

President Zourabichvili Questions Decision-Maker Behind Law Reintroduction: Georgia or Moscow?

By Liza Mchedlidze

In a recent interview with the BBC, President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili reiterated her criticism of the controversial Russian law, which she compared to legislation from Putin's Russia. She highlighted that this law not only undermines the work of NGOs and media but also targets international organizations that have been instrumental in supporting Georgia's state-building and economic development for over three decades. According to Zourabichvili, the funding mechanisms for these organizations are completely transparent, evidenced by detailed records available on their websites.

She expressed deep concerns about the non-transparent nature of government decision-making, particularly regarding the reintroduction of this law. Last year, massive public protests prevented the law's passage, yet its resurgence signals a troubling disregard for public sentiment, which Zourabichvili sees as a direct provocation to Georgian society.

Zourabichvili questioned the integrity of the decision-making process, speculating on the influence of external forces. She openly pondered whether the decision to reintroduce the law was made within Georgia's borders or if foreign influence, particularly from Moscow, played a role. This lack of clarity, she



argued, points to potential corruption at the highest levels of government and raises significant transparency issues that need addressing to maintain public trust and democratic integrity.

"This is a matter of concern because it is a copy of Putin's law, which was passed in 2012 and then gradually tightened and developed. This law targets the

activities of NGOs, the media, and those international organizations from our partner countries—European countries, the USA, or the United Kingdom—which have supported the independence of Georgia, the construction of state institutions, and the development of the economy for the last 30 years and more. It is a matter of concern; that is why the law was not

passed last year as a result of mass demonstrations, and now the repetition of this law is a direct provocation of Georgian society.

Those international organizations that support Georgia have very strict rules when it comes to funding, so this is clear. There are websites where anyone can view these details. What is not transparent is corruption at the

highest levels of government; what is not clear is how these steps were taken, especially this decision to reintroduce the law. Who decided to reintroduce the law? Did it happen in Georgia or outside its borders? Was this decision made in Moscow? These are the main questions about transparency," said Zourabichvili.

Georgian Dream Initiates Draft Law for Tax Exemption on Offshore Asset Transfers



By Liza Mchedlidze

Members of the Georgian Dream party have introduced a draft law proposing changes to the tax code. Concurrently with the review of the 'Agents Law', the Georgian Parliament will expeditiously consider it.

These amendments aim to exempt Georgian enterprises and their partner natural persons from taxation on income received when a company registered in a jurisdiction with preferential taxation (offshore zone) transfers to Georgia. The Parliament has already endorsed these legislative changes during its plenary session on April 17.

With these amendments, the favorable conditions for transferring enterprises from offshore zones will remain in effect until January 1, 2028.

The draft law aims to encourage moving assets from offshore places to Georgia, according to its creators.

Opposition MP Roman Gotsiridze criticized the proposed draft law, saying that it gives

Bidzina Ivanishvili the ability to bring his assets, including those "hidden" offshore, into Georgia without paying taxes or following anti-money laundering laws. Gotsiridze stated that Ivanishvili, the founder and honorary chairman of Georgian Dream party, proposed these changes because of the looming sanctions.

"The law only applies to him because one individual must own 100 percent of the offshore assets.

Now it has become clear why the National Bank bought 7 tons of gold worth half a billion dollars and why it is being brought to Georgia for storage.

He was awaiting sanctions! He doesn't even have a place to run to; he plans to turn the country into his personal castle," Gotsiridze stated.

Expert Gia Khukhashvili stated that there might be an influx of Russian illicit funds into Georgia, potentially leading to Western sanctions on the country's financial system. According to him, this could align

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6753; Euro - 2.8473; GBP - 3.3337; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8348; Swiss Franc - 2.9351

Georgian Dream Initiates Draft Law for Tax Exemption on Offshore Asset Transfers

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Georgia economically with Russia. Khukhashvili also speculated that the aggressive enforce-

ment of 'Foreign Agents' law may be aimed at demonstrating control to Putin. "We may see the entire Russian black money in Georgia.

This will naturally eventually cut the ways to the West, as they will be forced to sanction our entire financial and banking system. Accordingly, we naturally

become a part of the Russian Empire. I do not rule out that the main purpose of adopting the 'agents' law in such an aggressive man-

ner is the following - someone is trying to show Putin that he controls everything and his assets will be reliably protected here..." Khukhashvili wrote.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Parliament Adopts 'Agents Law' with 83 Votes in Favor during First Reading



With a vote count of 83 in favor and none against, the so-called 'Agents Law' was adopted by the Parliament in its first reading during the plenary session. Mamuka Mdinardze, the leader of the parliamentary majority, acted as the speaker for the draft law.

Subsequent to the discussion of the draft law, the opposition staged a protest. Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili exited the hall, accompanied by Chairman of the United National Movement Levan Khabeishvili, leader of Strategy Agmashenebeli Giorgi Vashadze, Chairman of the faction of the National Movement

Tina Bokuchava, and Lelo member Ana Natsvlishvili. According to the procedure, the Parliament undergoes three readings to consider and vote on the draft law.

Prime Minister Kobakhidze: Nothing Will Hinder Law Adoption

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze addressed the first reading of the 'Agents Law' during a briefing at the government administration. He asserted that nothing would hinder the law's adoption.

"Nothing can stand in the way of the protection of state sovereignty and, accordingly, the final adoption of the law. Towards Europe with dignity, transparency, and sovereignty. This is our motto and our spirit. We believe that we can become a member of the European Union



President Zourabichvili Meets with Ambassadors to Discuss 'Agents Law'

only with dignity, transparency, and sovereignty. So, forward to Europe with dignity," said Kobakhidze.

Kobakhidze criticized the statements of politicians from Georgia's international partner countries regarding the reintroduced law. He once again offered Western diplomats to hold a discussion on the draft law.

"It is unfortunate that no arguments were given. We saw the statements from Scholz and Stoltenberg, and today another statement from a specific diplomat working in Georgia was published. Not a single argument against the law was provided - zero argument. We are told that the law is against European values, but in which part? Which article? Why? - No argument is presented. In such circumstances, of course, unsubstantiated statements cannot become the basis for revising our decision," Kobakhidze said.

According to the President's administration, during the meeting held at the Orbeliani Palace, Zourabichvili emphasized the importance of the international community's support for Georgia's European path. She highlighted that Russia's goal is to destabilize the country and divide society, objectives that should not be achieved in Georgia.

"Your support is important for the country, and I urge you to continue this support," the president addressed the ambassadors.

Furthermore, President Zourabichvili stressed the significance of activating high-level visits of European leaders, viewing them as expressions of support in themselves.



At a meeting with the accredited diplomatic corps in Georgia, President Salome Zourabichvili discussed the developments in the country and addressed the draft law on 'Agents Law' (transparency of foreign influence).

Amidst the current situation in the country, the president also emphasized the importance of people freely expressing their opinions and making their choices during the elections.

ADB to Help Enhance Health Care in Georgia

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (17 April 2024) — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a Euro 46.3 million (\$50 million equivalent) policy-based loan to help improve access to quality and affordable health

care in Georgia.

Under ADB's Health Sector Enhancement Program, the bank will disburse the financing once the government has implemented a range of reforms to improve health sector governance and regulation, increase publicly funded primary health care and specialized outpatient and diagnostic services, and enhance the sector's operational efficiency and financial sustainability.

"This program represents ADB's comprehensive and integrated package of support to improve health care in Georgia," said ADB Director General for

Central and West Asia Yevgeniy Zhukov. "While it will help improve health care for all, this program will be particularly beneficial for the poor, women, and vulnerable groups."

Georgia has high levels of non-communicable diseases—including heart disease, hypertension, cancer, and diabetes—which reduce life expectancy and healthy aging. Strengthening government-funded primary health care and outpatient services can help to manage these diseases—most of which are preventable.

The program supports the redesign of the government's primary health care benefits pack-

age, which should lead to better service coverage becoming more affordable especially for the poor and vulnerable. It also enables strategic purchasing to increase the share of quality health care providers contracted and supports changes in digital information systems to efficiently manage health care programs.

"As part of improving health services, this program will also help Georgia prepare its health care providers and the general public against the impacts of climate change that affect health," said ADB Senior Health Specialist Brian Chin. "Among the government actions supported are

the establishment of an early warning system and an information campaign on climate-induced hazards such as heatwaves."

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 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.

Weather

Thursday, April 18

Day Clear High: 27°C
Night Clear Low: 14°C

Friday, April 19

Day Clear High: 29°C
Night Partly Cloudy Low: 15°C

published by

The Messenger

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IWA Georgia - International Women's Association Spring Fair 2024 held on April 14.









