

## Bidzina Ivanishvili publishes a letter, says Georgia has 'neutralized' a war threat



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The former chairman of Georgian Dream party Bidzina Ivanishvili published a letter through his lawyers regarding the political situation in Georgia and meeting with US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan after a war in Ukraine started.

"Today, when the threat of war has been neutralized as much as possible, I believe that the ruling team has the opportunity to largely shift its attention to another very important priority and take care of Georgia's relations with its strategic partners, the United States of America and the European Union so they are not damaged" said the former Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili.

According to Bidzina Ivanishvili, the most important thing for him is that Georgia is able to get out of such a difficult situation properly and maintain peace.

"First of all, I want to once again express my deep respect for Georgian society, which has repeatedly proven that it is loyal to European values. 30 years after the restoration of independence, Georgian people have shown once again that dignity, freedom and independence are their most important values. At the same time, Georgian society has proved to everyone that despite its short democratic experience, it has the wisdom to

deal with the most difficult challenges with dignity.

It has been a year and a half since I informed the public about my decision to withdraw from politics, and since then, I have fully defended and am defending my own decision. During this entire period, I published only one public statement, and that was only to give no one the opportunity to speculate on my behalf. I didn't want my factor to have any influence on the political processes, and that was and is the reason for my complete distancing from the public space.

At the same time, as a child of this country, I naturally follow the events in Georgia with all my attention. Against the background of the most difficult political situation in the region, Georgia and its ruling team had to go through very painful processes during the past months and are still having to go through it. The situation for Georgia and its government is complicated by the fact that certain forces actively tried to drag Georgia into the war, and this desire and goal of theirs, unfortunately, is still relevant today.

Despite the greatest difficulties, the ruling team worked correctly, took a correct and principled position, and the main difficulty, the first stage of the threat of war, has already been overcome. Thanks to these efforts, the immediate threat of Georgia being drawn into the

war has been neutralized as much as possible. However, I would like to point out here that until the end of the war in Ukraine, certain risks still remain, and both the government and the public should be extremely careful so that Georgia can finally avoid a fatal war.

However, today, when the immediate threat of war has been neutralized as much as possible, I believe that the ruling team has the opportunity to largely shift its attention to another most important priority and to ensure that Georgia's relations with its strategic partner, the United States of America and the European Union, are not damaged," the letter reads.

Bidzina Ivanishvili also mentions his personal dispute with Swiss bank and says that he believes this problem is directly connected to the ongoing political events in Georgia, adding that he prefers to leave this issue as personal and resolve it himself and not burden society with it:

"As for my personal problem, which arose in the relationship with the Swiss bank and is still relevant today, I believe that it has a direct connection with the ongoing processes in Georgia. However, due to the fact that Georgia has practically overcome the difficult situation and the threat of war has passed, I prefer to leave the relationship between me and

the Swiss bank as my personal problem and not to burden the public with this too much. It also doesn't matter what I planned to spend the funds frozen by the Swiss bank on - for private purposes or for public needs. I prefer that the society considers the problem created by the bank as my personal problem in all cases. My lawyer made relatively detailed explanations on this case and will do so in the future.

The most important thing for me is that Georgia can finally get out of the most difficult situation properly and maintain peace, and I will take care of my personal issue myself and will not try to overburden the society with this problem."

In the statement, when speaking about partners, Ivanishvili also mentioned the meeting with the US ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degnan, saying that the meeting was held in March at the request of the ambassador herself after a war in Ukraine started:

"Since a question was publicly raised about holding a meeting between me and the American ambassador after the start of the war in Ukraine, I would like to explain to the public that such a meeting did take place at the request of the ambassador on March 21 and it lasted for about three hours," Bidzina Ivanishvili's statement reads.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 2.7886 | EURO - 2.8282 | GBP - 3.3441 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.7200 | SWISS FRANC - 2.8903 |

## Azerbaijani Journalist Afgan Mukhtarli 'confirms' his kidnapping was Bidzina Ivanishvili's order

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli 'confirms' that his kidnapping was allegedly ordered by Bidzina Ivanishvili, former chairman of Georgian Dream.

Mukhtarli made this statement after the former deputy head of the State Security Service of Georgia Soso Gogashvili, who is now detained, released a statement from prison, saying Azerbaijani journalist was abducted and the video footage where the kidnapping can be depicted was deleted by Operational-Technical Department.

"I was kidnapped on the order of Bidzina Ivanishvili. The security service, the criminal police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the border service and the customs service, specifically the Lagodekhi checkpoint, were jointly involved in this. 4 state agencies could not have done it without the permission of Ivanishvili and the then prime minister, Kvirikashvili. I also had information that the Georgian side received a very large amount, 3 million dollars, for this. The border service gave this amount from the Azerbaijani side, and the security service took it from the Georgian side," said Mukhtarli.

The Azerbaijani journalist demands that Soso Gogashvili give an official testimony to the prosecutor's office and says Gogashvili's life might be in danger



in prison, because according to him, Gogashvili has a lot of information about Bidzina Ivanishvili's alleged crimes.

Mukhtarli said he wants to come to Tbilisi and he asks the European Union and the European Parliament for guarantees, because according to him, the Georgian authorities have already created an obstacle and did not allow him to enter the country.

"We demand that Soso Gogashvili give an official testimony to the prosecutor's office and we demand that he be protected so that he is not killed in prison. He knows a lot about Ivanishvili's crimes. I want to come to Tbilisi and take part in the process myself, but the problem is that they won't let me into Georgia. That's why I'm asking the European Union, the European Parliament, to give me a guarantee that I will be able to come to Tbilisi," said Mukhtarli.

Azerbaijani journalist Mukhtarli, who was investigating the corruption schemes of Ilham Aliyev's family and was persecuted because of it, moved to Georgia with his family. After 2 years of living, he was kidnapped from Tbilisi in May 2017. Two days later, it was revealed that Mukhtarli was detained in Azerbaijan.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

#### Director of ISFED interviewed regarding Gogashvili case

The Director of ISFED Nino Dolidze was interviewed in the prosecutor's office regarding the case of former deputy head of the State Security Service of Georgia Soso Gogashvili's files.

Nino Dolidze's interview with the investigative agency lasted about 3 hours.

The case refers to the materials provided by Soso Gogashvili to non-governmental organizations, the proof of the rigging of the elections by the ruling Georgian Dream party. NGOs checked the materials and concluded that "on the basis of the research, a large-scale scheme of mobilizing elector's votes in favor of the ruling party by illegal means was identified, which is highly likely to prove the use of state agen-

cies, including law enforcement agencies, for electoral and party purposes."

After the interview at the prosecutor's office, Nino Dolidze said that the questions of the investigation were mainly about when and in what form Soso Gogashvili gave the materials to NGOs. According to the ISFED director, the prosecutor's office was also interested in how non-governmental organizations worked during the study of these materials.

"I hope that an investigation will be launched, the main questions were related to the report we published and the materials we received, including a certain part of the conversation related to the communication with Gogashvili" said the director of International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy Nino Dolidze, after leaving the prosecutor's office.

According to Dolidze, in order to start the investigation, she provided the prosecutor's office with all the information available to her.



#### Soso Gogashvili's case classified as Top Secret, lawyer says

The case of the former head of the State Security Service of Georgia Soso Gogashvili has been given the classification of Top Secret, Gogashvili's lawyer

Ramaz Chinchaladze says. Until recently, the case was partially classified as Top Secret.

"The case was classified as Top Secret by a person who is accused by Ioseb (Soso) Gogashvili and his family of specific misdemeanors and, one might even say, of committing a crime. This is Mr. Gambashidze. He issued a written decision to keep the case materials secret."

According to the lawyer, there was no legal basis for keeping it secret, adding that the reason behind the case being classified as Top Secret is that they do not want to reveal the violations that exist in connection with the arrest of Soso Gogashvili and the charges presented.

The former deputy head of the Security Service of Georgia is charged with 3 counts: illegal purchase-storage-carrying of firearms, exceeding official authority, and tampering with personal information or personal data.

THURSDAY JULY 28

Day Partly cloudy  
High: 33°C

Night Clear skies  
Low: 21°C

FRIDAY JULY 29

Day Partly cloudy  
High: 32°C

Night Clear skies  
Low: 23°C

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