

Shalva Papuashvili Says Anti-Chinese Narratives Jeopardize Georgia's Strategic Projects

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, accused those fueling anti-Chinese narratives of jeopardizing strategic projects and transforming Georgia from a corridor into a dead end.

"Presenting this as something special now is absolute manipulation and anti-Georgian propaganda, as it goes against the interests of Georgia. The interest of Georgia lies in the Middle Corridor, the Silk Road, through which a significant amount of cargo is currently being transferred. This comes after the so-called 'northern corridor,' which runs through Russia, has been blocked and appears to remain closed for an extended period.

Now, we have the opportunity to utilize this corridor for the movement of cargo between China and the European Union through Georgia. One should contemplate the motivations and funding behind those opposing it. The fact remains that those who are currently fueling anti-Chinese sentiments in Georgia are aiming to disrupt the country's strategic projects, transforming Georgia from a corridor into a dead end," Papuashvili said.

When asked about develop-



ments in this direction following his visit to China, the chairman of the parliament mentioned that the project focuses on the development of the Middle Corridor, which, in turn, does not involve the generation of any

cargo or goods.

"The concept behind the corridor is to facilitate the transport of cargo originating from another country, passing through our corridor. When we assert that this functions as a bridge

between Europe and Asia, what is intended by 'Asia' is that they ought to open the map—be it political, economic, or including the physical map. Examine the routes of the corridors, trace the origins of the cargoes, and iden-

tify the interests, political groups, or financial entities supporting those individuals attempting to transform Georgia into a dead end rather than a strategically significant corridor," Papuashvili stated.

Chairman Papuashvili says USAID Funding for Center Promoting 'Religious Hysteria' is a Concern

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, spoke about the Tolerance Center, criticized its head, Beka Mindiashvili, and addressed the organization's donor, USAID. According to him, Mindiashvili, the head of the

Tolerance Center, is involved and is the 'instigator' of the attack campaign on religious grounds.

Papuashvili did not appreciate Mindiashvili's criticism of the Patriarchate, prompting him to appeal to the Public Defender. However, upon discovering that the center was not under the

jurisdiction of the Ombudsman, he issued a statement to the donor. According to Papuashvili, Mindiashvili's critique of the Patriarchate constitutes "religious intolerance, hostile rhetoric, and hate speech."

"The man who should be promoting the idea of religious tolerance has himself become the

spirit behind the campaign of attacks on religious grounds. In addition, he is generally characterized by religious intolerance and hostile rhetoric towards the Georgian Orthodox Church...

Referring to the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a 'spy, labeling the church as 'degraded', and dismissing the celebration of Christmas on January 7, on the secular calendar, as 'anti-Western stupidity' amounts to religious intolerance, hostile rhetoric, and hate speech.

Referring to the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a 'spy,' labeling the church as 'degraded,' and dismissing the celebration of Christmas on January 7, according to the secular calendar, as 'anti-Western stupidity,' amounts to religious intolerance, hostile rhetoric, and hate speech. This goes against what a tolerance center should be fighting for," Papuashvili said.

Papuashvili also addressed the funding of the Tolerance Center, noting that the center is financed under one of the USAID

programs, which, according to him, is a problem.

"I am deeply saddened that, once again, USAID finds itself at the epicenter of a scandal related to projects financed in its name. It turns out that a person distinguished by religious intolerance and inciting religious hysteria is able to secure American funding, even though the cause for which he acts is completely opposite to the values supported by the funding. I expect that the USAID leadership will soon find out about this issue and will act in the best interest of the American and Georgian people," Papuashvili said.

Papuashvili asserted that the 'Tolerance Center' is neither a center nor a structural unit of the Public Defender. According to him, it is "an independent project that exists separately," which, in turn, poses a problem. He argued that the appropriation of the name of a constitutional body is misleading citizens and presents the non-governmental organization as a state institution.



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Bidzina Ivanishvili's Third Political Comeback Ignites Controversy and Election Speculation

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

At the end of last year, it was announced at the Georgian Dream Congress that Bidzina Ivanishvili officially returned to politics for the third time. The representatives of the ruling party welcome this fact and announce an even greater victory in the next parliamentary elections, while the opposition sees Ivanishvili's return to power as a crisis and talks about the final defeat of the oligarch in the elections.

Ivanishvili's coming and going in politics has a long history. In 2011, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, who gained wealth in Russia, announced that he was planning to enter politics and opposed President Saakashvili, with whom he had cooperated for years as a benefactor and in some cases a sponsor of his government.

Entering politics, Ivanishvili founded his own party "Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia", which came to power as a result of parliamentary elections in October 2012 in a coalition with four parties, ending the 9-year rule of Saakashvili's United National Movement.

Ivanishvili became the Prime Minister, but a year later announced that he was leaving

politics. In this regard, on September 2, 2013, he published an open letter, stating he was moving to the non-governmental sector, and already in this role set a 20-year work plan "for the development of the civil sector".

November 20, 2013, was the last day of Bidzina Ivanishvili as Prime Minister. According to the NDI survey conducted at the time, 71% of the respondents did not justify Ivanishvili's departure from politics, but according to the opposition, Ivanishvili's departure from politics was another 'trick' of his, he did not go anywhere, he was simply removed from responsibility and moved to the backstage management system of the country.

Four years later, in May 2018, Ivanishvili returned to politics for the second time and took the position of chairman of the Georgian Dream. Some of the experts connected his return with the crisis within the ruling party. Be that as it may, on January 11, 2021, Bidzina Ivanishvili announced that he was 'finally' leaving politics. According to him, the mission was accomplished, and with his departure from politics, the Georgian Dream ended the vicious tradition of the personality cult.

The opposition did not believe in Ivanishvili's departure from

politics and spoke about the oligarch's behind-the-scenes rule. One of the main demands of the European Union was related to 'deoligarchisation'. The Georgian Dream did not consider Ivanishvili an oligarch and categorically denied his connection with politics.

A new stage in the history of the Georgian Dream began on December 30, 2023, when Ivanishvili appeared unexpectedly at the congress of the ruling party and announced his return to politics for the third time. The charter of the ruling party was specially changed for Ivanishvili and the position of 'honorary chairman' was introduced. In his speech, Ivanishvili said what the leaders of the Georgian Dream denied for a long time. According to him, after leaving politics, he communicated with a couple of leaders of the party, and gave advice, which "helped to maintain a healthy situation in the team". He also said that giving advice to the team by the former leader of the party is a common occurrence and that this is a common practice in many democratic countries.

Ivanishvili emphasized that his return to politics is not related to the upcoming elections, because 'unfortunately' the opposition is completely destroyed,

and "if the parliamentary elections were held now", the ruling team would get 90-100 mandates without any election campaign.

Other leaders of the Georgian Dream also talk about the future victory and obtaining a constitutional majority in the new parliament, although the results of the survey present a different picture.

At the end of December 2023, the results of a public opinion poll conducted by Edison Research show that 36.6% of voters would support the Georgian Dream, 4 more parties would cross the 5% threshold, and they would receive 42% of the votes in total. The study shows that the Georgian people support the idea of a coalition of opposition parties coming to power as a result of the 2024 elections. 56% of respondents believed that the best result for Georgia would be the victory of the opposition parties in the 2024 elections, while 65% believed that it was time to give other parties a chance to come to power. However, the ruling party considers these and similar studies to be biased and continues to talk about its inevitable great victory.

How did Bidzina Ivanishvili explain the need to return to power? He named two reasons: one is the complicated geopolitical situation when even a small

mistake can cost the country very dearly. He named the second reason the "absence of the opposition", saying internal conflicts may appear in the ruling party and the risks of corruption also increase, which "needs emergency insurance". It seems that Ivanishvili considers it his duty to avoid these threats, declaring EU integration as his main foreign policy task.

The opposition explains Ivanishvili's return with completely different reasons: the desire to avoid Western sanctions, to settle the aggravated internal conflict and corruption scandal in the ruling party, and to openly support the Georgian Dream in the upcoming parliamentary elections. According to the opposition, Ivanishvili's return to politics means that during the pre-election period, the Georgian Dream will use all measures not only to stay in power but also to obtain a comfortable 'constitutional majority'. Nevertheless, the leaders of the opposition parties are declaring that Ivanishvili's open return to politics will not change anything and that after the parliamentary elections, he and his party will have to leave politics for good, after which the country will fulfill the 9 steps in a short time and start negotiations on joining the European Union.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

USAID Responds to Shalva Papuashvili, Affirms Support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Aspirations

The USAID representative office in Georgia has responded to the statement made by the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili.

In the statement distributed by First Channel, the organization wrote that the US government, through USAID, is col-

laborating with numerous organizations for the benefit of Georgia to promote tolerance.

According to the USAID representative in Georgia, they maintain constant, open, and transparent communication with the Georgian government. "The US government, via USAID, collaborates with numerous organizations to promote tolerance and benefit Georgia. We maintain constant, open, and transparent communication with the Georgian government concerning how our programs contribute to supporting Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations," the organization stated.



Georgian Government Delegation Concludes Working Visit to China

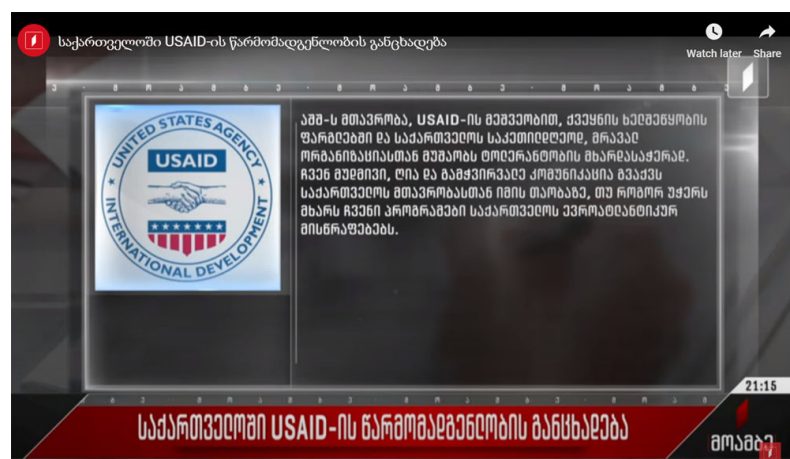
The visit of the delegation from the ruling party to the People's Republic of China, led by the chairman of Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze was concluded on January 20.

"Today, we concluded our visit to China, having had very fruitful meetings with the leadership of the ruling party's foreign

team, the minister, the deputy minister, the deputy minister of trade, the deputy chairman of the National People's Congress, and the leadership of the city of Shanghai.

The potential is huge. Our desire and goal is to deepen cooperation with China at different levels and in different directions. A strategic partnership

agreement was signed last year, which creates a very good basis for deepening the partnership in absolutely all areas. Of course, political cooperation is important, we have a special potential in the field of economy, we should use this potential as much as possible," said Kobakhidze.



Weather

Monday, January 22

Day Showers

High: 6°C

Night Snow Showers

Low: 1°C

Tuesday, January 23

Day Snow Showers

High: 4°C

Night Snow Showers

Low: -1°C

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According to the USAID rep-

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