

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

President Salome Zourabichvili: Georgia's Future Lies in Ukraine

The President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, addressed a discussion organized by the Chatham House Royal Institute of International Affairs, focusing on Georgia's future in Europe and the ways it can integrate with the European Union.

In her speech, the President asserted that Georgia's European identity is inherent and that Russia's interference obstructs its realization. According to her, the defeat of Russia in Ukraine holds crucial significance for Europe.

The President stated that over the past 20 years, Georgia has successfully completed all stages of joining the European Union. This includes joining the neighborhood policy, signing the association agreement, achieving visa liberalization, implementing a deep and comprehensive trade agreement, and steadily progressing towards candidate status, which was granted at the end of last year.

According to Zourabichvili, for Georgia to maintain its trajectory towards European integration and ultimately become a member of the European Union, it faces a significant challenge: Russia and its actions in Ukraine.

"Yes, we know, we have experienced, and we can say a lot about what it means to be a neighbor of Russia, to be conquered by different regimes of Russia in various ways, but today the challenge lies in Ukraine. There is no support for Georgia and its European path without the support of Ukraine. Supporting Ukraine is the common goal of Europeans, all Western partners, and the majority of Americans. This is the main goal and task for everyone," Zourabichvili said.

According to the President, the defeat of Russia in the war is a shared responsibility. She stated that due to Georgia's occupied territory and its proximity to Russia, Georgia has limited capacity to act.

Zourabichvili also addressed the challenging living conditions faced by people residing near the constantly shifting 'border' with Russia, highlighting instances of kidnappings, illegal arrests, and enduring extreme psychological pressure.



She emphasized that these people have no access to basic human rights.

"If the population living in the occupied territories needs medical support (which was very visible during the COVID pandemic), they cross the dividing line with difficulty because they are not always allowed to cross [the occupation line], or they do not know when they will be able to cross. They move to the controlled territory of Georgia to get education.

In the occupied territories, language is not protected as a sign of cultural identity. Neither the Abkhazian nor the Ossetian language is protected in any

way. In fact, they no longer speak these languages; there is only Russian, which is well-known to Georgia, leading to Russification. Culture is not preserved. What was expected from the separatist forces did not happen in the occupied territories - the strengthening of identity and differences.

Let's take Abkhazia as an example. One of the most important principles they voiced was that this is their land and that it would not be sold or alienated to foreigners. However, this principle was overcome by the Russians, who exerted strong pressure. They were able to obtain permission from the so-called Par-

liament of Abkhazia to buy land, an airport, and the port of Ochamchire on the Black Sea coast. This in itself is a problem because Russia wants to add a new military base in addition to the ones already there.

So, the future of Georgia lies in Ukraine, and the future of Europe hinges on Ukraine's victory. In many ways, Ukraine is already a winner because Russia has not succeeded, and we should all understand this very well. Despite Russian propaganda efforts to influence our public opinion, President Putin's war aims have not been achieved at all," Zourabichvili said.

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Parliament Chairman Calls on EU to Distance Itself from MEPs' 'Defamatory' Statements



The Chairman of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, addressed the European Union in an open letter, stating that it is time for the EU to officially distance itself from the "defamatory statements" made by MEPs.

Papuashvili responded to the amendment made by the Polish MEP Anna Fotyga to the resolution of the European Parliament, calling on President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili to pardon imprisoned ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili.

"Recently, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that included a paragraph where the MEPs demand Saakashvili's early release from legal custody on 'humanitarian grounds', whatever that means. MEP Anna Fotyga, the alleged author of the amendment, noted that the ex-president of Georgia is

'Putin's personal enemy and prisoner'. A few days ago, at the last Munich Security Conference, Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski made a similar sad comment about Saakashvili when he also demanded Saakashvili's release and called him 'a symbol of Georgia's modernization'.

This is not news. We have heard such appeals before, and we know that they are futile. The authors of such statements do not understand the negative attitude of the majority of Georgian society towards Saakashvili and his foreign patrons. While Saakashvili's lobbyists hail the 'merits' of the ex-president of Georgia, for most Georgians, everything is diametrically opposed. Moreover, such inexplicable statements by Western politicians cause a certain cognitive dissonance, as people



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6599; Euro - 2.8839; GBP - 3.3677; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9277; Swiss Franc - 3.0223

Parliament Chairman Calls on EU to Distance Itself from MEPs' 'Defamatory' Statements

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begin to question how a demo-

cratic West can still support an authoritarian figure. It also raises doubts as to whether the

declared 'Western values' are merely a gimmick to achieve certain geopolitical goals."

Papuashvili wrote.

Parliament Chairman urged the European Union to distance itself from 'defamatory' statements made by MEPs, questioning whether the EU shares common values or is influenced by the 'narrow' interests of MEPs. He emphasized the importance of Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration for the future.

"The time has come for the

European Union to officially dissociate itself from the defamatory statements of MEPs. Our question to the European Union is whether they share our common values or are they subject to the narrow interests of MEPs. We believe that our main task is the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia. We have to think about the future," wrote Papuashvili.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Saakashvili Different from Navalny; Elections Not Tied to his Location, Says President Zourabichvili



President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili stated that Mikheil Saakashvili is not Alexei Navalny, and fair and free elections do not depend on Saakashvili's location. The president remarked that while the former president is serving a sentence for a real crime, it would be more beneficial to explore alternative measures such as house arrest or extradition in terms of reputation. As for the pardon, according to Zourabichvili, she does not comment on it.

"What we see now, and what we have seen in different regimes, is the tendency of human rights violations in the prisons

of authoritarian regimes. We have witnessed all of this and experienced it during Saakashvili's time. So, he is in prison for real reasons.

However, this does not mean that the humanitarian perspective should not be

protected and respected. I have closely observed what happens to him in prison.

Asking what can be done, I agree that it would be much better reputationally for him to be somewhere else. This decision has to be accepted by the government. There are many ways that other countries have solved these problems, such as house arrest or extradition. Ukraine has shown readiness for extradition, although I don't know if it has happened formally. So, these possibilities are there.

From my side, I only have one opportunity, which I never comment on outside the country and rarely comment on inside the country, because there are

many others who are waiting for the opportunity to be pardoned, and if you start to explain or justify, it is very unfair to other people. So I'm not commenting. This is a moral decision that I will make on my own, and I will answer only to myself, and it is definitely not something that can be influenced by external or internal pressure," Zourabichvili said.

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze Meets Israeli Ambassador Hadas Meitzad



The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, met with the Ambassador of Israel to Georgia, Hadas Meitzad.

According to the government admin-

istration, the discussions during the meeting centered on the current cooperation between the two countries and the potential for further enhancing partnership across various sectors.

The Prime Minister underscored the longstanding friendship between the two countries, which is grounded in the strong political ties between them.

"Attention was paid to the positive dynamics of trade and economic relations development. Irakli Kobakhidze noted that Georgia welcomes the initiation of negotiations on a free trade agreement next year. The Prime Minister reiterated

his solidarity with the diplomat following the terrorist attack on the State of Israel and its citizens on October 7, 2023," the statement reads.

World NGO Day: EU is mobilising all tools to support NGO workers, human rights defenders, and journalists worldwide

"Civil society plays a crucial role as the voice for the most vulnerable, contributing to robust democracies and account-



able governance. However, they continue to work in an increasingly restrictive and hostile environment in many parts of the world," said EU High Representative Josep Borrell in a statement dedicated to World NGO Day on 27 February.

He noted that NGO workers, human rights defenders, and journalists are increasingly threatened and attacked, "often with impunity".

The EU high official reminded that the work of civil society is often stigmatised through "foreign agent" laws or other legislative and administrative measures that impede the legitimate

activities of NGOs.

"The use of excessive force against peaceful protesters hinders democratic participation. The EU strongly condemns attacks on freedom of association and peaceful assembly," said Borrell.

He added that the EU is mobilising all tools at its disposal to counter these trends, providing substantial financial support to civil society. The EU System for Enabling Environment (EU SEE), launched in 2023 with Euro 50 million, monitors and promotes civic space in 86 partner countries.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Friday, March 1

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 9°C
Night 🌙 Clear
Low: -1°C

Saturday, March 2

Day ☁️ Partly Cloudy
High: 9°C
Night ☁️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

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