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Parliament adopts foreign policy resolution



The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee named relations with the Russian Federation as the main challenge.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Parliament of Georgia discussed the draft resolution on foreign policy at the plenary session of the extraordinary session and adopted it unanimously with 81 votes.

Nikoloz Samkharadze, Chairman of

the Foreign Relations Committee, presented the issue for discussion. According to him, this resolution is based on the choice made by the Georgian people and Article 78 of the Constitution, which instructs all branches of government to work for Georgia's accession to the European Union and NATO.

The document, adopted by the new parliament on December 25, is based on resolutions adopted in 2013 and 2016 and identifies 16 priority areas, including de-occupation and the peaceful restoration of territorial integrity as the country's main foreign policy goals.

According to the resolution, joining the EU is a priority that has no alternative and which provides for the preparation of an institutional and legal framework for applying for full membership in the EU in 2024. Another priority of the document is NATO membership, including maintaining defense capabilities and improving compatibility with the Alliance, which provides strategic readiness for membership, in line with the decision of the 2008 Bucharest Summit.

The document focuses on deepening relations with the United States as a strategic partner and ally of the country, in particular by increasing US involvement in the Black Sea region and concluding a free trade agreement with it.

As for the Black Sea region, Georgia intends to maintain peace, security and stability and to deepen socio-economic and cultural relations, including strategic partnerships with Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as good neighborly and friendly relations with Armenia and to fully realize potential relations with Bulgaria, Romania and the Ukraine.

In terms of relations with Russia, the document states that Georgia will continue to pursue a "pragmatic and principled policy" with the Russian Federation, the main task of which is to de-occupy Georgian territory and strengthen peace, security and stability in the region.



At the annual report presentation of MFA work, Foreign Minister Zalkaliani announced that the primary focus should be to prepare an application for EU membership by 2024.

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With the open support of the Caucasus Platform, the President raises another topic of controversy

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

After the October 31 parliamentary elections, President Zurabishvili contributed to the foreign policy vector of the country, which is in a severe internal political crisis. On December 21, the 5th President of Georgia openly supported the idea of creating a Caucasian Platform put forward by Turkish President Erdogan, which was followed by silence from the authorities, fierce protests from the pro-Western opposition, and criticism from the West.

Erdogan made the plan to set up a Caucasus platform during a visit to Baku on December 10, following a cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, he has however, had this idea for a long time, having first spoke about it as prime minister after the August 2008 war. The essence of the project is simple - Russia and Turkey should ensure 'peace' among the three countries of the South Caucasus (five, according to Russia).

In 2020, Iran was also named among the guardian countries. From the affairs of the South Caucasus, Erdogan, whose initiative has already been approved by Putin, is trying to exclude the participation of the European Union and the United States. Obviously, the declaration of this idea in 2008 was met with a negative reaction in the West and Georgia wasn't enthusiastic either.

However, in 2020, after the President of Russia's approval,

the President of Georgia also approved Erdogan's Caucasus initiative. On December 21, Salome Zurabishvili, at the Ambassadors' Conference 2020, which was attended by the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Georgian ambassadors to various countries, Salome Zurabishvili said: "I am deeply convinced that Georgia will be neither passive nor secondary to the initiative of the Caucasus Platform. I hope that 2021 will be the year of our revival in this regard."

It should be noted that Salome Zurabishvili first spoke about the idea of the "Caucasian Peace Platform" on the day of her speech in the Parliament of Georgia on December 11. According to her, this platform "will bring together the countries of the Caucasus, external actors and international organizations" and will contribute to Georgia's economic development.

The 'external actors' in the current model of the Caucasus platform are Russia and Turkey. Zurabishvili's statements about supporting the Caucasus Platform went relatively unnoticed until she wrote about it on Twitter.

According to the current model of the Constitution of Georgia, foreign policy is determined not by the President, but by the Parliament and then the Prime Minister. Before making such a scandalous statement, Zurabishvili should have consulted with the leadership of the Georgian Dream.

After Zurabishvili's statement, the Georgian authorities should have made an explanation immediately, as the idea of Georgia joining the Caucasus platform calls into question Georgia's Western orientation.

Zurabishvili's statement was met with surprise and criticism in the West. Former US Ambassador to Georgia Ian Kelly immediately responded to him on Twitter. "Why does the President of Georgia want to popularize this Caucasian platform, when it means that Russia and Iran should have a say in your regional affairs?" Kelly asked and reminded Zurabishvili that the 'establishing peace' approved by her is being carried out by Russian troops. Former US Army Chief of Staff General Ben Hodgers has responded to Ian Kelly's tweet, asking what benefits Zurabishvili sees for Georgia's sovereignty by joining the Caucasus Pact. "Why is it a convenient plan for Georgia to cement Russian occupiers on the border? Why does Georgia allow 'Russian peacekeepers' to fly to Armenia through its airspace when 'Russian troops have occupied Georgian territory'?"

The questions are legitimate and it does not matter that these questions are asked not by those

in power, but by "former" associates.

Answers to these questions are expected both within the country and in the West. Zurabishvili's statement is alarming to the pro-Western opposition in Georgia, which is questioning the Georgian Dream's Western orientation.

Attention is drawn to the fact that Zurabishvili endorsed the Caucasus platform and questioned the country's Western orientation when discussions began in the West about accelerating Georgia's membership in NATO. The main opposition party, the National Movement, does not consider Zurabishvili's statement a coincidence. "Ivanishvili and his puppets just like that, purposefully and not covertly, steal our western future," said Salome Samadashvili, a representative of the United National Movement.

Labor party leader Shalva Natelashvili made the most direct statement about the Caucasus platform on behalf of the opposition. "I want to declare to the whole world and to the authors of this idea that Georgia will never return to the nest of the old invaders - Turkey and Russia, let neither Erdogan nor

Putin dream about it!" He also called on the Foreign Ministry to immediately disclose the secret correspondence that exists with Turkey and Russia regarding Georgia's accession to the Caucasus Platform. Against the backdrop of Russia and Turkey became geopolitical allies and together they divided Syria and the South Caucasus, Sh. Natelashvili considers the deployment of US military bases as a solution for Georgia and asked President Biden to speed up the work in this direction.

After the scandal erupted, the Georgian presidential administration clarified that Salome Zurabishvili had come up with the idea of a Caucasian peace platform during the war in Karabakh and "could not be seen as a response to Erdogan's initiative."

It seems that Salome Zurabishvili and the Georgian government are trying to stop the scandal and in this way are distancing themselves from Erdogan's initiative for now. However, when Russia and Turkey agree on a Caucasus platform, it is difficult to imagine the Georgian government standing its ground.

(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)

Parliament adopts foreign policy resolution

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According to the resolution, one of the main tasks of the country will be to minimize conventional and hybrid threats from Russia using international mechanisms. In addition, Georgia will continue to work actively on international disputes against the Russian Federation until final success is achieved.

According to the document, Georgia, in cooperation with international partners and organi-



zations, will continue to contribute to international security and stability by participating in peacekeeping missions, achieving sustainable development goals and tackling global challenges, including climate change and pandemics.

The resolution also provides for the promotion of European security with Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Baltic states and the Visegrad Group countries.



Among the foreign policy priorities are also the strengthening of bilateral relations with Israel, China, Japan, South Korea and India, focusing on working in multilateral formats and protecting the rights and interests of Georgian citizens abroad.

Weather

Wednesday, December 30

Day  Clear
High: 7°C
Night  Clear
Low: -1°C

Thursday, December 31

Day  Clear
High: 8°C
Night  Clear
Low: -1°C

President Trump signs a bill, Georgia to receive 132 million USD in financial aid

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

In what may be one of his last acts as a President of the United States, President Trump signed a Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021, according to which Georgia will receive a total of 132,025,000 USD in financial assistance. The bill, which has already been approved by the US Congress reads that Georgia is a strategic ally of the United States, and the latter will continue to support the country's efforts to establish a strong democracy, good governance, and the rule of law.

According to the findings of the 2019 Congressional Research Service Report, Georgia has already received 4,348, 400, 000 USD in a form of financial aid from the United States between 1992 - 2020. The report also details that during the 1990s (1992 - 2000), Georgia received an average of 92 million USD annually, which amounted to a total of 860 million USD, and financial aid issued to Georgia between 2001 - 2007 was valued



at 945 million USD. Moreover, in 2005 Georgia received an additional grant of 295 million USD from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which was to be used for the development of the agricultural sector, as well as the road and pipeline and municipal infrastructure reconstruction.

When the August 2008 war hit, the United States increased its assistance to Georgia and provided an immediate relief package of 38 million USD in humanitarian aid, that was delivered by the US naval and coast guard ships, as well as the aircraft. Between 2008 - 2009, Georgia has received a total of 1,04 billion USD, including the direct budgetary support and the additional 100 million USD of the MCC funds. Since 2008, Georgia continues to be a major recipient

of US financial assistance in the region of Eurasia. Between 2010 - 2019, the country has already received a total of 640, 6 million USD from the United States, and has also been awarded a second MCC grant of 140 million USD to strengthen the country's science and technology sector.

With the new bill for the financial assistance signed, the secretary of state will be required to submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations. The report should be submitted no later than 90 days after the act comes into motion and should contain a detailed assessment of the actions undertaken by the Georgian government since January 2020 for the purpose of strengthening the country's democracy, creating a favourable environment for foreign direct investment, as well as ensuring the rule of law. The report should also include a breakdown of how the recent October 2020 Parliamentary elections were carried out, and how well did the country manage to decrease the levels of corruption over the last year.

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Government to cover difference between current and increased electricity tariffs



The subsidy will cover 95% of families.

The gap between us and your calculations is about 150 million kW., which is about 13 million GEL,” - said the representative of “Telasi”.

According to the Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, “the Georgian government will fully subsidize the difference between the current tariff and the increased tariff, for subscribers consuming up to 300 kilowatts.”

He recalled that here are 1,700,000 subscribers in Georgia and 1,600,000 of them consume less than 300 kilowatts, which means that the subsidy will apply to 95% of families: “people will face other, more serious economic challenges. Tariff in-

creases should not become an additional challenge.”

As for private companies, according to the Prime Minister, by 2021, the difference between the current and increased tariffs will be 50% subsidized for those who produce locally produced food: “This is the minimum that allows us to be sure that the electricity tariff increase will not be reflected in the final price of food products produced in Georgia.”

In addition, due to the expected increase in water tariffs in Tbilisi, Rustavi and Mtskheta, the state will provide subsidies to socially vulnerable families.



The electricity bill increased in the whole country - both, Tbilisi and regions.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Government of Georgia announced a novel decision, that citizens will not have to pay electricity bills with increased tariffs next year.

The National Energy Regulatory Commission increased both consumer and non-household tariffs in Tbilisi, as well as regions. In the capital, consumer tariff has been increased by 3.5 tetri, while the non-household tariff has been increased by more than 11 tetri. The tariff change is different for non-household users in regions - it increased

from 10.8 to 14.6 tetris.

The tariff will be in force for 6 months, on July 1 the GNERC will reconsider the tariffs. The increase would have been higher, however, the GNERC reduced the costs incurred by Telas by GEL 16 million, which was 18 % of the total cost and in case of EnergoPro Georgia - by GEL 12 million.

“We can not share the structure of tariffs proposed by you ... Probably, it would be expedient to mention in the project that in a period of 6 months, the company’s error will be reflected in the tariff from July 2021 ...

European Youth Capital 2024 contest – applications are open!



Photo: European Union

Cities from Eastern Neighbourhood countries are invited to participate in the European Youth Capital 2024 contest. The deadline for applications is 17 January 2021.

To secure the European Youth Capital title, candidate cities are asked to submit an application outlining their performance in the field of youth, their motivation and the key challenges facing young people, and propose a multi-faceted programme designed to meet them.

They must detail clear plans to empower and involve young people and continue and expand youth-related projects. They also need to outline the longer-term impacts of their proposed European youth capital project.

Up to five short-listed candidates will be selected and provided with feedback and recommendations as to how they can improve their applications. The final winner will be chosen and announced at the European Youth Forum’s Council of Members in November 2021.

Each year, a new European city is given the chance to showcase its innovative ideas, projects and activities that aim to support young voices and bring a new youth perspective to all aspects of city life.

Any local authority from members of the Council of Europe, which are parties to the European Cultural Convention adopted in 1954 in Paris, are eligible to submit an application.

In 2024 the European Youth Capital title will be awarded for the 16th time, having first been awarded to Rotterdam in 2009.

(euneighbours.eu)