

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Volski: Strict Drug Policy Necessary for National Security

The Georgian Dream legislative package, which aims to tighten penalties for drug-related offenses, including those involving cannabis and marijuana, was discussed by the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights on March 14. The proposed changes affect eight different laws, including the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Offenses, and the Law on Organized Crime and Racketeering. Several new provisions have been added to the criminal law as part of strengthening drug policy.

In response to the package, Gia Volski, the First Vice Speaker of Parliament, highlighted the dangers of drug trafficking and its potential to destabilize Georgia's security.

"We saw acts of diversion involving weapons and drugs in the 90s, and we saw what this diversion did to an entire generation of Georgia. Many of them sacrificed their lives in the war, but after the war, they could not improve their situation, and their health remains damaged to this day," Volski stated.

He emphasized the importance of being particularly strict with those who import and sell drugs, not just for personal profit but possibly as part of efforts to destabilize the country's security.

"We must protect our future generations from this danger, and we must be especially strict with those who bring in and sell drugs for personal gain, and not



just for personal benefit, but possibly for purposes related to the destabilization of Georgia's secu-

rity and stability," Volski said.

Volski further connected the issue of drug trafficking to na-

tional security, warning that narcotics could undermine future generations' ability to be

competitive in the labor market and pose other threats to the country's stability.



Bokuchava Criticizes Zourabichvili for Not Pardoning Saakashvili

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Tina Bokuchava, the chairwoman of the *Unity - National Movement*, criticized 5th President Salome Zourabichvili for not pardoning Mikheil Saakashvili, stating that this decision will have long-term consequences. Bokuchava emphasized that history would judge Zourabichvili harshly for failing to take action and leaving Saakashvili imprisoned "under the influence of Ivanishvili's regime".

"The insurmountable difference between the National Movement and President Zourabichvili will remain that she did not make a decision to pardon President Saakashvili," Bokuchava said. "History will evaluate this as one Western president who did not pardon

another Western president, leaving him in captivity under Ivanishvili's Russian regime."

Bokuchava believes that a pardon for Saakashvili would have been a strong statement from Zourabichvili in support of Georgia's Western, pro-European future. However, she acknowledged that while a pardon may not have resulted in Saakashvili's immediate release, it would have shown political clarity in the ongoing struggle between Georgia's European aspirations and Ivanishvili's "Russia-leaning regime".

"In this important civilizational struggle, where on one side is a free, Western, pro-European Georgia and on the other side is Ivanishvili's Russian regime, moral political

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7755; Euro - 3.0267; GBP - 3.5937; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2505; Swiss Franc - 3.1415

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CONTINUED FROM Page 1

clarity is very important,” Bokuchava explained. “A pardon from Zourabichvili would have been a crucial statement in this regard.”

Bokuchava also discussed the need for opposition unity and proposed March 31 as a deadline to see if real collaboration could occur among opposition parties.

“March 31 should be set as a

deadline,” she stated. “If unity is truly ephemeral and unrealistic, then we should end the false talk and all parties should act within their capabilities.”

While Bokuchava expressed disappointment in Zourabichvili’s decision, she also reiterated that Saakashvili had asked his supporters and the National Movement to work towards opposition unity. She emphasized that the National Move-

ment is committed to this goal but acknowledged that parties must act based on their own strengths.

“We believe unity is the most effective way to win, but it’s a democracy, and everyone has the right to decide their own path,” she said. “We’re open to coordination with anyone, including Zourabichvili, who shares the same goals.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Government’s Course Threatens European Path, EU Warns



The current course of the Georgian government threatens the country’s European path, prompting a strong response from the European Union, European Commission spokesperson for external affairs and security Anita Hipper stated in Brussels.

According to Hipper, the political crisis in Georgia has deepened, particularly following the October 26 parliamentary elections.

“Georgia is sinking into a deep political crisis, and we are witnessing a deterioration of human rights since the parliamentary elections on October 26. The Georgian government’s current course poses a threat to Georgia’s European path. As a result, the European Union

has reacted strongly. We have reduced political contacts and frozen financial assistance,” she said.

Hipper noted that the redirected funding now supports civil society, and the EU has also taken measures regarding

diplomatic visas.

“We continue to monitor the situation in Georgia to remain engaged and stand by the Georgian people,” she added.

Vashadze: Georgia-US Relations Will Improve with Political Prisoner Releases and New Elections

Giorgi Vashadze, leader of the *Strategy Builder* party, stated that Georgia’s relations with the United States will improve once political prisoners are released and new elections are scheduled.

He emphasized that the MEGOBARI Act represents increased pressure on those who “falsify” the will of the Geor-

gian people.

“Relations between Georgia and America will begin to improve as soon as political prisoners begin to be released and new elections are scheduled. Ultimately, the strategic partnership will be restored as soon as we change the government and expel these anti-Western, anti-human, anti-democratic forces, the self-proclaimed regime, and when democratic forces come to power. The MEGOBARI Act is the foundation for this,” Vashadze explained.

He outlined two potential paths for Georgia: isolation, which he believes the *Georgian Dream* government is leading the country toward, or integration with America and Europe, resulting in more investments, jobs, visa-free travel, and benefits for the Georgian people.

“The MEGOBARI Act means even more pressure on all those people who falsify the will of the Georgian people. At the same time, the MEGOBARI Act means immense support for the Georgian people,” Vashadze concluded.



EU welcomes finalisation of negotiations on the draft Peace Agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Weather

Monday, March 17

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 28°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 12°C

Tuesday, March 18

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 26°C

Night Cloudy

Low: 8°C

The European Union today welcomed the announcements made by Armenia and Azerbaijan on the finalisation of their negotiations on the draft Agreement on Peace and Establishment of Interstate Relations.

“We commend both sides for their persistent work over



the past few years in this direction, both on the bilateral track and with the involvement of the international community. The EU welcomes Armenia paving the way for the finalisation of the text,” EU High Representative Kaja Kallas said in a statement.

She added that the announcements represented “a decisive step

towards lasting peace and security in the region”.

“It is key to keep this momentum and ensure smooth completion of this process with the same forward-looking and compromise-oriented approach, from both sides,” Kaja Kallas said.

Kallas said that the EU fully supported the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalisation process and stood ready to provide additional support and expertise, should the sides request it.

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The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
<http://www.messenger.com.ge/>

Nino Metreveli

Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze

Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili

Layout Designer, Photographer

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