

Minister of Internal Affairs on First Night Rescue Operation in Shovi: There Was no Need for Pilots to Risk

By MESSENGER STAFF

“There was no need to risk for the pilots because the helicopter could have crashed,” said the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri, on the suspension of the rescue operation on the first night of the landslide in Racha.

“We have night flight facilities, we have acquired them, we can fly, but there is a very high risk, so to speak, if something really threatens human life at that moment, it is not appropriate for pilots to take risks and it is not allowed, it is simply not possible.”

According to him, terrain, valley and mountains are additional risk factors.

According to Gomelauri, the helicopter arrived in the disaster area on time. Rescuers flew to the site within three hours, which is why the response of the rescue service to the disaster received criticism.

“A helicopter is neither a bicycle nor a car, you can’t just take off, you need to prepare for it,” the minister said.

Gomelauri explained that the state has already purchased three new helicopters and the country will receive the first one in March 2024, the other two by the end of next year.

“You can’t buy a helicopter like you can go to the shop and buy a car. There are queues and we have been working for almost a year, we have been working for months. It has already started. We have already bought it. Pilots need to be trained, etc,” the minister stated, adding that the existing helicopters are just



as capable as the new ones.

Regarding the advanced monitoring systems, the minister said that no matter what technological support we provide, natural disasters “happen within seconds” because “we live in the Caucasus mountains.”

“A problem can happen anywhere, water can overflow, unfortunately we cannot escape from that. It’s like this throughout the world. What happened in Hawaii, 100 people burned to death and more than 100 are missing. America is a much

stronger country than us, they also have better helicopters, aviation than we do, but it happened, it is happening, it’s nature, what can we do, it’s sad, it’s a tragedy,” Gomelauri said.

According to official information, 24 dead have been reported.

Rescuers are looking for nine more people. Rescuers have already checked 60% of the area. The search area has been expanded and 18 groups of rescuers have been deployed at a distance of 54 kilometers from Shovi.

Human Rights Center Condemns Interference with Journalists’ Work and Assaults on Media Freedom

By MESSENGER STAFF

The Human Rights Center (HRC) condemns recent cases of interference in the professional activities of journalists and attempts to restrict media freedom.

According to the center, the facts of recent attacks and violence against media representatives in Georgia are worrying, “because there is a risk that media activities will be associated with working in health-threatening conditions, which is directly related to the restriction of media freedom, its right to disseminate information and ideas.”



Funded by the European Union



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6211; Euro - 2.8816; GBP - 3.3314; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.6654; Swiss Franc - 2.9931

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"Freedom of the press is a special part of the freedom of expression, which is protected by the European Convention on Human Rights. According to the first paragraph of Article 10 of the Convention, everyone has the freedom to express their opinion. This right includes a person's freedom to hold opinions, receive or impart information or ideas

without interference from public authorities. "According to Article 154 of the Criminal Law Code of Georgia, it is punishable to illegally hinder a journalist in his professional activities, that is, to force him to disseminate information or refrain from its dissemination," the Center states.

The statement discusses three recent cases of attacks on media representatives, including the

attack on Misha Mshvildadze, one of the founders of Formula.

"On June 27, one of the founders of the TV company Formula, Misha Mshvildadze, was attacked at the entrance of the shopping center. The defendant was arrested on June 28 and charged under Article 126, Part 1 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which refers to violence that caused physical pain to the victim. According to the informa-

tion from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, statements made by Mshvildadze in the public space became the motive for the violence committed by the accused. Currently, the accused has been placed in jail as a preventive measure, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs handed over the case to the Special Investigation Service for investigation. According to Misha Mshvildadze, state structures may have been

involved in the planning and organization of the violence, in particular, one of the perpetrators of the attack may be an investigator of the State Security Service," reads the statement.

HRC calls on the government to conduct an independent and effective investigation into all such incidents in order to ensure a safe media environment, and for government officials to publicly condemn all cases of violence.

Opinion & Analysis

Unveiling the Implications: Exploring Georgia's 'Strategic Partnership' with China

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

After Gharibashvili's unexpected visit to China, the Georgian Dream started talking about establishing a strategic partnership with China and announced it as one of the most significant achievements of its foreign policy. The opposition is not against the deepening of economic relations with China but expresses various doubts about what China is trying to achieve in Georgia and what goals are driving the Georgian Dream in regard to the new initiative of deepening ties with the country.

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili's one-week visit to the People's Republic of China began on July 27 with a ceremonial meeting. At first, the Georgian government only spoke about the fact that Gharibashvili would participate in the opening ceremony of the Summer World University Games, however, the second day into the visit, after Gharibashvili's meeting with President Xi Jinping in Chengdu, Sichuan province, it was suddenly announced that Georgia and China will be strategic partners. Georgia and China are establishing a strategic partnership and thus our bilateral relations will move to a new level," said Xi Jinping during the meeting with Irakli Gharibashvili.

After Gharibashvili's strate-

gic visit to China, the opposition had more questions than answers. The constitution of Georgia remarks on the Western orientation of the country and the aspiration towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The main strategic partners of Georgia are the European Union and the United States. At the end of the year, Georgia is waiting for the EU membership candidate status. What does the sudden strategic partnership with China mean in such circumstances? Did our Western partners know about this? The government has not said anything clearly about this yet, although statements were made by the pro-government press and experts: "It's time to get the world used to the idea that Georgia conducts sovereign politics" - this is the title of the interview of political scientist Irakli Gogava in 'Saerto Gazeti'. "Georgia is an accountable country because it has a national government that protects the country's sovereignty," said political scientist Petre Mamradze in an interview given to the same newspaper. Therefore, we are sovereign and we do not ask the West what we will do.

Unlike the pro-government politicians, the government officials were more cautious and pointed out that the West has strategic relations with China, and "why shouldn't we?" "China has strategic relations with 110 countries, including almost all the countries of the European Union... therefore, not only it doesn't harm [relations with China], we will also advance our Western partners in the direction of relations with China," said the government parliamentarian Gia

Volski. Such answers do not satisfy the opposition. Badri Japaridze, one of the leaders of the Lelo party, considers it worrying to start talking about a strategic partnership with China. "A logical question arises, how is it compatible to be a strategic partner of both America and China?" The opposition considers this step as another sign of changing the foreign policy course, the purpose of which is to sabotage the EU membership candidate status. They also pay attention to the fact that China has never voted in the UN for resolutions on the issues of the occupied regions of Georgia, China did not condemn Russia's attack on Georgia in 2008 and does not condemn Russia's occupation of Georgian territories.

Another issue that critics are looking for an answer to is related to China's specific interests in Georgia. The answer to this is almost unequivocal - the deep-water port of Anaklia. Years ago, a port should have been built there with US investments. In 2019, the US Secretary of State at the time, Mike Pompeo, said that this project would connect Georgia with countries with free economies and protect it from the economic influence of imaginary friends, Russia and China, which do not serve Georgia's interests. It is likely that the construction of Anaklia Port will fail due to the efforts of the Georgian Dream. Now the government has again started talking about the construction of the port of Anaklia, and it seems that the responsibility of building the port will be entrusted to China. The statement of Georgian Dream chairman Irakli Kobakhidze proves this: "As

for China's interests regarding the port of Anaklia, which the US State Department mentions if the US cares about the port of Anaklia, it should express it through investment. I don't know what the reason is, although no investment has been made in the port of Anaklia so far... Care is expressed by investing."

What other important projects can China implement in Georgia? The aforementioned political scientist Irakli Gogava talks about the Baku-Tbilisi-Poti high-speed railway, which will cost 18-20 billion. China can provide these funds "in exchange for the transfer of 49% share for 49 years." By passing Anaklia and the railway into the hands of the Chinese, Georgia will probably become a more sovereign country, the government seems to believe.

Chinese firms are currently engaged in the construction of a challenging highway segment in Georgia. This endeavor involves the creation of rock tunnels and bridges. However, there is cause for concern as the outcomes thus far have been less than satisfactory. At intervals, the constructed road and the supportive pillars of the bridges are experiencing instances of structural collapse. The expert Sandro Tvalchrelidze notes that local companies used to carry out construction in the segment and the tunnels and bridges built by them never caused any problems.

A further concern comes to the forefront: over the past three decades of post-Soviet progress, Georgia has taken a course toward the West. The country is supposed to be shaping a democratic political framework aligned with Western models.

However, some of the gaps in this direction are recorded in the 12 points proposed by the European Union, which the Georgian Dream is reluctant to carry out.

China, which is a communist-authoritarian country, will not assert any demands for the democratisation upon the Georgian Dream and considers the potential victory of the Georgian Dream in the 2024 elections as a guarantee of the strategic partnership that has begun.

The Georgian Dream announces in advance that due to the 'weakness' of the opposition, victory in the next elections is guaranteed, but it is afraid of opposition protests and a new 'Rose Revolution'. Regarding this, statements are periodically made that the United National Movement is planning a new coup. But what does China have to do with all this? The pro-government political scientist Irakli Gogava, whose interview about the partnership with China was published in two newspapers and both emphasize the same thing, states:

China is against the organization of color revolutions, [i.e. coup d'états], by the West in various countries, including Georgia, which was a victim of this in 2003... China directly calls on the West to stop hijacking the political systems of the countries. It is difficult to say whether this is the opinion of a political scientist or an official calculation by the Georgian government.

The announcement of the partnership with China will have a more immediate impact on the country's strategy than on the economy.

Weather

Monday, August 14

Day  Clear
High: 37°C

Night  Clear
Low: 22°C

Tuesday, August 15

Day  Clear
High: 36°C

Night  Clear
Low: 22°C

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