

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze Emphasizes Diaspora Engagement in National Development

By Liza Mchedlidze

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze highlighted the crucial role of the Georgian diaspora in the nation's progress during his speech at the forum dedicated to Diaspora Day. He emphasized leveraging the qualifications, knowledge, and experience of compatriots living abroad for the benefit of Georgia.

"One of the important tasks of our vision and policy is to use the qualifications, knowledge, and experience that our compatriots living abroad, including young people, have accumulated for the benefit of the country," stated Kobakhidze. He outlined several programs aimed at utilizing this invaluable human resource for the development of Georgia.

The Prime Minister pointed out Georgia's commitment to the Dublin Declaration, aligning with the United Nations and international community efforts to develop a unified approach to global diaspora policy. This commitment includes creating mechanisms for the strengthening and involvement of the diaspora through international cooperation and providing conditions conducive to international standards.

Kobakhidze announced that the Government of Georgia will present a package of amendments to the Law "On Compatriots Living Abroad and Diaspora Organizations" in the next parliamentary session.



This initiative, developed in collaboration with the International Center for Migration Policy and Maastricht University, aims to integrate the best international practices into Georgia's diaspora

engagement strategies.

"In the wake of the country's economic development, our care for our compatriots living abroad will inexorably strengthen," he said. Kobakhidze expressed his

wishes for peace, happiness, and success to each diaspora member and expressed his hope for their eventual return to Georgia.

The forum served as a platform for discussing how the

diaspora's connections and knowledge can contribute to the nation's progress, reinforcing the government's commitment to integrating the diaspora into Georgia's development process.

Georgian Parliament Passes 'Anti LGBTQ Propaganda' law in First Reading



By Liza Mchedlidze

The Georgian Parliament has adopted a controversial legislative package "Anti LGBTQ Propaganda" law, described as homophobic and censorious in its first reading. The package received support from 78 MPs, who celebrated its passage with applause.

The constitutional bill, which requires 113 votes to pass, was postponed. Chairman Shalva Papuashvili announced that the vote will occur when the opposition members are present in the hall. Currently, the parliamentary majority lacks the necessary votes to pass the constitutional changes without opposition support.

The draft legislation, debated on June 26, was postponed by Mamuka Mdinardze, the leader of the majority, who insisted that the opposition should express its position on the draft law. The discussion saw the attendance of only Girchi MPs from the opposition, while the

rest maintained their boycott.

The second and third readings of the package are scheduled for the fall session, as the spring session concludes on June 28.

The main draft law and the accompanying 18 amendments aim to impose censorship on propaganda, broadcasters, and art, and to restrict freedom of assembly. A constitutional draft with similar content has also been submitted to the parliament.

The Venice Commission has expressed concerns about these legislative changes. The Commission recommended that Georgian authorities reconsider and refrain from adopting changes that could further deteriorate the situation of the LGBTI community in Georgia.

This legislative move has sparked significant controversy and concern among human rights advocates and international observers, who warn that it could severely impact freedom of expression and the rights of the LGBTI community in Georgia.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Mark Rutte Expresses Hope for Georgia's Return to EU Path at European Council Summit



Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands and the next Secretary General of NATO, expressed his concerns and hopes regarding Georgia's path to the European Union during a media briefing at the European Council summit in Brussels.

over recent developments in Georgia that may affect its EU aspirations. "I am worried about Georgia's path to the European Union because of the recent decisions. I spoke briefly with the president [of Georgia], I think she is a great leader, but she failed, the veto was overridden by the

parliament, unfortunately," said Rutte. Despite these concerns, Rutte remains hopeful about Georgia's future within the European Union. "We, of course, are waiting for Georgia and we hope that Georgia will return to the road to the European Union," he

added. When questioned about NATO, Rutte, who will assume the role of Secretary General in October, refrained from commenting extensively but expressed pride in his election to the position.

Addressing expectations from the European Union towards Georgia, Rutte emphasized that the primary responsibility lies with the Georgian government. "First of all, we should expect from Georgia, from the government, now it depends on you," he stated.

When asked about the potential for sanctions, Rutte was cautious but reiterated his hope for Georgia's alignment with EU values. "We'll see, we'll see, but we certainly hope that you, Georgia, will return [to the EU path]," he concluded.

Shalva Papuashvili Meets with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov to Discuss Strategic Partnership

Chairman of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, met with the Minister of Foreign



Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Jeyhun Bayramov, to discuss the strategic partnership and cooperation between the two countries.

The discussions emphasized the robust and friendly ties between Georgia and Azerbaijan, confirming both parties' commitment to further developing their strategic partnership. Key topics included bilateral and multilateral relations, the importance of the Middle Corridor for the transportation of energy resources, and significant transport and energy projects, such as the Black Sea submarine

cable project.

The meeting also underscored the importance of regional peace, with a focus on the ongoing negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding a peace agreement. Papuashvili reiterated Georgia's readiness to support regional stability and peace through parliamentary diplomacy.

Both sides expressed a mutual interest in enhancing cooperation and addressing common challenges to ensure continued development and prosperity for both nations.

Georgia failed to protect children against violence and abuse in church-run orphanage, UN committee finds

UN Treaty Bodies NEWS RELEASE



GENEVA (27 June 2024) – Georgia violated its child rights obligations by failing to take immediate intervention to address the frequent physical and psychological abuse of children who lived in a close-type orphanage run by the Georgian Orthodox Church, the UN Child Rights Committee has found.

The Committee issued a Decision today after reviewing a complaint filed on behalf of 57 children residing in Ninotsminda St Nino Children's Boarding School at the time of submission.

Of these 57 children, the individual cases of M.L. and L.K. revealed the extent of abuse and

mistreatment. Born in 2008, M.L. was placed in Ninotsminda St Nino from the age of three to thirteen where she suffered harsh punishments for bedwetting. Caregivers would often instruct older children to "discipline" her and other children by hitting them with sticks or hands. She was also compelled to take psychotic medicines when she was 11. Another child, L.K., born in 2003, faced similar hardships, including inadequate food, poor hygiene, and restricted movement. Her brother, who had disabilities, also experienced neglect and abuse.

"Children deprived of their family environment are entitled to special protection and assistance from the State, which is their custodian," Committee member Benoit Van Keirsbilck said, adding that the Georgian government is thus held account-

able for what happened behind the closed doors of an orphanage or any other similar institutions.

Ninotsminda St. Nino Children's Boarding School is a residential facility for orphans and children without parental care. Its dire condition was first identified by the Public Defender's Office of Georgia in a 2015 report. The report pointed out frequent psychological and physical bullying among children, as well as corporal punishments by caregivers such as prostrations, skipping meals, confinement, and forced crawling. Nonetheless, the orphanage was granted a care license in 2016 after the new edition of the Law of Georgia on Licensing of Educational Activities took effect.

The Public Defender's Office issued a follow-up report in 2018, underlying the systemic problems within the orphanage and the urgent need for oversight and improvement in the care of the children. For almost a year since June 2020, the Public Defender's Office was repeatedly denied ac-

cess to the orphanage.

Noting that the authorities had not been able to monitor children at the orphanage, NGO Partnership for Human Rights first took the matter to various courts in Tbilisi and eventually brought the case to the Committee in May 2021.

The Committee immediately granted interim measures in favour of 57 children requesting access for the Public Defender's Office to the orphanage.

One month later, the Public Defender's Office was allowed to enter to undertake a comprehensive assessment, which resulted in the transfer of 27 children to alternative care.

As of November 2021, 15 children, including at least one with a disability, still lived at the orphanage, although the issues raised remained unresolved.

After reviewing the complaint, the Committee found that Georgia had failed to protect the children in Ninotsminda St Nino Children's Boarding School, who were deprived of their family environment and some of whom had disabilities,

from violence and abuse, in violation of their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Committee requested Georgia to provide effective reparation to the child victims, including adequate compensation and rehabilitation, a public apology, reassessment of those still under State care, and independent investigation and prosecution of those responsible. Reparation measures should be coordinated with the child victims to incorporate their views.

"We are appalled at the situation these children deprived of their families, some of them from a very young age and throughout their childhood. The treatment they received will have lifelong consequences on their development" Van Keirsbilck said.

"Regular and independent monitoring of institutions where children reside is essential to ensure that the treatment and living conditions comply with child rights standards and that these violations are not repeated in the future," he added.

Weather

Friday, June 28

Day Partly Cloudy High: 27°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 18°C

Saturday, June 29

Day Partly Cloudy High: 27°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 19°C

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Ms Asunción Sánchez Ruiz, Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union to Georgia and Ms Evija Kotan, Deputy Head of Political, Press and Information Section held a Summer Outreach Event on June 26.



Ms Asunción Sánchez Ruiz



Ms Evija Kotan





