

## President Zourabichvili Criticizes Government and Emphasizes Importance of Upcoming Elections at Tbilisi Conference



GD Honorary Chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili for what she described as his antagonistic stance towards both Georgia's allies and its citizens. She condemned the party's threats to ban political parties and its push for a constitutional majority, as well as the Constitutional Court's defense of a law she believes jeopardizes Georgia's European aspirations.

Looking ahead to the elections, Zourabichvili urged the Georgian people to make their voices heard at the polls, stressing that the outcome of the vote is crucial for the country's stability. She expressed confidence in the electorate's ability to shape Georgia's future and called on international observers to closely monitor the election process.

The President also mentioned her efforts to work with pro-European political parties on a Georgian Charter aimed at meeting EU recommendations and advancing Georgia's bid to join the European Union. She vowed to advocate for the Charter with Georgia's international partners.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On September 2, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili hosted a reception at the Orbeliani Palace for participants of the 8<sup>th</sup> Tbilisi International Conference. During her speech, Zourabichvili highlighted the significance of the

2024 conference, describing it as occurring at a critical moment for Georgia, particularly in light of the upcoming October 26 elections.

Zourabichvili sharply criticized the ruling Georgian Dream party, stating that the party has strayed from its original goals and is leading Georgia away

from its long-standing aim of integrating with Europe. She emphasized that Georgia has historically aligned itself with Europe and has always sought independence from dominating powers, particularly Russia.

The President condemned those who label Georgia's Western allies as a "war party" while

remaining silent about Russia's occupation of 20% of Georgian territory. She argued that the current government is undermining Georgia's sovereignty and independence by being willing to make concessions to Russia and distancing the country from its traditional partners.

Zourabichvili also criticized

## Deadline Passes for Georgia's Foreign Agents Law Registration Amid Controversy and Protests

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The deadline for organizations in Georgia to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" under the Foreign Agents Law expired on September 2. According to Tamar Tkeshelashvili, First Deputy Minister of Justice, 476 organizations applied for registration during the one-month voluntary window. Starting September 3rd, the Ministry of Justice has the authority to forcibly register other civil society organizations (CSOs), impose fines, and conduct monitoring activities.

The number of organizations that registered voluntarily represents only approximately 1.5% of all registered CSOs in Georgia, with estimates suggesting there are over 30,000 such organizations nationwide. Official statistics from Geostat list 3,758 organizations as "active", a figure that includes public agencies.

In an effort to encourage registration, the government kept the Public Service Hall open on Sunday to accommodate last-

minute applicants. Despite these measures, many organizations chose not to register, and some representatives held protests outside the Public Service Hall.

Following the reintroduction of the Foreign Agents Law in April, numerous CSOs have voiced strong opposition, labeling it a "Russian-style law" and refusing to comply. The law's reinstatement sparked months of continuous protests across the country.

From August 29 to 31, the Constitutional Court conducted hearings on five separate appeals challenging the law, including one filed by Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili. The Court has yet to announce its decisions regarding the admissibility of these constitutional claims or whether to temporarily suspend the law's provisions pending a final ruling, as requested by the plaintiffs.

Several smaller organizations reliant on foreign donations have announced plans to cease operations due to the new law's requirements.

The Shame Movement, one of



Georgia's most prominent civil organizations, initially announced on August 30 that it would register under the Foreign Agents Law after internal deliberations. The group explained that registering would allow

them to continue their activities, particularly efforts to increase voter turnout in the October elections, without the risk of debilitating fines.

The decision drew significant criticism from society, which

accused the Shame Movement of undermining collective resistance against the law and fostering public disillusionment. Facing mounting pressure, the Shame Movement reversed its

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6906; Euro - 2.9699; GBP - 3.5298; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0390; Swiss Franc - 3.1576

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decision on August 31, announcing that it would not register and acknowledging that their initial choice had been poorly timed and communicated. The organization also announced a change in

leadership, with director Giorgi Mzhavanadze stepping down.

"Our decision was based on the goal of conducting planned campaigns to increase voter turnout and facilitate a change of government in the October elections," the organization

stated. "However, based on the feedback, we believe that we have contributed to sowing nihilism and disillusionment among our associates, which is detrimental to our overall goals."

In response to the reversal, Mdinradze commented, "Unfor-

tunately, fascist bullying defeated the Shame Movement. We couldn't save them; they won't register."

As the Foreign Agents Law comes into full effect, the landscape for civil society organizations in Georgia remains uncer-

tain. With legal challenges pending and widespread opposition continuing, the law's long-term impact on the country's civic and political environment will be closely monitored both domestically and internationally.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Further Steps Not Ruled Out as US is Looking Over Relations with Georgia, Miller Says



US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller expressed deep concern over Georgia's political direction, which is moving the country away from its Euro-Atlantic trajectory. In response to the situa-

tion, the US diplomat stated that the forcible registration of organisations as foreign agents is concerning.

"We are concerned about the enforcement of this legislation against organisations that have not voluntarily registered, including critically important civil

members of the Georgian Dream party, parliamentarians, and law enforcement officials. Additionally, \$95 million in aid benefiting the Georgian government has been suspended. The review process continues, with the diplomat warning, "Further steps are not ruled out."

### Former MEP Anna Fotyga Stresses Government's Role in Georgia's EU Accession

At the 8<sup>th</sup> Tbilisi International Conference, former European Parliamentarian Anna Fotyga emphasised that Georgia's EU accession process hinges on the actions of its government, not just public sentiment. While acknowledging the Georgian people's strong pro-European stance, Fotyga noted, "Society does not negotiate; therefore, society must realize the importance of representative government if it wants to move in the European direction."

Fotyga expressed concern over the current situation in



Georgia but clarified that sanctions are not an appropriate response to rhetoric. She also criticised the influence of oligarchs, stating, "One person,

an oligarch, is harmful to the economy and social order," and urged Georgians to address this issue themselves.

### Georgia: local youth in Ozurgeti and Ambrolauri fight against river pollution

"Every thoughtless step eventually turns against us" and "Trash should be in bins, not in rivers" – banners with these messages are now displayed along the rivers in Ozurgeti and Ambrolauri municipalities, Georgia.

With the support of the European Union and the Caucasus Environmental Non-governmental Network (CENN), local youth have created eye-catching banners featuring QR codes that link

to short videos showing pollution levels of each river.



Trained through the Georgia Climate Action project, young people spent seven months researching river pollution and waste management issues. Forty people attended thematic training sessions on climate change and assessed the condition of rivers in their municipalities and planned awareness cam-

paigns, which included informational meetings, creating slo-

how polluted the surrounding areas are. "There are two major rivers in Ambrolauri—Krikhula and Ritseula. Although they are considered relatively clean, there are certain spots along the banks where trash is frequently left.

how polluted the surrounding areas are."

"There are two major rivers in Ambrolauri—Krikhula and Ritseula. Although they are considered relatively clean, there are certain spots along the banks where trash is frequently left.

This significantly pollutes the surrounding area, and sometimes waste even ends up in the water," said another participant in the project, 29-year-old Salome Abutidze from Ambrolauri.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

## Weather

Wednesday, September 4

Day Clear High: 33°C

Night Clear Low: 20°C

Thursday, September 5

Day Clear High: 33°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 19°C

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