

By Liza Mchedlidze

Zourabichvili Warns of Russian Influence and Democratic Collapse

Georgia's fifth president, Salome Zourabichvili, has issued a stark warning that the country is facing an "existential challenge" as its democratic institutions are systematically dismantled by the ruling Georgian Dream party. Speaking before Lithuania's Parliament on March 25, she urged Europe and NATO to act quickly before Georgia falls under Russian influence, emphasizing that the crisis extends beyond Georgia itself.

Zourabichvili accused the Georgian Dream government of reversing the country's democratic progress and shifting toward an authoritarian model aligned with Russia. She warned that the ruling party is abandoning its pro-European commitments, putting Georgia at risk of falling into Moscow's sphere of influence.

"The Russian nightmare, which we thought was part of history since our independence, is coming back to haunt us in the 21st century," Zourabichvili declared.

She condemned the government's crackdown on dissent, highlighting the arrests of journalists, students, civil society leaders, and opposition figures. "In Georgia today, we are a nation under repression," she said, citing the detention of Mzia Amaghlobeli, director of the Batumelebi/Netgazeti media outlet, and the ongoing trial of 11 protesters.

Zourabichvili denounced the use of financial pressure to silence activists, stating that economic penalties are deliberately imposed to weaken opposition voices. "These are designed to financially cripple activists and their families," she said.

She further accused the ruling party of abandoning governance altogether, instead focusing solely on suppressing opposition. "There is no economic policy, no foreign policy... Repression has become the only and exclusive policy," she stated.

Zourabichvili also criticized Georgian



Dream's plan to introduce a U.S.-inspired Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), calling it a tool to suffocate civil society and independent media, similar to Russia's infamous "foreign agents" law. "It has nothing to do with the American model," she stressed.

She warned that power is being consolidated under Bidzina Ivanishvili, the party's founder and honorary chairman.

"The one-party, but in reality one-man rule has taken over the state, over politics, over social life. Georgia's independence itself is under siege," she said.

Zourabichvili framed Georgia's crisis as part of a broader geopolitical struggle, warning that Moscow seeks to reassert control over the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and Europe's access to Central Asia.

She also accused the Georgian government of blocking critical infrastructure projects, such as the Anaklia Deep Sea Port, which she described as Georgia's chance to create a trade corridor independent of Russian control. Instead, she noted, the government is welcoming Chinese influence over key infrastructure projects.

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Badri Japaridze Rejects Legitimacy of Georgian Dream's Investigative Commission

By Liza Mchedlidze

Badri Japaridze, one of the leaders of Lelo, has announced that he will not appear before the parliamentary investigative commission established by Georgian Dream to examine the activities of the former Unity-National Movement (UNM) government.

Japaridze dismissed the commission as illegitimate, calling it a one-party structure aimed at smearing political opponents with fabricated accusations.

"I do not consider this so-called Investigative Commission to be established on the basis of the law!" Japaridze wrote in a statement on social media. "This is a planned slanderous show, in

which I do not intend to participate."

Commission chair Tea Tsulukiani stated that Japaridze was expected to appear between 2:00 PM and 4:00 PM on March 25. Since he refused, the commission will reconvene on March 26 at 10:00 AM to discuss forwarding his case to the prosecutor's office. Under Georgian law, ignoring a parliamentary commission's summons can result in a fine or up to one year in prison.

Japaridze, however, remained firm in his refusal, arguing that the Georgian Dream-led parliament itself is illegitimate, formed through fraudulent elections. He

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7794; Euro - 3.0062; GBP - 3.5988; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2896; Swiss Franc - 3.1491

Zourabichvili Warns of Russian Influence and Democratic Collapse

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The president urged the EU and NATO to take a closer look at financial networks supporting the regime, arguing that Georgia is becoming a hub for Russian sanctions evasion. She warned that a new offshore law has created a “gray zone” for

sanctioned oligarchs and illicit financial activities.

“The EU cannot remain passive,” she insisted, advocating for sanctions tied to democratic conditions, including early elections. “If we do not find this alternative together, Georgia risks either full Russian control or dangerous instability.”

Zourabichvili emphasized that Europe’s security is at stake, calling for a new Black Sea and Caucasus security strategy. She argued that strengthening NATO’s presence in the region is indispensable to blocking Russian and Chinese expansion.

She also linked Georgia’s fate to broader regional stability, particularly in Arme-

nia and Azerbaijan, where ongoing peace talks present an opportunity for a stronger and more peaceful Caucasus. “Georgia must remain the strong anchor of our EU and American partners, as it has been for the past three decades,” she said.

Finally, Zourabichvili warned that Europe’s credibility is on the line. “If Europe... cannot find the ways to have leverage on a small country with a massively pro-European population... then the challenge goes much beyond Georgia and will affect the credibility of the EU’s foreign policy.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Germany Expands Sanctions on Georgian Officials Over Crackdown on Pro-EU Protests

on pro-European Union protesters.

The Ministry acknowledged that Georgians have been protesting for several months in favor of a European future and against the current course of the government. It noted that demonstrators “continue to face in-

the new measures.

This latest move follows Germany’s initial sanctions on December 31, 2024, when Berlin imposed entry bans on nine individuals deemed “primarily responsible” for violent actions against protesters and opposition figures in Georgia.

port for Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, leaders of the opposition party Lelo, who refused to participate in the commission’s proceedings.

Khazaradze, who was summoned to testify about Magnat LLC, did not attend the session. In response, the commission, led

commission’s request can lead to a fine or imprisonment of up to one year.

Tsulukiani claimed that Khazaradze had been properly notified, including through WhatsApp and Signal, but still refused to appear. She criticized him for dismissing the commis-



GermanForeignOffice
@GermanyDiplo

For nearly 3 months, the people of #Georgia have been protesting in favour of a future in the EU & against the course of the 🇧🇪 leadership. They continue to face intimidation, arrests & violence. Today, 🇩🇪 imposed further entry bans on 🇧🇪 officials responsible for the crackdown.

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on March 24 that it has imposed additional entry bans on officials from Georgia’s ruling Georgian Dream party who are responsible for the ongoing crackdown

timidation, arrests, and violence,” prompting Berlin to extend its sanctions on those responsible for the repression. However, the Ministry did not disclose the names or the exact number of individuals affected by

Opposition Rejects Legitimacy of Parliamentary Investigative Commission

The leader of the Coalition for Change, Nika Gvaramia, has announced that the opposition will boycott the parliamentary investigative commission, calling it an illegitimate body created by Bidzina Ivanishvili to serve Russian interests.

Gvaramia dismissed the commission as both illegal and illegitimate, stating that its true purpose is to distract from Georgia’s deepening political crisis by shifting attention to Kremlin-backed narratives. “We are not going to give the oligarch this opportunity,” he said.

Gvaramia also expressed sup-



by Tea Tsulukiani, voted to refer his case to the prosecutor’s office. Under Georgian law, refusal to comply with a

sion as a “circus” in a Facebook post, suggesting that his refusal left no doubt about his stance.

EU delegation to Georgia unveils ‘10 Years in Focus’ exhibition at Art House Gori



On 22 March, the ‘10 Years in Focus’ exhibition opened at the Gori Art House, offering a compelling visual narrative of Georgia’s most significant historical moments over the past decade. It features works by photojournalists, awarded by the EU Prize for Journalism.

The exhibition highlights the Georgian people’s aspiration for democracy, human rights and

social justice. It also features pictures highlighting the work of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which has been contributing to peace and stability in Georgia for 16 years. The EUMM has long supported journalists through one of the nominations of the EU Prize for Journalism.

“The EU is proud to support independent journalism and cultural spaces like Art House Gori. Culture and creativity is not just about expression – it is about giving a voice to communities, preserving culture, and creating dialogue. We want to ensure these voices continue to be heard in Georgia – loud and clear – for many years to come,” said Zane Rungule, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia.

“We are especially thrilled to host this exhibition at the Gori Art House, a space renovated with the support of the European

Union and recognised as a key hub for safeguarding freedom of expression and creative freedom,” said Otar Gvritishvili, Chairman of the Gori Photographers’ Club. “The Art House has endured persistent attacks over the past five months, making it even more meaningful to come together here in celebration of the values that unite us – resilience, dignity, freedom—deeply intertwined with our story and the stories this exhibition seeks to tell.”

The exhibition is now open to the public.

Established in 2012, the EU Prize for Journalism is an annual award recognising excellence in Georgian journalism. Organised by the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, the prize promotes professionalism, ethical journalism, and media integrity.

(eunighbourseast.eu)

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emphasized that a proper inves-

tigative commission should be formed only under a legally elected parliament that upholds democratic standards.

Mamuka Khazaradze, another key Lelo leader, also refused to attend the commission’s session today. His case has also been referred to the prosecutor’s office along with that of Japaridze’s.

Weather

Wednesday, March 26

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 17°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 7°C

Thursday, March 27

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 21°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 8°C

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