

Prosecutor's Office Rejects Victim Status Request for Saakashvili

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia did not satisfy the lawyers' request of the imprisoned ex-President of Georgia to recognize Mikheil Saakashvili as a victim. The Prosecutor's Office released a statement on January 20 regarding the investigation launched by the State Inspector's Office into Saakashvili's Gldani Penitentiary Institution #18 and Gori Military Hospital for alleged inhuman treatment.

"The prosecutor's office expresses its readiness to fully ensure the right to defense, to allow Mikheil Saakashvili's human rights lawyers to get acquainted with the materials of the criminal case," the statement reads.

The prosecution explains that the reason is the unsubstantiation of the request. Moreover, the statement notes that the State Inspector's Office has not yet complied with the instructions of the Prosecutor's Office to conduct investigative and procedural actions. The lawyers applied to the prosecutor's office, requesting for Saakashvili to be recognized as a victim. They demanded recognition of Saakashvili as a victim of degrading and inhumane treatment.

"It is important for us to have full access to all the material that exists today in the agency that is investigating this issue," said Saakashvili's lawyer, Nika Gvaramia.

Public Defender Nino Lomjaria considered that the lawyers' request was fair as well. On November 9, 2021, the Office of the State Inspector of Georgia announced that it had launched an investigation into the possible inhumane treatment of Saakashvili. The reason for launching the investigation was the message received from the Public Defender's Office and the information spread on social networks/media outlets. Later, before Saakashvili was returned from the Gori hospital to the Rustavi prison, he had a conflict with the escort staff.

The former president, now a citizen of Ukraine, returned to Georgia at the end of September 2021 after 8 years in politi-



► The Prosecutor's Office noted the inspector's service "has not yet carried out several investigative and procedural actions", as issued by the Prosecutor's Office on November 21, adding "the criminal case requires a complex and thorough investigation."

cal exile. He was arrested on October 1 in Tbilisi. Saakashvili was on a hunger strike since his arrest, which ended after the Ministry of Justice announced on November 19 that he had been transferred from a penitentiary medical facility to a Gori military hospital.

In 2018, a Georgian court tried Saakashvili in absentia for pardoning convicts over the death of Sandro Girgvliani and beating former MP Valeri Gelashvili. The court found Mikheil Saakashvili guilty in both cases of abuse of power. He has been sentenced to 6 years in prison. Additionally, the ex-president is charged with several other offenses including illegal seizure of property, embezzlement, illegal rally dispersal, and illegal border crossing. Saakashvili calls all cases politically motivated.

Saakashvili's judge changed the measure of restraint for the 4 defendants

arrested in the case of illegal entry of Saakashvili to Georgia. According to the judge, they won't wait for the verdict to be announced in prison and will be released on €5000 bail, each.

Investigation charges Mikheil Saakashvili's detainees into entering Georgia, Giorgi Narimanidze, Elguja Tsomaia, Shalva, and Zurab Tsotsoria to cover up serious crimes. As for Tsomaia, he has also been charged with assisting Mikheil Saakashvili in illegally crossing the border.

At the end of September, Saakashvili secretly returned to Georgia in a trailer loaded with dairy products, which arrived by ship from the Ukrainian port of Chernomorsk to the port of Poti. The owner of the trailer, Tsomaia, is accused of covering up a serious crime and assisting in illegal border crossing. Police arrested Tsomaia - who offered his flat to Saakashvili as a temporary residence and hiding spot — on October 3, while father and son Zurab and Shalva Tsotsoria were arrested on October 5 for transporting Saakashvili to Georgia's western region of Samegrelo after he illegally entered the country from Ukraine.



► Individuals who helped ex-pres. Saakashvili illegally enter Georgia and was released on bail.

Georgia's Foreign Trade Ups 25.6% in 2021

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Russia has deployed troops on the western border. The 2021 Foreign Trade preliminary results of Georgia were published by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on January 20. According to the document, Georgia's foreign trade turnover increased by 25.6% year-over-year in 2021, equaling \$ 14.3 billion.

Turkey topped the list of Georgia's largest trading partners by turnover, with \$2.1 billion, followed by Russia with \$1.6 billion, China with \$1.5 billion, Azerbaijan with \$1.1 billion, and the United States with \$820 million.

Georgia's exports increased by \$900 million (27%) to \$4.2 billion last year. China still ranks first in exports, where 615.6 million goods were exported. Exports to

China increased by 29%. Exports to Russia increased by 38% at a higher rate and reached \$610 million, as a result of which Russia left Azerbaijan and became the second-largest export market of Georgia.

China was Georgia's largest trading partner by exports with \$615.6 million, followed by Russia with \$610 million, Azerbaijan with \$531.7 million. Of this, 248 million came from re-exports of cars,

Turkey with \$322.2 million, and Ukraine with \$307.3 million.

Georgia's main exports to the Chinese market are copper ores and concentrates, which account for 80% of total exports (\$ 497 million); In turn, these products are also 80% re-export and it is mainly not export of goods made in Georgia. Conse-

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.0825 | EURO - 3.4980 | GBP - 4.1990 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.0305 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3677 |

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quently, most of the exports to China are not Georgian goods. Georgia's main export to Russia is ferroalloys, whose exports to Russia increased to \$ 172 million (59%) last year. The second place in exports to Russia falls on wines, whose exports amounted to \$131 million (an increase of 10%).

According to the document, the main export of Georgia during this period were copper ores and concentrates, \$ 815 million, which is 19% of total exports. Ferroalloys came in second with \$ 477 million in exports, followed by re-exports of automobiles with \$ 456 million. Next were wine or fresh grapes - \$ 239.3 million; spirits - \$ 155.7 million; mineral waters - \$ 141.8 million; nitrogen fertilizers - \$ 119.5 million; nuts - \$ 118.3 million; medicines - \$99.1 million; gold - \$64.2 million; other commodities - 1.6 billion.

The second half of the top ten countries by export are Armenia, an increase of 36.9% over the previous year; Bulgaria, a decrease of 18.8% over the previous year; US, an increase of 143.2%; Kazakhstan, an increase of 102%; Spain - \$89.3 million, an increase of 6.7%.

As for the groups of countries, Georgian exports to the EU increased by only 3% last year and reached 717 million, which was 16.9% of total exports. In the CIS, exports increased by 34% to \$2 billion, or 47.6% of exports.

Exports to the EU peaked in 2019 at \$805 million. In the same year, the EU's share of total



► Georgian exports to the EU increased by only 3% last year.



► China still ranks first in exports.

exports was 21.2%, in 2020 it decreased to 20.8%, and in 2021 it decreased to an additional 16.9%.

Last year, Georgia's largest traded commodity in the EU market was copper ores and concentrates, which are mainly re-exports. Exports of these goods to the EU market amounted to \$315 million, which is 44% of exports to the EU, followed by exports of hazelnuts with \$80 million.

Imports rose by 25.1% to \$10.1 billion. Meanwhile, the trade deficit was \$5.8 billion, 40.7% of total turnover.

Turkey, Russia, China, the U.S., and Azerbaijan were the top trading partners of Georgia in terms of imports, with \$1.8 billion, \$1 billion, \$864.9 million, \$625.3 million, and \$604.4 million, respectively.

According to the Geostat report, imports from all 10 of Georgia's largest imported goods have increased. Cars were first on the list of import items with \$ 898.8 million; followed by petroleum oils - \$822.6 million; copper ores and concentrates - \$736.1 million; medicines - \$382 million; petroleum - \$354.6 million; telephone sets - \$222.2 million; automatic data processing machines - \$147.7 million; vaccines, blood, and immune products - \$119.9 million; vehicles for the transport of goods - \$ 105 million; cigars, cigarillos, and cigarettes - \$101.8 million; other commodities - \$6.2 billion.

Georgia's trade turnover had decreased by 14.8% in 2020 compared to 2019.

Kobakhidze States the Georgian Government Supports Ukraine

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream, says that Georgia has a supportive position towards Ukraine.

As he told reporters, after consulting with other parties, it will be clear how Georgia expresses its support for Ukraine.

"Our position on these issues is very clear, and the parliament, of course, will state its position. Naturally, our position has no alternative, it is a supportive position towards Ukraine, it is the only thing we can express."

"As for the forms of expression, we will discuss it, including, of course, we will have

consultations with other political parties," Kobakhidze said.

For more than two months now, Russia has deployed hundreds of thousands of troops along the Ukrainian border. The West fears that Russia is planning an attack on Ukraine. The Kremlin justifies military mobilization for security reasons.

A meeting of the NATO-Russia Council was held in Brussels on January 12. After the meeting, Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO offered Russia concrete ways to increase the transparency of military exercises to avoid dangerous military incidents and reduce spatial and cyber threats.

Russia, for its part, has reiterated its demands: the abolition of NATO military positions near Ukraine, the refusal to expand the alliance, and the reversal of a decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine and Georgia would inevitably become members of the alliance.

FRIDAY JANUARY 21
Day ☁️ Partly cloudy
 High: 5°C
Night ☀️ Clear skies
 Low: -5°C

SATURDAY JANUARY 22
Day ☀️ Sunshine
 High: 8°C
Night ☁️ Mostly cloudy
 Low: -2°C

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