

Latvian President Criticizes Georgian Government for Straying from NATO and EU Path



man rights, and civilian control of the military. He stressed that if a country does not meet these criteria, it is the sovereign choice of NATO and EU member states to halt the membership process.

He urged Georgia to reconsider some of its legislation, warning that failure to do so would impact discussions about its membership. He noted that membership criteria must be fulfilled by candidate countries, and deviations from these values will not be tolerated by NATO and the EU.

"This is really Georgia's choice. The Georgian people should decide what kind of country they want to build," Rinkevics said. He reaffirmed Latvia's position in NATO and the EU, stating that cooperation and aid programs could be reassessed if Georgia does not continue on the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Rinkevics concluded by saying, "We are ready to continue cooperation with Georgia and its support if Georgia is ready to protect the values that we all share," leaving it to the Georgian government to address the security consequences of their decisions.

By Liza Mchedlidze

Latvian President Edgars Rinkevics has expressed strong criticism of the Georgian government, stating that it has strayed too far from its path toward NATO and EU membership. In an interview with the Georgian editorial office of Voice

of America, Rinkevics addressed the lack of a clear promise for Georgia's NATO membership in the recent Washington summit declaration, which contrasts with previous years.

Rinkevics remarked that Georgia appears to have decided it can proceed without NATO and EU membership. He specifically

cited the controversial "Foreign Agents" law and the government's dismissal of calls from its own society, the European Union, and NATO as evidence of this shift.

"This means that the government of Georgia has gone too far," Rinkevics stated. "Formally, Georgia is a candidate

country, but we should limit this status unless it decides to uphold the common values we all share. If not, you are not part of this club. This is your sovereign decision."

Rinkevics emphasized that NATO membership is based on strict criteria, including democracy, rule of law, respect for hu-

Georgian Public Defender Meets US Ambassador to Discuss Human Rights and 'Foreign Agents' Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

Levan Ioseliani, the Public Defender of Georgia, recently met with Robin Dunigan, the US Ambassador to Georgia, to discuss pressing issues including the "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law, human rights, and the upcoming parliamentary elections. The Office of the Public Defender released a statement detailing the key points of their discussion.

During the meeting, Ioseliani and Dunigan addressed the lawsuit filed in the Constitutional Court against the "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law. They also discussed the protests sparked by this legislation and examined the proportionality of law enforcement actions during these demonstrations. Ambassador Dunigan expressed interest in the condition of the detained protestors and the ongoing investigations into law enforcement's conduct.

The conversation also covered the broader human rights situation in Georgia. Ioseliani provided insights into the various human rights challenges and emphasized the need for ongoing vigilance and advocacy.

Regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections, the parties discussed the Public Defender's mandate and the role his office will play in ensuring a fair and transparent electoral process. Ioseliani reaffirmed his commitment to actively participating in the election to uphold democratic standards.

The meeting also highlighted the long-standing cooperation between the US Embassy and the Office of the Public Defender. They discussed the ongoing USAID project aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Public Defender's office. Ioseliani thanked Ambassador Dunigan for the continuous support provided by the US government and the American people, which he said is crucial in

promoting and establishing democratic values in Georgia.

The meeting concluded with

both parties expressing a commitment to continue their cooperation in addressing Georgia's

human rights issues and ensuring the integrity of the upcoming elections.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6996; Euro - 2.9382; GBP - 3.4871; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0723; Swiss Franc - 3.0350

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgia's Path to Euro-Atlantic Integration Stalls Amid Political Turmoil

Ahead of the 2024 parliamentary elections, Georgia is not only not moving forward on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, but is also rapidly moving beyond the officially declared foreign policy course and its traditional allies. The relations between Georgia and the West have reached a dead end. According to experts, changing the situation and renewing the Western vector in foreign policy is possible only in case of the victory of the Western-oriented opposition in the parliamentary elections.

Georgian Dream openly distanced itself from the West after Russia's attack on Ukraine. They explained the clearly pro-Russian steps with the interests of the country's security. In the West, they treated it with some understanding. The war in Ukraine suddenly raised the prospect of joining the European Union. In order to move forward on this path, it was necessary to implement reforms, which the European Union formulated first in the form of 12 conditions, and then in the form of 9 reservations. The Georgian Dream for the most part only imitated the fulfilment of these conditions. Nevertheless, based on geopolitical considerations, Georgia was not distanced from Ukraine and Moldova and given the status of a candidate

for the European Union.

The policy of distancing from the West was also expressed in the intense anti-Western rhetoric of the Georgian government, who began talking about the "Global War Party", which "wanted to drag Georgia into a war against Russia". The West was accused of organising a coup in Georgia in the form of a "Rose Revolution" and of new coup attempts. Often this rhetoric turned into personal insults of Western politicians. In the West, this rhetoric was considered a misunderstanding and an expression of "Russian propaganda".

The "transparency law" turned out to be a turning point in the West's policy of "turning a blind eye" to the actions of the Georgian government, which, in accordance with the Russian model, is directed against the non-governmental sector and the West in general. In March of this year, the consideration of the law by Georgian Dream was followed by large protests, and the West repeatedly warned the government that the adoption of this law would have its consequences in relation to the representatives of the Georgian government and

the country. Georgian Dream did not take into account these warnings and on May 30, after overcoming the veto of the president, it finally passed the law.

They moved to action in the West. The Americans began by personally sanctioning government representatives, imposing visa restrictions. Although the specific individuals sanctioned were not publicly announced, the media estimates around 30 people are affected. All those suspected of being sanctioned deny the claims. The reaction of the West caused by the policy of the Georgian government became clear to everyone when specific steps were already taken openly, and it first of all affected the field of defence. The USA postponed the joint military training "Worthy Partner" planned for July 25 - August 6 in Georgia for an indefinite period.

These exercises have been held annually in Georgia since 2016. Cancelling drills is just the beginning. According to Michael Carpenter, the senior director of the European direction of the National Security Council of the USA, all the programs in the USA with Georgia are in the process of review.

After the US, the European Union also started to revise its relations with Georgia. On June 27, EU leaders agreed on the EU's strategic agenda for the next period in Brussels. In relation to Georgia, they agreed to stop Georgia's EU integration process joining, while negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine have started.

According to Pawel Harczynski, the ambassador of the European Union, the reason for this is the law "on the transparency of foreign influence" and the anti-Western, anti-European rhetoric unleashed in the country. All this is completely incompatible with the declared goal of joining the European Union.

Also, Georgia will no longer receive the 30 million euros allocated for the defence sector, which will be diverted to help the media and civil society. A large part of the E's aid has so far come to the public sector.

The statements of the representatives of the Georgian authorities were made in consideration of the upcoming elections. According to these statements, nothing much happened. Joining the European Union is not expected yet, and when the EU

enlargement is on the agenda, Georgia will be among the new members. The message "Georgia will be a member of the European Union in 2030" is still valid. As for the suspension of military cooperation, this is called a "regrettable misunderstanding", which hurts the West as well as Georgia.

Such statements of Georgian Dream are aimed at ordinary voters, who are convinced that the West is trying to bring Georgia to its knees, forcing it to "engage in war", a relatively new propaganda thesis has emerged that the USA does not want Georgia to cooperate with China, and cooperation with China brings Georgia great profits.

This persistent official propaganda obviously affects ordinary voters, convincing them that "nothing special is happening" and that the West of Georgia is "unjustly oppressing".

Representatives of the pro-Western opposition believe that the situation will be quickly corrected if the current government is replaced after the elections and a coalition of opposition parties comes to power. However, the opposition is still in the process of organising.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Dream Leaders Meet with IRI Observation Mission Ahead of Parliamentary Elections

Irakli Kobakhidze, as a head of the election headquarters for Georgian Dream, along with key parliamentary committee chairs Nikoloz Samkharadze, Maka Bochorishvili, and Givi Mikanadze, met with the International Republican Institute (IRI) observation mission, the Georgian Dream party reported.

The meeting, which included 20 long-term observers, focused on the upcoming October 26 par-

liamentary elections and the overall election environment.

Discussions highlighted the new election legislation, the importance of international observation missions, and the current political climate in Georgia.



Kobakhidze assured that the government is committed to ensuring free and fair elections, as in previous years. He emphasized the invitation extended to both short-term and long-term

missions from various reputable international organizations to monitor the elections. Kobakhidze reiterated his commitment to open and active cooperation with international observers.

The session with the IRI long-term observation mission concluded with a question-and-answer segment, facilitating an in-depth exchange on election-related matters.

Sheltering a Criminal is Not a European Value, Says Georgian Parliament Chairman

Shalva Papuashvili, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, has criticized the European Union for providing refuge to Davit Kezerashvili, who has been found guilty by Georgian courts of embezzling funds from the Georgian army. In a social media post, Papuashvili emphasized that harboring a criminal contradicts the European values

as understood by Georgians.

"When we talk about European values, let's not forget that Davit Kezerashvili, who is known to be guilty of stealing money from the Georgian army by all courts, is taking refuge in the European Union," Papuashvili wrote. "As he himself said, with the money stolen from the army, he finances parties, NGOs, and the media in Georgia. Sheltering a criminal is not a European value, as we Georgians understand it."



Weather

Monday, July 22

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 31°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 21°C

Tuesday, July 23

Day Clear
High: 33°C

Night Clear
Low: 20°C

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