

## Tbilisi Citizens March to Demand Fuel Price Reduction



PREPARED BY *THE MESSENGER* STAFF

A protest rally was held in Tbilisi demanding a reduction in fuel prices.

Protesters demand:

- Complete abolition of excise tax
- Transfer of VAT to the floating

regime

- Dismantling of artificial monopolies

According to them, this will reduce the price of fuel by 80-90 tetri.

"Otherwise, the price of fuel will rise further and it will be very bad for every-

one. It is time for the government to change the ostrich's posture and carry out radical economic reforms.

The price of fuel does not apply only to

car owners. The price of fuel is reflected in 70% of services and food. "Our population is getting poorer by 20% every month," said the rally organizer.

## Russia-Ukraine Talks to be Held in Turkey

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As Davit Arakhamia, the leader of the Rada faction of the People's Service and the representative of the Ukrainian side in the negotiations, noted, the relevant decision was made during an online meeting today.

According to Arakhamia, the talks are scheduled for March 28-30.

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24. For 32 days now, a large-scale war has been going on in the country. Several million people became refugees.



## Another Georgian Soldier Killed in the War in Ukraine



Another Georgian fighter was killed in the war in Ukraine.

The Russian military killed him in a battle for Irpen.

Today, the Georgian fighter is the fourth killed in the fight against the Russian invaders in Ukraine.

Davit Ratiani and Gia Beriashvili were killed on March 17 near Irpen. Bakhva Chikobava died on March 19 in Mariupol. Ratiani and Beriashvili were transferred to Georgia and buried yesterday, March 26. The issue of transferring Bakhva Chikobava from Mariupol is still unknown.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.2234; Euro - 3.5486; GBP - 4.2481; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2581; Swiss Franc - 3.4780

# The Bait of Neutrality in Georgian Politics

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

In recent days, Georgian media and politicians have been talking about the possibility of Georgia's neutrality. However, both the government and the opposition strongly opposed the idea and blamed the opponent for talking about it.

After the 'political blunder' of neutrality and the separation of all major political forces from it, the issue should be stopped, as a rule, however, the opposition is convinced that the talk of neutrality was not accidental and that this is Russia's demand for Western-oriented countries.

The idea of Georgia declaring neutrality is not new, and this demand is constantly being made by openly Russia-oriented political groups operating in Georgia. The arguments for a "declaration of neutrality" have not changed over the years: we are still not accepted into NATO, and we "irritate Russia" by demanding that it join NATO.

Therefore, to make a statement that we want neutrality, in this way Moscow can look at us with kind eyes and also con-

tribute to the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity. Such an argument is intended for a very naive reader. There is the experience of Moldova, which has declared neutrality, but the Transnistrian conflict has nothing to do with resolving it.

Georgia's bitter experience with neutrality The Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) also declared neutrality, and in 1920. A peace treaty was signed with Soviet Russia on May 7, but Russia did not stop it, and in February 1921, it invaded Georgia and, after a month-long war, occupied Georgia and then annexed it to the Soviet Union.

As for today's Georgia, it held a plebiscite in the spring of 2008, where two-thirds of the population supported Georgia's membership in NATO, and Georgia's foreign policy aspirations are enshrined in the Constitution. If someone in Georgia promises to renounce NATO, they will have to hold a new plebiscite and make changes to the constitution, the resources of which are not available to open or secret pro-Russian forces.

After the Russian attack on

Ukraine and the rhetorical statements of the Georgian government, the opposition expected that the government would at some point talk about neutrality:

"Will we destroy Russia as a country?", "Do you want a war?", "At least they will not accept us in NATO," "They could not help Ukraine."

At the March 17 trial, Mikheil Saakashvili said that there was a plan to provoke the occupied territories, that the opposition would be blamed, that the Russian government would demand immediate neutrality, and that the Georgian government would be ready to declare neutrality, and that the opposition would be blamed. At the same time, according to Saakashvili, declaring neutrality for Georgia means the overthrow of statehood.

When some government-oriented media outlets spoke of neutrality on the grounds that "neutrality was even talked about in Ukraine" and "what can we do if Russia asks us to declare neutrality", "have we not tried to accept neutrality in NATO?"

This provoked the outrage of the pro-Western opposition.

"There is another proof of neutrality in expert circles that the Georgian Dream is checking the situation, studying the situation," Khatuna Samnidze said. "The Georgian government has already received a message from Russia regarding neutrality," said Salome Samadashvili.

Manu of such statements have been made by representatives of various parties - that talking about neutrality is a continuation of Russian rhetoric, that neutrality will leave Georgia alone in the face of Russian aggression, that the Georgian people cannot be forced to get used to neutrality.

Contrary to such accusations of the opposition, the reaction of the government was unexpected, which distanced itself from the statements about neutrality and, on the contrary, blamed the opposition for raising this issue.

According to government officials, such as Parliament Speaker Papuashvili, "the issue of neutrality is not on the agenda at all." The same was repeated by other members of the Geor-

gian Dream parliamentary wing.

Such statements did not satisfy the pro-Western opposition and called on the authorities to show clearer support for Ukraine.

Public debate on the issue of neutrality has shown that the rejection of NATO is followed by protests from a large part of the political spectrum, while the pro-neutrality political force is already openly showing its pro-Russian sentiment and a new wave of protests is brewing in the country. The policy of intimidating the public with a possible Russian attack cannot change this.

There is nothing new in the fact that Russia demanded that Ukraine and Georgia renounce NATO. Before the start of the war in Ukraine, Moscow demanded in writing from NATO confirmation that these two countries would not join NATO.

Moscow's ultimatum to Georgia to renounce NATO is quite expected, but the current situation, when the war in Ukraine lasts for a month and Moscow is unable to win, is not really 'favorable' for Georgia to issue an open ultimatum.

The Embassy of Italy in Tbilisi and the Office of the Council of Europe in Georgia, organised on 25 March a Conference aimed at raising awareness and fostering action to end violence against women and girls, while emphasizing the need to strengthen the protection of women's rights. The event was held both in-person and remotely, through a Zoom video conference.

Gender-related issues have been examined in their overall implications, both at the global level and in Georgia. Efforts within the Council of Europe have been recalled, also in light of the Italian ongoing Italian Presidency of such Organisation, likewise to other international fora, including the United Nations and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

This provided a valuable opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved by Georgia in this respect and to highlight the remaining challenges, alongside the actions needed to further enforcing women rights.

## Conference on Ending Violence against Women: Time for Action.



The event has been kicked-off by H.E. the Ambassador of Italy to Georgia Enrico Valvo, the

Head of the Council of Europe Office in Georgia Natalia Voutova, and other distinguished

guests, such as the Chairperson of the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia

Nino Tsilosani and the Advisor to the Prime Minister of Georgian on Human Rights Niko Tatulashvili. The Italian Minister of Equal Opportunities and Family, Ms. Elena Bonetti, intervened through a special video address, while a keynote speech was delivered by Ms. Tamar Dekanosidze, expert of the Council of Europe.

A panel discussion took place, moderated by the Georgian member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Ms. Lia Nadaraia. Among the distinguished panelists, the floor has been given to the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Alexander Darakhvelidze, alongside the Head of the Human Rights Department of the General Prosecutor office of Georgia, Salome Shengelia, the Deputy Public Defender of Georgia, Eka Skhiladze and the Head of UN Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Nino Shekrladze.

Such discussions have been further enriched by the participation of both local and interna-

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### Weather

Monday, March 28

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 6°C

Night Clear

Low: -2°C

Tuesday, March 29

Day Clear

High: 12°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 2°C

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# Conference on Ending Violence against Women: Time for Action.

tional representatives of academia, civil society and International Organizations, such as Ms. Cristiana Carletti, full Professor at "Roma 3" University (and advisor to the Italian Department for Equal Opportunities), the Executive Director of the union Sapari Baia Pataraiia, and UN Women EAW Portfolio Manager Irina Japaridze. The Council of Europe and Italian experts delivered presentations regarding the European standards and promising practices.

The conference ultimately offered a high-level and substantial discussion on

the fight against gender-based violence, engaging Georgian authorities, experts, the local diplomatic community, representatives of civil society and the academic world, towards the ending of all forms of violence against women.

In order to inform and raise awareness at the fullest extent within the Georgian public, the event, held at Radisson, Tbilisi, has been streamed live on the Ital-

ian Embassy's social media profiles.

"Having been in this beautiful country for two years already as Ambassador of Italy, I have been personally impressed by how vital the role of women is in the Georgian society, as a true engine for the moral and economic development of the Nation.", stressed the Ambassador. "Such centrality does come by accident, having solid, strong roots. How not to mention

the pivotal figure of queen Tamar of whom you can legitimately be proud. And many others could be recalled who ensured, home and abroad, their contributions in the fields of culture, science and economy" he further indicated, welcoming the progress achieved by Georgia over recent years and inviting Tbilisi's authorities to keep using this positive momentum to address the remaining challenges.







### H.E. Enrico Valvo's speech at the Conference

Distinguished participants,  
Dear Colleagues and friends,

I am extremely glad to kick-off today's Conference, co-organized by the Italian Embassy and the Office of the Council of Europe in Georgia, in co-operation with the Georgian authorities, both at the parliamentary and governmental level.

I would like to start my brief introduction by the title itself of this initiative: "Ending Violence against Women: Time for Action". The message could not be clearer, pursuing the goal of raising awareness and fostering action to end violence against women and girls, but also to uphold their rights to the fullest extent.

Looking back at history, we should of course celebrate, proudly, the huge advancements that women experienced over

the last decades, which probably have been, in comparative terms, the most empowering ever. Yet, as still much remain to be done, we should never allow ourselves to lower the guard on the road to achieving full equality.

This is, in a nutshell, the very reasons why we are organizing this conference, for which I would like to thank my dear colleague, Ms. Voutova, and all her staff for their cooperation. I take this opportunity to welcome the Chairperson of the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia, Ms. Nino Tsilosani, and the Advisor to the Georgian Prime Minister on Human Rights, Mr. Niko Tatulashvili, who will provide welcoming remarks.

I also would like to thank the Honorable Italian Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family, Ms. Elena Bonetti, who will provide a special video-address to the Georgian public, as well as Prof. Cristiana Carletti, who will be represent-

ing both the Italian Department of Equal Opportunities and the Italian academic community<sup>1</sup>. It is a privilege for me to present such strong commitment, further witnessing the priority that the our Government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are giving to gender-related issues, traditionally and within the ongoing Italian Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers.

We are especially glad to welcome high-level participants in today's discussion, including the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lasha Darsalia, and the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Mr. Alexander Darakhvelidze, alongside both local and international representatives of academia, civil society and International Organizations, taking the floor live and online. To you all goes my strongest gratitude and appreciation. A special thank goes to Ms. Lia Nadaraia Member of the Committee of the Convention the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, who kindly accepted to moderate our panel discussion today.

Through such a wide expertise, we will aim at taking stock of the progress achieved, as well as the remaining challenges, on the path to ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women, both at the global level—taking into account the effectiveness of International instruments and discussion within the main multilateral fora – and in Georgia.

About this last point, let me first stress that, having been in this beautiful country for two years already as Ambassador of Italy, I have been personally impressed by how vital the role of women is in the Georgian society, as a true "engine" for the moral and economic development of the Nation.

Such centrality does come by accident, having solid, strong roots. How not to mention the pivotal figure of queen Tamar of whom you can legitimately be proud. And many others could be mentioned who ensured, home and abroad, their contributions in the fields of culture, science and economy.

Coming to nowadays, we appreciate the progress achieved over recent years by Georgia, of which the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence on 19 May, 2017, represents indeed a pillar. Yet, more efforts are now needed, as the Istanbul Convention itself remains to be fully enforced in the legal framework, and there is still wide room for improvement to achieve the full protection of women rights and the eradication of all the forms of violence.

Italy welcomes the growing awareness towards such issues by the Georgian authorities and within the society, reflected in an increase in criminal complaints and investigations related to gender-based violence. Nevertheless, the extent of domestic violence and femicides remains a concern to which authorities should keep ensuring adequate priority. I tell this without any wish to lecture anybody: the problem is present in Italy as well as in many other countries of the world despite a wide range of instruments we have enforced to tackle it.

There is a need to continue the work aimed at increasing public awareness, and in particular to change perceptions, stereotypes and behaviors to prevent cases of violence, coupling strict punishment of the perpetrators with educational campaigns.

On the other hand, inequalities, further exacerbated – in Georgia like elsewhere – by the pandemic, are a challenge for the full enforcement of women rights, as they are often a stumbling stone towards the full political and economic participation of women in society. In this respect, we welcome the latest amendments to the code of work, as well as legislation enacted to promote further political participation of women, and we encourage the Georgian authorities to keep using this positive momentum.

On a more general note, I firmly believe that each and any of us, involved at the political, diplomatic level, as a civil servant or in civil society, can make a difference, provided that we keep committed to fostering awareness and identifying innovative solutions. This is the ultimate goal of this conference, within the "Gender Equality and Diversity Month" in Georgia.

Let me conclude my brief introduction expressing the sympathy and strongest support from the Italian side to all the women who are now suffering in Ukraine, because of the military aggression by the Russian Federation. While we hope that at the soonest you will not have to struggle anymore, it should be clear that your strength is an inspiration for all of us.

In the words of a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Ms. Jane Addams, "true peace can be found not merely in the absence of war, but just in the presence of justice". This is our wish for women all around the world.

Thank you very much for your attention.

<sup>1</sup> Associated Professor of International and Human Rights Law at "Roma 3" University.

