

EU Suspends Visa-Free Travel for Georgian Diplomats Amid Rising Tensions

By Liza Mchedlidze

On December 16, Kaja Kallas, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, announced that EU ministers had decided to suspend visa liberalization for Georgian diplomatic passport holders. Speaking after the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Kallas condemned the violence against demonstrators in Georgia and emphasized that the suspension was a "symbolic" first step in addressing the situation.

Kallas expressed concern over Georgia's political direction, stating, "Democracies do not oppress opposition voices or curtail the freedom of media." She criticized the ruling party's actions, revealing that the EU had "downgraded political contacts and cut funding for the Georgian government."

Highlighting the council's response, Kallas said, "Today we agreed the need to hold the visa-free regime for diplomatic passport holders, and the Commission will make a proposal already this year. We also discussed sanctioning Georgian officials responsible for violence against peaceful protesters." She added that the EU



would redirect funding from the government to civil society, independent media, and Georgian citizens.

During the Q&A session, Kallas noted that discussions

among EU ministers had been "very intense," with some advocating stronger measures and others urging caution. Talks on sanctions against Georgian officials stalled due to the unani-

mous consent required among all 27 member states.

Despite this, Kallas reiterated the EU's commitment to supporting the Georgian people, emphasizing that their future

must be decided by the people themselves. She stated that the visa suspension was an initial step toward accountability, signaling the EU's readiness to take further action if necessary.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Urges Georgia to Uphold Fundamental Freedoms Amid Ongoing Violence

By Liza Mchedlidze

In response to the ongoing protests and continued reports of violence in Georgia, the Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Democracy, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Questions, Lucie Potucková (Czech Republic), and the Committee's Rapporteur, Carina Ödebrink (Sweden), issued a statement reiterating their call for Georgian authorities to uphold the fundamental freedoms of assembly and expression.

The statement expressed deep concern over the ongoing violence against Georgian citizens who are exercising their fundamental rights. It called on the Georgian authorities to take immediate action to halt the persecution of civil society, media, and political opposition.

"We are deeply concerned about the current situation in view of reports of violence against Georgian citizens exercising their fundamental rights. We call on the Georgian authorities to take immediate action to

end the persecution of civil society, media, and the political opposition," the statement said.

The leaders of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's human rights committee expressed alarm over the continued use of disproportionate force against protesters, as well as the targeted violence against opposition voices and media representatives. They stressed that fundamental rights, including the freedom of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, must be upheld and protected in line with

Georgia's Constitution and OSCE commitments.

The OSCE PA reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the democratic aspirations of the Georgian people, as outlined in the Bucharest Declaration. The statement also condemned the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by law enforcement officials against protesters, calling it a serious breach of the right to peaceful assembly.

The Committee urged Georgian authorities to ensure that all law enforcement agencies re-

spect these fundamental rights and called for a prompt and thorough investigation into any incidents of excessive force or misconduct, as previously urged by the Georgian Public Defender.

The statement also expressed support for the concerns raised by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights regarding the October parliamentary elections, the 'transparency of foreign influence' law, and the use of excessive force by police during protests.

Furthermore, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly leaders reiterated their support for the 13 December statement by the OSCE Troika – comprising Malta, North Macedonia, and Finland – urging Georgian authorities to make use of the tools and expertise available through the OSCE and its institutions.

The statement concluded by echoing the recent call from OSCE PA Special Representative on the South Caucasus, Luis Graça (Portugal), for all sides to engage in a constructive and open dialogue to address the ongoing crisis in Georgia.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Hungarian Foreign Minister Criticizes EU's Sanctions on Georgia



Hungary's Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó condemned the European Union's stance on Georgia, calling it a "world record for political hypocrisy." His comments followed Hungary's veto of proposed EU sanctions against Georgian

police leaders, which were introduced amid ongoing tensions between Georgia and the EU.

Szijjártó accused Brussels of targeting Georgia simply because the country

elected a "peace-oriented, patriotic, conservative party," in contrast to the liberal forces preferred by the EU. He argued that the EU's response was politically driven, overlooking the Georgian government's achievements.

The Hungarian minister also empha-

sized Georgia's "economic progress under the Georgian Dream party", which has been in power for 12 years. According to Szijjártó, the country's average incomes have tripled, per capita GDP has doubled, and foreign investments have grown significantly. He further stated that no one in Brussels should have the right to question the will of the Georgian people, suggesting that the EU's actions were unjustified and unrepresentative of Georgia's democratic choices.

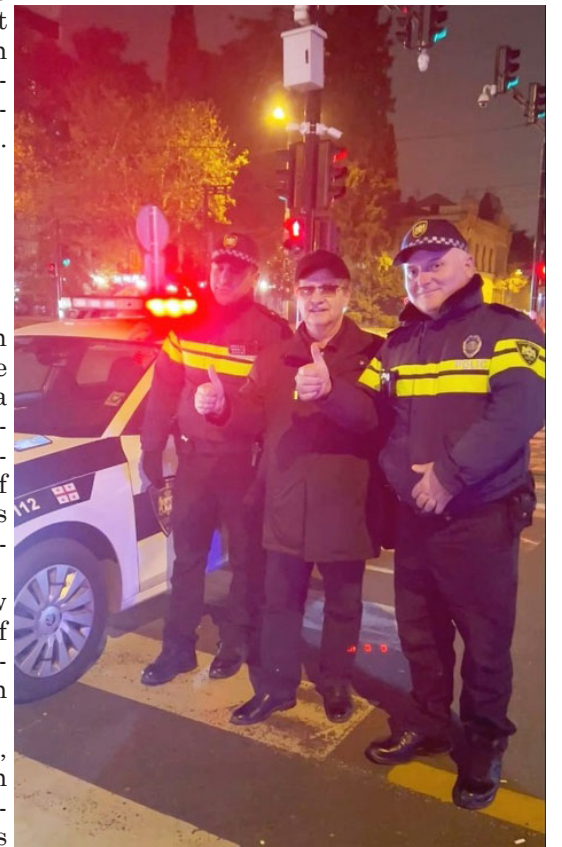
Russian Law Enforcement Union Leader Praises Georgian Police After Visit to Tbilisi

Alexei Lobarev, head of the Russian Association of Law Enforcement Trade Unions, announced on social media that he had been in Tbilisi "at the invitation of his colleagues." Lobarev expressed support for the actions of Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs and shared photos with Georgian police officers.

Lobarev praised the conduct of law enforcement, stating, "Employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia conducted themselves honorably in this extreme situation."

Addressing relations with Russia, Lobarev noted what he perceived as an "improvement" in attitudes: "The attitude towards Russia in Georgia has

improved significantly in recent months. I spoke Russian fluently on the streets, at markets, in shops and cafes, everyone understood me and answered me in Russian," he wrote.



Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 15th package of restrictive measures

The Foreign Affairs Council today adopted a 15th package of economic and individual restrictive measures with the objective of further limiting Russia's ability to wage its illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine.

These measures are designed to address the circumvention of EU sanctions by targeting Putin's shadow fleet, and to weaken Russia's military and industrial complex.

The Council agreed on a package of 84 new listings, which consists of 54 persons and 30 entities responsible for actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

The EU is sanctioning the

military unit responsible for striking the Okhmadyt children's hospital in Kyiv, senior managers in leading companies in the energy sector, individuals responsible for children's deportation, propaganda and circumvention, and two senior DPRK officials.

As to entities, the EU targeted

primarily Russian defence companies and shipping companies responsible for the transportation of crude oil and oil products by the sea, providing important revenues to the Russian government. It also listed a chemical plant, and a civil Russian airline which is an important provider of logistical support to the

Russian military.

For the first time, the EU is imposing fully-fledged sanctions (travel ban, asset freeze, prohibition to make economic resources available) on various Chinese actors supplying drone components and microelectronic components in support of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Council added 52 vessels originating from third countries to the list of 17 those subject to a port access ban and ban on provision of a broad range of services related to maritime transport. This measure targets non-EU tankers that are part of Putin's so called "shadow fleet" circumventing the oil price cap mechanism or that support Russia's energy sector, or vessels responsible for transporting military equipment for Russia or involved in the transport of stolen Ukrainian grain.

The Council also added 32 new entities to the list of those directly supporting Russia's military and industrial complex in its war of aggression against Ukraine. They will be subject to tighter export restrictions concerning dual use goods and technologies, as well as goods and technology which might contribute to the technological enhancement of Russia's defence and security sector. Some of these entities are located in third countries (China, India, Iran, Serbia and the United Arab Emirates) and have been involved in the circumvention of trade restrictions or have engaged in the procurement of sensitive items used for Russian military operations, like UAVs and missiles.

The relevant legal acts will soon be published in the Official Journal of the EU.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Tuesday, December 17

Day Partly Cloudy High: 7°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 2°C

Wednesday, December 18

Day Cloudy High: 7°C

Night Showers Low: 4°C

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