

## Putin submits Agreement on Dual Citizenship Between so-called South Ossetia and Russia



► The Russian Federation signed the so-called dual citizenship agreement with the occupied Tskhinvali region in 2021.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Russian President Vladimir Putin has submitted an agreement simplifying the acquisition of Russian citizenship by "citizens" of so-called South Ossetia to the State Duma for ratification. Based on this document, signed in 2021, South Ossetians can obtain Russian citizenship without renouncing their citizenship. The same will apply to Russian citizens.

The residents with dual citizenship will have the right to social security, education, and medical care as per the legislation of the territory they reside in permanently. The norm also applies to military service.

Russia provides the so-called citizens of South Ossetia the right to apply for Russian citizenship in a simplified manner. If ratified, the document will be valid for five years and it will be automatically extended until either party wishes to terminate it.

Georgian Foreign Ministry echoed the issue saying that any agreement signed between the occupant country and its puppet regime is void.

"In gross violation of the principles of international law, the Russian Federation



► According to the Georgian MFA, any agreement signed between the occupant country and its puppet regime is void.

has been using forced 'passportization' of the population in the occupied regions of Georgia since the early 2000s as an illegitimate step and a hybrid tool against Georgia," the ministry's statement reads, adding that the international community strongly supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and unanimously condemns the illegal 'passportization' of residents in the Russian-occupied territories.

As chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Nikoloz Samkharadze told reporters, Russia has once again proved that it plans the actual annexation of both Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali (so-called South Ossetia) region. According to him, this is yet another provocative step aimed at violating the territorial integrity of Georgia.

On Saturday, March 12, the de facto authorities of Abkhazia (another Russi-

an-occupied region) held so-called parliamentary elections in the region. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, this fact is a violation of the norms and principles of international law and is another 'futile' attempt to legitimize the illegal occupation of two Georgian regions.

The international community, including the United States, the European Union, and NATO, does not recognize the legitimacy of the elections, emphasizing that Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (so-called South Ossetia) are integral parts of Georgia. According to Carl Hartzell, the European Union Ambassador to Georgia, the EU would continue pursuing its non-recognition policy in regards to Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. According to the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CoE), Leendert Verbeek, the de facto authorities of Abkhazia have 'once again' undermined the principle of the territorial integrity of Georgia, "forcing this region further into isolation to the detriment of the local population". As he noted, the so-called elections, "instead of strengthening, further erodes stability in this region and is, moreover, the wrong signal at the wrong time."

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.2274 | EURO - 3.5485 | GBP - 4.2150 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 3.2069 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4298 |

# Georgia Participates in Extraordinary NATO Ministerial

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The meeting of the North Atlantic Council is being held at the NATO Headquarters, amidst Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Ministerial along with the representatives of member states is also attended by the Defense Ministers of Georgia, Ukraine, Finland, Sweden, and the EU.

The Minister of Defense of Georgia Juansher Burchuladze said that the meeting discussed the security environment, including the challenges facing Georgia together with Ukraine. According to the Minister, the speakers at the meeting stressed their support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, "which is a choice of the people." According to him, the Defense Ministers also discussed the possibility for the EU to grant Georgia and Ukraine the status of candidates in an accelerated fashion.

"The issue of Georgia has never been so topical in NATO before," Burchuladze said, noting that each Minister took note



► The Minister of Defense of Georgia Juansher Burchuladze pays a visit to Brussels.

of Georgia's challenges alongside Ukraine.

In his remarks about the war in Ukraine, the Minister noted that the entire civilized world comprehends that escalation

could lead us to a catastrophe. Burchuladze also emphasized that via sanctions and other mechanisms, the aim will be achieved in the medium and long-term, yet added that Ge-

orgian Dream's government policy of not joining the sanctions doesn't raise any questions in partner countries.

The meeting was opened by the Secretary-General of NATO,

Jens Stoltenberg who spoke about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and preparations for the NATO summit. He condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine and reiterated the importance of supporting Ukraine.

Russia has been waging a war against Ukraine since February 24, preceded by President Putin's recognition of 'independence' of Ukraine's 2 breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Earlier, Russia demanded guarantees that Ukraine would not become a member of NATO.

Putin has announced a 'special military operation' in Ukraine to 'demilitarize and denationalize' Ukraine. The Russian army has been bombing not only military but also civilian facilities in Ukraine - homes, hospitals, and educational institutions, as Putin has announced yesterday, 'special operation is being carried out in strict compliance with pre-approved plans'. The war has already claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians. Up to 3 million Ukrainians have become refugees.

## Council of Europe Officially Expels Russia

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) has formally decided to expel Russia from the human rights group, making it the first case in the organization's history. The Strasbourg-based organization said in a statement on March 16 that it had unanimously adopted a measure 'that allows the Russian Federation to no longer be a member state of the organization'.

The day before the decision, the organization was notified by Russia that it was leaving its ranks.

The CoE suspended Russia's membership on February 25, a day after Moscow invaded Ukraine without provocation. Secretary-General Marija Pejcinovic Buric called the attack on Ukraine a gross violation of the statutes of the CoE and the Eu-



ropean Court of Human Rights.

Ukraine has filed a lawsuit in the Hague in protest of Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, saying he must allegedly end the 'genocide' of pro-Russians there. On March 16, the International Court of

Justice, in a preliminary ruling that gives it more symbolic significance, ordered Russia to immediately cease hostilities in Ukraine. The votes in the court were distributed in the ratio of 13: 2, representatives of Russia and China - opposed the verdict.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

#### BBC News Webpage Blocked in Russia

Access to the BBC News website has been restricted in Russia. According to Roskomnadzor, the website was blocked based on the February 24 appeal of the Prosecutor General's Office.

The website of the BBC Russian service was still blocked on March 4. Access to Meduza's website and social networks has been restricted since the same period. Later, other critical editions were blocked as well. The blocking of the websites was preceded by a demand from Roskomnadzor to refer to the ongoing war in Ukraine, launched by Russia, as a "special operation." However, use only official Russian sources when disseminating information.

On March 4, the Russian parliament passed a law providing for up to 15 years in prison for spreading 'fake news' on the actions of the Russian army.

#### Russia Bombs Mariupol Theatre Where Hundreds of Civilians Were sheltering

The deputy mayor of the besieged port city of Mariupol has told the BBC that Russian forces have bombed a theatre where hundreds of civilians were sheltering.

Serhiy Orlov said between 1,000 and 1,200 people were in the building. The number of casualties was still unknown, he said.

Mariupol has been encircled by Russian forces, and an estimated 300,000 are trapped with no running water, electricity, or gas. Food and medical supplies are running low, and Russia has not allowed the delivery of humanitarian aid.

THURSDAY MARCH 17

Day Snow & Rain  
High: 5°C

Night Snow & Rain  
Low: 0°C

FRIDAY MARCH 18

Day Snow  
High: 4°C

Night Snow  
Low: 1°C

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