

# The Messenger

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BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## MFA Issues Response to Abkhazia's Occupation Regime Approving the Transfer of Bichvinta Country Houses to Russia

On December 27, despite on going protests from Abkhaz 'citizens', the de facto parliament of Abkhazia decided to transfer the Bichvinta state cottages to Russia.

According to the 'agreement', 186 hectares of land and 115 hectares of sea space will be transferred to the ownership of the Russian Federation. All buildings and structures will become the property of the Federal Protection Service, and the Black Sea water area, along with the surrounding lands, will be leased to Russia for 49 years. Due to opposition from part of Abkhazia's population, it took over a year to 'ratify' the agreement for the transfer of the Bichvinta territory to Russia.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia has expressed concern and addressed the issue of the transfer of Bichvinta government cottages to Russia by the occupation regime of Abkhazia.

According to the ministry, the ratification of the 'agreement' by the 'Parliament' for the transfer of the Bichvinta cottages to Russia constitutes another illegal act and represents a continuation of Russia's policy of occupying the indivisible regions of Georgia, which grossly violates the fundamental principles of international law.

The Foreign Ministry emphasized that, from an international legal standpoint, any such so-called 'agreement' holds no legal force and is not considered legally binding. Accordingly, the Ministry pointed out that the



'agreement' signed regarding the transfer of territory under the conditions of Abkhazia's occupation cannot have any legal effect.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia appeals to the international community to properly assess yet another illegal step by the Russian Federation, which aims to encroach on

the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs calls on the Russian Federation to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and to fulfill its international obligations, including the ceasefire agreement of August 12, 2008, as brokered by the

European Union," the statement reads.

President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili responded to the transfer of Bichvinta government cottages to Russia and called on the international community for an urgent reaction.

"Strongly condemn another land grab by Russians in Geor-

gian territories & their creeping annexation policies. The strong popular reaction we see around the #Bichvinta transfer is a direct result of continued occupation. I call on the Int. community for a strong and urgent reaction," Zourabichvili wrote on X.

## Opposition Leaders Criticize Government's Response to Russian Occupation Amid Transfer of Bichvinta Cottages to Russia



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Georgian opposition leaders criticized the de-facto government of Abkhazia's decision to transfer Bichvinta cottages to Russia. They view it as a land annexation and question the Georgian government's approach to the matter.

Giorgi Gakharia, the former Prime Minister and leader of the For Georgia party, stated that Russia has taken another step toward annexing Abkhazia. He criticized the Georgian Dream, accusing them of maintaining a counterproductive and non-pragmatic silence in response to Russia's actions.

Gakharia condemned the Sukhumi 'authorities' for accommodating Russia's request to transfer the Bichvinta resort, describing such decisions as illegal. He called for unity, suggesting that both Georgians and Abkhaz should work together to reclaim the land that has been transferred.

"Russia took another step towards annexation of occupied Abkhazia against the back-

ground of Georgian Dream's policy of anti-pragmatic silence. The Sukhumi occupational regime accommodated the request of the occupant country & gave Russia the Bichvinta resort totally neglecting the will of Georgian and Abkhaz people. Such 'decisions' are illegal. Together with our Abkhaz compatriots, we should reclaim our land," Gakharia wrote on X.

According to Teona Akubardia, an opposition member of parliament, it is crucial to adopt a parliamentary resolution on this issue. She emphasized that it is necessary for the government to pursue an adequate policy towards Russia.

"Today, at 6 o'clock in the morning, the actual annexation of Bichvinta was signed, and this was the tribute that Vladimir Putin demanded from the Abkhaz community. Of course, this will not be the last fact of the actual annexation [...] In this context, we see how inadequate the positions and attitude of the Georgian authorities are to the

CONTINUED ON Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6920; Euro - 2.9763; GBP - 3.4253; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9275; Swiss Franc - 2.9275

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national interest of territorial in-

tegrity and sovereignty," said Akubardia.  
The leader of the Lelo party,

Saba Buadze, referred to the situation as a "tragedy". He emphasized that the direct

handover of the historical territory to Russia is indicative of Russia's primary interests, suggesting that Russia is not even accountable to their "own puppet regime" in Abkhazia. Additionally, Buadze criticized the Georgian government, pointing out that, in his recollection, there has been a lack of statements from the government regarding the transfer of the Bichvinta cottages.  
"What happened in Bichvinta

is a great tragedy, where the historical territory of our country was directly handed over to Russia. This once again highlights that Russia has no other interest; they are not even accountable to their own puppet regime. History has unfolded in a way that we don't recall a single statement from our government regarding the transfer of the Bichvinta cottages," Buadze stated.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili Holds Farewell Meeting with Italian Ambassador Enrico Valvo



The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, held a farewell meeting with the Am-

bassador of Italy to Georgia, Enrico Valvo.  
According to the press service of the Prime Minister, during the meeting, attention was paid to the existing close cooperation and friendly relations between the two countries, demonstrated by the establishment of a high-

level political dialogue format.  
The meeting highlighted Italy's support for Georgia's accession to European and Euro-

Atlantic structures, emphasizing the historic decision to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country for EU membership. Ambassador Enrico Valvo reiterated Italy's strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister thanked the Italian diplomat for his significant contribution to the development of cooperation between the two countries during his tenure as ambassador and extended best wishes for success in his future endeavors.

### Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze Emphasizes the Significance of Reclaiming Territories through 'Intelligence' and 'Education'

The Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze responded to the 'ratification' of the 'agreement' on the transfer of the Bichvinta country houses to Russia by the 'Parliament' of de-facto Abkhazia, emphasizing that Georgia aims

to achieve economic strengthening and development through its policies. He highlighted the importance of reclaiming occupied territories through 'intelligence and education'.

"We have issued several statements regarding this matter. I reiterate once again that all our friendly countries and the international community will be involved in addressing the mentioned issue. The occupation of

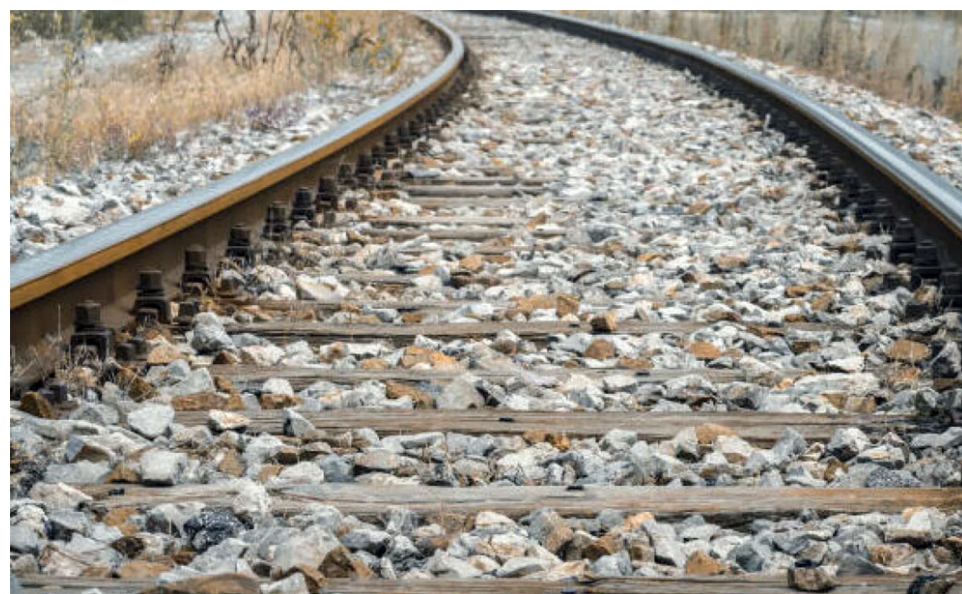
a significant part of our country's territory is a major problem. Today, for us and the government of Georgia, the biggest challenge is the occupation of a certain part of our country's territory by Russia. Accordingly, with our policy, we aim to achieve the economic strengthening and development of the country while regaining the territories with intelligence and education," stated Kaladze.



# EU, Ukraine and Moldova sign high-level understandings to improve transport connectivity

On 22 December, the European Commission signed high-level Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with Ukraine and Moldova to revise the trans-European transport (TEN-T) network in their territories and improve connections with the EU.

The modified TEN-T maps for both countries also reflect new



transport priorities in the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

The changes will be reflected in the new TEN-T Regulation when it enters into force in early 2024 and further extends four European Transport Corridors into Ukraine and Moldova.

European Commissioner for

Transport Adina Valean said the new agreements were another "key step towards bringing Ukraine and Moldova closer to our common market".

"By extending four European Transport Corridors into Ukraine and Moldova, all the way to the ports of Mariupol and Odesa, we strengthen transport connectivity in the region and with the EU. Both countries can now apply for CEF infrastructure funding for projects along these corridors," Adina Valean said.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

## Weather

Thursday, December 28

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 9°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 1°C

Friday, December 29

Day Clear  
High: 7°C

Night Clear  
Low: -1°C

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