

By Liza Mchedlidze

## 27-Kilometer Rikoti New Highway Section Opens for Traffic

On October 29, a significant 27-kilometre stretch opened for traffic at the Rikoti Pass in Georgia. This newly accessible 4-lane road segment connects Khevi village in the Kharagauli municipality to the Shorapani settlement in the Zestaponi municipality.

This section's completion is marked by the incorporation of an extensive infrastructure—comprising 65 bridges and 38 tunnels—effectively reducing travel time across the Rikoti Pass by 25 minutes.

The Rikoti Pass project commenced in 2019 and involves the development of a 52-kilometer road. This initiative encompasses the construction of a total of 97 bridges and 51 tunnels.

The construction activities have provided employment to over 10,000 individuals, with 70% being Georgian citizens. The project, valued at GEL 2.6 billion, is funded by the European Investment Bank (EIB), World Bank (WB), and Asian Development Bank (ADB). The overall project completion is expected in 2024.

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, in his address at the opening ceremony, highlighted that the new road's opening will significantly facilitate movement for Georgian citizens, tourists, passengers, and all those utilizing this route.

"First of all, I want to tell you that I am very thrilled to participate in the opening ceremony of such an important and large-scale project. We all understand the profound significance of constructing highways, roads, and particularly the East-West highway for the development of our country.

As of today, 261 kilometers of highways are accessible, with 193 kilometers built and opened during our administration. The Rikoti section was, and still is, deemed one of the most challenging sec-



tions due to its difficulties. However, you are witnessing a four-lane expressway being built and the process continues," Gharibashvili said.

According to Gharibashvili, constructing roads and highways is costly and time-consuming, yet crucial for the country's growth.

"I've said it before, and I'll reiterate -

the construction of roads and highways signifies swift development and prosperity. We acknowledge that these large-scale projects are lengthy and costly, but the transformation within the country is evident. Throughout this period, the nation has been evolving, becoming more developed, strengthened, and enriched. This progress achieved within the coun-

try will be distributed across different regions," the Prime Minister stated.

Gharibashvili expressed gratitude towards the European Union Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, representatives from the European Investment Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and all donor organizations who played a role in making the project possible.

## Prime Minister Announces Increased Budget for Education and Teacher Salaries at National Teacher Award Ceremony

By Liza Mchedlidze

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, announced at the National Teacher Award ceremony that an additional half a billion GEL will be allocated to the Ministry of Education in 2024, of which 160 million will be used to increase teachers' salaries.

"The government is committed to enhancing the prestige of your profession, and both our minister and the entire government are dedicated to this goal. We have now intensified our efforts towards this purpose. Our focus remains on improving conditions for teachers. I am pleased to announce that, as per our decision, a budget of half a billion GEL will be allocated to the Ministry of Education in 2024. Of this allocation, 160 million GEL is specifically earmarked to increase teachers' salaries. This adjustment is intended to result in an average increase of 500 GEL or more for teachers under full workload," stated Gharibashvili.

According to him, the Ministry of Education is working on a specific vision and it will be presented in the near future.

The Prime Minister also announced that teachers who have made a 'special contribution' to

the development of the public and the education system will be recognized with the National Teacher Prize, accompanied by a cash award of 10,000 GEL.

Gharibashvili highlighted the Government's significant initiative, a 1 billion GEL large-scale project initiated last year. This project focuses on the rehabilitation and construction of nearly 1,000 schools, with ongoing rehabilitation in 400 schools and 1,000 kindergartens.

He noted that the Education Minister engages in extensive meetings with teachers, actively listening to their recommendations, visions, and advice. The Prime Minister assured the teachers that their input and visions would be taken into serious consideration to collaboratively build a more efficient education system alongside the ministry and the Minister of Education.

"I had a conversation, I had a number of discussions with the Minister of Education and I know he holds intensive meetings with teachers, listens to your recommendations, visions, advice. Trust me, we will certainly take your vision into account to develop an even more effective system together with the ministry and the minister," the Prime Minister stated.





# Abkhazia's De Facto Leader's Statement on Russian Military Base Sparks Concern in Georgia

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The de facto leader of occupied Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania, said in an interview given to 'Izvestia' newspaper on October 5, about the signing of the agreement on the Russian military-marine base in Ochamchire. This statement received a great response in Georgian analytical circles and various opinions were expressed regarding the created reality and future perspectives. The authorities condemned Russia's actions, while the opposition spoke about the crisis of the Georgian Dream policy and the increased threats to the country.

The port of Ochamchire, which was created during the Soviet period in the mid-1930s, fell directly into the hands of Russia after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. The announcement about the creation of a military base there was made back in 2009, the fairway was deepened to 9 metres, after which water vessels up to 10 thousand tons can enter Ochamchire.

A large part of the ships of the Russian Black Sea military fleet fit in this scale, but in order to transform it into a full-fledged military base, serious work needs to be done in Ochamchire. Small Russian warships are still

stationed in Ochamchire today, and the application to create a naval base in Ochamchire was first discussed in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Due to the Ukrainian strikes, Sevastopol is no longer safe for the Russian fleet, and part of the ships have already been transferred to Feodosia and Novorossiysk. These points are also accessible for Ukrainian strikes, as for Ochamchire, it is not less than 620 kilometres away from the Ukrainian front in a direct line, it is not accessible to the cruise missiles currently in the hands of Ukraine.

But this does not mean that Ukraine will not be able to attack it if Ukraine is attacked from there or from its ships. According to the analysts, it turns out that the opening of the "second front" is already becoming a reality in Georgia, which Georgian Dream talked about after the Russian attack on Ukraine and claimed that there was a "global war party" in the West, which demanded the Georgian government to start a war against Russia in support of Ukraine.

In fact, it turned out that not the West, but Russia is going to involve Georgia in the war against Ukraine. Although the territory of Abkhazia is occupied

by Russia, Georgia is responsible for it. According to the opposition, the mentioned action of Russia is an attempt to bring war to Georgia.

In the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, official Tbilisi was concerned and assessed Moscow's actions as "an attempt to legitimize the illegal occupation". Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili condemned the mentioned action of Moscow and said that "this is a continuation of the occupation".

The opposition deemed it crucial to issue a more stringent statement and address this matter in parliament, whereas the Georgian Dream saw it as unnecessary. In the opposition, they talked about the complete collapse of the policy pursued by the Georgian Dream towards Russia. The essence of this policy is considered to be 'non-irritation' of Russia. After coming to power, Georgian Dream deepened economic ties with Russia, did not join the sanctions imposed against Russia, restored flights with Russia, allowed more than one hundred thousand Russian migrants into the country, effectively distanced itself from the West.

This was followed by the praise of Georgia's 'pragmatic policy' by Russian politicians,

but Moscow has not changed it, but is expanding and deepening its occupation of Georgian territories. Russia continues and will continue to encroach on the interests of Georgia in pursuit of its imperial interests. Against this background, the statements that it will be possible to end the occupation by making concessions towards Russia and pursuing a 'smart' policy look weak and ridiculous.

On the contrary, such a policy is only followed by the expansion of the occupation and the announcement of the creation of a Russian naval base in Ochamchire. In parallel with the application for the creation of a Russian base, representatives of the proxy regime of Abkhazia talked about the desire to join Abkhazia with the Russia-Belarus alliance state.

In addition to the exclusion of part of its ships from Ukrainian strikes, other reasons for the announcement of the establishment of a naval base in Ochamchire were also mentioned. One of these reasons is to reassure the separatist regime of Sokhumi after the events in Nagorno-Karabakh that Moscow is not going to leave Abkhazia and will not allow Georgia's territorial integrity to be restored.

The creation of the base is also a sign that Russia is not going to leave the South Caucasus, in the conditions where Russia's positions in Azerbaijan and Armenia have weakened dramatically. Moscow wants to show the world that it maintains its positions in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region.

They also talked about the threat that the Ochamchire military base could pose to Georgia's transit potential. Ochamchire is about 35 kilometres away from Anaklia, and in Anaklia, Georgia is planning to build a deep-water port. The naval base will scare potential investors. Today, only a Chinese company has expressed its desire to build a port in Anaklia, and the Chinese should not be afraid of the Russian military neighbourhood.

The creation of a military-naval base in Ochamchire, of course, increases the military threats facing Georgia, but this step of Moscow should be considered first of all in the context of the crisis of the policy towards Russia. By making concessions with Russia, Georgia will not be able to ensure its security, and even more so, it will not be able to make any progress towards ending the occupation, on the contrary.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### EU Ambassador to Georgia Highlights Rikoti Pass Highway's Role in Regional Integration

The EU Ambassador to Georgia, H.E. Pawel Herczynski, highlighted the significance of the moment during his address at the opening of the new section of the Rikoti Pass highway. He stated, "Today, we are witnessing a very important stage, the transport connectivity of Georgia with the European Union - let's move forward together to connect Georgia with the European Union."



In his statement, Herczynski expressed the belief that collective efforts lead to greater strength achieved through sustainable development. According to the EU Ambassador to Georgia, this highway enhances regional integration by boosting connectivity.

"We like to say it - we are stronger together through sustainable development. In Georgia, the men-

tioned strategy is implemented through economic and investment plans, taking into account its flagship projects, which are linked to international connectivity. This includes the mentioned East-West expressway. This highway is part of the extended trans-European transport network, providing opportunities for regional integration through increased connectivity," Herczynski said.

### Visa-Free Travel Agreement Signed Between Georgia and the Commonwealth of Dominica

On October 27, 2023, in New York, Khatuna Totladze, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, signed an agree-

ment between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica. This agreement pertains to "exemption from the obligation to obtain visas for holders of diplomatic, service, and ordinary passports."

The agreement, representing the Commonwealth of Dominica's interests, was signed

by Philbert Aaron, who serves as the Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica to the United Nations.

As per the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the agreement will enhance tourism, cultural, and economic ties, while also raising awareness of both countries within their respective regions.



## Weather

Monday, October 30

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 23°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 12°C

Tuesday, October 31

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 20°C

Night Clear  
Low: 10°C

published by

**The Messenger**

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# UNITED NATIONS GEORGIA



## United Nations in Georgia marks 78<sup>th</sup> UN Day, calls for accelerated action towards Sustainable Development Goals

This year's United Nations Day observance in Georgia centered around the Sustainable Development Goals - a global call to action to end poverty, protect the earth's environment and climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity in the spirit of Leaving No One Behind. Halfway to the SDG deadline, the UN Day commemoration underlined the importance of collaborative efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

A special panel discussion "From Economic Growth to Shared Prosperity: Reality Check after the SDG Summit and Vision for the Future" focused on Georgia's progress on decent jobs creation and decentralization and discussed forward-looking strategies for the achievement of the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) and provision of equal opportunities for all. The panel discussion brought together government officials, think tanks, civil society (including organizations of persons with disabilities), academia, the private sector and other stakeholders to facilitate discussion on how to ensure that economic models and policy processes are revamped at scale for SDG acceleration and for transforming Georgia's economic growth at the macro-economic level into shared prosperity. The diversity of involved individuals enriched the dialogue and the exchange of perspectives. Speaking at the event, United Nations Resident Coordinator Sabine Machl noted that economic growth is not an end goal in itself, but one of enablers of meaningful improvements in the lives of people, including reducing poverty and

achieving other development goals. She highlighted the urgent need for action and collaboration to achieve the SDGs.

The central focus of another panel discussion organized by the United Nations in Georgia in partnership with the Georgian-American University (GAU) and the Kant's Academy has revolved around SDG 4 – quality education. UN Resident Coordinator Sabine Machl, President of the Georgian-American University (GAU) R. Michael Cowgill, and prominent representatives of the Iv. Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Ilia State University, Caucasus University, and the University of Georgia took stock of where we are in terms of progress towards SDG 4, shared knowledge about good practices and suggested ways forward to expedite the achievement the SDGs.

The role of young people in accelerating efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals was the primary focus of the discussion between UN Resident Coordinator, Sabine Machl and members of the youth organization 'Civic Engagement and Activism Center' held on October 25 at the UN House in Tbilisi.

In celebration of UN Day, the United Nations in Georgia also unveiled the multifunctional SDG Spaces at the Gori State Teaching University and the Georgian-American University (GAU) on October 24 and 25, respectively. The initiative implemented in partnership with the Education and International Development Academy and the Kant's Academy aims at empowering young people with the skills and opportunities to advance their vision of a sustainable future.



UN Resident Coordinator Sabine Machl addressing participants of the panel discussion "From Economic Growth to Shared Prosperity: Reality Check after the SDG Summit and Vision for the Future", 24 October 2023.



Zviad Barkaia, Deputy Head of the Administration of the Government addressing participants of the panel discussion "From Economic Growth to Shared Prosperity: Reality Check after the SDG Summit and Vision for the Future".



Panel discussion "From Economic Growth to Shared Prosperity: Reality Check after the SDG Summit and Vision for the Future".



Participants of the panel discussion organized by the United Nations in Georgia in partnership with the Georgian-American University (GAU) and the Kant's Academy.





At the opening of a SDG Spaces at the Georgian-American University (GAU).



At the opening of a SDG Spaces at the Georgian-American University (GAU).



UN Resident Coordinator Sabine Machl and members of the youth organization 'Civic Engagement and Activism Center'.



Students of the Gori State Teaching University at the opening ceremony of a SDG Space.