

## Parliament Chairman Papuashvili Accuses Opposition Leaders of Being 'Anti-National' and 'Anti-Church'

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Chairman of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili characterized the opposition as being against the nation and the church, labeling them as "anti-national and anti-church" in his statement. He stated that, during the upcoming elections in October, the population of Georgia will face a choice between the ruling party, Georgian Dream, which he claims aligns with national interests, and the opposition, which he accused of being "anti-Georgian" and working against the interests of Georgia.

"We have witnessed hysteria from the opposition regarding the EU integration process. Initially, they stated that they wouldn't spend time in working groups; now, they are in a frenzy to create working groups. This reminds me of the exact same people who, during COVID, advocated for opening the country, and once we opened, they demanded to close it.

The sole purpose of this hysteria is to perpetually keep the society in a state of anxiety, to constantly keep the entire society on edge. Our action plan has been made public, and we will



adhere to it precisely. There will be work formats, and, of course, if the opposition wishes to assist the government, they are welcome to do so." Papuashvili said.

Papuashvili accused opposition leaders Mamuka

Khazaradze and Davit Kezerashvili of being individuals who typically advocate for secularism but are now criticizing the patriarch's epistle. He asserted that this constitutes a direct conflict with the Church and

claimed that the party Lelo, under the leadership of Mamuka Khazaradze, is actively involved in a direct fight against the Church and, specifically, against the Patriarch.

"The opposition has already

clearly occupied not only an anti-Georgian but also an anti-Church niche. Today, I listened to comments from the opposition, including Mamuka Khazaradze and Davit Kezerashvili's TV reports, where individuals who usually talk about secularism at other times chose to criticize the patriarch's epistle. This is a direct fight with the Church, and it can be seen that Lelo, in this case, positioned itself as a party under the leadership of Mamuka Khazaradze, who is directly fighting against the Church and not only the Church; in this case, they are already directly fighting against the Patriarch.

The opposition is an anti-national and anti-church group, therefore, at the end of the year, in October, when there will be elections, the population of Georgia will have a choice between the Georgian dream, which comes from national interests, is based on the history of Georgia, the history of its spirituality, and, on the other hand, the opposition, which is Anti-Georgian and acting against the interests of Georgia and acting against the Church and Patriarch of Georgia" Papuashvili said.

## For Georgia Party Initiates the Return to Direct Election of the President

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's party, For Georgia, is proposing to return to the direct election of the president by the people, rather than through the collegium. Beka Liluashvili, a party member, spoke about the initiative in the parliament.

The party believes that electing the future president by the people will ensure both high legitimacy and independence, especially given the heightened polarization in domestic politics and the security challenges in the region.

"On December 30, during his recent return to politics, Bidzina Ivanishvili acknowledged the issue of balance within the government. Instead of constitutionally addressing this problem, he proposed to take on the role of a balancer in his own government. In democratic systems, such a scenario simply does not exist; it is both unacceptable and, most importantly, impossible for one person to be the guarantor of the state's stability, let alone the guarantor of their own balanc-

ing act.

In state governance, the vitality of maintaining balance and harmony between branches of government lies in the presence of independent and highly legitimate institutions, not individuals. The ongoing political processes in the country have convinced us all of this reality.

Therefore, our team, the 'For Georgia' party, is proposing an initiative to amend the constitution, advocating for the direct election of the future president of Georgia by its citizens instead of through the electoral college." the party stated.

However, according to Gakharia's party, the practice of the last three years has demonstrated that a directly elected president was much more effective in performing the role of a balancer.

"We are not going to elaborate on international examples where, due to systemic necessity, states altered their current practices and reinstated the direct election of the president, as occurred, for example, in the Czech Republic in 2012," the party stated.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6879; Euro - 2.9408; GBP - 3.4155; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9558; Swiss Franc - 3.1593

# Georgia's Transformative Year: From Mass Protests to EU Candidate Status in 2023

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The attainment of EU candidate status on December 14 can be unequivocally named as the main historical event for Georgia in 2023. Simultaneously, when recalling significant events of the year, the events of March 6-9 should be recalled, when mass rallies opposed the Georgian Dream government's so-called "Russian law."

Throughout the year, Georgia grappled with two contrasting trends: the Georgian Dream government's pro-Russian leanings and the pro-Western aspirations of society.

Despite longstanding anti-Western propaganda, initially dismissed by the Georgian Dream, it ultimately failed to sway public opinion. Notably, in early March, attempts to "Putinize" the country and enact a law on "foreign agents" sparked mass protests, primarily led by young people. Although the rallies were forcefully dispersed, the Georgian Dream ultimately retreated, refusing to adopt the Russian law.

The March protests are often credited with Georgia obtaining EU candidate status at year-end. The government's fulfillment of only three out of the 12

conditions set by the European Union could have led to rejection, but the EU's decision aimed to avoid bolstering anti-Western propaganda in Georgia.

On December 15, the Georgian Dream celebrated the candidate status without the opposition and the president, who they claimed "did not deserve" to partake in the celebration. Another noteworthy event was the impeachment procedure against President Salome Zurbashvili, initiated on September 1. Despite a Constitutional Court ruling against her, the impeachment failed on October 18, leading to the Georgian Dream ignoring President Zurbashvili.

In 2023, a significant challenge was the uncontrolled entry of Russian citizens and capital into Georgia, along with strengthening Russian influence. The opposition's call for a visa regime with Russia was disregarded by the Georgian Dream. On May 15, 2023, Georgia received a "gift" from Russia—the cancellation of the visa regime—further distancing itself from EU policy.

Politicians strategically positioned themselves for the upcoming 2024 general election, with the Georgian Dream refusing to lower the electoral threshold and

banning pre-election blocs, disadvantaging the opposition. Internal conflicts within the United National Movement also characterized the year.

Despite obtaining candidate status, Georgia faces nine reservations for EU membership negotiations. The Georgian Dream pledges to address these reservations promptly, while the opposition insists that fulfillment depends on a change in government. The anticipation of 2024 parliamentary elections continues as it is to drastically impact the country's future development.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### 'Georgian Dream' Political Council to Approve Prime Ministerial Candidate upon Ivanishvili's Submission

charter, the party's political council will approve the prime minister's candidacy upon the nomination of the honorary chairman.

According to the same charter, similar to the chairman of the party and the political council, the honorary chairman has the authority to call for an extraordinary congress of the party

cal council, alongside the party chairman and 15 members elected by the party congress. The honorary chairman, the party chairman, or not fewer than one-third of the members of the political council can convene a meeting of the political council.

### Government Allocates 50 Million GEL for Housing 1000 Large Socially Vulnerable Families

Health Minister Zurab Azarashvili stated that, in accordance with the government's decision, new living spaces will be provided for up to 1000 large families living in difficult conditions. The government has allocated a total budget of 50 million GEL for the program.

According to Azarashvili, a family with three or more minor children, all of whom are registered in the unified database of socially vulnerable families at the Social Service Agency, can be a beneficiary of the program.

The government states that the goal of the program is to support socially vulnerable, homeless families with many children



and create decent living conditions for them.

"The beneficiary of the program can be a family with three or more minor children, all of whom are registered in the unified database of socially vulnerable families at the Social Service Agency. The program can be used by families whose members are not registered in the unified electronic database of displaced or eco-migrant families at the IDPs, Eco-Migrants, and Livelihood Provision Agency.

Also, if a homeless family member has not already received a living space from the state or appropriate monetary compensation for purchasing a living space.

After evaluating these and other criteria, the relevant commission will decide on housing the families. The program will last until the end of 2025, and families will be housed in any administrative-territorial unit of Georgia," the statement reads.



ქართული ოცნება / Georgian Dream 192K followers • 0 following

The amendments made to the charter of 'Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia' on December 30, which included the addition of the position 'Honorary Chairman' held by Bidzina Ivanishvili, were published on January 8.

According to the updated

by their decision.

As per the same charter, similar to the chairman of the party and the political council, the honorary chairman has the authority to call for an extraordinary congress of the party by their decision.

The honorary chairman of the party is a member of the politi-

### EBRD and EU to support Georgian firms via ProCredit Bank

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development



(EBRD) and the European Union announced on 28 December that they would provide ProCredit

Bank, one of Georgia's leading banks, with US\$ 10 million (+9 million) to on-lend to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) across the country.

These funds will be used to help local MSMEs modernise their products and services to meet EU standards, boost their competitiveness and seize international trade opportunities. As at least

70 per cent of the loan is expected to fund investments in green technologies, the borrowers will be able to improve environmental practices and resource efficiency, and boost product quality, health, and safety measures.

Borrowers successfully implementing their investments will be eligible to receive incentive grants of up to 15 per cent of the value of their loans. They will also receive technical assistance throughout the implementation

process.

This new financing falls within the EU4Business-EBRD credit line. This programme is active across the Eastern Partnership region, and focuses on incentivising investments in highly advanced technologies and processes, and encouraging best practice to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can increase their competitiveness. (euneighbourseast.eu)

## Weather

Tuesday, January 9

Day Partly Cloudy High: 11°C

Night Mosly Cloudy Low: 5°C

Wednesday, January 10

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 8°C

Night Showers Low: 3°C

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