

Anti-Corruption Bureau Labels Transparency International - Georgia and Choose Europe as Electoral Entities

By Liza Mchedlidze

On September 24, Georgia's Anti-Corruption Bureau recognized Transparency International - Georgia (TI Georgia), its director Eka Gigauri, as well as the organization Choose Europe, its director Khatuna Lagazidze, and the co-founders as entities with declared electoral goals. This classification subjects them to the restrictions outlined in Chapter III of the Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens. They have been ordered to submit financial reports to the Bureau within five days.

"If the decision is not implemented, I will need to make a new decision, and we will calculate the mentioned costs with monitoring. The law allows us to demand the accounts of both individuals and legal entities," stated Razhden Kuprashvili, head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, during a briefing.

Following the decision, Transparency International - Georgia issued a public statement, expressing concern and rejecting the Bureau's ruling.

"As we have learned from the media, the Anti-Corruption Bureau has made the decision to classify 'Transparency International - Georgia' and its Executive Director Eka Gigauri as entities with a declared electoral goal, applying the restrictions stipulated in Chapter III of the Organic Law of Georgia 'On Political Associations of Citizens.' Neither the organization nor Eka Gigauri has yet received the official decision," TI Georgia stated.

The organization strongly criticized the



Bureau's ruling, stating that it lacks both factual and legal basis. TI Georgia emphasized that both the organization and its director remain committed to Georgia's European aspirations, a goal enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia and supported by the majority of the country's population. TI Georgia added that they will take appropriate legal steps

once they officially receive the decision.

In response to the controversy, Georgia's Public Defender, Levan Ioseliani, announced that his office has begun examining the Bureau's decision.

"We started studying it as soon as it became public knowledge. We will request all documentation from the Anti-Corruption Bureau to understand the le-

gal reasoning behind their decision. Once we have that information, we will make our response clear," Ioseliani said.

Meanwhile, both the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) and Fair Elections (ISFED) have condemned the Bureau's actions, calling the decision illegal.

U.S. Senators Respond to Georgian Anti-Corruption Bureau's Actions Against NGOs

FOREIGN
RELATIONS COMMITTEE

By Liza Mchedlidze

On September 24, Georgia's Anti-Corruption Bureau declared Transparency International Georgia and Vote for

Europe, as well as their leaders, as entities with "electoral objectives." This decision has drawn criticism from four prominent members of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

U.S. Senators Jim Risch (R-Idaho) and Ben Cardin (D-Md.), ranking member and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, alongside Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), chair and ranking member of the Europe and Regional Security Cooperation Subcommittee, released a joint statement addressing their concerns.

"We are concerned by Georgia's Anti-Corruption Bureau's decision to label Transparency International Georgia and Vote for Europe as organizations 'with a declared electoral goal.' These NGOs are active in preparing monitoring missions for the upcoming Georgian elections but are not part of the electoral contest. They support democracy regardless of whom people vote for," the statement read.

The senators also highlighted the situation of Eka Gigauri, Director of Transparency International Georgia, who they believe is being targeted for her testimony during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on "Anti-NGO Laws and Other Tools of Democratic Repression" held on September 12. The statement strongly condemned the actions taken against her, saying, "It is unconscionable that Transparency International Georgia Director Eka Gigauri is being punished for her recent testimony. The announcement about her yesterday proves that autocratic governments are misusing laws to punish independent voices."

SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

Cardin, Risch, Shaheen, Ricketts on Georgian Government's Punishment of SFRC Witness

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Senators Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Chair and Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, along with Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), Chair and Ranking Member of the Europe and Regional Security Cooperation Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, issued the following statement:

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Biden Disinvites Georgian Prime Minister from UNGA Reception Over Anti-Democratic Concerns



U.S. President Joe Biden has disinvited Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze from the September 25 reception for world leaders and senior U.N.

officials. PM Kobakhidze, along with Foreign Minister Iliia Darchiashvili, is attending the 79th session of the UN General Assembly.

The cancellation was first reported by Voice of America, citing unnamed White House and congressional sources. The deci-

will of the Georgian people.”

The Biden administration made this move after communications with Georgian officials failed to show any change in direction. Recently, the U.S. Ambassador to Georgia expressed concern that the government’s actions were isolating the country from the West. This came after PM Kobakhidze summoned the U.S. Ambassador to criticize new U.S. sanctions on Georgian police officials, calling it a “critical limit.”

The U.S. Embassy confirmed that the decision was due to “increasing concerns about the Georgian government’s anti-democratic actions, disinformation, and negative rhetoric about the United States and the West.”

South Ossetia’s De Facto Government Hands Over Georgian Citizen

The de facto government of South Ossetia claims that Georgian citizen, Vasili Salamashvili,

who allegedly violated the state “border”, has been handed over to Georgia.

According to the occupation authorities, Salamashvili, a 43-year-old resident of Sakorintlo village in Georgia’s Kaspi municipality, was arrested on September 24 in the Akhagori district near a monastery.

The de facto security committee stated “due to Salamashvili’s health problems, the South Ossetian KGB’s border service decided to transfer him to the Georgian side without imposing any penalties”.

The Georgian State Security Service has confirmed the transfer.



ADB Raises 2024 Growth Forecast for Georgia

TBILISI, GEORGIA (25 September 2024) — A rapid expansion in services coupled with higher domestic consumption has accelerated Georgia’s economic growth in 2024, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report.

The Asian Development Outlook (ADO) September 2024, forecasts Georgia’s gross domestic product (GDP) to grow by 7%, a notable increase from the earlier projection of 5% growth made in April 2024. The outlook for 2025 remains unchanged, with an anticipated growth of 5.5%.

The Caucasus nation’s economic growth was propelled by a 9.7% increase in transport and storage, 8.5% in accommodation and food services, 12.2% in information and communication, and 9.6% in finance and insurance services. Domestic con-

sumption which became the main driver of growth, helped expand domestic investment. Unemployment fell to 14% in the first quarter of 2024.

“Georgia’s economy continues to show steady progress despite geopolitical risks,” said ADB Country Director for Georgia Lesley Bearman Lahm. “This bodes well for the country’s ability to continue strengthening regional connectivity, supporting the private sector, developing

human capital, and investing in climate-resilient agriculture.”

Inflation slowed in the first half of 2024 reaching 1.1% but rose again in June to 2.2%. This was mainly driven by increased transportation costs, owing to unstable oil prices, and elevated prices for tobacco and alcoholic beverages. A relatively stable exchange rate and prudent fiscal policy helped keep prices from rising faster.

During the first half of 2024,

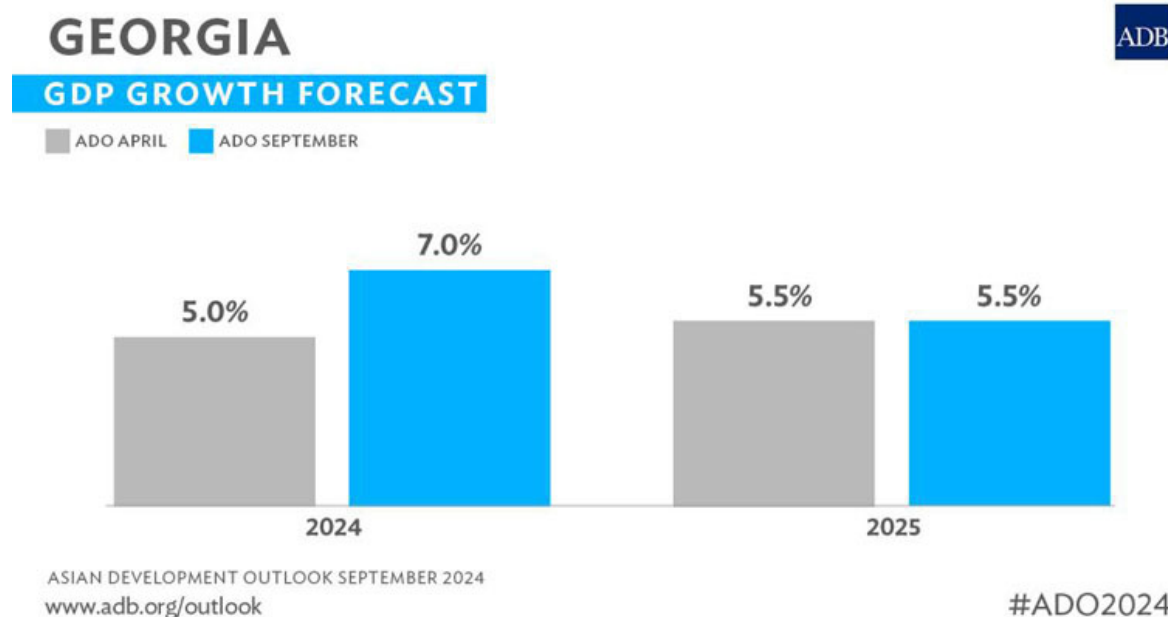
an 18.5% increase in revenue helped erase the fiscal deficit. The balanced budget and a relatively stable lari contributed to a reduction in the ratio of public debt to GDP to 38.9% in the middle of this year, down from 39.2% a year earlier. Meanwhile, money transfers fell by 30.3% in general, while those from the Russian Federation plunged by 71.4%, even as they were partly offset by higher inflows from the United States and

Europe.

Risks to the current account include domestic policy uncertainty and geopolitical risks, which may exacerbate exchange rate pressures. In addition, potential disruption to trade from the knock-on effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine could hit supply chains, creating inflationary pressures from higher commodity prices.

ADB has supported Georgia since 2007 and is one of the country’s largest multilateral development partners. ADB’s loans, grants, and technical assistance to Georgia total \$4 billion. ADB’s new 5-year country partnership strategy with Georgia aims to help the nation develop into a green and inclusive regional gateway, support sovereign and private sector investments, policy reforms, capacity building, climate resilient infrastructure and regional integration.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.



Weather

Thursday, September 26

Day Showers
High: 20°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 16°C

Friday, September 27

Day Showers
High: 20°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 14°C

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