

Prime Minister Addresses Attack on Nova Kakhovka Dam, Stresses the Need for Peaceful Negotiations

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Prime Minister addressed the attack on the Nova Kakhovka Dam by Russia in Ukraine, and said that the explosion of the Nova Kakhovka Dam is a consequence of the brutal and destructive war being waged by Russia in Ukraine. However, according to him, this destruction is not a new occurrence, as 20 percent of Ukraine's territory has already been destroyed.

Irakli Gharibashvili highlighted that there are no apparent sincere efforts to end the war or start negotiations. Instead, he noted a concerning trend of escalating aggression without meaningful progress towards resolution.

"This is one of the results of this brutal war, the destructive war that Russia is waging in Ukraine. This is not new, the Kakhovka surprised you, but 20 percent of Ukraine's territory has been destroyed to date. Cities, villages are leveled to the ground. Kakhovka Dam is one of them. This is what we are talk-



ing about when we refer to the importance of peace on a daily basis. There is no alternative to peace. We don't really see, and I

don't think anyone does, any real efforts to end this war or calls for negotiations. On the contrary, we see more escalation,

more aggression, this is one of the manifestations and to this day, we remind you that as a result of this destructive war in

Ukraine, I repeat again, 20 percent is occupied, this is today's reality. It is said that a trillion dollars is the damage that has been done to Ukraine, and most of all, the lives of people are heavy. More than 500 children are dead and tens of thousands of people are dead. This is a disaster, this is a catastrophe that must be stopped," said Gharibashvili.

Gharibashvili expressed his belief that the logical end of the war can only be achieved through a collective effort to engage in peaceful negotiations. He emphasized that there is no alternative to this approach.

"I want to ask you, how do you imagine what could be the logical end of this war? I believe that everything should happen, everyone should make an effort to sit down to negotiate and start the process of peaceful negotiations. There is no alternative to this. I'll tell you why. Well, today you mentioned the dam, tomorrow there could be an even bigger disaster. The killing of people must be stopped; this is our position," Gharibashvili told journalists.

German Parliament Committee Chairman Supports Georgia's European Integration Efforts

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



During a press conference in Tbilisi, Michael Roth, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the German parliament, expressed appreciation for the solidarity shown by the Georgian citizens towards Ukraine and emphasized Georgia's crucial position within Europe, describing it as a country that holds a special place in the heart of Europe.

Roth praised the strong pro-European sentiment prevailing among the majority of Georgians and acknowledged that work still remains to be done. He emphasized that the responsibility to realize the dream of EU membership lies with both Georgian politicians and the EU itself, emphasizing the importance of close and effective collaboration. Roth also stressed the need for Georgia to continue implementing the EU's recommendations in order to secure candidate status.

However, Michale Roth also expressed concerns about recent developments in Tbilisi, noting that certain messages received were not entirely aligned with the desire to join the European Union. He called upon the Georgian government and parliament to fulfill their obligations and complete the 12 recommendations put forth by the EU.

Roth reminded Georgia that the EU has opened its doors, and it is now time for Georgia to fulfill its responsibilities. He raised concerns about certain politicians' statements on LGBT rights, urg-

ing a respectful approach in upholding human rights principles. Roth emphasized the importance of combating homophobia and avoiding stereotypes and clichés related to ethnic, religious, cultural, and sexual minorities.

Michael Roth called for Georgia to abandon any strategies that breed misunderstanding and to send a clear message to Brussels, highlighting the shared expectation of progress. Roth expressed hope that substantial advancements could be made in de-oligarchization, strengthening civil society, and implementing necessary reforms in the coming months.

"Now is the time to send a clear message to Brussels – we expect something from you too, but we are ready to fulfill our obligations, our work. I think it is not very simple. I very much hope that in the next few months, there is a real chance to do more with respect to de-oligarchization, strengthening the role of civil society, and carrying out other necessary reforms. No one wants to teach Georgia, although I believe the voice of the people in your country is often heard, and this voice is clear, sincere, and emotional - Please open the door. We have already opened the door, and now is the time for action and homework from both sides - Brussels and Tbilisi. Traditionally, Germany wants to play the role of an honest mediator. We want to build bridges that are acceptable and comfortable not only for politicians but also for citizens and civil society, and that's why I'm here," said Michael Roth.

Michael Roth reiterated his commitment to supporting Georgia's European integration and encouraged mutual cooperation, urging both sides to take action and fulfill their respective responsibilities.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6173; Euro - 2.7992; GBP - 3.2489; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2238; Swiss Franc - 2.8834

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgia's Democratic Decline

The international authoritative organization Freedom House has published the 2023 democracy assessment report. Georgia's democracy has taken a turn for the worse, with the lowest democracy score in the last 10 years. Georgia still remains in the category of hybrid regimes. Representatives of the government and the opposition give an opposite assessment to the report published by Freedom House. The government denies democratic backsliding, and the opposition criticizes the Georgian Dream for the backsliding of democracy.

According to the last report of Freedom House, Georgia has set another anti-record in the reversal of democracy. The democracy rate in Georgia decreased to 33.93%. In 2022, the democracy score dropped from 3.07 to 3.04. Georgia still remains in the category of hybrid regimes, but our country is already standing next to autocratic regimes. The reasons are explained one by one in the report. In 2022, Georgia took a step towards EU status, although structural problems remain in judicial independence, media freedom and multi-party governance. This prevents democratic development in the country and the processes of integra-

tion into the European Union.

According to the report of the world's authoritative organization, the reduction of the democracy index in Georgia was caused primarily by the restriction of media freedom. The rating of independent media decreased from 3.50 to 3.25 points, which is mainly caused by harassment of journalists and violence against them. According to the report, the arrest and trial of Nika Gvaramia, the general director of the Main Channel, had a particular impact on the situation of critical media. The organization notes that this is perceived as another attempt to suppress voices critical of the government.

Georgian Dream does not believe Freedom House's evaluations and claims the opposite. "Talking about the decline of democracy is speculation" - this is the answer of the chairman of Georgian Dream. According to him, the situation is the opposite. Georgia has no backwardness in terms of democracy. The leader of the official team claims that the media environment has only improved during their 10-year rule. "Media pluralism is one of the main achievements of our government. In our time, a

pluralistic media environment was formed, which has been preserved to this day," this is Kobakhidze's point of view.

Other representatives of the Georgian Dream say the same. For example, according to the Vice-Speaker of the Parliament, Giorgi Volski, the Freedom House report is 'biased and politically engaged'. According to him, media outlets were limited during Saakashvili's rule, and today "in terms of the number of television companies, Georgia ranks second or third in the world."

This is not the first time that the government has made such an assessment of the Freedom House report, and the new report also talks about it. It is emphasized that in 2022, acceptance of criticism by the Georgian Dream decreased, including from strategic partners. The report includes the ruling party's accusations against the West regarding "drawing Georgia into the war". It is said that the Georgian Dream designation of the opposition as a 'party of war' had a negative impact on democratic governance. Unlike the ruling party, the Freedom House report is considered by the opposition to be a real assessment of the

state of democracy in the country and a 'ground for alarm'.

For example, Irakli Kobakhidze, the general secretary of one of the opposition parties Lelo, believes that the main reason for the democratic decline is the Georgian dream, which destroys democracy in the country - this is manifested in all areas, starting from human rights, ending with the destruction of state institutions, clanishness and corruption of the government.

The opposition places the main responsibility for Georgia's "democratic decline" on Bidzina Ivanishvili, under whose instructions the country is moving towards Russia. In the meantime, it is known that the European Union has finished working on the 11th package of restrictions, where the Caucasus countries also appear. The sanctions will not affect state institutions and will apply only to individuals and companies that help Russia circumvent international restrictions. Ivanishvili is also included in the list of such persons.

The fulfillment of the well-known 12 conditions of the European Union would contribute to stopping the decline of democ-

racy in Georgia and in this sense to the sharp improvement of the situation. 8 local non-governmental organizations have created a special "status-meter", according to the evaluation of the month of May, only one priority has been fulfilled at the moment, which involves the practical consideration of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) by the Georgian courts.

At this stage, 2 priorities have also largely been fulfilled - the fight against organized crime and gender equality and violence against women.

Four priorities have been partially fulfilled - electoral and institutional reforms, anti-corruption measures, vulnerable groups and independent public defender.

According to the status meter, 5 priorities should be fulfilled at this stage - depolarization, an independent judiciary, delogarchization, media and civil society involvement.

Unfortunately, regarding the fulfillment of the 12 conditions of the European Union, the evaluations of the Georgian Dream on the one hand, and of the opposition and non-governmental organizations on the other hand, are diametrically different. The polarization of Georgian politics is manifested in this.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER SRAFF

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili Delivers Speech at Apartment Distribution Ceremony for IDPs



The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, addressed the audience and delivered a speech at the ceremony commemorating the occasion of distributing apartments to displaced families in Kutaisi.

Irakli Gharibashvili, acknowledged the prolonged wait for receiving the apartments, recognizing the collective journey endured since the loss of Georgia's historical territories.

Irakli Gharibashvili asserted that currently, 20% of Georgia is under temporary occupation and expressed confidence that with a 'rights-focused' and 'result-oriented policy', the Georgian government will strive to restore Georgia's territorial integrity.

"We have lost many of our fellow citizens in these wars, and, most importantly, today 20% of our country is under temporary occupation. I would like to emphasize that this occupation is

temporary. I firmly believe that, with the help of God, we will achieve the reconciliation of our country through our correct and result-oriented policy. This is our shared goal, a collective aspiration, and it should be a national objective.

For our politicians, it does not matter whether someone is in the opposition or holds a position in the government; everyone's duty should be to unite. Let's ask anyone present here, what is your main concern? Is it returning to your homes in Abkhazia and Samachablo? I wholeheartedly believe that the day for such returns will surely come, as our peaceful policy brings us closer to this significant goal every day. I have deep faith in this belief, as there is no alternative." Irakli Gharibashvili said.

US State Department Spokesperson Highlights Monitoring of June 2 Arrests and Criticizes Contradiction with European Values

During the regular press briefing at the United States

State Department, the spokesperson Vedant Patel was questioned about their awareness of the ongoing protest in Tbilisi and the government's measures restricting freedom of speech and expression. In response, the spokesperson affirmed that the USA is closely monitoring the arrests made on June 2 and emphasized that the suppression

of dissent contradicts European values, which prioritize tolerance. "The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi has already issued a statement regarding this matter over the



weekend, and I will reiterate their position. We are closely monitoring the cases of those who were arrested on June 2 for peacefully protesting in front of the Parliament. The right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of democracy. The lack of tolerance for dissenting opinions is

incompatible with Euro-Atlantic values and the European community, which the majority of Georgia's population aspires to join," stated spokesperson Vedant Patel.

Weather

Wednesday, June 7

Day T-storm
High: 26°C

Night Showers
Low: 16°C

Thursday, June 8

Day Light Rain
High: 22°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 16°C

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.