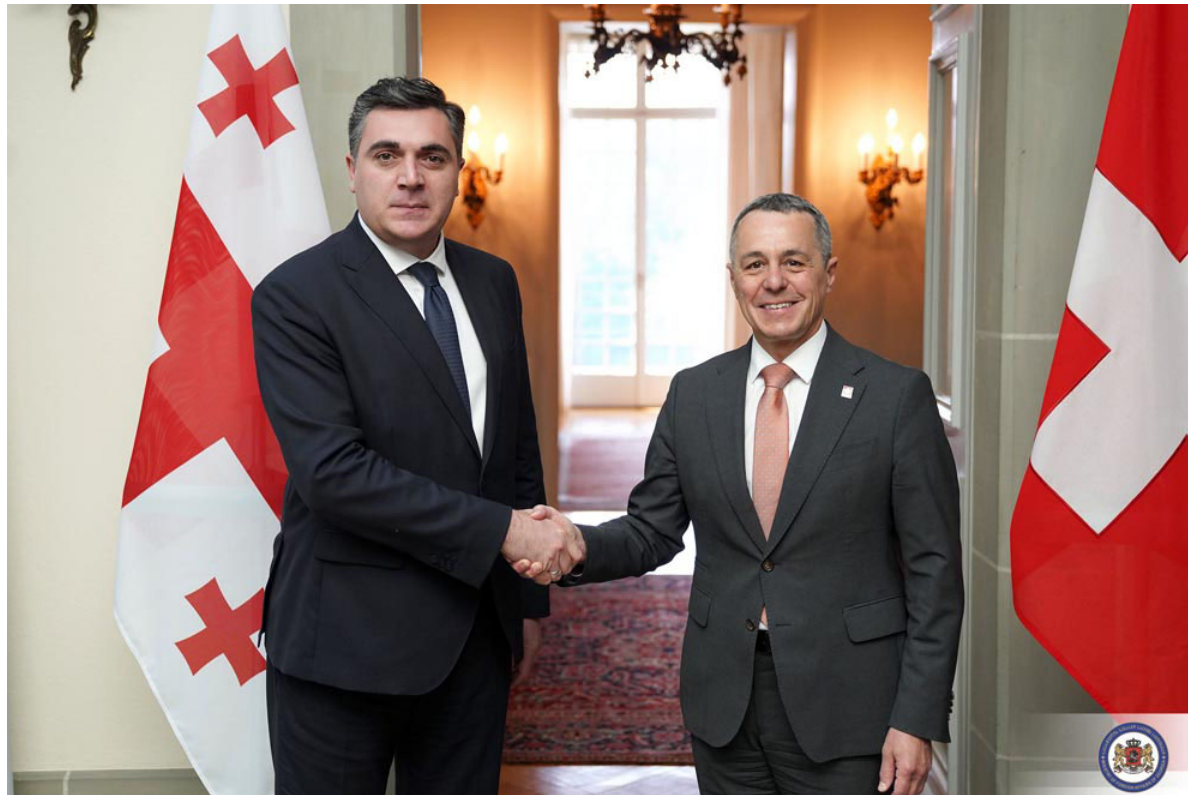


Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, Holds Meeting with Switzerland's Foreign Affairs Minister, Ignazio Cassis

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Within the framework of his visit to the Swiss Confederation, Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ilia Darchiashvili, held a meeting with Switzerland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ignazio Cassis. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shared this information, stating that the discussions centered on the productive collaboration between the two nations across diverse domains and their future plans.

Ilia Darchiashvili expressed gratitude for Switzerland's support in upholding Georgia's territorial integrity and promoting reconciliation projects. They also discussed the security situation in the region due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine and emphasized the importance of the Black Sea region. The ministers highlighted the positive trend of high-level visits between Georgia and Switzerland. They also touched upon economic, tourism, and trade cooperation, noting the success of Swiss companies operating in Georgia. The long-term contributions of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to Georgia's socio-economic development were recognized. The importance of mutual support within inter-



national organizations was emphasized.

"Ilia Darchiashvili expressed gratitude to Ignazio Cassis for Switzerland's steadfast support in upholding Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as for their contributions to reconciliation and confidence-building projects aimed at bridging the divide among citizens

along the occupation line. It was acknowledged that Swiss assistance has gained even greater significance in today's challenging environment.

The positive trend of high-level visits and meetings between Georgia and Switzerland in recent years was emphasized. In particular, the meeting between the Prime Minister of

Georgia and the President of Switzerland in Davos in January 2023 was highlighted.

The ministers discussed the security challenges prevailing in the region due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. They underscored the significance of the Black Sea region for the European continent and the need to engage international partners in

the region.

The conversation covered various areas of cooperation between Georgia and Switzerland, including the economy, tourism, and trade.

It was observed that Swiss companies are successfully operating in Georgia, and both trade dynamics and the number of Swiss visitors to Georgia have increased. The visit of the Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs, Ellen Budliger Artieda, and the accompanying business delegation to Georgia in June 2023 received positive appraisal.

The long-term engagement of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Georgia, which has significantly contributed to the country's socio-economic development, was emphasized.

The discussion also addressed the collaboration between the two countries within international organizations and the importance of mutual support.

Ilia Darchiashvili is currently on his first official visit to the Swiss Confederation, scheduled from June 19 to 20. As part of this visit, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will also hold meetings with the President of the Swiss National Council and the Mayor of the city of Bern," as stated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Kakha Kaladze Calls for Transparency in Funding Sources for Youth Groups Engaged in Activism

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



Kakha Kaladze, the Mayor of Tbilisi, stated that funding organizations, originating from what is considered Georgia's friendly countries, actively "recruit" and "train" young individuals in opposing the police and initiating revolutions. He expressed his concern about the negative consequences of promoting polarization and emphasized the detrimental effects it has on society.

Kakha Kaladze expressed concern about the support given to individuals involved in violent acts by opposition representatives. He criticized the portrayal of those who throw Molotov cocktails as heroes and emphasized the need for society to unite against such behavior. Kaladze called for transparency regarding the sources of funding and organizations involved in recruiting young people for activities like revolution and confrontation.

"A person who throws a 'Molotov cocktail' at a police officer intends to burn the officer alive. It is concerning that individuals like Japaridze, who engage in such actions, receive support from repre-

sentatives of the opposition. This attempt to portray someone who throws a 'Molotov cocktail' as a hero is highly detrimental and encourages evil. Society must come together to prevent such occurrences. Moreover, it is disheartening and harmful when financial incentives are involved in such acts. The public deserves to know the sources of these funds, the organizations providing financing, and the entities involved in recruiting young people for activities related to revolution, confrontation, and bloodshed. Transparency is essential, and the public should be aware of the specific countries and organizations funding these youth groups.

In our 12-point plan, the first point emphasizes depolarization and reducing political confrontation in the country. However, instead of everyone working towards reducing polarization and taking steps towards depolarization, the opposite is being promoted. It is alleged that our friends are directly funding organizations that recruit young people and train them in combating the police, organizing revolutions, coups, and similar activities. We need to know where these funds come from and who they are financing. On one hand, we are encouraged to reduce polarization, while on the other hand, actions that encourage and promote polarization are taking place, which is deeply regrettable," stated Kaladze.

Navigating the Opposition's Course: Assessing the Path for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Levan Khabeishvili's appeal for opposition parties to join forces in the upcoming 2024 parliamentary elections, aiming to overcome the Georgian Dream, has sparked extensive debates within the UNM party. Although the elections are still distant, and various factors are likely to evolve in the interim, the primary patterns have already begun to manifest. Yet, the pivotal question remains unanswered: will the formation of a "third political center" come to fruition or not?

The appeal to rally behind the "National Movement" was met with skepticism from a significant segment of the pro-Western opposition, who responded with the sentiment that this approach is not a recipe for success. Furthermore, there is historical precedence, as a similar attempt to forge such a coalition in 2020 did not yield the desired outcomes. The consolidation of the opposition under the banner of the "National Movement" maintains a bipolar political landscape, wherein the "Georgian Dream" succeeds in overcoming the "National Movement".

The upcoming 2024 parliamentary elections will take place with a 5% threshold, ne-

cessitating each individual opposition political entity participating in the electoral race to assess their prospects carefully. While the "United National Movement" is expected to surpass the 5% threshold, making an alliance with them appealing, it is worth noting that the party currently faces greater internal challenges compared to the 2020 elections. There has been ongoing speculation about Nika Melia, who was defeated by Khabeishvili in the intra-party elections, potentially establishing a separate political party alongside his supporters.

Some assert that Nika Melia could potentially engage in negotiations with various opposition parties, forming a separate faction that aspires to surpass the 5% threshold. There are even speculations suggesting that Khabeishvili's appeal for opposition party unity may have stemmed from concerns over the possibility of Melia establishing a distinct party.

The collaboration between Khabeishvili and Melia within the confines of a single party did not prove to be highly successful. Therefore, if Melia genuinely intends to establish a separate party, it would be advisable for him to undertake this endeavor no later than the autumn of this

year. This would allow sufficient time for thorough preparation leading up to the 2024 elections.

The recent ruling by the Strasbourg court, which denied the transfer of the former president abroad for medical treatment, somewhat shifted the attention surrounding Saakashvili within Georgian politics. Nevertheless, Saakashvili maintains a dedicated following in Georgia, and if he reenters the political arena, a political force supported by him is likely to surpass the 5% threshold with relative certainty.

The question remains regarding whom Mikheil Saakashvili will endorse between Khabeishvili and Melia if the latter departs from the UNM and establishes a distinct party. Saakashvili would likely support those who retain the name of the "United National Movement," which is presently led by Levan Khabeishvili.

It is important to note that Khabeishvili's rise to party leadership was largely based on his pledge to secure the prompt release of Saakashvili. However, this promise has proven to be unfulfilled.

The attempt of uniting those pro-Western opposition parties, which excludes the connection with the "National Movement" is interesting. The initiative is spearheaded by "Lelo," which

extends invitations to factions that have distanced themselves from the "National Movement" or other smaller pro-Western political parties to engage in cooperation. In this union, together with "Lelo", "Strategy Aghmashenebeli", "Droa" and "Girchi" by Zurab Japaridze are considered.

So far, the idea of unification is only at the level of statements. The matter should not only come to the creation of a common platform, on which there will not be a big difference of opinion, but they should also form a common electoral list, which will be much more problematic. The general electoral landscape today looks like this. The "Georgian Dream" openly declares that it will be the winner again in the 2024 elections, already for the 4th term. "Georgian Dream" will try to maintain the status of the main opposition force, despite all its current internal problems. Another pro-Western political union will probably be formed, which will fight to overcome the 5% threshold.

There are other political forces involved in the process, such as the "pro-Russian bloc" with "People's Power", who distanced from the Georgian dream, Irma Inashvili's "Patriot Alliance", and the "Conservative Party"

founded by "Alt-Info".

Their anti-Western statements are slightly different from the anti-Western messages of the "Georgian Dream". So the planners of the election strategy of the "Georgian Dream" will have to think about losing the pro-Russian-anti-Western electorate, if they use the support of such an electorate themselves. All the more so if Bidzina Ivanishvili's former lawyer Viktor Kifiani creates a political force whose members, unlike Georgian Dream, will not make anti-Western statements.

The outcome of the 2024 elections can be envisioned through three potential scenarios:

1. The elections are held fairly and the opposition political parties, which will have a majority in the parliament, win.
2. The elections are held fairly and "Georgian Dream" wins.
3. "Georgian Dream" wins the elections, but the elections are not evaluated fairly.

However, we can imagine another scenario, when an entirely new political force wins elections, as happened in 2012. There is little time left for this scenario, however. A new charismatic leader should appear already in the autumn with a statement to mobilize political power.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Supreme Court Declares Appeal Inadmissible, Upholds Decision in Nika Gvaramia's Case

The Supreme Court has upheld the Court of Appeal's decision regarding Nika Gvaramia, the founder of the 'Mtavari' Channel.

The highest court of the country deemed both the prosecution's and defense's cassation appeals as inadmissible. Consequently, the prison sentence of 3 years and 6 months for Nika Gvaramia remains valid.

Nika Gvaramia was sentenced to 3 years and 6 months of imprisonment by the Tbilisi City Court, and this verdict was upheld by the Court of Appeal. Moreover, the appellate court modified the penalty of a 5,000 GEL fine to imprisonment for the

charge of abusing official authority in relation to the embezzlement of 6,700,000 GEL.

The Supreme Court's ruling marks the conclusion of the legal battle at all levels of the country's judiciary regarding the case of Nika Gvaramia.



Kobakhidze Emphasizes Government's Responsibility to Investigate Borjomi Incident

In relation to the incident that occurred in the camp of the "Girchi-More Freedom" party in Borjomi, Irakli Kobakhidze, the Chairman of the "Georgian Dream" party, stated that it is the government's responsibility to conduct investigations into such matters.

When questioned by journalists about the government's accountability for organized groups that target individuals based on their political opinions, including the groups that attacked the "Girchi-More Freedom" camp in Borjomi on June 17th, Saturday, Irakli Kobakhidze responded by stating that the government solely assumes responsibility for investigating such incidents.

"The government takes responsibility for the investigation,



and it is essential to thoroughly examine all such incidents. Violence is unequivocally wrong and unacceptable; it must be investigated. It is the government's duty to investigate these matters. Our country's utmost priority is to put an end to polarization and reduce the level of radicalism. Certain forces deliberately attempt to polarize the political landscape and promote radicalism. Regrettably, these actions often result in violence, which is highly detrimental. I urge everyone to refrain from engaging in any actions that foster polarization within the country," stated Kobakhidze.

Weather

Tuesday, June 20

Day Rain
High: 23°C

Night T-storm
Low: 16°C

Wednesday, June 21

Day Showers
High: 24°C

Night 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.