

Georgian Dream Delegation's Official Visit to Beijing Led by Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

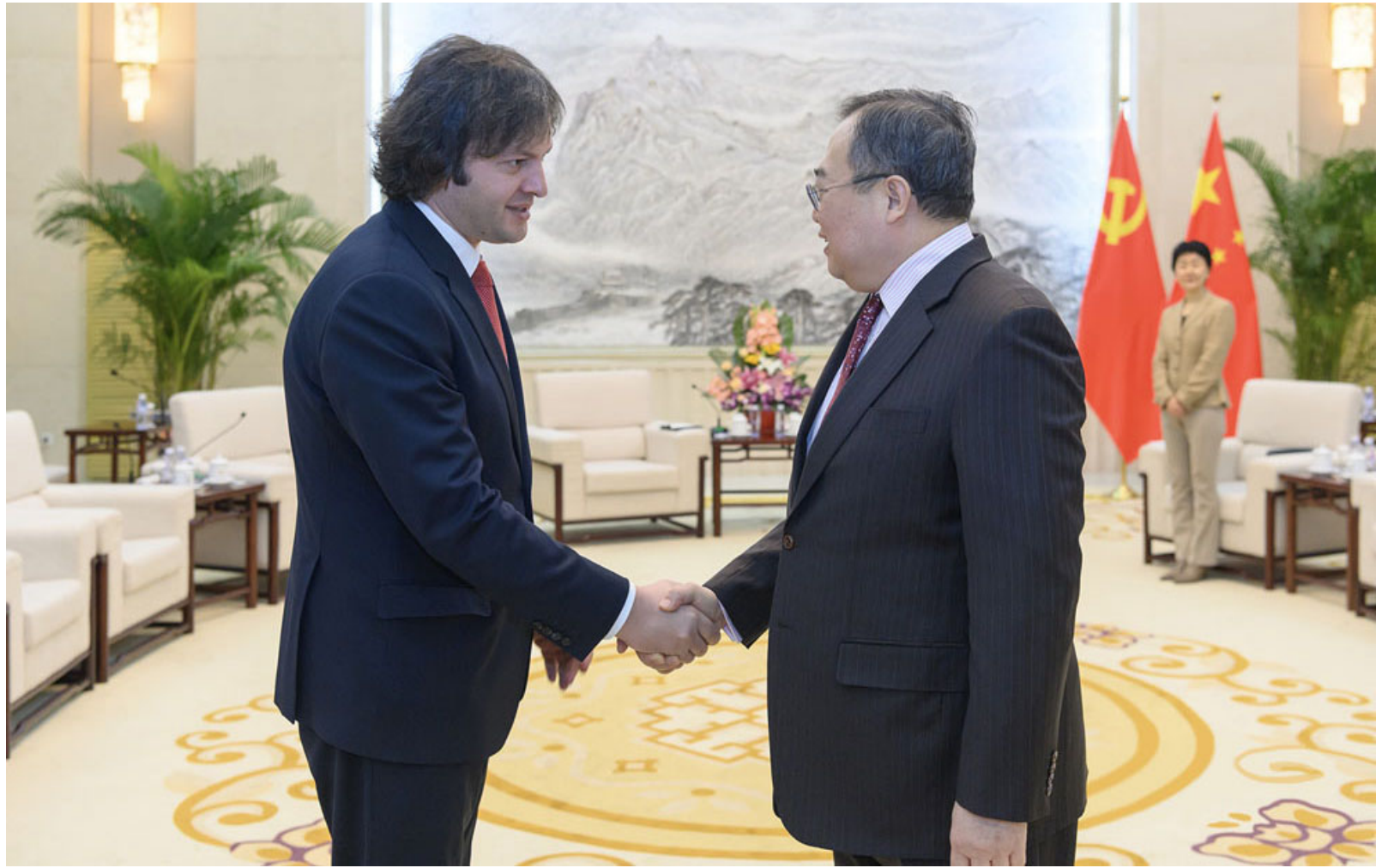
The Georgian Dream delegation is now in Beijing for an official visit to China, and it's headed by the party's chairman, Irakli Kobakhidze.

During the visit, they met with Minister Liu Jinchao, the Head of the International Department of the Chinese ruling party, along with Deputy Minister Sun Haiyan and Vice President of the Development Research Department of the State Council, Wang Yiming.

Kobakhidze emphasized that a strategic partnership agreement has been signed, and the aim of their visit is to ensure the proper implementation of this agreement. He specifically highlighted that, both political and economic cooperation with China are crucial. According to him, this collaboration can bring very concrete tangible results for Georgia and the people of Georgia.

"During our official visit to China, we had meetings with the head of the International Department of the ruling party, Minister Liu Jinchao, and the Deputy Minister. Additionally, we held discussions with the leadership of the research center under the State Council to explore opportunities for deepening cooperation. The past year was historic in terms of strengthening relations between China and Georgia.

A strategic partnership agreement has been signed, and our aim is to ensure the proper implementation of this agreement, which is the purpose of our visit.



We attach great importance to the development of relations between Georgia and China.

There are various areas where relationships can be strengthened. Our cooperation with China holds significant importance from different perspectives — political and economic. This collaboration is crucial for us, and it has the potential to yield concrete and tan-

gible results for our country and population," Kobakhidze stated.

The Opposition is critical of Kobakhidze's visit to China. One of the opposition leaders, Khatia Dekanoidze, stated that while relations with China are important, it becomes very dangerous when the Chinese Communist Party becomes the sole international partner for the ruling party.

"We have had economic relations with China for a long time, but the first point in the recommendation of the European Commission is the alignment of foreign policy with the European Union, and China cannot be the only international partner of Georgia.

International partners should be America, EU, and NATO member states who are lobbying Geor-

gia as a future EU member state.

Relations with China are important, but when the Chinese Communist Party becomes the only international partner for the ruling party, while Georgian Dream is kicked out of the family of European parties, it is very dangerous. Especially in the period before the opening of negotiations with the European Union," Dekanoidze stated.

Government Initiative Expands Program for Chronic Disease Medications

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Based on the decision made by the government administration during the meeting,

there is an expansion in the program for treating chronic diseases with medicines. More specifically, citizens falling under the relevant category or status

will receive full funding for glaucoma medication throughout the year, starting from January 15, according to the government's directive.

Furthermore, in accordance with government directives, individuals within the specified beneficiary category will receive full funding for their needs throughout the entire year.

In addition, as per government regulations, individuals falling within the relevant beneficiary category will receive full funding for their needs throughout the entire year. The coverage includes:

- Chronic diseases of cardiovascular, lung, and thyroid gland
- Type 2 diabetes
- Medications for Parkinson's and epilepsy
- Socially vulnerable persons (whose rating score does not exceed 100,000 units)
- Pensioners
- Veterans
- Disabled persons (in-

cluding disabled children and individuals with severely or significantly disabled status)

The population living in villages near the dividing line with the occupied territories of Georgia.

The Cabinet of Ministers members also reviewed the Government of Georgia's draft resolution titled "On determining the social package".

With the recent update, starting from January of this year, the social package for severely disabled persons and disabled children will increase by 50 GEL, from 340 to 390 GEL.

The financial assistance for all other categories of disabled persons has been increased by 20 GEL. Notably, the social package for individuals with significant disabilities is raised from 175 to 195 GEL.

The budget, totaling about 46 million GEL, will benefit up to 123,000 beneficiaries through the increased social package.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6582; Euro - 2.9067; GBP - 3.3810; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0336; Swiss Franc - 3.1112

Georgian Dream's Political Manoeuvres: Claiming Credit for EU Candidate Status Amidst Electoral Tensions

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

After receiving the candidate status for EU membership, the main topic for Georgian politics has become who gets the credit for it and how the political forces before the elections will use this in the future.

The Georgian Dream claims the status as its merit and once again announces the 4th 'convincing victory' in the upcoming elections. The opposition considers getting the status a merit of the people and considers it possible to fulfil the 9 requirements named by the European Union only in case of a change of government.

The ruling party had planned a ceremonial celebration but as it turned out, it was only a celebration of the Georgian Dream. Neither the representatives of the opposition, some of whom came to the mentioned celebration, nor President Zurabishvili, who in the role of an ordinary citizen was watching the speakers on stage, were allowed to the microphone.

The leaders of the Georgian Dream then noted that it was planned that way - the president and the opposition did not de-

serve to speak, because they tried to prevent Georgia from being granted candidate status. The Georgian Dream announced the status as its merit and thanked Bidzina Ivanishvili for setting Georgia on the road to democracy in 2012.

Not at the celebration, but two days later, Bidzina Ivanishvili also appeared at the anniversary of the late Ramaz Chkhikvadze, a famous Georgian actor. Ivanishvili had disappeared from public space in the last two years and his appearance was preceded by a praise campaign from the Georgian Dream.

During the day, Gharibashvili announced all the achievements of the country, including the candidate status, as the merit of Ivanishvili, and at the end of the day, Ivanishvili appeared. Journalists were not allowed to visit him and he did not say anything, although his sudden appearance revived the idea that Ivanishvili is going to return to politics. And a couple of weeks later, he did announce his return as a party Chair and an advisor, promising to "bring the country to the final victory" by 2030.

In the past, Ivanishvili's return to politics was often con-

nected with the critical periods of the Georgian Dream, when it was close to defeat.

The pre-election positions of the ruling party are not as solid as they try to present and they're talking about obtaining a constitutional majority in the next parliament. The upcoming elections will be held entirely by the proportional system, and if the electoral threshold is reduced to 2%, pro-Western democratic parties will form the majority. That's why the Georgian Dream is so adamant to maintain the 5% threshold.

The opposition has not been able to unite. According to today's pre-election surveys, only the UNM is capable of overcoming the 5% barrier, but a big split recently occurred in this party. Some opposition parties have even found a new "victory formula" - if three (or four) opposition parties cross the 5% threshold, the majority will be in the hands of the opposition coalition. To what extent it is possible to achieve this is another matter.

Receiving the candidate status for EU membership also influenced the official rhetoric of the Georgian Dream. They no

longer criticise European parliamentarians, and no one claims that Georgia will receive the candidate status only if it "engages in war" against Russia, and they no longer talk about the "global war party".

In the upcoming election campaign, the Georgian Dream will try to claim the status of a candidate entirely on its merits and declares that it has already started working to fulfil the 9 reservations of the European Union. The opposition claims that the government will not fulfil the reservations of the European Union and that the government needs to be changed in the next elections, while the coalition of pro-Western political parties that came to power will fulfil these reservations of the European Union in a few months.

As for the actual policy of the Georgian Dream, it has not changed much. Criticism from the opposition side followed the first decision of the Georgian government as a candidate for EU membership. Georgia did not join the European Union's decision to extend the "Magnitsky List".

The sanctions lasted for three

years. Among the signatories are Georgia's neighbours - Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The anti-Western campaign continues. Alt-info's videos of several individuals burning EU flags have been circulating on social media. The opposition sees the Georgian Dream behind this and they also point out that Russia will definitely strengthen its anti-Western actions in Georgia before the elections.

The Georgian Dream faced serious warnings and criticism. The Venice Commission criticised Georgian Dream's amendments to the electoral code, which fail to ensure a consensus-based political process, and a new anti-corruption bureau run by the prime minister.

Xavier Colomina, the special representative of the NATO Secretary General, was in Georgia and spoke with the current leaders of the Georgian government about the importance of the quality of democracy in the upcoming elections and noted that this factor will determine the relationship with NATO. In a word, the Georgian Dream will not get away with imitation reforms and rigged elections.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Maka Bochorishvili Stresses Integration Mechanism Needs at EU Committee Meeting



At the meeting of the chairmen of the European integration committees of the European

Union member parliaments, Maka Bochorishvili, Chairman of the European Integration Committee of the Parliament, stated that the enlargement policy holds greater strategic importance and plays a more significant role to-

ment of the European Union, which has made it possible to increase the area of peace, stability and prosperity in Europe, but has not created the same situation in the neighborhood, despite numerous efforts within the framework of the neighborhood policy. Aggressive actions of Russia have repeatedly made it clear that other steps are needed for a secure future of the European Union.

The enlargement policy today holds greater strategic importance and plays a more significant role, and we no longer have the luxury of allowing the process to proceed as slowly as it has for the last ten years.

We all need effective integration mechanisms, removing existing barriers wherever possible, so that candidate countries can rapidly integrate economically and politically into the European Union. An individual approach is needed, but opportunities should be equally provided to all candidate countries," Bochorishvili stated.

Volski Says China Recognizes Importance of Middle Corridor



The delegation of the ruling party, led by the chairman of the Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze, is on a working visit to China. Giorgi Volski, also part of the delegation, informed reporters that China recognizes the strategic significance of the Middle Corridor.

"China's stance on the ongoing global processes and the perceptions towards China from our partner countries—the European Union and the USA—is

widely known. And, of course, China also understands well the importance of the strategic loca-

tion of the Middle Corridor, where Georgia occupies a key position in such a situation.

The conversation touched on Georgia's participation in the relations between the West and East, European Union, and Asian markets. Despite the significant difference in resources between China and Georgia, the standard of cooperation, which implies equality, is maintained here," Volski stated.

Weather

Tuesday, January 16

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 8°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

Wednesday, January 17

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 10°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 2°C

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