

Direct Flights to Russia Don't Violate International Sanctions, Parliament Chairman Says

By Liza Mchedlidze

According to the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia Shalva Papuashvili, direct flights to Russia are not in violation of any international sanctions. Papuashvili further emphasizes that the authorities of the Georgian Dream have consistently communicated their policy toward Russia for over a year.

In response to journalists' questions in the parliament, Papuashvili highlighted that none of the statements made by foreign politicians or organizations suggest that the direct flights between Georgia and Russia violate any international sanctions. He called for a recognition of the fact that these flights do not breach sanctions.

The chairman clarified that Georgia does not allow the circumvention of international sanctions and maintains an honest approach. Additionally, he noted that Georgia does not impose bilateral sanctions.

"Look at these statements; in no statement, whether from a foreign politician or an organization, does anyone claim that these flights circumvent or violate any sanctions. Let's agree that direct flights do not breach any international sanctions. If there are other motives behind these assessments, they should be openly discussed. For over a year now, we have already stated our policy regarding Russia. The policy is as follows: on one hand, we do not allow the circumvention of international sanctions by using Georgia, and in this regard, Georgia is absolutely hon-



est, without a single fact, rumor, or doubt. Secondly, we do not impose bilateral sanctions," Papuashvili stated.

According to him, the imposition of

sanctions could potentially escalate the situation and lead to unpredictable consequences:

"In a situation where no country or

organization offers guarantees of military and economic security to Georgia, it would be unjust to demand that Georgia impose bilateral sanctions," Papuashvili said.

Vice Speaker of Georgian Parliament Archil Talakvadze Reassures Georgia's Partners Amidst Concerns over Resumed Flights with Russia

By Liza Mchedlidze

Vice Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakvadze addressed the concerns raised by the US State Department, providing assurance to Georgia's partners that there is no need for alarm. He emphasized that Russia's decision was made unilaterally and without Georgia's involvement.

Talakvadze's response came after the concern was expressed by the US State Department, which advised against increasing engagement with Russia at the present moment.

Talakvadze criticized the demands of the 'radical' opposition regarding the movement of ordinary citizens, deeming them unacceptable and contrary to the interests of both citizens and society. He emphasized that it is unimaginable to consider imposing sanctions on Georgian citizens.

The Vice Speaker emphasized that the primary focus and efforts of their partners should be directed towards ensuring that Georgia promptly attains the status of a candidate for EU membership. He stressed that this decision holds significant importance and is timely for Georgia.

Talakvadze further highlighted that the delay in this decision has resulted in height-

ened risks, particularly in a region already facing substantial challenges. He pointed out the serious security threats posed by Russia towards the states whose territories it occupies.

"I want to assure our partners that there is no cause for concern. Russia unilaterally made the decision to sanction our citizens previously, and now they have made another unilateral decision without our participation.

The issue revolves around the movement of ordinary citizens, and the demands of the radical opposition are unacceptable, unbelievable, and contrary to the interests of our citizens and society. They are requesting that we sanction our own citizens, which is unimaginable.

I want to reassure our partners that there is no need to worry. Currently, our partners' main attention and efforts should be focused on ensuring that Georgia promptly attains the status of a candidate for EU membership. This decision is crucial and timely for Georgia.

We have witnessed that the postponement of this decision has resulted in increased risks, which are already significant in this region. Moreover, there are serious security challenges emanating from Russia towards the states whose territories it occupies," stated Talakvadze.



Putin's Calculated Maneuver: The Geopolitical Implications of Restoring Air Traffic and Scrapping Visa Regime with Georgia

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On May 10, it became known about Putin's decision - the Russian president restored direct air traffic and canceled the visa regime with Georgia. The Georgian government welcomed this move by Putin, while the opposition saw the further growth of Russia's influence on Georgia and a threat to Georgia's European future.

The Kremlin has always used economic ties to achieve its political goals. Georgia's 30-year post-Soviet experience with Russia is enough to convince us of this. The economic sanctions imposed by Russia on Georgia and the transition from sanctions to the 'dangling' policy served political goals.

Both the visa regime and direct air flights are political tools for the Kremlin, and this is how the step taken by Putin toward Georgia on May 10 should be perceived. The visa regime with Georgia was established by Putin himself in 2000, still during the period of Shevardnadze's rule. It was a tool to punish

Georgia - Putin did not like Shevardnadze's cautious Western course and was angry that Shevardnadze did not support his war against the Chechens.

For some reason, the Kremlin was convinced that Georgians could not tolerate the visa regime with Russia and that Shevardnadze would face problems. Georgia also introduced a visa regime with Russia, but soon after the August 2008 war, Saakashvili canceled the visa regime first with the North Caucasus and then with all of Russia. In these circumstances, the Georgian Dream came to power in 2012 and it is still maintaining the same policy.

After Putin attacked Ukraine, the visa-free regime with Russia turned into a national problem for Georgia, - the country has hundreds of thousands of Russian citizens, not a small part of which is planning to stay in Georgia for a long time. Nothing is hindering them from staying in the country. Public opinion polls show that a large part of the population of Georgia supports establishing a visa regime

for Russian citizens.

Pro-Western opposition parties are also calling for the necessity of establishing a visa regime with Russia. On May 10, President Salome Zurbishvili requested the convening of the Security Council to discuss the establishment of a three-month visa regime for Russian citizens and to control the activities of those Russian citizens who remained in Georgia. It is also clear that while the Georgian Dream is in power, it will not impose any restrictions on Russian citizens in Georgia.

As for the direct air connection between Georgia and Russia, Putin stopped and resumed it several times. Russia stopped direct flights to Georgia in October 2006, after Russian spies were arrested in Georgia. In 2008, direct flights resumed for a few months but were stopped again after the August war. The last direct flights to Georgia were stopped by Russia on July 8, 2019, after the sitting of the deputy of the Russian State Duma, Sergey Gavrilov, in the chair of the Georgian Parlia-

ment, caused a public protest.

The Georgian Dream government unanimously welcomed Putin's cancellation of the visa regime and the restoration of direct flights. The main argument was the citizens of Georgia in Russia, who would find it easier to connect with their homeland. But Putin did not take this step for 'humanist' reasons.

With this step taken on May 10, Putin is trying to achieve several goals:

1. He 'rewarded' the current government of Georgia for 'good' behavior, which Russian propagandists even noted when commenting on Putin's decision. This 'prize' will also benefit the Georgian dream before the 2024 elections, - here is my policy bringing results;

2. He showed the world that he actually perceives Georgia as an ally and expects more from it;

3. Georgia is seen in the Kremlin as a way to avoid Western sanctions. Russia will try to get the goods it needs through Georgia.

4. The restoration of direct flights with Russia and the mutual cancellation of the visa regime is likely to have a negative impact on obtaining EU candidate status;

5. With this step, Russia will try to bring Georgia even closer to its economic space, Russify economic institutions, and lead demographic expansion in Georgia on an even greater scale.

Deposits of Russians in Georgian banks exceeded 2 billion, compared to March 2022, in March 2023, the amount of remittances from Russia to Georgia increased 8.3 times and amounted to 224 million USD. The amount of real estate purchased by Russian citizens is increasing, they are buying apartments and land en masse, 17 thousand companies have been registered in Georgia by Russian citizens, and more than half of them were registered in Ukraine after the war started. In the not-so-distant future, the Kremlin will use all this to influence Georgia.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

US Department Raises Concerns over Resumption of Direct Flights between Russia and Georgia



During a press briefing held on May 22, the US Department

spokesperson, Matthew Miller, addressed questions regarding recent developments in Georgia, specifically concerning the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's sanctioned daughter to the country and Russian aircraft arriving in Tbilisi. The journalist questioned

Western countries, including the United States, already have restrictions in place, prohibiting Russian aircraft from entering their airspace.

Miller stated that the resumption of direct flights between Russia and Georgia could potentially have repercussions for companies operating within Georgian airports, exposing them to the risk of sanctions. Moreover, Miller emphasized that the Western community as a whole has distanced itself from Russia and stressed that now is not the time to increase engagement with them.

Prime Minister of Georgia Meets Emir of Qatar

Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, held a meeting with the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. According to the Georgian government administration, the discussions revolved around enhancing the cooperative relationship between the two nations

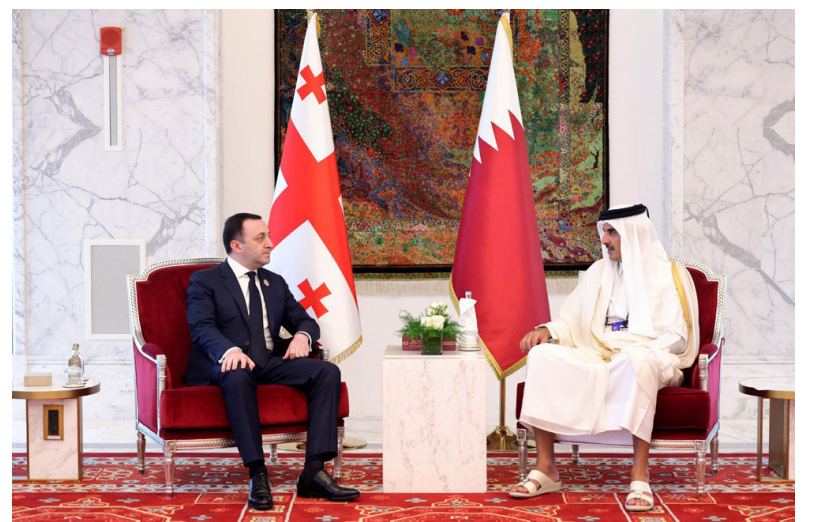
across multiple sectors.

Both sides acknowledged the significance of advancing economic cooperation, which remains a key priority on the economic diplomacy agenda of both Georgia and Qatar. The meeting also witnessed an expressed commitment to deepen and strengthen the existing economic and trade ties between the two countries.

The Prime Minister emphasized the Government of Georgia's eagerness to embrace

Qatari businessmen who are interested in making investments across diverse sectors within the country.

"Held productive talks with the Amir of the State of Qatar. Discussed economic relations between the countries and investment opps in Georgia. Strengthening bilateral partnership with the State of Qatar is of utmost importance for Georgia to reach new milestones in our fruitful cooperation!" Gharibashvili wrote on Twitter.



Weather

Wednesday, May 24

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 30°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 17°C

Thursday, May 25

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 31°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 16°C

the lack of US reaction and sanctions in response to these events.

In his response, Matthew Miller expressed concerns about the resumption of direct flights between Russia and Georgia.

The US Department spokesperson highlighted that many

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ROYAL DISTRICT THEATRE

MAKA MAKHARADZE'S BALLET STUDIO AND
ETERI ANDJAPARIDZE'S "PIANOTHEATRE"

Cast:
Eteri Andjaparidze,
Datuna Aladashvili
Piano Duo

„Vera District Dance Class“ Students
Actors: Maka Makharadze, Nata Murvanidze,
Tamar Makashvili, Nika Tetradze

Choreographer – Gvantsa Gavasheli
Costume designer – Anka Kalatozishvili
Manager – Nino Metreveli

Project Director
Maka
Makharadze



Sergei Prokofiev

Samuel Barber

PETER AND THE WOLF

(Musical Fairy Tale)

SOUVENIRS

(The Plaza Hotel Divertissement)

Thursday, 1 June
To International Children's
Protection Day

Friday, 2 June
To Lexo Toradze

Saturday, 3 June
To Temur Chkheidze

2023

20:00

