

## Georgia's EU Integration Frozen by 'Foreign Agents' law, Says EU Ambassador

By Liza Mchedlidze

Pawel Herczyński, the Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, has stated that the adoption of Georgia's "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" has effectively halted the country's integration into the European Union. The statement was made in response to Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's suggestion that the law could increase the chances of EU negotiation talks by "20-30%".

Herczyński expressed regret over the strained relations between the EU and Georgia, citing long standing concerns that the "Foreign Influence" law would hinder Georgia's aspirations to join the EU. He noted that these concerns have now become a reality, impacting Georgia's progress toward EU membership.

"In principle, the adoption of this law froze Georgia's integration into the European Union," Herczyński emphasized. He highlighted the EU's require-



ment for unanimity among member states for integration decisions, noting that several states have publicly opposed opening accession negotiations with Georgia due to this law.

The EU Ambassador also revealed that the European Commission and External Action Service have prepared various options for retaliatory measures in response to Georgia's legislative developments. These options will be discussed among EU member states at upcoming meetings of foreign ministers and the European Council.

Herczyński expressed disappointment that Georgia's integration process has been halted, while also noting the EU's ongoing progress with Ukraine and Moldova in accession negotiations. He emphasized that decisions on measures against Georgia will be made by EU member states based on the options presented.

"We have provided member states with a menu of options, and it is up to them to decide which measures will be implemented," Herczyński concluded.

## Estonian Ambassador Discusses Impact of 'Foreign Agents' Law on Relations with Georgia

By Liza Mchedlidze

In an interview with Interpressnews, Estonian Ambassador Riina Kaljurand stated that due to a newly adopted "Foreign Agents" law, Estonia will be unable to continue its usual activities with Georgia. She emphasized that

this move directly opposes the advice given to Georgia by Western countries.

Kaljurand mentioned that the issue extends beyond this single law, pointing out that other laws are also controversial and contrary to the European Union's value system. She suggested that while non-governmental

organizations and the government may face challenging discussions, these should be resolved through means other than repressive measures.

"There should be no talk of punishment. It shouldn't be stigmatizing because that's what we're seeing here. If we want to be a member of the European

Union as a protector of human rights, civil liberties, and all those freedoms that we value so much, we all have to play by the rules.

It is a pity that the government of Georgia claims to be getting closer to the European Union, but their actions do not support this. You cannot promise people something that is not within your power to promise, such as becoming a member of the European Union by 2030. That decision depends on us, the member states.

We also went through the process of joining the European Union and never questioned such criteria. I think Estonia may be a bit more sensitive about this issue because we now know that the requirements for aspirant countries are always higher than for existing members," said Kaljurand to Interpressnews.

According to the Estonian ambassador to Georgia, EU member states cannot always make compromises whenever a government adopts any kind of law.

"The EU as a whole can protect all member states only if we all follow the same rules. You cannot come and say, 'I want to become a member of the club, but I have my own rules'. It doesn't work that way. Unfortunately, some events can be quite painful for the public as well.

No one wants to punish society, but we must show that this

is the result of not following the rules of the game. With 85% of the population aspiring to join the European Union, the Georgian government has an obligation to fulfill the wishes of its people and play by the rules," said the Estonian ambassador.

In the interview, Kaljurand also discussed the suspension of visa-free travel for Georgia by the European Union, stating that while this should never happen, it is a real tool.

"The EU is a set of rules, a way of life, not a charity. If this way of life and these values are unacceptable for any reason, the EU also has the right to change this privileged relationship.

It has nothing to do with the people, although people will be hurt. However, ultimately, people will have a choice. Elections are approaching, and it is up to the Georgian people.

A visa suspension should never be implemented, but it is a real tool. It can change because it's a technical issue. It only requires a majority (qualitative majority) vote, and Estonia has put this issue on the agenda as an option. We do not know whether it will have the support of other member states, but we see that this is one of the realistic options available.

This is not against the Georgian people, but it is something that arose as a result of the policy of the Georgian government," stated the Estonian ambassador to Georgia.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8071; Euro - 3.0151; GBP - 3.5746; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.3627; Swiss Franc - 3.1704

# President's Referendum Idea to Have Electoral Significance

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

President Salome Zourabichvili's idea of holding a referendum which she voiced on May 28 received mixed reactions. On June 11, the President clarified what she believed the referendum should be about - support for her proposed "Georgian Charter".

On May 28, after 84 members of parliament overrode the President's veto on the "Russian Law," Salome Zourabichvili called for the collection of signatures to hold a referendum, which should address the question, "Do we want a European future or do we want Russian slavery?"

This initiative by the President was met with scepticism for several reasons: one reason was of a purely technical nature. According to Georgian legislation, a referendum must be held across the entire territory of the country, which is currently impossible due to the Russian occupation of one-fifth of Georgia's territory. However, constitutionalists do not rule out the possibility of bypassing this requirement and point to referendums held under similar conditions in 2003 and 2008.

According to the Constitution of Georgia, the right to demand a referendum belongs to 200,000 voters. Based on this demand, a referendum is scheduled by a presidential decree, which requires the Prime Minister's approval to become effective. If the Prime Minister refuses, the referendum will not take place. It is likely that this initiative by the President will be blocked.

Political reasons were also cited against the President's initiative. Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic orientation is defined by the referendum held in 2008 and is enshrined in the Georgian constitution. Previously, pro-Russian forces had the idea of holding a new referendum to nullify the results of the 2008 referendum. Some saw hidden motives by Ivanishvili in the President's proposal to hold a referendum, suspecting an attempt to question Georgia's Western orientation.

On June 11, during a meeting with the youth, President Zourabichvili once again spoke about the referendum and elaborated on her position. She noted that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations are already defined and there is no need to reiterate the constitution. The referendum

question should be about the Georgian Charter as an action plan to save the country's European future.

Zourabichvili also acknowledges that the Georgian Dream will block the holding of the referendum through the Prime Minister, but in this case, the main focus will be on collecting signatures in support of the referendum. According to the President, this will be a sort of "pre-election exercise" to introduce the "Georgian Charter" in the regions and gain support.

The opposition responded to Salome Zourabichvili's idea of the Georgian Charter proposed on May 26, and by the deadline set by the President, June 3, the "Georgian Charter" was signed by 17 opposition parties and 5 independent entities.

The parties that signed the Charter commit to fulfilling the Charter's objectives during the spring session if they win the parliamentary elections on October 26, 2024, and to calling early elections by the fall of 2025. Additionally, they pledge to create conditions for free and fair elections. For one year, a technical, non-partisan government, whose members will be nominated by the President, should

operate. According to Salome Zourabichvili, the victory of pro-Western political forces in the elections is the only way for the Georgian Charter to succeed. Zourabichvili has promised to strictly monitor the adherence to the principles of the Charter.

Here arises an important issue: how likely is it that Salome Zourabichvili will manage to be re-elected for a second term as president, given that her presidential term ends right after the parliamentary elections in 2024? According to the current constitution, the president is not elected by the people but by an electoral college, which, in addition to the 150 members of parliament, includes an equal number of representatives from the regions. Even if the opposition secures a majority in parliament, this does not ensure their candidate's victory. The Georgian Dream party enjoys significant support in the regions.

Within the opposition political spectrum, there is a critical attitude toward the constitution itself. Some parties believe that Georgia should return to a semi-presidential model where the president is elected by the people. To amend the constitution, the opposition would need 113 votes

and two parliamentary sessions, as a constitutional amendment passed by one session must be approved by the parliament convened in the next session.

However, before reaching this point, the opposition needs to win the elections and is eagerly discussing the "winning formula". There was an idea for the pro-Western opposition to run with a unified list in the elections, supported by the United National Movement. However, some pro-Western parties reject the idea of a unified list, as it might actually cause them to lose votes.

The Georgian Charter does not include provisions for forming a consolidated list. Instead, it outlines an action plan in the event of victory. During the parliamentary elections, the pro-Western opposition intends to compete in multiple blocs. However, the challenge lies in each bloc needing to surpass the 5% electoral threshold; otherwise, their votes will not count and may benefit other successful parties, notably the Georgian Dream.

In summary, the opposition faces significant decisions, with their final determination expected shortly before the required 60-day start of the election campaign.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### US Ambassador on Anaklia Port: Why Deepen Economic Ties with Chinese Communist Party Financing Your Occupier?



US Ambassador to Georgia Robin Dunnigan, in an interview with InterPressNews, expressed concerns about the CCCC company, which was awarded a contract for the Anaklia project by the government. She pointed out that a majority stake in CCCC is owned by the Chinese Communist Party, which she noted

is owned by the Chinese Communist Party and the company is known to be affiliated with the Chinese military. The Chinese Communist Party is the number one financier of the Russian military today. So one question is - why deepen an economic tie with the party that is financing your occupier? Because the Russian military is being financed by the Chinese Communist Party," said the Ambassador.

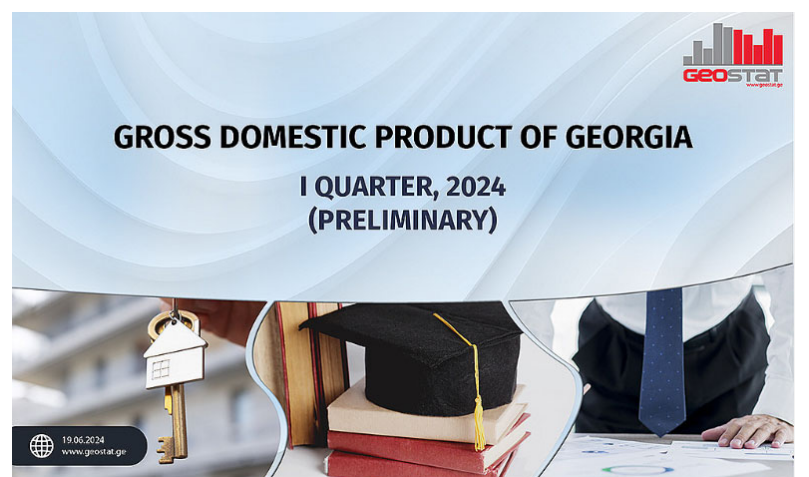
### Georgia's Q1 2024 GDP Growth and Sectoral Analysis: Geostat Report

In the first quarter of 2024, the National Statistics Service reported that the gross domestic product reached 18,913.2 million GEL at current prices, marking an 8.4 percent increase in real GDP compared to the same period last year. Geostat also indicated a 3.1 percent change in the gross domestic product deflator for the first quarter of 2024.

"In the first quarter of 2024,

the following sectors made a significant contribution to growth: activities related to real estate (18.8 percent), education (29.1 percent), public administration and defense; Compulsory social security (13.0 percent), construction (10.3 percent), information and communication (12.2 percent), transport and warehousing (9.7 percent). A decrease was noted in the following sectors: supply of electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning (-11.6 percent), other services (-11.2 per-

cent), mining industry (-1.8 percent). Trade (13.5 percent) and real estate-related activities (11.1 percent) have the largest shares in the sectoral structure of the GDP. The following positions are occupied by the processing industry (9.2 percent), state administration (8.3 percent), construction (7.5 percent), education (6.6 percent), financial and insurance activities (6.0 percent), information and communication (5.9 percent)," Geostat noted.



## Weather

Thursday, June 20

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 31°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 19°C

Friday, June 21

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 30°C

Night Clear  
Low: 19°C

is the largest financier of the Russian military.

"On Anaklia, the majority of the CCCC company that the government awarded a contract to

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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.

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On June 14<sup>th</sup>, AFG hosted an appreciation event at EZO for its valued supporters, including TBC, AmCham, Deloitte, SOCAR Midstream Operations, EY, KPMG, Georgia Today, The Messenger, and Foresight Investment Group. The warm and informal atmosphere provided the perfect setting to recognize AFG's main supporters with certificates of appreciation, acknowledging their generosity and unwavering commitment to the organization's mission of promoting generosity and compassion.

The evening also served as a platform to highlight AFG's achievements over the years. Guests were presented with an overview of the organization's various initiatives and programs, focusing on its efforts in humanitarian assistance, reha-

# AFG Marks 30 Years With Supporters

bilitation, and community outreach. Through success stories and project presentations, AFG emphasized its dedication to making a positive difference in the lives of Georgia's most vulnerable populations.

Looking ahead, AFG unveiled plans and initiatives aimed at further expanding its reach and impact, remaining steadfast in its ongoing commitment to supporting Georgians in need. Attendees departed the event feeling inspired and empowered, knowing their continued support makes a tangible difference.

Continuing the 30<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebration, AFG hosted a delightful day out

at Dzegvi Shelter on June 16<sup>th</sup>, featuring a traditional Italian feast prepared by renowned chefs (Enzo Neri and David Le Grand and the team: Sandro Samkharadze Diego Buttiglione from Reality Show MasterChef Georgia and Niccolo Ricciardi, Giorgi Kokaia, Irina Salmina, Teo Ghambashidze, Antonio Buttiglione and Tina Nijaradze). This cherished tradition marks both Children's International Day and the beginning of summer. The event transcended gastronomy, showcasing the artistic talents nurtured through AFG's Art rehabilitation programs. An exhibition of artwork created by program participants

under the guidance of artists led by Nino Chichinadze provided a visual treat for guests. Additionally, a captivating concert of Georgian folk songs and dances performed by Dzegvi Shelter children further enriched the celebration.

Among the distinguished guests were representatives from AFG's friends and supporters, including BDO, EY, SOCAR Midstream Operations, The Messenger, and Georgia Today. The presence of H.E. Massimiliano D'Antuono, the Italian Ambassador to Georgia, further underscored the international spirit of the occasion.









