

President Salome Zourabichvili Ready for Second Term to Secure European Future

By Liza Mchedlidze

In an interview with the French newspaper Le Figaro, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili expressed her willingness to assume greater responsibilities, including a potential second presidential term, to ensure Georgia's return to a European trajectory. President Zourabichvili's current term ends in December, and according to constitutional amendments passed in 2017, the next president will not be elected by a popular vote but rather by a 300-member electoral college composed of MPs and local and regional authorities.

During the interview, President Zourabichvili shared her thoughts on the upcoming parliamentary elections, stating, "We have to be ready for anything" from the government, including potential "machinations" such as obstructing the voting process for Georgians living abroad and exploiting administrative resources and propaganda related to the war or the LGBTQ+ issue. Based on polling, Zourabichvili predicted that the ruling party would secure "no more than 25 percent" of the vote.

Despite the fragmented nature of Georgia's pro-Western opposition, Zourabichvili remained optimistic, emphasizing that although the opposition "cannot be united given the recent past," it could still coalesce around the European idea and secure "50 or 60 percent of the



votes." She underscored the importance of unity in the face of the October elections, which she suggested could be decisive for Georgia's future direction.

Zourabichvili also voiced her concerns over the controversial "foreign agents" law, which she highlighted as being deliberately labeled a "Russian law." She drew parallels with how Russian President Vladimir Putin had used a similar law to undermine Russian civil society, warning that the Georgian government

seemed intent on cutting the country off from Europe and turning Georgia into a "Russian protectorate."

Addressing how France and the European Union could assist Georgia, Zourabichvili called on them to speak out against the Georgian government's actions, which she claimed were moving the country away from its European aspirations. While not a strong advocate for sanctions, Zourabichvili noted that such measures could be misinter-

preted by the public but did not rule out the possibility of European responses post-election, particularly if Georgia's pro-Russian orientation was confirmed.

The President underscored that the upcoming elections would effectively serve as a referendum on Georgia's European future, warning that the country faced an "existential choice" between pursuing its European destiny or reverting to a Russian-dominated regime. Zourabichvili expressed particu-

lar concern over the influence of Georgian Dream's honorary chairman, Bidzina Ivanishvili, an oligarch with close ties to Moscow. She stated that his interests with Russia were "the most opaque."

Zourabichvili framed the parliamentary elections on October 26 as a pivotal moment for Georgia, determining whether the country would maintain its European course or fall back under Russian influence.

Council of Europe Commissioner Urges Georgian Parliament Chairman to Abandon Anti-LGBT Legislation

By Liza Mchedlidze

On September 10, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'Flaherty, published a letter addressed to Georgian Parliament Chairman Shalva Papuashvili. In the letter, O'Flaherty urged the Georgian Parliament to abandon the proposed anti-LGBT legislation, which recently passed its second hearing, and called for an end to rhetoric that stigmatizes the LGBTI community. The Commissioner emphasized that framing their efforts for equal rights as "LGBTI propaganda/promotion" is harmful and unacceptable.

O'Flaherty also encouraged Georgian authorities to collaborate with both national and international partners, including the Council of Europe, on how best to protect the rights of LGBTI individuals and combat discrimination.

"The draft law provides a legal footing

for discrimination against LGBTI people and appears to be at variance with the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention)," O'Flaherty wrote. He also provided a brief overview of relevant case law from the European Court of Human Rights, reinforcing the need for the Georgian government to reconsider the bill.

The Commissioner expressed concern over prejudice against LGBTI people in certain segments of Georgian society, particularly among some politicians. He recalled previous statements made by his predecessors, highlighting that LGBTI people in Georgia remain targets of hate crimes and discrimination.

O'Flaherty also criticized provisions in the draft law that list sexual orientation and gender identity alongside incest, arguing that this only worsens the stigma

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The Commissioner
Le Commissaire



Ref: CommHR/MOF/sf 095-2024

Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI
Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia

Strasbourg, 6 September 2024

Dear Chairman,

Further to our previous exchange of letters regarding the draft law "On transparency of foreign influence", I wish to continue the dialogue on ensuring the effective observance of human rights in Georgia.

Accordingly, I share with you my concern about the draft law "On protecting family values and minors," including amendments to 18 other laws (N 07-3/466/10, registered in the Parliament on 10 June 2024 and passed in second reading on 4 September 2024).

I understand that the draft law limits educational institutions, broadcasters and advertisers from "promoting" information about gender identity and same-sex relationships, and restricts the right to hold assemblies and manifestations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) people. Further, the draft law proposes a total ban on legal gender recognition: it is not permitted to change the indication of sex in a person's identification document and health professionals providing gender affirming healthcare face up to four years of imprisonment. The draft law also prohibits legal recognition of same-sex relationships and LGBTI people are not allowed to adopt children or be foster parents.

The draft law provides a legal footing for discrimination against LGBTI people and appears to be at variance with the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention). I provide below a brief overview of some of the relevant caselaw of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court), as it applies to the various matters covered in the draft law.

According to the well-established caselaw of the Court, "a democratic society within the meaning of the Convention rejects any stigmatisation based on sexual orientation" (see *Bayev and Others v. Russia*). Such a society is built on the equal dignity of individuals and is sustained by diversity, which it perceives not as a threat but as a source of enrichment (see *Nachova and Others v. Bulgaria* [GC]).

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6959; Euro - 2.9755; GBP - 3.5300; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9560; Swiss Franc - 3.1795

Council of Europe Commissioner Urges Georgian Parliament Chairman to Abandon Anti-LGBT Legislation

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

and discrimination faced by the LGBTI community.

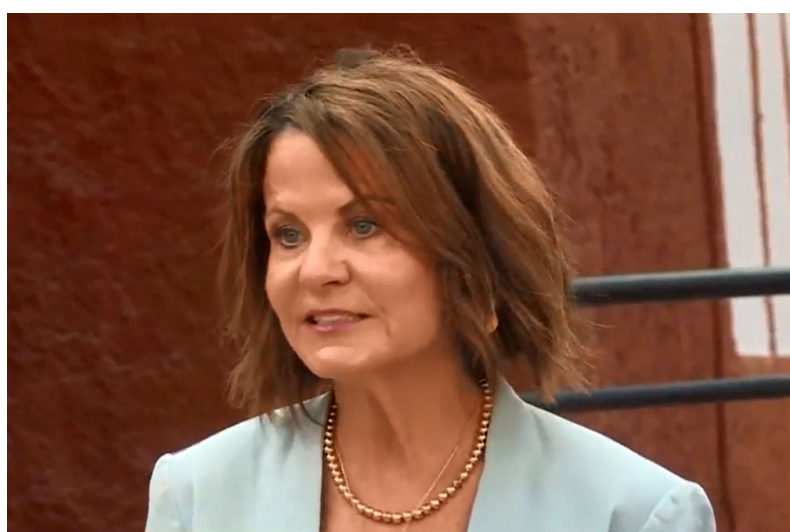
Addressing the issue of protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse, the Commissioner stressed that Georgia, as a party to the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Convention, should address any gaps in the protection of children through targeted legislation. He underscored the importance of not jeopardizing other human rights under the Con-

vention or fostering societal prejudice against LGBTI individuals in the process. O'Flaherty requested that the Georgian Parliament Chairman ensure all MPs receive a copy of the letter and reaffirmed his willingness to maintain constructive dialogue on this and other human rights issues in Georgia.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan Addresses Disinformation on Western Assistance in Georgia



On September 10, US Ambassador to Georgia Robin Dunnigan addressed the disinformation regarding Western assistance in Georgia and provided concrete examples of the benefits foreign aid brings to the country. Speaking at the

opening ceremony of a new American Corner in Batumi, Dunnigan highlighted recent projects initiated by the US Embassy to support the local population.

The Ambassador emphasized that, in just the past two days, the US Embassy had launched

disinformation that has circulated in recent months, particularly concerning the foreign influence law and the role of foreign assistance in Georgia. She stated, "There's been a lot of disinformation over the last several months, including around the foreign influence law, about what foreign assistance does. And these [projects in Batumi] are examples of where our foreign assistance goes [in Georgia] to help Georgians."

The Ambassador further explained the positive impact of US aid, highlighting its role in helping people with disabilities, supporting Georgian youth in learning English, and preserving and celebrating Georgian culture. "This is what our assistance is doing. So, it's positive, it's working together with Georgia... it is really a positive thing, not a negative thing," Dunnigan concluded.

Defense Ministers of Georgia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan Hold Trilateral Meeting in Batumi

On September 10, the Defense Ministers of Georgia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan convened for a trilateral Defense Ministerial



meeting in Batumi. As part of this gathering, Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Chikovani held bilateral meetings with the Defense Ministers of Azerbaijan, Zakir Hasanov, and Turkey, Yasar Güler.

During the meeting between Georgian Defense Minister Chikovani and his Azerbaijani counterpart, the two leaders discussed the significance of fostering friendly relations between neighboring countries, as well as maintaining peace and stability in the region. According to a press release from the Georgian Defense Ministry, the discussions also covered various aspects of defense cooperation, including military education.

In the bilateral meeting with Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Güler, Chikovani expressed his gratitude for Turkey's unwavering support of Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and NATO integration efforts. The conversation further delved into issues of bilateral cooperation, focusing on military training opportunities, financial and material-technical assistance, and joint participation in international training exercises.

Additionally, Turkey's contribution to the implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP) initiative was highlighted during the talks, as noted in the Georgian Defense Ministry's press release.

EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia moves to new field office in Zugdidi

On 6 September, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) officially moved into its new Field Office in Zugdidi. This marks a "significant milestone" in the Mission's ongoing efforts to maintain its operational capabilities along the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line (ABL), says a press release by EUMM.

The new Field Office at 25 Tsothe Dadiani Street, replacing the previous location at 8 Tavisupleba Street, is tailored to meet the evolving needs of the EUMM. The new office is equipped with modern facilities, advanced communication tools,

and enhanced security measures.

During the opening ceremony, the Head of Mission, Bettina Patricia Boughani, said: "This move is about more than bricks and mortar. This new building is a symbol of our long-lasting dedication to peace and stability in Georgia. In particular, it reflects our ongoing commitment to support the conflict-affected communities along the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line."

The previous Field Office, in use since December 2008, has been central to EUMM's operations for nearly 16 years. Throughout this period, the EUMM has been contributing to stability in Georgia through its 24/7 monitoring presence, confidence-building efforts, and impartial reporting.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Wednesday, September 11

Day Clear
High: 33°C

Night Clear
Low: 21°C

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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**

დასანს სერენადები
NIGHT SERENADES

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