

Pawel Herczynski Says Georgia's EU Candidacy Status Depends on Achieved Progress

By Liza Mchedlidze

EU Ambassador to Georgia H.E. Pawel Herczynski while speaking to reporters during his visit to Georgia, expressed hope that Georgia would be granted candidate status for EU membership which will bring huge benefits to the country.

As the ambassador noted, membership of the European Union means stability, peace, prosperity, and raising the standard of living.

Herczynski states that the EU is trying to help Georgia to get the candidate status at the end of this year, but it depends on the progress that will be achieved by all the political forces of Georgia.

"I am very happy to be in Georgia at this historic moment. Georgia has decided to apply for EU membership. 27 member states decided to give Georgia a European perspective. Work is now underway to implement the 12 priorities. This is still a work in progress. We will assess progress at the end of the year and the 27 member states will decide on next steps in December. I hope there will be a positive decision and Georgia will be given the candidate status. This is not the end of the road.

If candidate status is granted, it will be another step towards EU membership. There will also be many more steps. As a del-



egation of the European Union, we are here to be with Georgia on the path to EU membership. I hope that Georgia will become a member of the European Union and this will bring enormous

benefits to Georgia. Membership of the European Union means stability, peace, prosperity, raising the standard of living.

We are working in this direction, but it requires national

approval. This requires the joint work of all political forces, in the spirit of compromise, inclusiveness and constructiveness. The work continues and we will see, the final decision will de-

pend on the progress made by Georgia. This will be the decision of the 27 member states of the European Union," Herczynski said.

By Liza Mchedlidze

GYLA Concludes Presumption of Innocence of Lazare Grigoriadis was 'Repeatedly Violated' by Gov't Officials



Georgian Young Lawyers Association responded to the case of 21-year-old Lazare Grigoriadis, the arrested activist accused of throwing a 'Molotov cocktail' at police during the 'Foreign Agents' bill protests in March.

GYLA, based on public sources, believes that there may be cases of violation of the defendant's rights and called on the Special Investigation Service and the Public Defender to act in accordance with their mandate.

According to GYLA's assessment, the discriminatory statements made by government officials may negatively impact Lazare Grigoriadis' right to a fair trial.

"Regarding the arrest of Lazare Grigoriadis, the chairman of the ruling party, Irakli Kobakhidze, made a discriminatory statement. His statement was not only homophobic, but also aimed at forming negative attitudes about Lazare Grigoriadis in the general public.

The statement made by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili regarding the participants of the March 7-8 rally is also problem-

atic," GYLA statement reads.

According to the organization, despite the fact that Gharibashvili did not directly name Grigoriadis' name, the sentence he said had a context which was detectable by the public, thereby violating the presumption of innocence of Grigoriadis.

"Also, the day before, on April 2, 2023, the TV company Imedi program in Imedi Week, the presenter mentioned Lazare Grigoriadis as convicted in the past, the program also spread the materials of the ongoing criminal case against Lazare, in such a way that it would have caused a negative attitude towards Lazare Grigoriadis in society.

It should be emphasized that on March 31, 2023, at the public session of the first presentation of Lazare Grigoriadis in court, the judge confirmed that Lazare has not been convicted," the organization noted.

GYLA concluded that the presumption of innocence of Lazare Grigoriadis was repeatedly violated by the statements made by politicians and the false information about his criminal record was spread.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Public Defender's Medical Council Says Mikheil Saakashvili's Health Condition has Worsened



საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველი PUBLIC DEFENDER (OMBUDSMAN) OF GEORGIA

The medical council created by the Public Defender has pub-

lished the results of the visit to Mikheil Saakashvili at the 'Vivamed' clinic on Sunday, April 2.

It is emphasized in the information that due to the visit on a non-working day, unfortunately, it was not possible to interview the attending physician or review the medical documentation on the spot.

According to doctors, the patient's condition worsened after February 19 (previous visit to the patient) and the objective examination found severe sarcopenia, a muscle degeneration.

Doctors wrote that Mikheil Saakashvili has lost another 4 kilograms at the expense of significant muscle relaxation and that his movement is significantly limited due to weakness. "Currently, unsupervised

movement of the patient is dangerous, as the risk of falling, body damage/fractures is very high. In the case of the latter, the resource of the cachexic body to heal the wound or fracture is very low, which will lead to the cascading development of other critical complications (hemorrhage, infection, deep vein thrombosis, etc.) with a high probability of lethal outcome," the statement reads.

Lelo MP Ana Natsvlshvili Denied Permission to Visit Grigoriadis by Parliament Chairman Shalva Papuashvili

Lelo's leader Ana Natsvlshvili stated that she could not get permission from the



speaker of the parliament to visit Lazare Grigoriadis in prison.

"As a member of the parliament, I asked for permission to visit Lazare, which I have the right to do as a deputy. Unfortunately, the Speaker of the Parliament refused me to visit Grigoriadis in prison. This happened without any explanation. It was reported that his rights were being violated in prison.

The chairman of the parliament refuses to allow the MP to use the constitutional right without explaining any reason. Under these conditions, the suspicion deepens that his rights are under serious risk" said Natsvlshvili.

In response to Ana Natsvlshvili, Shalva Papuashvili stated that entering a penitentiary institution and visiting a prisoner is not the right of a deputy, it is the right of the chairman of the parliament, which he can delegate to a member of the parliament.

Papuashvili said that this right is used extensively by the members of the parliament and sometimes exceeds the limit defined by the rule.

Papuashvili added that he sees the 'danger' of politicizing this issue.

Opinion & Analysis

Georgia's European future hinges on fulfilling EU recommendations

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

In Georgia, there was a generous response to the statement of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, that the negotiations on the accession of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia to the European Union should begin by the end of the year.

The subject of the dispute is the state of implementation of Article 12 of the European Union. The Georgian Dream claims to have fulfilled 10 points of the recommendations, while the opposition considers only 1 point fulfilled and states that the Dream is not going to fulfill the recommendations and brings Georgia's European perspective to a dead end.

Unlike Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova already have EU candidate status. On June 17, 2022, the European Commission issued a recommendation to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, and Georgia must fulfill 12 recommendations named by the European Union to receive this status. According to Charles Michel, the European Union is ready to start negotiations with all three countries, but if the interim conclusion of the European Commission, which will be published in April,

are not positive in relation to Georgia, it is doubtful that Georgia will end up next to Ukraine and Moldova.

Such doubt is already raised by the fact that Charles Michel, who made the mentioned statement in Chisinau and did not even consider paying Tbilisi a visit. And rightfully so, one might say. He visited Tbilisi three times during his office and reached an agreement between the government and the opposition on April 19, 2021, but after 100 days, the Georgian Dream unilaterally left the agreement, thus refusing to fulfill the terms of the agreement.

After Charles Michel's statement, the representatives of the Georgian Dream confidently declared that they have positive expectations because they have actually fulfilled the 12 points of the European Union. According to Irakli Kobakhidze, the Georgian Dream Chairman, 10 points have been fulfilled without the participation of the "radical opposition", with the unilateral responsibility of the government.

The remaining two bills will be adopted by the end of June. Anri Okhanashvili, the chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Parliament, said that Georgia has fulfilled the 12-point plan as much as possible, is way ahead of Ukraine and

Moldova and deserved a candidate status.

As already said, already in April, the European Commission will present an interim conclusion, on which the European future of Georgia depends. If the European partners see progress, then Georgia, like Moldova and Ukraine, will have the opportunity to get candidate status.

As we have seen, the government expresses its optimistic mood, but the opposition and the civil sector are skeptical. Opponents of the government believe that the "Georgian Dream" not only failed, but did not fulfill part of the specific recommendations and, along with that, with the continuous criticism of Western politicians and structures, the relations with Brussels have reached a peak of tension over the last year.

According to the opinion of the opposition, what the government claims to have been completed are actually either bogus changes, or they are directly tailored to the interests of the Georgian Dream. An example of this is the 'de-oligarchization' law, which has not been adopted and is one of the most important of the 12 recommendations.

The draft law developed by the Georgian Dream is specifically structured in such a way that it does not apply to Bidzina

Ivanishvili because he has on paper left politics and is "engaged in charity work".

The law of de-oligarchization will be implemented against the big businessmen who finance the opposition. The leaders of the Georgian Dream directly stated that the European Parliament does not mean Ivanishvili in de-oligarchization. That is why, on July 12 of last year, European parliamentarian Rasa Yukneviciani said that the de-oligarchization of Georgia means re-innovation.

The Georgian Dream categorically denies the existence of political prisoners in Georgia and categorically excludes the release of Nika Gvaramia and the transfer of Mikheil Saakashvili abroad for treatment. They also state that nothing is said about this in paragraph 12.

Nevertheless, the position of the European Union will soon become clear. If Georgia does not deserve the status of a candidate, the Georgian Dream will strengthen its anti-Western statements and announce that Georgia did not receive the status of a candidate because it "did not open a second front" and did not engage in a war against Russia.

In addition, it will further reinforce the Georgian Dream's criticism of the 'radical opposition', whom they accuse of not

contributing to the implementation of the 12-point plan and attempting to jeopardize Georgia's candidate status during their visits to the West.

While there is some time left before the conclusion of the European Union, the part of the opposition does not lose hope and notes that in case of joint work and determination, it is possible to fulfill the 12 points in the shortest possible time, which only requires the appropriate political will from the government.

The second part of the opposition believes that the Georgian Dream does not fulfill the 12 points because their fulfillment means the end of the oligarchic rule. That is why they believe that the only way is to put pressure on the Georgian Dream with protest actions and to introduce personal sanctions from the West.

A protest rally with this incentive was announced by the UNM on April 9. However, some other opposition parties do not join this. They did not like the fact that one party, without an agreement with others, scheduled a protest rally on a day that is of great importance for Georgia. Attending the rally will be a recognition of the leadership of the United National Movement by the opposition, which is disputed by a number of parties.

Weather

Wednesday, April 5

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 22°C

Night T-storm

Low: 11°C

Thursday, April 6

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 18°C

Night T-storm

Low: 9°C

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