

## Parliamentary Visit in Ukraine Ends, Delegation Returns to Georgia

By LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Georgian parliamentary delegation returned from Ukraine on April 17. Advisor of the Prime Minister of Georgia David Sergeenko assessed the visit to Ukraine to be crucial in terms of current and future relations between the two countries.

"During the planning of the visit, of course, we had two expectations. First, it was an expression of Georgia's solidarity towards the country. Second, it would allow the existing misunderstandings to be resolved. The meeting at Rada, which lasted several hours, emphasized that this meeting changed a lot for the better. Their attitude from the beginning to the end of the meeting significantly changed towards positive.

Most of the misunderstandings were clarified. If there is any direction left, for example in terms of support or no support of sanctions, Shalva Papuashvili made very clear and unambiguous explanations, which turned out to be absolutely understandable and acceptable to them.

"I think we can say that the vast majority of these issues are already closed and if there is anything left, it is already on the way to a positive solution," said Sergeenko.

According to Lelo member Anna Natsvili, Ruslan Stefanchuk asked the Georgian side for two things. The first is for Georgia to discuss bilateral sanctions, where it sees the possibility of doing so, and the second is for Georgia to take steps that Ukraine has already taken, including fighting Russian propaganda and disinformation.

"It was stressed that Georgia will not become a black hole to bypass international sanctions," Natsvlshvili stated.

According to MP Khatuna Samnidze,



the visit to Ukraine was delayed, but it was important for the restoration of relations between the two countries.

"After this meeting, I hope that a discussion will be opened, including with the opposition on what can be done to sup-

port our partner Ukraine," Samnidze said.

The delegation consisting of 9 deputies of the Parliament of Georgia arrived in Ukraine on April 16. The delegation included: Shalva Papuashvili, Archil

Talakvadze, Davit Sergeenko, Levan Ioseliani, Beka Odisharia, Ana Natsvlshvili, Vakhtang Megrelishvili, Khatuna Samishvili. They visited the Ukrainian cities of Bucha and Irpen.



# The First Step on the European Path

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On April 11, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Oliver Varhej presented a self-assessment questionnaire to Georgian Foreign Minister Iliia Darchiashvili.

The Georgian government has a month to complete the questionnaire. The EU response will be announced in June. The opposition demands that both the questionnaire and the answers prepared by the government be made public. Given the rather difficult relationship of the current Georgian government with its Western friends, the Georgian Dream's European statement will face many problems.

Integration into NATO and the European Union is a declared priority of the current Georgian government, but judging by the implementation of the recommendations from the West, the Georgian Dream was in no hurry to take practical steps in this direction.

The GD leaders stated that they were not going to make an official application for Georgia's membership in the European Union until 2024. New parliamentary elections are expected in Georgia this year, which was supposed to be submitted before the elections and used during the election campaign, while the

critical remarks made by the EU for the government, which plans to win the next elections, would be 'easy to pass'.

The Georgian government expected to get the candidate status by 2030.

Russia's attack on Ukraine changed the situation, with Ukraine demanding accelerated EU membership.

Earlier, Georgian authorities, including Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream party, said on March 1 that they would not apply until 2024 in response to calls from Ukraine to join Ukraine and join the European Union as soon as possible. But they soon changed their position, and on March 2, Irakli Kobakhidze said that the ruling team had changed its position and decided to apply for membership "taking into account the general political context and the new reality." On March 3, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili signed an application for EU membership.

It is noteworthy that the ruling team made this decision in the light of President Salome Zurabishvili's visit to Brussels, where she met with the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission — Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen.

The recent relationship between the Georgian Dream gov-

ernment and Brussels is noteworthy. The Georgian Dream unilaterally abandoned the April 19 agreement reached between the ruling team and the opposition, mediated by Charles Michel, in July last year and refused to make several legislative changes, prompting criticism from the European Union and the United States.

The EU was dissatisfied with the delay in judicial reform, the Georgian Dream refused an EU soft loan, which it could not get, Irakli Kobakhidze criticized the EU Ambassador to Georgia, and a group of MEPs refused to visit Georgia due to the inability of the Speaker to visit Georgia, which they could not meet. Obviously, these and other problems related to the degree of democracy of the country will be reflected in the questionnaire provided to Georgia, the purpose of which is to check the readiness of the country for EU membership.

Ukraine received a questionnaire on April 8, and Georgia and Moldova — on April 11. As a rule, the procedure for filling in the questionnaire and granting the candidate status takes years, but this time the process is accelerated and the countries were given one month to complete the questionnaire. The European Commission's assessment is expected to be ready in June.

President Salome

lic, intends to apply to the European Union to make the questionnaire public.

Critical background to the questionnaire was created by the US Department of State's April 13 report on the human rights situation in Georgia in 2021. The report prepared in Georgia consists of 85 pages and, according to the opposition, is an unprecedentedly critical document. "Whether this report is crucial for Strasbourg or not, will be of the utmost importance," the opposition said.

Filling in the EU questionnaire seems to be one of the main problems of Georgian policy in the coming months. The government says the destructive opposition is trying to undermine the country's achievements, while the opposition believes the main cause of the problems related to democracy is the current government. There is a high probability that even filling in the questionnaire will not become a basis for constructive cooperation between the government and the opposition.

## EU4Digital: networks uniting digital SMEs from the Eastern partnership join major European association



With the support and facilitation of the EU4Digital Facility, the associations uniting digital SMEs of the Eastern partner countries have joined the European DIGITAL SME Alliance (DIGITAL SME) for a one-year sponsored membership, starting from March 2022.

The membership will benefit the EaP associations in three main areas: policy, networking, and funding. Members will receive information on ongoing legislative discussions and their impact on SMEs, ICT standards for SMEs, as well as funding opportunities. Also, organisations will be invited to participate in networking events, knowledge-sharing workshops and training organised by the DIGITAL SME Association.

Overall, it is expected that the knowledge and the new tools gained will empower EaP associations to expand their activities, strengthen their capacities as key supporters of digital SMEs in the EaP region, and enhance cross-border collaboration in the region and with the EU. As for the bigger picture, the EU4Digital Facility believes that such an initiative will contribute to harmonising digital markets between the EU and the EaP regions.

The Digital SME Alliance counts more than 45,000 SMEs in the ICT sector, 450 experts in working groups, and 30 national and regional SME associations from EU member states and neighbouring countries.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

### Nikoloz Shanava, Georgian Soldier Killed in Ukraine, Repatriated

Nikoloz Shanava, a Georgian fighter killed in Ukraine by Russian occupiers, was buried with military honor at the Civil Cemetery on April 17.

Nikoloz Shanava was killed by the Russian occupiers in the city of Iziun. Shanava was 21 years old.

Bodies of Georgian soldiers Nika Shanava and Davit Menabdishvili, who died in Ukraine, Izum, were repatriated



to Georgia on April 15.

Three more Georgian soldiers Zaza Bitsadze, Alika Tsaava, and Arkadi Kasradze were killed in the fight with the Russians in Ukraine on April 16.

Nine Georgian soldiers were killed as a result of Russian war crimes in Ukraine: Davit Ratiani, Gia Beriashvili, Bakhva Chikobava, Davit Gobejishvili, Davit Menabdishvili, Nikoloz Shanava, Arkadi Kasradze, Zaza Bitsadze, and Alika Tsaava.

Davit Gobejishvili, Gia Beriashvili, and Davit Ratiani have already been repatriated to Georgia.

The Messenger honors the memory of the heroes killed

while fighting against Russia's war crimes in Ukraine.

### Miner Dies in Itkhvisi Mine, Georgian Manganese Reports

According to the company *Georgian Manganese*, the head of the mining district in the Itkhvisi mine was killed while on duty. He was 30 years old.

According to them, the state labor inspector and trade unions are investigating the case.

"The company is actively involved in the process and cooperates with the investigation. We are interested in the smooth operation of the investigation to determine the objective circumstances of the incident. *Georgian Manganese* once again expresses deep sorrow over the incident and sympathizes with the family and relatives of the deceased," read the statement.

## Weather

Monday, April 18

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 23°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 10°C

Tuesday, April 19

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 25°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 13°C

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