

## President Salome Zourabichvili Hosts Reception for Tbilisi International Conference Participants



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili hosted a reception at the Orbeliani Palace for participants of the 8th Tbilisi International Conference, which is being held in Tbilisi on September 2-3. During her address, President Zourabichvili described the 2024 conference as occurring at a "decisive" and "existential" moment for Georgia and underscored the significance of the upcoming October 26 elections.

Zourabichvili criticized the ruling Georgian Dream party, stating that it has turned the nation's aspirations into a "nightmare" and moved Georgia away from its long-standing European goals. She emphasized that Georgia's historical desire to align with Europe has been a constant, as the country has always aspired to be independent from external empires, particularly its northern neighbor.

The President condemned the rhetoric of Georgian Dream Honorary Chairman Bidzina

Ivanishvili and the party's recent actions, including the proposed ban on opposing political parties and attempts to undermine the Constitutional Court's stance on "Foreign Agents" law affecting Georgia's European aspirations. She described these developments as "unacceptable" and contrary to the will of the Georgian people, who she believes reject the current authoritarian regime.

Zourabichvili called on Georgians to express their stance through the upcoming elections,

stressing that the democratic process must reflect the people's will. She assured the attendees of her confidence in the Georgian people's decision and urged international partners to closely observe the election process.

Additionally, the President highlighted her collaboration with pro-European political parties on the Georgian Charter, which she sees as crucial for meeting EU recommendations and initiating negotiations similar to those of Ukraine and Moldova. She emphasized the

need for the EU to start negotiations promptly and for the U.S. to support positive aspects of the MEGOBARI act.

Zourabichvili emphasized the importance of a stable and democratic Georgia for the future of the free world, stressing that developments in Ukraine and a secure Black Sea are vital for the Western world. She reaffirmed her commitment to leading Georgia towards its democratic and European aspirations with the support of international partners.

## Public Defender Criticizes Justice Minister's Decree on Foreign Agents Law

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On August 30, Public Defender Levan Ioseliani addressed Justice Minister Rati Bregadze, expressing concern over the Minister's August 1 decree related to the "Foreign Agents" Law. Ioseliani contends that the decree, which outlines the "procedure for the preparation of the register of organizations carrying out the interests of the foreign power, submission of financial declaration and monitoring," introduces risks of discrimination and arbitrary state actions.

The Foreign Agents Law does not specify the details required in the financial declarations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), leaving this to the discretion of the Justice Minister.

According to Ioseliani, the decree permits the publication of sensitive personal information about employees of these NGOs, including names, personal identification numbers, and bank account details.

Ioseliani argues that such disclosure is both unjustified and harmful, having a "strong restrictive, chilling, and stigmatizing effect" on employees working for organizations affected by the law. He has urged the Justice Ministry to revise the decree to exclude the publication of personal data, suggesting that financial details and the purposes of foreign funding be shared in a depersonalized manner or as aggregate totals.

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საქართველოს  
სახალხო დამცველი  
PUBLIC DEFENDER  
(OMBUDSMAN) OF GEORGIA

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6896; Euro - 2.9758; GBP - 3.5325; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0018; Swiss Franc - 3.1624

# Public Defender Criticizes Justice Minister's Decree on Foreign Agents Law

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The Foreign Agents Law is currently under scrutiny by the

Constitutional Court of Georgia, which is expected to make a decision soon regarding the admissibility of the constitutional

claims. The court may also consider a request to temporarily suspend the law's provisions until a final ruling is issued.

In his Amicus Curiae brief submitted to the court, Ioseliani highlighted that the law unfairly targets certain organizations by as-

signing them a distinct status based on foreign funding, which he argues stigmatizes these entities and hampers their operations.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan Visits Georgia for Bilateral Talks



Armenian Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan visited Georgia on September 2, meeting with Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Chikovani.

The visit was extended at the invitation of the Georgian Defense Minister, as reported by Armenian media.

Papikyan was officially welcomed with a ceremony at the Georgian Defense Ministry. During his visit, he and Minister

Chikovani discussed the state of relations between Armenia and Georgia, focusing on the significance of regional peace and stability. They also reviewed the bilateral cooperation plan for 2024, aiming to strengthen mili-

tary and defense ties.

Following their discussions, Papikyan paid homage to Georgian soldiers who lost their lives defending the country's territorial integrity at the Heroes' Memorial. In his meeting with Prime Minister Kobakhidze, the focus was on fostering "friendly relations and defense cooperation" between the two nations. Both sides highlighted the Strategic Partnership declaration as a robust foundation for deepening their partnership in various areas.

The Georgian government's press release emphasized the mutual commitment to joint efforts in addressing global and regional security challenges, underscoring the importance of continued collaboration between Armenia and Georgia.

### Georgian Parliament to Continue Debate on Amnesty Bill Affecting Up to 6,000 Prisoners

Chairman of Georgian Dream, Mamuka Mdinardze,

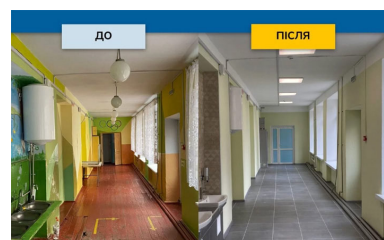
announced that the Georgian Parliament will continue discussions on an amnesty bill on September 3. According to Mdinardze, the proposed legislation is expected to impact up to 6,000 prisoners, with releases occurring at various times and in different forms.



Mdinardze explained that the bill would lead to the immediate release of over 1,000 prisoners once the amnesty is enacted, with an additional 5,000 prisoners being released gradually over time.

The amnesty bill was initially introduced by Georgian Dream in July. The ongoing parliamentary debate will determine the final details and implementation timeline of the legislation. The first reading of the draft law is planned to take place during an extraordinary parliamentary session. The second and third readings are expected to be conducted during the autumn session. The bill, initially proposed by Georgian Dream in July, will undergo further scrutiny and debate as the legislative process continues.

### EU4UASchools: 30 schools renovated in 4 Ukrainian regions



A total of 13,490 students and teachers have started the school year in renovated and rebuilt schools, the European Union Delegation to Ukraine said in a Facebook post.

According to the post, the European Union and the United Nations Development

Programme in Ukraine have completed repairs in 30 schools damaged by the Russian full-scale war in Ukraine, as part of the 'EU4UASchools: Build Back Better' project.

The renovated schools are located in Odessa, Rivne, Zhytomyr and Mykolayiv regions.

The schools have replaced windows, renovated walls and ceilings, installed thermal insulation, and arranged shelters.

The 'EU4UASchools: Build Back Better' project was launched by the UNDP in Ukraine, with financial support from the European Union, in November 2022, to carry out the repair, retrofitting and re-equipping of 178 schools in 11 oblasts of Ukraine: Zhytomyr, Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Rivne, Odesa, Zakarpattia, Khmelnytskyi (re-equipment and renovation), and Cherkasy, Lviv, Kirovograd, and Poltava (re-equipment only). Its total budget is Euro19.35 million. (euneighbourseast.eu)

## Weather

### Tuesday, September 3

Day Clear High: 34°C

Night Clear Low: 19°C

### Wednesday, September 4

Day Clear High: 34°C

Night Clear Low: 20°C

published by

## The Messenger

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**21 AUGUST**  
**BORJOMI** | Borjomi Likani Hotel

**23, 25 AUGUST**  
**BATUMI** | Batumi Drama Theater

**15, 17, 18, 20**  
**SEPTEMBER**  
**TBILISI** | Tbilisi State Conservatoire

Founder of the Festival  
LIANA ISSAKADZE

Artistic Director  
GIORGI ISSAKADZE

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NIGHT SERENADES

ART  
არტ აკადემია