

Zourabichvili Calls on Public to Gather on June 16 to Stand up for European Future



BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili offered the public to hold a large-scale meeting before the decision on the status of an EU candidate country in Brussels. The meeting is scheduled for June 16, 19:00 at Europe Square.

"We have no solution other than unity. Therefore, I also offer to gather on June 16 in Tbilisi, from Europe Square to Rike. Let us see each other and show Europe ourselves - our unity, our will. It will be a societal gathering of our population, where everyone will be an ordinary citizen - me, you and any member of a political party, or government official, everyone will come as an ordinary citizen. There will be no words, no announcements, no posters. If anyone wants a song, they can sing it. The rest will be just to stand up for what we want for our children, for this next generation in Europe," Zourabichvili said at a briefing held at the Orbeliani Palace.

At a special briefing, the President of Georgia criticized the Georgian Dream government for its policy of waiting for EU candidate status. She also added that the position and statements of the ruling party posed a threat to Georgia's isolation.

"We have quarreled with everyone and offended everyone with insulting statements. All

three Baltic states have been our traditional ally on this path to Euro-Atlantic integration; Poland, which is so involved and helps Ukraine and Ukraine itself."

She also spoke of MEPs and Charles Michel, President of the Council of Europe, who 'used to be our institutional supporter, but we do not allow him to stand by us anymore'. Here President referred to the Georgian Dream annulling the April 19 agreement between the ruling and opposition parties, which was brokered by Michel in 2021 to overcome post-election political crisis in Georgia.

"What else could we have done?" President referred to this question stating the simple answer - 'At least what Moldova has done'. Zourabichvili said that Moldova has not imposed more sanctions than Georgia and it hasn't been demanded from them or from us, none of us were asked to join the war. But, most importantly, Moldova has managed to remain silent and work in all European capitals - 'something that we seem to be struggling with'.

The President also addressed the President of the European Commission to take into account the will of the people of Georgia, whose path deserves to be recognized.

Zourabichvili also announced that she will address the heads of all 27 EU member states with

letters where she will present all the political, moral and strategic arguments as to why Georgia deserves this historic decision and why leaving it behind could be a fatal mistake.

On March 3, the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili signed Georgia's application for EU membership.

The country's government decided to apply for EU candidate status expeditiously on March 2, after Ukraine made a request on February 28, amid the ongoing war. Moldova also applied for accelerated EU membership on March 3.

On June 9, the European Parliament passed a resolution on violations of media freedom in Georgia and challenges to the safety of journalists.

The resolution was also amended by the European Parliament groups - the European People's Party (EPP), Renew Europe and the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) - to call for targeted sanctions against former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The amendment, submitted by the 3 groups, states that the European Parliament 'expresses concern about the destructive role played by sole oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili in Georgian politics and economy, concerns about the level of influence over the government and its decisions, including politically motivated journalists and political

opponents'.

"Such a text, with its factual inaccuracies and unsubstantiated allegations, is just one indication that sufficient work has not been done with the parties in the European Parliament that participated in the drafting of the resolution. For its part, the opposition worked to achieve its goals, and the government did not do the job it was supposed to do. Sometimes they chose silence, sometimes offensive answers to

serious questions, and that's the result they got."

According to the Georgian President, the European Parliament resolution, along with criticism, expresses the belief that Georgia deserves to meet the legitimate aspirations of its people and calls on EU institutions to grant candidate status. She reiterated her belief that despite the difficult picture, there is still a chance to get the EU candidate status.

Pension Agency Says 1,838 People in Pension Scheme

BY MESSENGER STAFF

According to the Pension Agency, as of June 13, 2022, the total value of pension assets is 2.39 billion GEL. The benefit is 334 million GEL.

1 million 285 thousand people are members of the pension scheme.

The Pension Agency states that currently 1,938 people from different backgrounds have benefited from the accumulative pension, and the amount issued to them is 3 million 986 GEL.

The partially mandatory funded pension system was launched in Georgia on January 1, 2019. A pension agency has been set up to manage the money.

All citizens who receive remuneration as a result of a contractual relationship are included in

the pension scheme. Employees under the age of 40 are obliged to join the accumulative pension system as soon as the law enters into force.

Participation in the pension scheme is voluntary for the self-employed.

Those 40 and older can retire from the pension system.

A citizen participating in a funded pension gets 2% of the total salary deducted for the pension. The employer and the state are both obliged to pay 2% towards the pension fund each.

It's possible to withdraw money in the following cases: before retirement in case of moving abroad permanently, if the status of a person with a disability is determined and request the access.

In case of death, their family takes over the pension fund.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.9631; Euro - 3.0923; GBP - 3.5883; 100 Russian Ruble - 5.1637; Swiss Franc - 2.9822

US to Fully Support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Aspirations, US Ambassador to Georgia Says



US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan

“Almost everything that we have done and are doing here in Georgia is designed to support the people of Georgia’s desire to be part of the European Union and to be part of NATO,” the ambassador told reporters.

According to her, allegations about the United States working against Georgia or trying to drag Georgia into the war or open a ‘second front’ is a ‘hundred percent Russian disinformation’.

“We absolutely do not want to see Georgia dragged into this war. In our view, what the European Union – and NATO stand for is peace, stability, and prosperity...and we want that for Georgia too,” she said.

According to the ambassador, the US will continue to be fully committed to Georgia’s sovereignty, its territorial integrity, and to its desire to be fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations.

Yesterday, the Embassy of the



The United States Embassy to Georgia.

United States to Georgia said the United States would not “turn its back” on its partners in Georgia and Ukraine no matter how much their independence might ‘irritate’ Russia.

“With the collaborative support from the West, Georgia and

Ukraine stand, maintaining their sovereignty and independence. As much as the independence of these countries might annoy Russia, the United States will not turn its back on its partners,” the embassy reported, adding that “the west is more united than ever.”

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

We have been advocating on behalf of Georgia’s EU candidacy because we want to see Georgia succeed in its European aspirations, US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan told re-

porters on Monday. She also stressed that for 30 years, the United States has been working toward Georgia’s full integration into NATO, stressing that “that is what the people of Georgia want, and that is what the United States firmly supports.”

Young people at the forefront of positive change – how EU4Youth is helping to grow youth communities in rural Georgia

Rural Innovation Knowledge Hubs have been launched by EU4Youth in three different rural municipalities of Georgia – Gori, Ninotsminda and Akhmeta. The Hubs provide a space for young people whether they have entrepreneurial ideas, want to learn more about different social or environmental issues, plan awareness-raising campaigns, or build an active civil society in their communities.

The Hubs have been launched as a part of the EU4Youth: Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development (SEED) for Green Growth project, which plays a key role in developing and delivering green and social entrepreneurship education, as well as practical skills to vulnerable young people.

The Hubs provide many opportunities to the community, particularly in terms of education, and play a huge role in young people’s personal and ca-

reer development. The Hubs also act as resource centres, attracting funding and encouraging activities that benefit the municipalities.

Giorgi Khokhobashvili is an active participant in all Hub events. He first became involved with the Knowledge Hub when he completed EU4Youth’s Social and Green Entrepreneurship Course; afterwards he became a member and helped to organise many campaigns and events, such as ‘Discover Akhmeta’, and hosted a tour for young people from Gori and Ninotsminda, as well as a vaccination campaign (which involved inviting an immunologist to speak about the vaccines and answer questions from the community members to help reduce vaccine anxiety). Giorgi soon took a lead in campaigns and is planning a biodiversity campaign, in which he plans to teach the community members about biodiversity by taking them to the Batsara Nature Reserve and conducting practical games and activities.

Through the Hub, Giorgi was introduced to a number of opportunities and, after consultations with the Hub coordinator, he decided to participate in the Eu-



ropean Solidarity Diplomacy competition, which he won. As a result, he will be travelling to Austria for 10 months to work towards empowering local youth. Upon his return, his plan is to use the experience and knowledge he has gained in Austria and apply it in Akhmeta to help other young people participate in similar programmes.

“The existence of these Hubs and the support they provide is a source of motivation for us to do our share in developing our region and do our best to improve the environment for young people. When I return from Austria, I will continue to be actively involved in the activities and I advise all young people to become members of the Hub in order to receive the broad knowledge and experience available,” says Giorgi.

Akhmeta Innovation Hub’s recent activities included a field

trip to the capital Tbilisi to visit social enterprises and meet the founders of the Hub. The young people from Akhmeta were introduced to people behind successful and innovative enterprises, who spoke to them about their experiences, and offered many insights on starting and running a business. The Akhmeta Innovation Hub members also received information on which organisations or government agencies offer funding and other types of support to social enterprises.

Larisa Karslyan from Ninotsminda Innovation Knowledge Hub believes that this project has come at the perfect time: “Hub activities and topics are crucial and up to date. Environmental issues are important and youth engagement is necessary to effectively tackle climate change, pollution and other problems.” She points out that

young people are really excited by the idea of changing something in a positive way, and notes that the Hubs, “are trying to increase youth engagement in social processes, which I see as the best approach”.

As well as providing an inclusive, safe working environment, the Hubs are equipped with essential hardware like professional cameras and laptops and, crucially, access to Wi-Fi.

In regions such as Ninotsminda, the Hubs have done much to help integrate society. Karslyan explains that, “young people living in Ninotsminda are facing integration problems, most of them are not able to speak the Georgian language – the Innovation Knowledge Hub is a platform that allows them to communicate, meet each other, discuss social entrepreneurship and environmental topics, and better integrate.”

It is hard to underestimate the positive effects of this project in the target rural municipalities of Georgia. Many of the young people in these regions face acute disadvantages and are highly vulnerable as a result. The Rural Innovation Knowledge Hubs offer them a safe space where they can take their future into their own hands.

Authors: Maiken Bjorlin Hansen, Nana Takvarelia, CENN

Weather

Wednesday, June 15

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 27°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 18°C

Thursday, June 16

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 29°C

Night Clear
Low: 18°C

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