

President Signs Bills on the Abolishment of State Inspector's Service, Organic Law on Common Courts



► "It is unacceptable to adopt such an important law in a rushed manner without consultations," Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili said.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili has signed the proposed law about the abolishment of State Inspector's Service and the establishment of two separate bodies instead, despite calls from several NGOs to veto the bill. According to her even though there are differing views on such structural changes, this decision does not contain a categorical legal objection, adding that the abolition of the service and the establishment of new structures 'do not provide a basis for motivated remarks of a legal nature by the President'.

However, the President notes that it is unacceptable to adopt such an important law in an expedited manner, without any consultations or proper discussion.

"It is unacceptable that in a country that aims to consolidate democracy, a key issue such as the protection of personal data is not given adequate time or space for discussion," Zourabichvili said. According to her, it is a 'bad precedent' that the head of an independent service, who was elected for a term of 6 years, is dismissed without any prior warning or reasoned explanation, "especially when strengthening the independence of officials remain one of the biggest challenges for our country".

President also signed amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts and warned the Parliament "about the risks contained in the new edition of

the law." She noted that these legislative changes also raise some questions, however, she noted that the grounds for submitting legally motivated remarks regarding these changes are insufficient. According to her, increasing the degree of independence of judges through these changes is questionable.

"However, the President is not able to make a decision based on doubts. Instead, I want to warn the legislature about the dangers of the new edition of

the law and remind them that the independence and impartiality of judges is a cornerstone of our democracy," the President noted.

The parliament of Georgia adopted the bill about abolishing the State Inspector's Office in its current form on December 30, despite calls from local civil society organizations and Georgia's partner states to not rush the process. The State Inspector's Service was mandated to investigate alleged offenses committed by state officials

and law enforcement agencies. President Zourabichvili has also urged the legislative body to refrain from adopting the draft law, stating that during a difficult polarization situation in the country, making such decisions is detrimental. According to several NGOs, the ruling party, without any justification or involvement of the relevant actors and the State Inspector Service itself, made an "unconstitutional decision that is extremely damaging to Georgian democracy".



► According to the President, amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts raise questions in respect of increasing the degree of independence of judges.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.0866 | EURO - 3.5376 | GBP - 4.2410 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.1357 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3800 |

Georgia Hosted 1.8 mln International Travelers in 2021



► In 2021, Georgia received \$ 1.2 billion from international travelers.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Tourism Administration of Georgia has released a statement according to which the restoration of international tourism in Georgia in 2021 was rapid, both in terms of revenue and travel. Georgia received \$ 1,244,941,717 from

international travelers in 2021. The dynamics of recovery of revenues from international tourism, compared to 2019, is moving at a rapid pace every month - in 2021, 38% of revenues will be restored. As for December, the recovery rate was 58%. Compared to 2020, revenue growth will exceed 130%.

In 2021, the number of international travelers in Georgia amounted to 1,881,271. The recovery rate, compared to 2019 data, is 20%. Compared to 2020, the number of international travelers has increased by 7.7%.

In the 12 months of 2021, 1,577,463 international tourist visits took place in Georgia. Compared to 2019 data, 31% of tourist visits have been restored. Compared to 2020, the increase is 45.1%.

In 2021, the majority of international visitors' visits took place by air. In particular, 51% of visits were made through Georgia's international airports. Recovery, compared to 2019, amounted to 48%.

According to the report, 51% of visitors arrived in Georgia by air, 48% by road, 0.6% by rail, and 0.4% by the sea in 2021.

The data of specific countries are as follows: The highest number of visitors who came to

Georgia in 2021 were from Turkey - 32 628 visitors, Armenia - 18 656 visitors, Russia - 18 442 visitors, Georgia (non-resident) - 13 223 visitors, Israel - 9 331 visitors, Azerbaijan - 8 787 visitors, Ukraine - 7 044 visitors, India - 4 993 visitors, Saudi Arabia - 4 917 visitors, Philippines - 4 830 visitors, Kazakhstan - 4 624 visitors, Uzbekistan - 4 014 visitors, Iran - 3 851 visitors, Belarus - 2 286 visitors, USA - 1 488 visitors.



► In December 2021, the number of foreign visitors to Georgia increased by 226.4%.

Droa: Today, President Joins the Georgian Dream Punishment Campaign by Approving the Laws

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

According to the Droa party, President Salome Zourabichvili has joined the Georgian Dream's punitive campaign by signing the laws of the Inspector's Office and common courts.

The party claims that the decision made by the President of Georgia severely damages the process initiated by him regarding the formation of a national consensus.

"President Zourabichvili has signed amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts and the Law on the Abolition of the Independent Investigation Mechanism, the Office of the State Inspector. The President of Georgia has joined the Georgian Dream campaign against the judiciary and state inspector.

The changes initiated by the ruling party were followed by harsh assessments from the political opposition, the non-

governmental sector, Georgia's international partners, and professional circles. According to the US embassy, "by abolishing the Office of the State Inspector, the ruling party has undermined government accountability."

The fact that the President did not use his powers under the Constitution of Georgia and refrained from returning the law to the Parliament with motivated remarks should be considered as encouraging the Georgian Dream

in the process of destroying state institutions.

President Zourabichvili's action contradicts his position stated in the statement of December 27, 2021, according to which, "while the country is in a state of severe polarization, all such decisions cause ambiguity and questions in society, which are detrimental to the depolarization process."

Today, on January 13, the President of Georgia Salome

Zourabichvili signed the abolition of the State Inspector's Office.

According to the statement, "the abolition of the service and the establishment of new structures in itself does not provide grounds for motivated remarks of a legal nature by the president."

In addition, the President signed amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts, although he noted that "these legislative changes raise some question marks."

FRIDAY JANUARY 14

Day Windy
High: 3°C

Night Few clouds
Low: -1°C

SATURDAY JANUARY 15

Day Cloudy
High: 5°C

Night Few clouds
Low: -2°C

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