

EU Ambassador Concerned About Impact of 'Russian Law' on Georgia's EU Membership Bid

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, H.E. Pawel Herczynski, expressed strong disapproval of the 'Russian law', stating that it is inconsistent with European norms and values.

Herczynski emphasized, "This law does not align with European or American standards."

When asked whether the adoption of the law could hinder Georgia's path to EU membership, Herczynski indicated that due to its incompatibility with European values, the European Commission would find it challenging to provide a positive assessment.

The EU Ambassador expressed hope that alternative means could be explored to ensure transparency without marginalizing or stigmatizing civil society organizations.

Furthermore, Herczynski stressed the essential nature of freedom of speech and media freedom for all democracies, including Georgia, which is a candidate country for European Union membership.

"This law is incompatible with European values and norms. Especially in the current context, it will be very difficult for the European Commission to make a positive assessment if this law is adopted. This law is not good; it is neither European nor American. I believe that another way will be found to ensure transparency, which is absolutely legitimate. We have nothing against transparency; we are all in favor of it.

However, this should not be achieved at the expense of limiting the very good,



very important, and necessary work that civil society organizations are doing for the benefit of the people of Georgia. This

should be done without resorting to stigmatization and marginalization of civil society organizations. They play a very

important role in any democracy, including Georgia," said Herczynski.

Georgian Foreign Minister Challenges Linking 'Russian Law' to EU Accession Talks, Emphasizes Transparency Goal

By Liza Mchedlidze

During discussions with journalists in Germany, Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ilia Darchiashvili, emphasized the critical role of transparency. He highlighted transparency as a key value that strengthens Georgia's connection with the European community.

Darchiashvili explained that the draft law 'On transparency of foreign influence', often referred to as 'Russian law', aims to promote transparency and accountability to the Georgian people.

"Our main message to our partners is for them to fully understand what this law entails. Our primary concern is that our partners may not have the accurate information, but rather rely on information conveyed by others. However, we want to engage in a thematic discussion with them regarding this issue because transparency is the

main value that brings us closer to the European family. We do not understand any argument that contradicts transparency. We have our specific arguments, and there are no arguments that can be countered.

The legislative process will begin, and discussions around this law will commence. Everyone will have the opportunity to share their vision in an inclusive manner within the parliament. The main vision of this law is that everyone is obliged to be transparent and accountable to the Georgian people; this is the main message," said Ilia Darchiashvili.

Darchiashvili also responded to the remarks made by the EU ambassador, Pawel Herczynski, who emphasized that due to the law's inconsistency with European values, the European Commission would encounter challenges in providing a positive assessment. Foreign Minister



CONTINUED ON Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6720; Euro - 2.8663; GBP - 3.3491; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8538; Swiss Franc - 2.9285

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

35 Years After April 9

If we look at the history of post-Soviet Georgia, which is only a third of a century today, and observe the development of events, we will definitely come to April 9, 1989, which turned out to be a key date and greatly determined the further development of events.

On April 9, 1989, according to the decision made in Moscow, the units of the Soviet Army specially brought to Tbilisi brutally dispersed the protesters gathered on Rustaveli Avenue, whose main demand was the restoration of Georgia's independence. The purpose of the brutal dispersal was to intimidate the national movement and arrest its leaders. The Kremlin had prepared a 'justification', which was officially announced - it turns out that "the protesters were planning a coup".

The brutal crackdown and the introduction of military rule in Tbilisi led to the opposite result of the Kremlin's assumption. The Soviet government was completely discredited, the so-called 'moderates' lost their authority in the national movement and the public mood was radicalised, the members of the Communist Party publicly threw away their party mandates, the funeral of the dead on April 9 actually turned into silent protest demonstrations.

The 'legislative body' of the communist government - the Supreme Council, which had previously been of a formal nature, suddenly began to make decisions recognizing the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921 and effectively declaring the Soviet government illegal.

In the elections of October 28, 1990, the Communist Party was defeated. On the second anniversary of the April 9 tragedy, Zviad

Gamsakhurdia announced the restoration of Georgia's independence based on the referendum held on March 31, 1991.

At that time, Gamsakhurdia also noted that Georgia was facing a great ordeal and a tough battle was waiting for it with the Russian-Soviet Empire. But then probably no one could have imagined how long and bloody this battle would turn out to be.

No one could have imagined that on the 35th anniversary of April 9, 1989, people would gather again on Rustaveli Avenue, in front of the Parliament building, and along with honouring the people who died then, they would protest the attempt to return the country to the orbit of Russia, whose current leader is the war with the neighbouring post-Soviet states and the agency left over from the Soviet period or created later. He is trying to restore 'historical Russia' through use.

The round date makes people look to the past, to evaluate achievements and failures. What did Georgia achieve and what did it fail to achieve in the last 35 years?

The most recent academic research on this topic was conducted a few years ago - The Future of Georgia, Research report, CRRC Georgia, 2021. However, the underlying estimates are likely to remain unchanged.

The population's attitude towards April 9, 1989 turned out to be as follows: according to a significant part of the respondents, "The 9th of April, 1989 was a positive event, because it helped Georgia on the road to independence."

21% of respondents fully agreed with this and 46% agreed. But even more think

that April 9, 1989 was a tragedy. 66% of respondents fully agreed with this opinion and 29% agreed.

The majority of the population (64%) perceives the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 as a positive event for Georgia. The minority of the population did not agree with this opinion (28%), a small part did not have an answer to the question (8%), or did not want to (1%). Young people are more likely to agree that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a positive event.

Residents of Tbilisi, people with higher education and relatively affluent people are more likely to perceive the dissolution of the Soviet Union positively.

Georgia has gone through two conflicts on ethnic grounds, with the active involvement of Russia, and the 2008 war with Russia. The majority of the population thinks that ethnic conflicts and the 2008 war could have been avoided. According to 57%, the wars in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region in the 1990s could have been avoided. Only 18% disagree with this, and many do not know (23%).

Regarding the August 2008 war, the majority of respondents (55%) did not agree with the opinion that everything was done to prevent the war; Only 28% agreed with this.

The study also included the question of what was the most negative outcome of the 2008 war, apart from the occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. According to the majority, the most negative result was the death of people (62%).

The attitude of the respondents towards the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, is generally

positive. The majority thinks that Gamsakhurdia was a true patriot (81%) and his overthrow was a bad event for Georgia (76%). According to half of the population (50%), the country would not have gained independence without Gamsakhurdia. The number of people who disagreed with the opinion that Gamsakhurdia was responsible for the war in Abkhazia (47% disagreed and 20% agreed) and Tskhinvali region (45% disagreed and 21% agreed) was significant. Almost a third of the population did not have answers to this question. Citizens found it difficult to name the successes of Shevardnadze's government (28%), or said that this government had no successes (34%). One in nine people (12%) said that the biggest success of Shevardnadze's government was gaining international recognition of Georgia's independence. According to 5%, the creation of the East-West energy corridor. All other answers were given by 5% of the population or less.

In contrast to the successes of the Shevardnadze government, the population has a clearer idea of its failures. A fifth of the population (21%) named economic collapse as the biggest failure. It was also considered a significant failure that nothing was done to prevent wars in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (11%), failed to eliminate electricity shortages (9%), failed to manage the country effectively (7%), allowed a lack of law and order (6%) and more.

Unlike Shevardnadze's government, people have clearer opinions about the biggest successes and failures of the 'United National Movement' government. About equal parts of the population named crime fighting / law and order and economic growth (24% and 23% respec-

tively). As for failures, the largest part of the population (27%) cited human rights violations, and 25% think that they could not prevent the 2008 war.

The survey also included questions about the successes and failures of the Georgian Dream government. The most common answer was that the current government has no success. The second most common answer was 'I don't know' (13%). The third most frequently mentioned answer was better protection of human rights (11%). The effective management of the risks of the Covid-19 pandemic (9%), the introduction of a universal insurance program (9%), visa-free travel to the European Union (7%), the implementation of the hepatitis C eradication program (5%), and the maintenance of peace (4%) were considered a success.

The biggest failures of the Georgian Dream were weak economic growth (26%), violation of the terms of the electoral system (9%) and 'Gavrilov's night' (8%), and it was also considered a failure that it could not fulfil the promise of restoring justice (8%).

Overall, citizens are more optimistic. The majority (48% do not agree and 6% do not agree at all) with the opinion that "after gaining independence, there have been more failures than successes in the history of Georgia."

Even more disagree (56% strongly disagree and 7% strongly disagree) with the opinion that "after independence, Georgia has never developed in the right direction."

35 years after April 9, the majority of respondents would consider the EU membership candidate status a success and would actively protest against all attempts to hinder the progress towards European integration.

Georgian Foreign Minister Challenges Linking 'Russian Law' to EU Accession Talks, Emphasizes Transparency Goal

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

asserted that linking the 'Russian law' with the initiation of EU accession negotiations for Georgia is not a suitable approach.

"I have not heard the statement of the EU ambassador, but I believe that connecting this law with the opening of negotiations is not the right approach. Our further integration into the European Union depends on the reform agenda that we have agreed to and recommended accordingly. We follow this process; we are responsible for all the commitments we have made and will fulfill them," said Darchiashvili.

Weather

Friday, April 12

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 24°C

Night Clear
Low: 10°C

Saturday, April 13

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 21°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 11°C

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000

E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge

http://www.messenger.com.ge/

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Public Defender Urges Parliament to Safeguard Georgia's Constitutional Goals Amid 'Russian Law' Concerns

რეპროდუცირებულია საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველის მიერ

1481

საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველი Public Defender of Georgia

The News in Brief

The Public Defender of Georgia responded to the 'Russian law' proposed by Georgian Dream, stating that the legislation's goal—to enhance transparency in foreign aid and accountability among receiving organizations—is legitimate. However, achieving this objective

should not entail disproportionate interference with the right to association or dignity. The Public Defender suggested achieving the goal through alternative changes in current legislation.

"The Constitution of Georgia mandates that constitutional bodies must take all measures within their powers to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

This imperative should be especially taken into account, given that, in relation to the freedom

MORE NEWS IN BRIEF ON P. 3

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

The News in Brief

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

of association and expression, as well as the right to privacy, similar arrangements reflected in the legislation of other countries have been evaluated negatively by esteemed bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner, the Venice Commission, and the UN Special Rapporteur.

Accordingly, in the opinion of the Public Defender, Parliament should refrain from adopting any legal acts that may endanger the implementation of Georgia's constitutional aspirations," the statement reads.

President Zourabichvili Affirms Tbilisi's Dedication to Freedom, Art, and European Values

rary Art Fair, underscored Tbilisi's unwavering commitment to freedom, artistic expression, and European principles.

She stressed the vital connection between freedom and artistic expression, affirming that art cannot thrive without liberty.

Zourabichvili reiterated Tbilisi's commitment to freedom and declared that Tbilisi will always be free, art will always be free, and Georgia will always be European, underscoring the country's unwavering commitment to its European aspirations.

"I would say that this breeze of freedom that exists here is very important for today's Georgia. Culture is nothing but great freedom. There is no art, no culture where there is no freedom.

I want to congratulate you all on today's day, today's freedom, and I know that Tbilisi will always be the host of such extraordinary events. Because Tbilisi will always be free, art will al-



President Salome Zourabichvili, addressing attendees at the Tbilisi Contemporary Art Fair, underscored Tbilisi's unwavering commitment to freedom, artistic expression, and European principles.

IWA
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION GEORGIA
invites you to
Spring Fair 2024
arts, crafts, fashion, wine, tourism, cultural offerings, children's corner and more
Sunday, April 14
10 am - 6 pm
at the Paragraph Freedom Square,
a Luxury Collection Hotel, Tbilisi

AMERICAN FRIENDS of GEORGIA
საქართველოს ამერიკელი მეგობრები
Celebrating 30 Years of Charity Work
CHRIS BOTTI for AFG!
An unforgettable evening of celebration, giving and music
Saturday, May 18 at 18:00
Location: Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi
Corporate tables as well as individual tickets available:
Lena@afgeorgia.org
Kate@afgeorgia.org

TBILISI, GEORGIA (11 April 2024) — The Georgian economy is expected to grow moderately in 2024 due to slowing external demand and decreased expansion of services before recovering slightly in 2025, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report.

The Asian Development Outlook (ADO) April 2024, ADB's flagship annual economic publication, forecasts Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) to grow by 5% in 2024. Growth is expected to accelerate to 5.5% in 2025, boosted by continued gains in tourism and investment.

"Georgia has been growing steadily in recent years," said ADB Country Director for Georgia Lesley Bearman Lahm. "A strong focus on regional cooperation, private sector-led growth, developing the country's undoubted human capital, and adopting policies and actions that fast-track the transition to a greener and more climate resilient economy will help to accelerate prosperity and strengthen social security."

Inflation is projected to accelerate slightly to 3.5% in 2024 and further to 4% in 2025 as commodity prices rise moderately. The fiscal deficit is projected to satisfy the government's fiscal rule by remaining below 3% of GDP in 2024 and 2025, this year and next, reflecting further improvements in revenue administration, rationalization of tax expenditures, and sound management of public debt. Revenue is projected to rise to 28% of GDP in 2024 and 28.5% in 2025 due to higher tax collections.

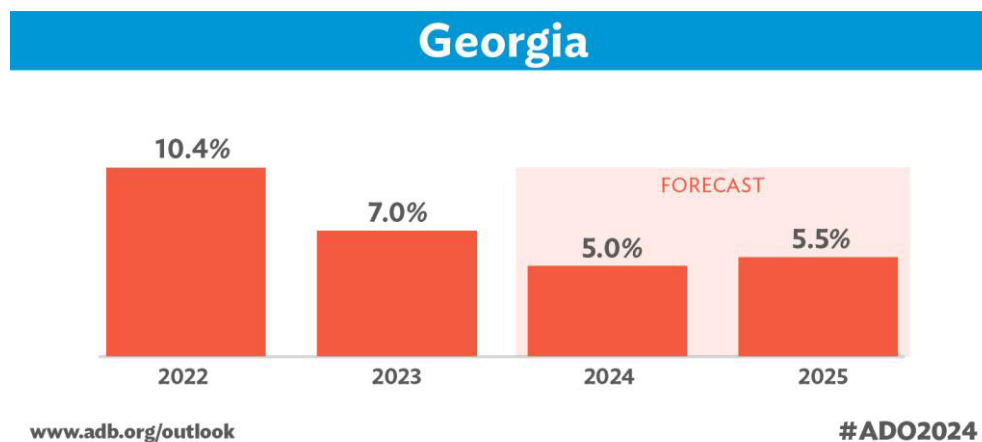
Geopolitical tensions in the region may

ways be free, and Georgia will always be European," Zourabichvili said.

Georgian Economy to Grow at 5% this Year, 5.5% in 2025 – ADB

Asian Development Outlook April 2024

GDP GROWTH FORECAST



slow growth in services to 5.5% in 2024, before accelerating to 6.3% in 2025 on the back of faster growth in tourism. Growth in industry is projected to accelerate to 4.2% in 2024 and 4.9% in 2025, reflecting higher output of ferroalloys. Agriculture is expected to slow to 0.5% in 2024, before picking up again to 1.1% next year with higher government support for agricultural credit and insurance and expanded investment in new technologies.

According to the ADO, imports are ex-

pected to expand at a slower rate of 6.1% in 2024 mainly due to slower domestic growth and moderate vehicle reexports, before rising by 11.1% in 2025. Money transfers are forecast to stabilize at around \$3 billion over the next 2 years, which could put downward pressure on the lari from slowing or reversing inflows associated with Russian migrants.

Georgia is experiencing an aging population because of below-replacement fertility,

increasing life expectancy, and outmigration of working-age people. To promote social inclusion, the government needs to strengthen social protection programs and create new jobs for the elderly who are interested and able to work. Productivity can be enhanced through skills development and greater use of technology. Despite persistent labor shortages, a large gap remains between the labor force participation rates of men and women. It is critical for the government to introduce policies that encourage women to enter the labor force.

ADB has supported Georgia since 2007 and is one of the country's largest multilateral development partners. ADB's loans, grants, and technical assistance to Georgia total \$4 billion. ADB's new 5-year country partnership strategy with Georgia aims to help the nation develop into a green and inclusive regional gateway, support sovereign and private sector investments, policy reforms, capacity building, climate resilient infrastructure and regional integration.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.