

European Commission Recommends Granting EU Candidate Status to Georgia

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The European Commission recommended granting European Union candidate status to Georgia with the condition that the government takes significant reform steps.

Georgia is required to make further progress on the 12 priorities identified in the previous year. These reforms must be successfully implemented before candidate status for EU membership can be granted.

The Commission recognized several positive developments in Georgia, such as increased scrutiny by the opposition in parliamentary work, adoption of a plan to reduce the influence of oligarchs, withdrawal of a personalized approach (potentially related to governance or policy), and establishment of an Anti-corruption Bureau.

The European Commission urged the authorities in Georgia to better reflect the genuine aspirations of its citizens by engaging more with the opposition and civil society. This involvement is seen as crucial in matters of national interest, indicating a call for more inclusive governance and decision-making processes.



"Finally, with regard to Georgia, here the College fully supports the genuine aspirations of the overwhelming majority of its citizens to join the European Union. These aspirations need to be better mirrored by the authorities who should engage more with the opposition and civil society on matters of national interest. And further progress is needed by the government on the 12 priorities identified last year before candidate status can be granted. Now the Commission also acknowledges a number of positive steps. For example, the opposition's scrutiny of parliamentary work has been increased; an action plan for de-oligarchisation was adopted; the personalized approach was withdrawn; and the Anti-corruption Bureau was set up. Therefore, the Commission recommends granting candidate status to Georgia on the understanding that the government takes important reform steps," President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen stated.

The final decision on whether Georgia will be granted candidate status will be announced at the December 14-15 summit.



European Parliament

November 8, 2023, Brussels

EU candidate status for Georgia:

Georgia is Europe and Georgians are Europeans. This fact has been recognized once again by the European Commission in its annual enlargement report. We, the friends of Georgia in the European Parliament, strongly support the Commission's recommendation to grant Georgia EU candidate status with conditions. Despite the Georgian government's continued reluctance to implement the Commission's twelve recommendations and align the country's foreign policy with the EU, the will of the Georgian people, some Georgian political leaders, including the President of Georgia, and many Georgian civil servants proved to be stronger and their Europeanness more resilient. They, and only they, deserve the credit for this historic achievement.

There is still one step to go before the EU candidacy. We continue to monitor situation and work hard to ensure that the support expressed by the European Commission and the European Parliament will be reflected in the decision of the European Council in December 2023.

Respectfully,
Friends of Georgia in the European Parliament:

- Petras Auštrevičius
- Viola von Cramon-Taubadel
- Anna Fotyga
- Michael Gahler
- Markéta Gregorová
- Rasa Juknevičienė
- Andrius Kubilius
- Sven Mikser

Friends of Georgia in the European Parliament Express Strong Support for Georgia's EU Candidate Status and Continue Monitoring

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Friends of Georgia in the European Parliament have released an open letter expressing their strong backing for the European Commission's recommendation to grant Georgia EU candidate status and strongly emphasized the European identity of Georgia and the resilience of the Georgian people in striving for EU candidate status.

The letter credited the Georgian people, certain political leaders (including the President of Georgia), and many civil servants for their determination and commitment to European integration. It indicates that despite the government's perceived reluctance, the will and resilience of these individuals have been instrumental in the progress made.

While recognizing the progress made, the letter mentions that there is still one final step to achieve EU candidacy. The Friends of Georgia in the European Parliament pledged to continue monitoring the situation and actively work towards ensuring that the support expressed by the European Commission and the European Parliament translates into a positive decision by the European Council in December 2023.

The letter was signed by several Members of the European Parliament, includ-

ing Petras Auštrevičius, Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Anna Fotyga, Michael Gahler, Markéta Gregorová, Rasa Juknevičienė, Andrius Kubilius, and Sven Mikser.

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Respectfully, Friends of Georgia in the European Parliament," the letter reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili: 'This Is Our Response to Occupation'



President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili addressed the Georgian people and congratulated them on the positive assessment by the European Commission.

Zourabichvili stated that, above all, this day is for the Georgian people who have chosen the European path. According to the president, the people have not wavered from this chosen path.

During a speech at the Orbeliani Palace, where citizens had gathered, Zourabichvili said, "This is our answer to Russia, our response to the occupation."

"Congratulations, my fellow compatriots - both here in Georgia and those be-

yond our borders. Congratulations to all residents of the occupied territories, for I am certain of one thing - our European future is also your future.

This day belongs to you; it is an achievement for Georgia. Today, I am genuinely happy, and together, we all share this happiness." Zourabichvili stated.

President Zourabichvili dedicated this day to both those who have defended the country and those who fell victim and endured the hardships of Russian occupation.

"We understand that this path is the only route to preserving our culture, identity, security, peace, and territorial integrity. The alternative path leads to slavery and the loss of our true selves, a reality not taught to the Georgian people.

This day is also a tribute to those who have been guardians of our country and, regrettably, couldn't see this day. It's a day for those who have fallen victim to the unjust and tragic occupation of our homeland. This day belongs to all, as our love for this unwavering motherland underpins both our past and our future.

This is our response to Russia, our answer to the occupation, our response to all its injustices, and a victory for all those who have resisted it, who have endured it, and who are here with us today," Zourabichvili stated.

EU Ambassador Pawel Herczyński Calls for Unity Among Georgians Towards European Integration



EU Ambassador to Georgia Pawel Herczyński addressed the citizens of Georgia outside the Orbeliani Palace, calling the European Commission's decision to recommend granting EU candidate status to Georgia 'a truly historic day'.

"I want to sincerely congratulate all political leaders in Georgia. I want to congratulate the President of Georgia for her strong and unwavering efforts but first and foremost, I want to congratulate you all, the people of Georgia. You have strongly and consistently supported Georgia's European integration," he stated.

Pawel Herczyński highlighted that Georgia's path to achieving candidate coun-

try status involves necessary reforms as outlined by the European Commission. He emphasized the crucial need to address these steps. His central message urged unity and collective effort for Georgia's European integration, citing the potential for significant accomplishments when united.

"Today as we grieve the horrific killing of the Georgian citizen by the Russian border guards, I hope the positive recommendation from the European Commission will also encourage the occupied breakaway territories to move closer to the rest of the country and eventually help bring a peaceful resolution of the continued tragic division of Georgia.

Today's positive recommendation also underlines that the EU sees Georgia as the key partner in the region which can play an important role in bringing peace and stability in the neighbourhood.

At the same time, we should not forget that the recommendation to grant Georgia the candidate country status is linked to further reforms. Addressing the steps, identified by the EC will be crucial to moving to the next stage. To do this Georgia needs to reduce political polarization. My one and most important message to all of you would be that now is the time to unite and join forces for Georgia's European integration. I witnessed many times when you are united you can really do many great things," Herczyński said.

Opinion & Analysis

The Failed Impeachment and Georgia's Political Landscape

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Last month, on October 18, 2023, a historic session of the Parliament of Georgia took place. The ruling political party was not able to bring the impeachment procedure of the president to an end and could not depose Salome Zourabichvili. One of the political intrigues disappeared - the question of whether the ruling political power would replace Salome Zourabichvili was answered, but many different versions remained as to what was the purpose of the impeachment process initiated by the Georgian Dream.

It is certain that the confrontation of the Georgian Dream with the president will continue, and in more acute and offensive forms. The Georgian Dream continues to claim that the impeachment process of the president was initiated in order to protect the constitution, and that Zourabichvili violated the constitution by holding several meetings in Europe without the government's permission. The constitutional court confirmed the vio-

lation of the constitution by the president with a majority vote (6 votes against 3), but the vote in the parliament stopped the impeachment of the president.

86 parliamentarians supported the impeachment, instead of the required 100 votes. The Georgian Dream remained angry. According to their statements, Zourabichvili remains only formally the president, and they have already threatened to file a criminal case in the prosecutor's office.

According to some opposition politicians and analysts, the main goal of the impeachment initiated by the Georgian Dream was not to oust Zourabichvili, but to divert attention from scandalous topics. The list of such topics is impressive: Covering up the Shovi tragedy and the problems at the Rikoti Pass, sanctioning of Partskhaladze by the USA, and exposing him as a Russian agent as well as the question of Georgia's complex EU integration process.

In this direction, Georgia has fulfilled only three of the 12 recommendations. Instead of addressing these issues, the impeachment process took the front seat. The impeachment process of the president was perceived negatively in the West.

This is unanimously noted by the opposition parties that the real goal of the impeachment is to prevent the Georgian Dream from get-

ting the candidate status. Another consequence of the impeachment process is the loss of confidence in the opposition. For a long time, there was a version in the media that the Georgian Dream would be able to recruit a part of the opposition members represented in the parliament and collect the 100 votes needed for impeachment.

At the same time, they insisted that they would gather these votes in the United National Movement. Such a version was spread with such eagerness that the UNM refused to enter the parliament hall to vote, in order to avoid any misunderstanding. In the end, according to Salome Zourabichvili's request, a large part of the opposition did not enter the hall at the impeachment hearing. Nevertheless, there is still a version that if he had trusted the Georgian Dream, he would have managed to buy the necessary number of votes from the opposition.

Many opposition politicians and analysts insist that the entire impeachment process was a sham and represented a political game where Bidzina Ivanishvili was the main winner.

According to the supporters of this version, Salome Zourabichvili has never actually confronted Bidzina Ivanishvili and she didn't confront her this time either, she didn't mention that the Georgian Dream operates under Bidzina

Ivanishvili's mandate. What did Ivanishvili win?

Salome Zourabichvili has become a political figure capable of attracting a part of the Western-oriented electorate that will no longer vote for the Georgian Dream due to its anti-Western rhetoric and pro-Russian politics.

It is difficult to find out in these versions, it is difficult to convince the supporters of the existence of the alliance between Salome Zourabichvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili, as well as to change the opinion of those who believe that there is no room for any games and that there is really a sharp contradiction between the president and the Georgian Dream.

Despite the differences of opinion and the jealous attitude of the pro-Western opposition towards Salome Zourabichvili, they did not support the impeachment of the president, and President Salome Zourabichvili, the only one in power, firmly and clearly identifies the Western vector of Georgian politics.

The impeachment process and the conflicting statements about whether the president violated the Constitution have exposed constitutional loopholes where the parties have used different articles of the Constitution to make their case.

According to some, there should have been a clear record that the president should not need the approval of the government in case of

making a visit, but in case of concluding an agreement. They also point out that the parliamentary republic needs a bicameral parliament. The impeachment process and the conflicting statements about whether the president violated the Constitution or not have exposed constitutional loopholes where the parties have used different articles of the Constitution to make their case.

A large part of the opposition believes that the entry in the constitution, that from 2024 the president will be elected not by the people, but by an electoral college consisting of 300 members, is incorrect. 150 representatives of the regions will be added to the 150-member parliament.

If Georgian Dream managed to depose the president, the appointment of a new president would be completely in the hands of the Georgian Dream, because it is also represented by a majority in the parliament, and dominates in the regions.

Most likely, if the Georgian Dream does not win a majority in the new parliament elected in 2024, the question of revising the existing constitution will arise.

If we return to the current politics, the impeachment of the president did not take place, and this contains certain dangers for the Georgian Dream. In addition to the fact that the president can become a unifier of a certain part of the pro-Western electorate, she can have a say in the event of a confrontation between the Georgian Dream and the opposition after the elections, if the opposition accuses the ruling forces of rigging the elections.

Weather

Thursday, November 9

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 19°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 8°C

Friday, November 10

Day ☁️ Partly Cloudy
High: 19°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 10°C

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