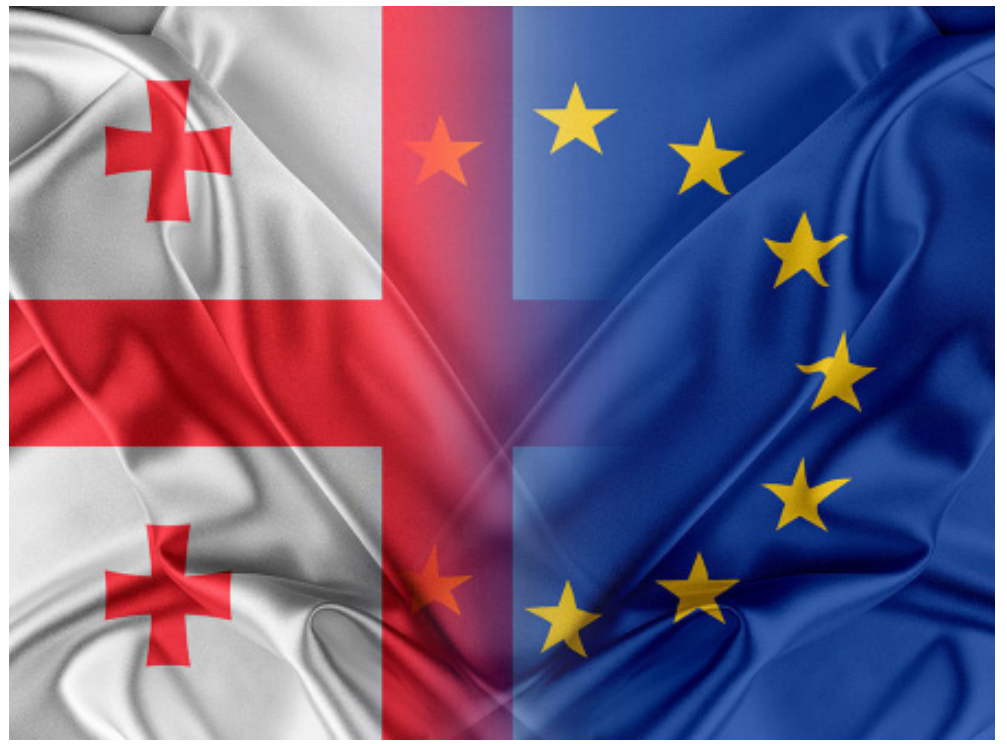


## EU Commission to Present Opinion on Georgia's EU Membership Application



Georgia and Moldova submitted formal applications for EU membership on March 3.

The Parliament calls on the EU member states and the EU institutions to take all respective steps for the acceleration of the EU integration of Georgia.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The ambassadors of the EU member states have agreed that the European Commission will present its views on applications for EU membership submitted by Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, the French delegation to the Council of Europe wrote on Twitter. It also mentioned the launch of a written procedure for the Council to validate draft letters seeking the opinion of the Commission.

Maka Bochorishvili, EU Integration Committee Chair stated that accession to the EU is a difficult and long process and it will depend on Georgia and its reforms as well as on the support and readiness of partner countries to have a further expansion with Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili has welcomed the EU Council's decision, stressing that this new chapter in EU-Georgia relations motivates the government to accelerate the

reform agenda.

Member of the European Parliament Petras Austrevicius has stated that the message to the aggressor Putin must be clear that Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are future members of the European Union. He emphasized that the discussions on EU membership of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova would require a certain amount of time, noting that it is important not to revise the decision.

A draft resolution on Georgia's integra-

tion into the European Union was submitted to the Parliamentary Bureau of Georgia on Monday. In the 13-point document, the Parliament calls on the EU member states and the EU institutions to take all respective steps for the acceleration of the EU integration of Georgia. The document also calls on the EU to engage at the high level in the process of strengthening Georgia's territorial integrity, as well as in promoting peace and stability in Georgia and the region.

## State Security Service Claims Rumors on Mass Influx of Russian Citizens Is Disinformation

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The State Security Service responded to rumors regarding the massive influx of Russian and Belarusian citizens into Georgia in recent days on the 8th of March, rejecting the speculation and assuring that state security is under full control.

The agency assessed the rumors as the deliberate spread of misinformation, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The public is being intimidated by the alleged existence of so-called Saboteurs and terrorism-related groups infiltrating the state among a stream of citizens crossing the border. We declare with full responsibility that the security environment in the country is under full control," they reported.

Together with other relevant agencies, the State Security Service announced that it is actively taking all necessary measures to minimize possible risks and challenges, as well as to fully control all persons at potential risk in the country.

According to the SSS, "as a result of the measures taken, a calm and safe en-



The economy minister stressed that Georgian law enforcement agencies remain 'vigilant' so that sanctioned people do not enter the country and that their businesses are traceable.

vironment has been maintained throughout the country. Citizens of the Russian Federation, Belarus, and other foreign countries who have entered the country do not tend to carry out activities that pose a risk to the country's security."

"It should be noted that the number of people entering the country in the current period does not exceed the statistics of the same period in previous years. The state of Georgia exercises the sovereign right of a foreign citizen to enter the territory of the country in full compliance with the law, by the existing risks and challenges."

Similar information was spread by the Minister of Economy, Levan Davitashvili the previous day. During comments after the government session, he addressed public concerns about the possible influx of Russian citizens due to international sanctions imposed on Russia over the war in Ukraine, saying that 'We are talking about 20-25 thousand people. This is the rank that was in 2020, before the introduction of covid-related restrictions. This data is not comparable to 2021 as all traffic was blocked'. He did not specify the exact timeframe within which the number was recorded and commented that accurate data will be published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

CONTINUED ON Page 2

# Where Does Georgia Stand in the Black and White World of the Russia-Ukraine War?

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Putin's Russian attack on Ukraine has made the world black and white, with Russia and now Belarus on one side, and on the other side - Ukraine, which is heroically defending itself.

Georgia is in a double state. People unequivocally express their support for Ukraine, which we can not say about the government with such a solution.

Georgia's position seemed to be clear, Georgia is a strategic partner of Ukraine, and is suffering from Russian aggression and 20% of its territory is occupied by Russia. In August 2008, during the Russian aggression, Ukrainian President Yushchenko was among the European presidents who arrived in Tbilisi and risked their lives.

It is clear that Ukraine expected much more from Georgia than from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or Armenia. The Georgian people also received public thanks from President Zelensky for the mass rallies in support of Ukraine, which we can not say about the Georgian government.

The Georgian Dream, accord-

ing to its parliamentary and governmental figures, supports Ukraine, however, the forms of self-expression also cause dissatisfaction in Georgia and abroad. Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili has repeatedly stated that he will be guided by "Georgia's pragmatic and national interests."

And did not join the sanctions imposed on Russia, stressing that the sanctions "did not work" and that the Ukrainian leadership "didn't manage to avoid war." Georgia, unlike in 2008, has maintained peace.

According to Gharibashvili, if Mikheil Saakashvili were in power now, "the war would start first in Tbilisi and then in Kyiv."

Georgia's not joining the sanctions could have been regarded as more sensible as Moldova didn't either. But the tone of the statement made by the Prime Minister made it out as if Georgia was being dragged into the war.

It should be noted that the President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili, who found herself in this position with the support of the Georgian Dream, distanced herself from such statements by Gharibashvili.

Perhaps the last straw for Zelensky was the non-receipt of a plane sent from Ukraine to Tbilisi, despite a request from the Ukrainian authorities. This plane was to be flown by a group of volunteers from Georgia.

According to the Georgian authorities, sending volunteers to Ukraine was tantamount to joining the Ukrainian side in the war.

The statements and actions of the Georgian government were followed by the summoning of the Ambassador of Ukraine from Georgia by President Zelensky for consultations. According to the Ukrainian embassy, there were two main reasons for the recall: the "immoral position of the government" regarding sanctions and the obstruction of sending volunteers to Ukraine.

Clear statements were made in the Rada of Ukraine. "The Georgian government, with its decision regarding Ukraine, is betraying the Georgian people and also the Ukrainians - by not imposing sanctions on Russia, by preventing Georgian volunteers from coming to Ukraine. It was from these actions that the Ambassador of Ukraine from Georgia happened and this is the right decision.

The population of Georgia should think about what kind of government it has. Unfortunately, the Georgian government has chosen the policies of

dictator, aggressor Putin and Lukashenko. "The government in Georgia should be changed as soon as possible," said Alexei Goncharenko, a member of the Ukrainian Rada.

Former Minister of Defense of Ukraine Anatoly Gritsenko stated:

"War makes everything black and white ... The current government of Georgia is foreign to us. We will see how the Georgian people, whom we helped in every way in 2008, will behave." Georgia as we see it now, with such a government and people electing and enduring such a government, can no longer be our strategic partner.

Official Tbilisi considered the ambassador's recall "absolutely unacceptable and unjustified." Irakli Kobakhidze, chairman of the Georgian Dream, said that they were trying to involve Georgia directly in the military conflict and that the decision of the Ukrainian authorities to recall the ambassador "is an expression of this coordinated action."

In Georgia, the United National Movement, which also has representatives in the Ukrainian government, "Davit Arakhamia, Zurab Adeishvili and other Georgian criminals," announced itself as part of this coordination.

David Kramer, director of the Bush Institute, says the incident

is likely to strain relations between Georgia and Ukraine. Kramer blames Gharibashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili hiding in the shadows. According to Kramer, Georgia must join the sanctions against Russia, and the parliament must pass a resolution declaring Russia an aggressor.

Opposition groups called for a halt to the protests, saying "the closure of Russian airspace, the closure of Russian propaganda media outlets in Georgia, and the start of negotiations on sanctions." Also make an urgent application for EU membership. Added to this was the demand for the resignation of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili.

The opposition and civil society believe that Gharibashvili is not a suitable figure in the current crisis and should resign because of his 'degrading statements' about Ukraine. "He is repeating the Kremlin propaganda and moving away from the Western course," said Nika Melia, the leader of the United National Movement.

The civil sector advises the opposition to start a no-confidence motion against the government. This requires 51 votes and the parliamentary opposition may be able to collect this number of votes. Consultations between the opposition parties have begun.

## State Security Service Claims Rumors on Mass Influx of Russian Citizens Is Disinformation

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

According to the National Statistics Office, in the first quarter of 2019, 74.2 thousand Russian nationals visited Georgia per month on average. The same number stood at 48.8 thousand and 2.6 thousand in the first quarters of 2020 and 2021, respectively. The data for the first quarter of 2022 has not been published yet.

The Economy Minister also dismissed calls to impose restrictions/visa regime on Russian Nationals, explaining that with the screening process of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Georgia

can attain the same objective of a visa requirement anyways. According to him, Georgia is one of the rare islands of freedom in the region and the country has pursued liberal economic and trade policies to 'attract more people for business'.

Davitashvili also recalled the previous United National Movement administration's decision of 2012 to waive the visa requirement for Russians and argued that Georgia back then aimed to show its democracy and openness to people 'who did not want to live with the regime', the goal which is shared by GD government.

Speaking about Russian citizens possibly willing to relocate their businesses to Georgia, the Minister noted that their activities should align with the requirements of Georgian law and international sanctions.

### Weather

Wednesday, March 9

Day Cloudy  
High: 7°C  
Night Rain  
Low: 2°C

Thursday, March 10

Day Mostly Cloudy  
High: 8°C  
Night Showers  
Low: 2°C

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**Invites 16-20 year old young speakers to take part in the Public Speaking Competition**

**The theme of the competition is "We expect too much from our heroes". Speakers may interpret this theme in any way they see fit, but they should not use the theme as their title. Each speaker will be allocated 5 minutes.**

**The competition will be held in three rounds. The first round, March 21, at the English Language Centre "British Corner".**

**The date and theme of the second round will be announced later.**

**The competition is sponsored by the Bank of Georgia.**

**Due to the pandemic the final of the competition in London will be held online.**

**The deadline for registration is March 15.**

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