

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## Finland's Foreign Minister Hosts Georgia's Foreign Minister

Elina Valtonen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, hosted Ilia Darchiashvili, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, for discussions. Following the meeting, Valtonen affirmed Finland's strong support for Georgia's integration into the European Union. Additionally, she expressed Finland's endorsement of the ongoing reforms in Georgia and expressed satisfaction that Georgia has committed to a future rooted in values, human rights, and the rule of law.

According to the head of the Finnish Foreign Ministry, Georgia and Finland have a very strong partnership with ample opportunities for further development.

In response, Ilia Darchiashvili expressed gratitude to Elina Valtonen for her hospitality and support.

"We have repeatedly mentioned how important Finland's unwavering support is, as well as your constant involvement and support for Georgia's European integration. We Georgians are very grateful for that," said Darchiashvili.

Minister Darchiashvili acknowledged the significant milestone achieved by Georgia in obtaining candidate status for European Union membership. He emphasized the importance of the next phase - initiating accession negotiations - and expresses readiness to collaborate closely with Finland and Brussels in this endeavor.

Additionally, Minister Darchiashvili extended gratitude



to Finland for its support in Georgia's foreign policy endeavors and affirms Georgia's reliability as a partner in the Black Sea region.

"Georgia has reached one of

the most important stages - it has obtained candidate status. The next step for us will be to work closely with you and Brussels to move to the next important stage: the opening of acces-

sion negotiations.

Once again, I would like to express my gratitude for supporting Georgia's foreign policy priorities, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. Georgia is a

reliable partner of Finland in the Black Sea region, and I hope that the interesting dialogues held today will contribute to the start of a new stage in bilateral relations," Darchiashvili stated.

## Chairman of Georgian Parliament Condemns 'Clan' Terminology by Non-Governmental Organizations



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Shalva Papuashvili, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, condemned the use of the term 'clan' by non-governmental organizations when referring to individuals involved in administering justice in Georgia. Chairman described this usage as absolutely disturbing and emphasized that it constitutes an attack on the institution.

Papuashvili further underscored that the responsibility for such actions falls on the donors, including The Swedish Development Agency, Transparency International Georgia, as well as the European Democratic Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, and USAID.

According to Papuashvili's statement, it's already evident what these organizations represent and what their political agenda is, especially since some of them have openly declared their election goals. Papuashvili stressed that attacking the justice system crosses a line and is unacceptable.

The Parliament Chairman

strongly condemned the use of foreign funds to undermine Georgian democratic institutions:

"When Georgian justice is attacked by organizations that are fully financed from abroad, I believe that the responsibility of their financiers is already on the agenda. It is already clear what these organizations represent, as well as their political agenda. Several of the five organizations have already announced their election goals.

They talked about wanting to change the government. It is a separate problem that foreign-funded organizations have political agendas and goals. However, regarding the attack on justice, this is absolutely unacceptable.

The use of the term 'clan' in this manner is once again a question that donors must answer: why is their citizens' money used to undermine the justice system of another country? It goes against the spirit of partnership and aims to undermine democratic institutions," Papuashvili stated.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6586; Euro - 2.9061; GBP - 3.4003; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9036; Swiss Franc - 3.0270

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

# How will Russia interfere in the parliamentary elections of Georgia?

Everyone agrees that Russia will interfere in the 2024 parliamentary elections of Georgia - both the government and the opposition. President Zurabishvili speaks often about the threat, but so far nothing has been said about how this threat can be neutralised.

Russia actively interferes in the election process of other countries. There are many examples of this - US presidential elections, French presidential elections in 2017, German Bundestag elections in 2015. Elections, as the main attribute of the democratic system, are one of the important targets of the Russian hybrid war.

Russia's attempt to interfere in the political life of Georgia and especially to influence the elections is nothing new. Moscow has always actively done this. Russia has many levers to influence the ongoing processes in Georgia, and it is easier for it to interfere in the 2024 parliamentary elections of Georgia and influence its results. The vector of Georgia's foreign policy depends on these elections, and Moscow will do everything to ensure that this vector is directed towards Moscow.

The President of Georgia drew attention to the threat of Russian interference in the parliamentary elections of Georgia. Salome Zurabishvili made the statement on February 20 during a conversation with 'Deutsche Welle' that "we should expect a lot of intervention, a

hybrid war is going on against Georgia," Salome Zurabishvili noted. She repeated the same in an interview with Sky News on February 27 and emphasised that it is very disturbing.

The Georgian government was warned about the threat of Russian interference in the elections by its strategic partner, the USA, whose position was clearly stated by the US ambassador to Georgia. "I think there are real risks that disinformation from Russia will threaten trust in the democratic system," said Robin Dunnigan.

The statement of Mamuka Mdinardze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, was interesting: "Russia might intervene, but no one knows for whose benefit". Mdinardze was probably pointing towards the opposition, but his words provoked a mocking reaction in the opposition. Russia, of course, wants the current government to stay in power. The Georgian Dream pursues policies desired by Moscow, and a block made of pro-Western parties in power instead of the current one is not in Moscow's interests.

The Kremlin does not spare words of praise for the current government of Georgia, but it can't be denied that Moscow will not be completely satisfied with the policy of the Georgian

Dream, as they dislike its pro-Western rhetoric. It would be better for Moscow to have openly pro-Russian forces come to power, or at least to bring them into the parliament.

Moscow will try not to create additional problems for the Georgian Dream before the elections. For example, the Tskhinvali proxy government received an instruction from Moscow to refrain from such actions that would negatively affect the rating of the Georgian Dream. For example, to temporarily forget about the 'referendum' on 'joining' the Russian Federation.

After Bidzina Ivanishvili returned to politics for the third time, some pro-government commentators said that one of the goals of Ivanishvili's return would be to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. It is possible that this topic will become more active as the elections approach, but for this, certain 'confronting' statements from Russia will be required. Whether Moscow will go or not is another question.

One of the main directions of Russia's interference in the parliamentary elections, which the president also spoke about, is the support and covert financing of the open or disguised pro-Russian forces in the country. And these groups should strengthen their anti-Western propaganda.

It is a fact that Russia is actively interfering in the political life of Georgia. For example, it became known that the organisation Skolkovo [წინამძღოელი], sponsored by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, is planning to hold an "independent international conference" - OpenTalks.AI on March 6-7 in Tbilisi. The entire army of propagandists close to the Kremlin will arrive in Tbilisi.

In the Georgian Dream, there were two reactions to the threat of Russian interference in the elections. Some do not see such a danger. Some representatives of the government, for example Kakhi Kaladze, cannot recall Russian interference in Georgian elections and note that the electoral system of Georgia is well protected from such things. Vice-Prime Minister Levan Davitashvili considered the general talk about the strengthening of Russian propaganda for elections in Georgia to be unfounded.

Others do not openly reject the possible Russian interference in the elections. For example, the speaker of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, responded to Salome Zurabishvili's statement, who saw nothing new in the fact that Russia would try to interfere in Georgian politics. He turned his attention to the

interference from the West.

Papuashvili noted that with the statements made about the threat of Russian intervention, "they are trying to make it seem as if the only source is Russia, and thus diverting our attention to other directions".

According to his own statement, the European Democracy Fund, founded by the European Union, directly finances political parties and interferes in elections. The chairman of the parliament attacked the pro-Western opposition, which, according to him, is directly financed from abroad through fake NGOs. "Foreign money has nothing to do with Georgian politics, such financing should be stopped," Papuashvili said sternly.

The Georgian Dream will easily find the money coming from the West, because it is open and aimed at supporting democracy, as for the money coming from Russia, it flows into Georgian politics in illegal ways and is difficult to detect, especially if you don't consider it a threat.

Russian interference, in addition to supporting specific political groups, will be manifested in the operation of the entire information propaganda machine - false information, active use of kompromats and active efforts to worsen polarisation and disorient the Georgian society.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Foreign Minister of Georgia Meets Finland's Minister for European Affairs



During his visit to the Republic of Finland, Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ilia Darchiashvili, held a meeting with Anders Adlercreutz, Finland's Minister for European Affairs.

According to the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, during the meeting, the ministers reviewed the main directions of cooperation between the two countries and discussed the prospects for deepening cooperation in various fields.

Georgia-EU relations and progress towards EU accession were discussed, emphasizing the historical significance of Georgia being granted candidate status.

Ilia Darchiashvili noted that the Georgian government continues to actively work towards advancing to the next stage of integration into the European Union. He expressed hope that

Georgia's progress and ambitious reforms implemented in various areas will be properly recognized and appreciated by European partners.

Georgia's Foreign Affairs Minister thanked the European Affairs Minister for backing Georgia's EU integration and reaffirmed Georgia's commitment to further progress towards EU membership.

### Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia Meets President of the National Council of Switzerland



Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, met with the President of the National Council of Switzerland, Eric Nussbaumer.

During the meeting, close and friendly relations between Georgia and Switzerland were emphasized.

Shalva Papuashvili expressed

gratitude for Switzerland's strong support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as for its contribution to reconciliation and restoring trust among the population divided by the occupation line.

The parties discussed the close parliamentary ties between the two countries. Shalva Papuashvili expressed apprecia-

tion for the visit of the President of the National Council of Switzerland to Georgia in 2022 and highlighted that his return visit to Switzerland further strengthens Georgian-Swiss relations.

The parties also reviewed successful sectoral cooperation in healthcare, professional education, agriculture, trade, and various other fields.

## Weather

Thursday, March 14

Day Showers  
High: 9°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

Friday, March 15

Day Mostly Cloudy  
High: 16°C

Night Showers  
Low: 7°C

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