

## Concerned Georgian Citizens Submit Petition Urging Action on Russia's Decision to Cancel Visa Regime and Lift Flight Ban

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

A petition has been published on [manifest.ge](http://manifest.ge) where citizens of Georgia express concerns about the decision made by Russian President Vladimir Putin to cancel the visa regime and lift the ban on direct flights from Russia to Georgia, effective from May 15, 2023. The petition emphasizes the dangers associated with this decision and calls for specific actions from the Georgian authorities.

The Georgian authorities have voiced their support for the decision to lift the ban on direct flights and cancel the visa regime with Russia. However, the petition signifies the concerns of Georgian citizens who strongly oppose the idea of deepening relations with Russia.

The petition outlines several points that the citizens of Georgia acknowledge. They first highlight the occupation of 20% of Georgian territory by Russia and the ongoing creeping occupation of the country by the aggressor. They further condemn Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine, including the capture and destruction of cities, as well as the loss of innocent lives. The petition underscores the increasing

international isolation of Russia, citing the International Criminal Court's issuance of an arrest warrant for the Russian President.

Given the Georgian people's solidarity with Ukraine and the sacrifices made by Georgian soldiers in the fight for Ukraine's freedom, the citizens perceive the warming relations with Russia by the Georgian government as a treacherous step that undermines the country's statehood. They express concern about the potential risks posed by an uncontrolled influx of Russian citizens into Georgia, emphasizing the security implications.

Moreover, the citizens argue that aligning closer with Russia would mean moving away from the European Union and the civilized world. They anticipate adverse consequences such as losing strategic partners, becoming economically and politically dependent on Russia, and impeding the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity. They strongly object to the notion of becoming a part of Russia.

In light of these concerns, the petition puts forth specific demands to the Georgian authorities. It urges the establishment of a visa regime for Russian citizens, which would enable stricter control

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პრობლემა შექმნა



39444 ნიშნა

12 მაისი, 2023

over their entry into Georgia. Additionally, the petition calls for a refusal to resume direct flights with Russia, emphasizing the dangers associated with such a move. Lastly, the citizens demand that

the Georgian authorities reject any secret agreements with Russia and take all necessary measures to facilitate integration into the European Union, aligning with the provisions outlined in the

Georgian constitution.

A petition signed by 6,084 Georgian citizens has been submitted to the Sectoral Economy Committee of the Parliament of Georgia for consideration.

## Applications for Direct Flights Under Review Following Putin's Decree, Says Economy Minister Levan Davitashvili

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

After the government session, Economy Minister Levan

Davitashvili provided an update during a briefing concerning the flights from Russia. He reiterated that the decision to cancel

the flights was made unilaterally by Russia and emphasized that the Georgian government had no involvement in this deci-

sion.

Davitashvili stated that following Putin's decree on the resumption of direct flights, Georgia has already received several applications from both Russian and Georgian airlines by the end of last week. He mentioned that they have received applications from three airlines, but the documentation is currently under review.

"...now let's discuss our choices and actions. After the decision was made last week, we received inquiries from both Russian and Georgian airlines. We engaged in an intensive collaboration with internal experts, as well as experts from the Ministry and the Civil Aviation Agency, to analyze the existing practices regarding flights with Russia.

We have adopted the most stringent approach worldwide, which countries follow when conducting flights with Russia. Our decision is based on multiple cri-

teria:

Firstly, we will not permit sanctioned companies, specifically those listed by the European Union (EU).

Secondly, our primary objective is to ensure flight safety, so our decision must align with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) requirements. Consequently, aircraft lacking access to technical information and qualified repair and service facilities cannot operate in Georgian airspace. On the other hand, we will allow companies that meet these requirements to resume their flights," stated Davitashvili.

The Economy Minister stated that the applications received will be thoroughly examined within the day to assess the extent to which each company complies with the two criteria established by them. Subsequently, information regarding the issuance of flight permissions will be disseminated.





# Unifying the Opposition: Navigating Challenges and Opportunities in Georgia's Political Landscape

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Public opinion surveys published one after another by IRI and NDI showed approximately the same picture in terms of political ratings of the parties - the decrease in the rating of the ruling Georgian Dream does not mean an increase in the rating of the opposition parties.

In parallel with the low rating of the ruling party, approximately half of the respondents state that they do not support any political party.

Party ratings recorded as a result of public opinion research are always controversial. Let's leave aside the specific numbers and talk only about the clear trends, which cannot be questioned. First of all, it should be noted that over the last few years, the same result has been recorded - in the case of elections, only two political forces will cross the 5% threshold - the Georgian Dream in power and the National Movement in opposition. The rating of other parties is from 1 to 3%. Moreover, their mentioned indicator does not actually change after the 2016-2020 elections, and it seems unlikely that small opposition parties will cross the 5% threshold.

For the opposition political spectrum and for the country, it would certainly be good for the 5% threshold to be reduced even to 3%, the relevant bill has already been passed by the Parliament in two readings, but it is doubtful that the Georgian Dream will agree to reduce the electoral threshold. Of course, lowering the threshold allows the party in power to facilitate the creation of satellite political parties, dummy opposition forces, and their entry into the parliament. This creates an image of multiple parties and 'neutralizes' the boycott announced by the opposition due to election fraud. Let's recall the parliamentary elections of 2020 when no opposition party entered the parliament and the Georgian Dream with a guaranteed majority was alone in the legislative body.

But lowering the barrier has a bigger disadvantage - along with the official satellite parties, the real opposition, which has been given the name of 'radical' and 'destructive' by the government, will enter the parliament. Therefore, according to experts, the Georgian Dream will not risk and will maintain the existing barrier, which many op-

position parties will find difficult to overcome.

Today we have the following situation - the next parliamentary elections should be held in the autumn of 2024, with a purely proportional system and a 5% threshold, and the participation of party blocs in the elections is prohibited.

All parties should go to the election marathon separately. In such conditions, there has been talk of unification of parties for a long time. If earlier this was facilitated by the possibility of creating a block, now it is a matter of direct merging of parties. It is difficult to say what the parties themselves think, but it is a subject of wide discussion by experts and the media.

One option is the unification of opposition parties around the main and strongest opposition party the National Movement, a similar thing was already tried by some parties in the 2020 parliamentary elections, but it did not lead to victory. Many also say that if the National Movement remains the main opposition force against the Georgian Dream, the 'Dream' will win again, because people who are disappointed with the current government do not want the UNM to return to power.

Mikheil Saakashvili, who is in the hospital, is no longer the 'main threat', but behind the 'National Movement' Kezerashvili, who was involved in a scandal, and the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Merabishvili, appeared instead. It is doubtful that the mentioned persons will increase the rating of the National Movement. In addition, there is a split in the National Movement itself.

The current leader of the UNM party Levan Khabeishvili and his supporters, behind whom Kezerashvili-Merabishvili is thought to be, are opposed by the old leader Nika Melia and his supporters. It is probably impossible to reconcile them, and the object of the struggle is the name of the party and the ownership of the structures. In such a situation, it would probably be more reasonable for Nika Melia and his supporters to create a separate party and manage to form it in the remaining period before the elections and attract part of the UNM electorate.

Several political groups separated from the National Movement, which today are represented as separate political parties ('European Georgia', 'Droa', 'Girchi' by Zurab Japaridze, 'Strategy Agmashenebeli').

Those parties whose history does not include the 'National Movement' can unite separately. 'Lelo' and former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's 'For Georgia', which separated from 'Georgian Dream' and took part in its electorate, are considered such relatively influential opposition forces. But the relationship between the leaders of these two parties is strained and there are serious problems stemming from the past.

When they talk about the possible unification of the opposition, they also mention one existing danger. With its current total rating, the opposition exceeds the rating of the Georgian Dream, but their unification does not mean an automatic unification of separate ratings. On the contrary, in the case of such a merger, some parties may lose their electorate. For example, it is unimaginable to unite any party that came out of the National Movement with that of Gakharia's. Therefore, we should not rule out that a number of opposition parties will think of increasing their 2-3% rating to 5% and will pay the main attention to that large segment of voters, which no political party likes today.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Georgian Civil Aviation Agency Affirms Strict Criteria for Flights Between Georgia and Russia to Exclude Sanctioned Airlines



The Georgian Civil Aviation Agency has issued a statement

asserting that Georgia maintains a strong stance on permitting flights between Georgia and the Russian Federation only by airlines and aircraft not subject to sanctions.

"Consequently, the Civil Aviation Agency will meticulously examine and verify all applications, information, and documentation submitted by airlines, taking into account various mechanisms related to sanctions.

Simultaneously, the agency engages in consultations with states that adhere to sanctions while maintaining direct air traffic with the Russian Federation, studying their practices as well," stated the agency.

Based on their reports, the Civil Aviation Agency of Georgia has currently received applications from multiple airlines seeking to establish regular air traffic between Georgia and Russia. Nevertheless, the agency has

chosen not to disclose which airlines have submitted these applications.

"We emphatically state that, in relation to each appeal submitted to the Civil Aviation Agency, the decision will be made after conducting a detailed study of the current status of the airlines and their aircraft in relation to international sanctions or restrictions. Flight permits will be issued in accordance with the aforementioned principle," the statement reads.

### Danish Foreign Minister Affirms Support for Georgia's European Aspirations During Joint Press Conference

During a joint press conference with Georgian Foreign Minister Iliia Darchiashvili, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen expressed Denmark's backing for Georgia's European aspirations, affirming that their country's response regarding the candidate

status would be positive.

"You will obtain candidate status in the fall when we witness the implementation of recommendations from the European Commission. It is a merit-based pathway to the EU, and all of this is interconnected with the Copenhagen criteria. We aim to

assist Georgia in meeting these criteria. If Georgia fulfills these criteria based on recommenda-

tions and decisions, Denmark will lend its support for the granting of candidate status," stated Rasmussen. As per the statement of the Danish Foreign Minister, Denmark endorses Georgia's European aspirations, which are founded on the principles of hu-



man rights, the rule of law, and independent democratic institutions.

## Weather

Tuesday, May 16

Day Clear  
High: 22°C

Night Clear  
Low: 10°C

Wednesday, May 17

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 23°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 12°C

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