his release from prison called off a major hunger fast that began on December 21.

Nika Melia, the leader of the United National Movement (UNM), declared a mass hunger strike for Saakashvili's release on his birthday, December 21 during a UNM gathering in central Tbilisi.

Supporters of the former president set up 9 tents on Kakheti Highway, close to the UNM party's headquarters, to demonstrate against his detention. Members of the party, notably Melia, and civic activists were among the demonstrators. Melia indicated that the decision was taken at Saakashvili's request, stressing that the choice would not have been made otherwise.

Following the announcement of a large demonstration demanding Saakashvili's release, some 300 people have gone on



For the record, the party leaders, supporters, and civil activists near the office of the National Movement went on a hunger strike for 12 days.

hunger strike.

The former president was transferred to Rustavi No. 12 jail on December 30 from Gori Military Hospital, where he was receiving treatment after a 50-day hunger strike that began on the day of his arrest in Tbilisi on October 1. Saakashvili was admitted to Gori Military Hospital on November 19.

"Mikheil Saakashvili is worried about the condition of each person on hunger strike and he will be forced to resume the hunger strike, which none of us has the right to allow, because the start of the hunger strike by him will be fatal and therefore, together with our comrades, we decided to move to the next stage of the fight, which will be diverse and non-violent, until justice prevails in the country

and political justice ends. Therefore, we are moving to another stage of the struggle," Melia explained.

More than 200 individuals have been on hunger strike since that, according to the UNM, however, several protesters have been hospitalized due to health concerns.

Following his clandestine return from 8 years in political exile earlier this year in October, Saakashvili, who now possesses Ukrainian citizenship, is serving a term for abuse of authority. The former president was found guilty in his absence on 2 charges of obstruction of justice. He was sentenced to 6 years in jail on 2 counts of abuse of authority. He is also accused of unlawful property seizure, embezzlement, illegal rally dispersion, and illegal border crossing.

We Should End Putin's de Facto Veto on Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Aspirations, Former NATO SEC-Gen Rasmussen Says

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Former NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen has told a media outlet, Politico, that it is time that Georgia and Ukraine become NATO members as promised at the 2008 Bucharest Summit. According to him, this could be done with a proviso stating that NATO's Article 5 only covers the territory controlled by Kyiv and Tbilisi, stating that "NATO cannot have an open-door policy on enlargement in which it continues to allow Putin to act as the doorman".

Rasmussen noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin's de facto veto on Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations must be halted, noting that Putin stirs up low-level conflicts in these countries according to his needs.

"Russia has already signed the 1999



"We promised both Georgia and Ukraine seats at the NATO table in 2008, and it is time we set out an action plan to realize our promise," said Former NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen.



OSCE Charter, which grants "the inherent right of every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve," he told Politico.

According to Rasmussen, even though NATO seeks peaceful cooperation with Russia and sought to include Moscow in discussions about the European security architecture, "that cooperation has been made difficult by Putin's behavior". Former NATO secretary-general claims that when he met Putin for the first time as NATO secretary-general, "he opened our meeting by telling me he wanted to disband NATO," noting that this desire of Russian President will be fulfilled if NATO allies engage with Russia's most recent proposals for a new security relationship in Europe. Rasmussen also notes that if Russia attacks Ukraine, NATO must send military aid to Ukraine and launch economic sanctions that will cripple the Russian economy.

On December 10, the Russian Foreign Ministry urged NATO to annul the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit decision which says that Georgia and Ukraine will become NATO members. According to the statement, "to ensure the vital interests of European security," the decision made at the Bucharest summit should be disavowed. Current NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg noted in response that NATO's position remains unchanged, stating that it is a fundamental principle that every nation has the right to choose its path.

According to Rasmussen, Putin's de facto veto on Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations should be put to an end.

Georgia Celebrates New Year!



Weather

Tuesday, January 4

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 8°C
Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

published by
The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi,
0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze
Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.