

## EU Ambassador to Georgia Highlights Importance of Avoiding Use of Georgia to Evade Russia Sanctions, Expresses Hope for Georgia's EU Accession Progress

By Liza Mchedlidze

In a recent statement, the EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, highlighted the importance of ensuring that Georgia is not used to evade sanctions against Russia. According to Herczynski, the European Union has imposed the toughest sanctions against Russia as part of a multilateral policy aimed at changing Russia's behavior and ending the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Herczynski stressed that the EU's sanctions against Russia are an essential element of this policy, and all 27 member states have agreed on a new package of sanctions each time. The EU is also working together with international partners to ensure that the sanctions are effective.

While acknowledging that different countries contribute to joint efforts against Russia in different ways, Herczynski stated that Georgia has imposed some but not all of the EU's sanctions. He urged the country to ensure that its territories and companies are not used to evade sanctions, saying, "We want Georgia to ensure that it is not used to evade sanctions. At the moment, we have no information that Georgia is helping Russia to evade sanctions."

Herczynski emphasized that the EU's ultimate goal is to change Russia's behavior and put an end to the war in Ukraine. He called on Russia to stop its aggression against Ukraine and to work towards a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Pawel Herczynski also expressed his hope for Georgia to make progress in



implementing reforms, to pave the way for its accession to the European Union (EU). He emphasized that the EU wants to expand and offer other countries, including Georgia, the opportunity to join their family of 27 sovereign nations. However, he noted that the decision to join the EU ultimately lies with Georgia and its people.

Herczynski mentioned that the current support for European integration and EU membership in Georgia is the

highest in history, at 89%. He assured that the EU is there to support and help the Georgian government in achieving its goal of joining the EU. However, he emphasized that this is a process that every country that has joined the EU had to go through and it is in the hands of Georgian political elites to make sufficient progress in terms of implementing necessary reforms.

"We respect whatever decision is made by Georgia, by the Georgian political elite,

by the Georgian population. We are here to help, to support and to ensure that the Government of Georgia has all the necessary support to achieve this goal, but this work is for Georgians to do," Herczynski said.

EU Ambassador to Georgia expressed his hope that Georgia will continue to make appropriate progress in implementing reforms, so that the EU can continue to take steps towards Georgia's accession to the EU family.

## Tbilisi Mayor Claims Denial of EU Candidate Status was Political Due to Reluctance to Join Sanctions Against Russia

By Liza Mchedlidze

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze recently spoke out about Georgia's failure to be granted candidate status for European Union membership, stating that it was a political decision rather than a reflection of Georgia's progress towards meeting EU membership requirements. He argued that the Georgian government's reluctance to join EU sanctions against Russia and its peaceful approach towards conflict resolution made it a problem for some EU member states, who were looking to use Georgia as leverage in their dealings with Russia.

Kaladze reiterated his belief that Georgia had made significant progress towards meeting the requirements for EU membership, citing the country's implementation of reforms and efforts to combat corruption. He acknowledged that candidate status had been granted to Ukraine and Moldova, but argued that Georgia deserved the same recognition for its achievements.

According to Kaladze, the public in Georgia understood that the denial of candidate status was

a political decision, and were aware of the reasons behind it. He maintained that the government's peaceful approach to conflict resolution and its refusal to join sanctions against Russia were factors that made it a target for political leverage.

Kakha Kaladze expressed his hope that Georgia would eventually receive the status of a candidate for the European Union. According to him, the Georgian government is prepared to fulfill all the necessary requirements to receive this status. However, he acknowledged that the decision ultimately lies with the EU and that it is out of Georgia's hands. Regardless of the outcome, he emphasized that the government will continue to work meticulously to implement reforms and fight corruption.

When asked about the government's compliance with the 12-point plan, Kaladze clarified that there was no mention of Nika Gvaramia or Mikheil Saakashvili in the plan. He reassured the public that the government is committed to fulfilling the plan and that the status of a candidate for the EU is not contingent on the fate of these individuals.





Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.4940; Euro - 2.7449; GBP - 3.1237; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.1153; Swiss Franc - 2.7938

# Georgian politics marred by scandals

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Scandals have never been alien to Georgian politics, but recently, the number of scandals has increased dramatically. This is an indicator that a normal political process is not taking place in the country. In order to normalize the situation, first of all, the 12 requirements of the European Union, which were set as a prerequisite for Georgia's candidate status, should be fulfilled. After all, this was a peculiar democratic audit of the current political system of Georgia, conducted by friends.

If we were to try to compile the top five or ten of the last consecutive scandals in Georgian politics, what criteria should we rely on? The noise caused by the scandal in today's politics or the probable consequences of this scandal for Georgian politics in the future? Both are clearly important. Although the first criterion is obvious, the second is tentative and therefore controversial.

One of the most recent scandals was President Salome Zurbashvili suddenly canceling

her speech in the European Parliament. Before that, a number of statements by the President about the current state of Georgian politics were well received in the West and by a part of the Georgian opposition but instead irritated the Georgian Dream.

They demanded that the President to take certain steps that were in her hands, and first of all, to pardon Nika Melia. The President did not do this and then canceled her speech to the European Parliament, which was supposed to take place during her working visit to France on April 17-19.

The President blamed the government for this, artificially delaying the approval process. However, she immediately received an answer from the government, saying that on April 12, she asked for approval in writing, and on April 13, it was already given.

The President's canceled visit to Strasbourg did not make much noise because it was overshadowed by other scandals. However, from the point of view of future politics, the President's speech in Strasbourg could bring significant positive results for Georgia

and for the President herself.

Canceling the visit to Strasbourg did not bring anything to the country and harmed the image of the President. Some people from the opposition said that she did not go because she had nothing to say. Others said, "It has once again appeared that Salome Zurbashvili is being controlled by Bidzina Ivanishvili." As was already said, after the well-received speeches of Salome Zurbashvili, they asked her to take concrete steps.

In addition to the pardon of Nika Gvaramia, the 4th President of Georgia, Giorgi Margvelashvili, asked the 5th President to pardon the 3rd President, Mikheil Saakashvili, so that he would not share the fate of the first President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who, according to the official version, committed suicide in unclear circumstances.

On April 11, Mikheil Saakashvili's lawyers appealed to the Strasbourg court regarding the serious health condition of the imprisoned President. On April 14, it became known that before making a decision, addi-

tional information was requested in Strasbourg, both from Saakashvili's lawyers and from the Georgian government. The main intrigue here is whether the Strasbourg court will make a decision on Saakashvili's release 'due to urgent need'.

Zurbashvili's canceled visit was marred by two foreign scandals. On April 5, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the US State Department had sanctioned four Georgian judges "for their involvement in significant corrupt activities." This was followed by an article published by the UK Public Broadcasting BBC on April 12 about "call centers" that allegedly robbed European pensioners, implicating several individuals, including Davit Kezerashvili.

The Georgian Dream party was outraged by the sanctions against the judges and dismissed the US decision as groundless. The opposition attempted to create a parliamentary investigative commission, which required 50 votes. They were able to collect enough votes, which surprised the Georgian Dream, but the

majority of deputies did not register, resulting in the commission being unable to be formed due to a lack of quorum. The Georgian Dream claims that their action was out of solidarity with the unjustly sanctioned judges. However, the opposition believes that it reveals the government's connection with the judicial clan and their fear of revealing corrupt links between the judiciary and executive power.

The scandal caused by the BBC publication mentioning Kezerashvili as one of the possible defendants put the opposition in an awkward position because Kezerashvili finances several opposition parties and owns the opposition television company Formula. The authorities used the BBC publication to bring new charges against Kezerashvili. Kezerashvili denies the accusations and claims that he will reveal more about the connections between the call centers and the Georgian Dream.

Both the scandals surrounding the judges and the call centers are still unfolding, and more revelations are expected in the future, unless, of course, even more scandalous news overshadows them partially or completely.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili Meets With Permanent Representatives of the United Nations Member States



The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, held a meeting with the permanent representatives of different countries at the United Nations, as reported by his press office. This meeting took place during the visit of these representatives to Georgia, which was announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and is scheduled

to take place between April 30 and May 5.

At the meeting held in the government administration, as per the reports of the representatives, the cooperation dynamics between the countries were discussed, and the significance of reinforcing collaboration based on shared interests was underscored.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister highlighted that the Georgian government considers the advancement of global partnership as one of its top priorities. The representatives also discussed the progress made by Georgia in implementing effective reforms, and the Prime Minister expressed the willingness to share the country's experience of successful and internationally

acclaimed reforms in diverse domains.

### Tbilisi City Court Rejects Bail Request for Lazare Grigoriadis, Accused of Throwing Molotov Cocktail and Burning Police Car during March Protests

Lazare Grigoriadis, who is accused of throwing a Molotov cocktail and burning a police car during the March protests, was brought to the Tbilisi City Court for a pre-trial session. The trial began with the defense filing a motion to replace Grigoriadis' preventive measure, which is imprisonment, with a bail of 20,000 GEL. According to the defense, there was no risk of Grigoriadis absconding, and he



would cooperate fully with the investigation if released on bail.

Grigoriadis, in his statement to the court, reiterated the same argument as his lawyers and said that he had no intention of fleeing from the authorities. He added that he had worn the same clothes during the rally and at the time of his arrest, indicating that he had nothing to hide. "I will say the same thing about hiding. If I wanted to hide, I would hide for a month. Even the clothes I was wearing

during the arrest, I wore them at the rally as well," said Grigoriadis.

The prosecution opposed the motion and argued that the preventive measure should be upheld as Grigoriadis posed a flight risk, given the severity of the charges against him. The prosecutor also highlighted that the investigation was still ongoing, and the possibility of influencing witnesses could not be ruled out.

After hearing both sides, Judge Nato Khujadze refused to grant the defense's motion and ruled that Grigoriadis should remain in custody until the trial. The decision was met with disappointment by Grigoriadis and his legal team, who argued that the detention was unjustified and that the defendant was innocent until proven guilty.

## Weather

Tuesday, May 2

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 15°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 6°C

Wednesday, May 3

Day Light Rain  
High: 10°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 5°C

## Committee for European Union affairs of the German Bundestag visits Tbilisi

A delegation from the committee for European Union affairs of the German Bundestag will visit Georgia from May 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Members of the delegation are: Christian Petry (SPD, Head of delegation), Ralph Brinkhaus (CDU/CSU), Michael Sacher (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN), Thomas Hacker (FDP) and Dr. Harald Weyel

(AfD). During the visit, meetings are planned with the Minister of Justice, H.E. Rati Bregadze, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, H.E. Levan Davitashvili, and Deputy Foreign Minister, H.E. Teimuraz Janjalia. Furthermore, the delegation will hold talks with the Speaker of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili

and the chairmen of several committees of the Georgian Parliament. The program is completed by exchanges with representatives of civil society, the media, business and cultural institutions. As Georgia submitted an application for membership to the European Union in March 2022 and has had the prospect of joining the EU since

June 2022, the talks will concern necessary reforms and the structure of relations and cooperation between Georgia and the EU. Against the background of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, the focus will also be on coordinating questions of foreign and security policy, as well as on the regional effects of the war and geopolitical aspects.

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