

## Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock Says There Are Attempts to Divert Georgia from Pro-EU Course



the Government of Georgia, they will discuss the steps that the country should take to get the candidate status.

Foreign Affairs Minister of Germany Annalena Baerbock wrote that Georgia is facing pressures from inside and outside and emphasized that Germany fully supports Georgia's European perspective.

"The European Union is a clear goal for the population of Georgia. During the past weeks, citizens have been waving the EU flag in the streets of Tbilisi to defend pluralism and the rule of law.

During my visit to Georgia, I would like to emphasize the fact that Germany fully supports Georgia's European perspective.

We see efforts aimed at deviating the country from the pro-European course. Also, we see the pressure that the country is facing from the inside and outside.

During the meeting with the government of Georgia, I will talk about the steps that the country should take to get the status of a candidate country for EU membership. In this case, it is not only a matter of protecting democratic standards, but especially of maintaining a free media environment, a dynamic civil society, and public debate based on mutual respect, even when the positions differ sharply from each other.

We are united by European values, and we are sure that we cannot deviate from this path," the statement reads.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Annalena

Baerbock, issued an official statement before her official visit to Georgia. According to Baerbock, there are attempts to divert Georgia from the pro-European

course.

In the official statement, she also discussed the upcoming official visit to Georgia and said that during the meeting with

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Salome Zourabichvili will represent Georgia at the Summit for Democracy organized by US President Joe Biden. The senior director of the National Security Council for Democracy and Human Rights, Robert G. Berschinski spoke about this at a briefing.

"We have clearly expressed our concern about the decline of democracy in Georgia. President Zourabichvili was recently here in the United States of America, she was the voice of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and she will be the representative of the country we invited to the democracy summit," Berschinski said.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan was asked by reporters regarding Zourabichvili's participation in Summit for Democracy 2023 and she said that President Salome Zourabichvili is doing an excellent job at presenting Georgia.

"President Zourabichvili is a fantastic representative of Georgia, as we have seen in the last few months. She also attended last year's summit, where all

countries made certain commitments. This summit is a continuation of these commitments," Degnan said.

Kelly Degnan was also asked why is Salome Zourabichvili representing Georgia in the Summit for Democracy and why is the country not represented by the Prime Minister or another member of the Government and Parliament.

"In the case of Georgia, these are the obligations of the entire government, as well as the participation of the government in fulfilling the agenda that Georgia has set for itself in terms of improving its democracy and fighting corruption. As far as I know, the foreign ministers will also present themselves via video on the second day of the summit, which will be held in the Netherlands. I think this reflects the commitment of the president on the part of Zourabichvili, who is doing an excellent job of representing Georgia, as well as on the part of the government regarding the commitments that Georgia has in terms of strengthening its democracy and fighting corruption," said Kelly Degnan.

## President Zourabichvili to Represent Georgia at Summit for Democracy 2023



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Public Defender Levan Ioseliani Says Returning Mikheil Saakashvili to Prison Hospital May Damage his Health Further



Public defender Levan Ioseliani spoke to the media about the statement issued by the Vivamed clinic about Mikheil Saakashvili in which the clinic stated that they are 'forced' to contact the penitentiary service to assess the feasibility of Mikheil Saakashvili's delay in the clinic.

He said that returning to the prison hospital may be dangerous for Mikheil Saakashvili's health. However, he noted that he does not know if this statement means that the Penitentiary Service will return Saakashvili to prison.

"I don't know whether the statement implies his return to prison or not, maybe we are talking about transferring him to another civilian clinic. As far as I know, the Public Defender stated that returning to the prison hospital could be dangerous for his health. According to my information, the members of the Council agree. I share the position that the public defender had toward Mikheil Saakashvili. I don't want any type of action to be taken against him that could aggravate or worsen his health condition. In which clinic Saakashvili will be transferred is not our prerogative," he said. Levan Ioseliani said that the group of the Public Defender's

Consilium will have complete freedom regarding visiting Mikheil Saakashvili in clinic Vivamed and said that Consilium will visit him in the near future. Ioseliani also plans to visit Mikheil Saakashvili.

Kelly Degnan Responds to Gharibashvili, Says Information in State Department's Report Verified

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan told reporters that the issues included in the reports of the State Department of the United States of America have been verified many times.

On March 20, 2022, the US State Department published a report on human rights which also covers the situation in Georgia on which Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili commented and said the State Department relies on 'unfair' and 'subjective' conclusions provided by elite non-governmental organizations in this report.

"The US has been reporting

on human rights for decades. They are about problems, not

These reports are important and I would encourage people to



political parties or personalities. Their material is obtained from a range of reliable sources, and we check and recheck them to ensure that the information in the report is reliable.

read the previous reports because they chronicle the areas where progress was needed and often the areas where progress has actually been made," Kelly Degnan said.

Opinion & Analysis

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Russian-Style Law Aftermath in Georgian Politics

The developments in Georgia have been unpredictable and full of surprises. Recently, the Georgian Dream, along with its division People's Power, passed a law on 'foreign agents' in the first reading. However, after two days of protests on March 8-9, the same members of parliament rejected the law in its second reading due to the mass protests. Despite this, anti-Western rhetoric and threats of repression continued to persist. As a result, many have made various predictions about future events in the country.

The reasons behind the sudden withdrawal of the draft law on agents have become clearer. Two factors played a significant role: firstly, the scale of the protest movement, which was largely led by youth, could not be quelled despite the authorities' repressive measures. It was apparent that the movement would continue to grow if the law were to pass. Secondly, the West warned that personal sanctions would be imposed

on the Georgian Dream leaders and Bidzina Ivanishvili, who was perceived to be the driving force behind the party.

Although the draft law was withdrawn, the comments made by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and Irakli Kobakhidze indicated that the withdrawal was a tactical retreat. Gharibashvili issued threats of repression against the young protesters, accused the UNM and Western-controlled NGOs of supporting them, and referred to them as anarchists and Satanists. He also warned MEPs to be cautious and claimed that over 100 MEPs were involved in corruption scandals. Furthermore, he reiterated that the West was seeking to involve Georgia in a war. Alt-Info, a far-right activist group, was also activated, and its members removed and burned the EU flag in front of the parliament building. The police made no attempt to stop them. In short, the official rhetoric and actions of the government have remained unchanged, both domestically and internationally.

The opposition forces are try-

ing to use the government's retreat and are trying to put on the agenda the fulfillment of 12 demands of the European Union, for which the Georgian government has given a deadline until autumn. The new leader of the United National Movement Khabeishvili gave the government until April 9 to fulfill these demands and announced a new action on that day.

Adoption of the Agents Law in the first reading and the protest wave caused by this law turned out to be a severe test for the Georgian Dream. Several of their deputies did not show up for the voting, and two did not vote for the bill. There are rumors that 4 or 6 deputies of the Georgian Dream will leave the party.

If this happens, the Georgian Dream will lose its parliamentary majority and it will need the support of the satellite factions in the parliament - European Socialists, Girchi and Citizens. One of the latter two-member factions was elected as public defender exactly at the beginning of the actions.

Bidzina Ivanishvili's personal lawyer Viktor Kifiani suddenly

made political statements. On March 10, he criticized Georgian Dream for trying to pass a law on agents, noting that recently the "politics of the struggle for power" overshadowed the "long-term goals and priorities of the country's development."

In response, the representatives of the Georgian Dream announced that Viktor Kipiani is no longer Ivanishvili's lawyer and hinted at the existing conflict between them. However, a number of commentators point out that this may be another political maneuver of Ivanishvili and he is trying to create a new political force based on the few deputies who may leave the Georgian Dream ranks. This hypothetical political force will separate from the Georgian Dream and its current leaders, who have effectively lost the opportunity to dialogue with the West with their anti-Western statements.

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The charm of such elections for the government is that, unlike the next election in 2024, it will be held not by the proportional system, but by the existing mixed system, when 30 out of 150 parliamentarians will be elected by majority rule. In parliamentary elections, the candidate of the government is practically guaranteed to win.

The Georgian Dream, by introducing the Law on Agents to the political scene and forcibly withdrawing it did a lot of damage to its image and political positions and gave impetus to the processes that could create a new political reality in the near future.

Weather

Friday, March 24

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 20°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 8°C

Saturday, March 25

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 19°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 9°C

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