

## Kuleba Demands Evidence that Georgia is Not Helping Russia

NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry's intelligence service said on April 4 that by bypassing sanctions, the Russians were setting up smuggling channels through Georgian territory. According to Ukrainian intelligence, the Georgian special services were instructed by the political leadership not to interfere with the activities of smugglers. According to the intelligence statement, the products included in the form of smuggling also include ammunition.

This information is denied by the Georgian government. The Ministry of Finance of Georgia calls the information spread by the Ukrainian intelligence a completely unfounded and absurd accusation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Deputy Foreign Minister met with Andriy Kasyanov, Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine in Georgia, to whom the Georgian side expressed concern over the information provided by the Ukrainian side. The Ukrainian side could not provide any evidence regarding the spread of information.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba says he expects official evidence and convincing arguments from Georgia that the country is not helping Russia. "Then we will decide what to do if the evidence and arguments are not convincing enough," Kuleba said. According to him, Ukraine and its allies still have influence over Georgia's position, 'otherwise, the Russians would have already created a bypass route for sanctions through that country'. In response, the Georgian Dream 'categorically demands' that Ukraine present evidence of the 'disgusting accusation' itself.

"The Georgian side asks the Ukrainian side not to instrumentalize disinformation and replicate narratives with such baseless statements, which is not really in the interests of our countries and our people and encourages external forces for additional provocations," Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Lasha Darsalia said.

According to him the meeting underlined the destructive nature of such accusations and statements and noted that it unequivocally damages the relations



► According to the intelligence department of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Russia is developing smuggling channels through Georgia.

between our countries and poses a great risk to Georgia in terms of security and reputation. The Ukrainian diplomat was briefed on the positions of the relevant competent authorities of the Georgian side in this regard, moreover, the State Security Service provided additional clarifications, including on close coordination and cooperation with Tbilisi on similar topics.

"We remind the Ukrainian side that the exchange of such information is defined by a number of interstate agreements. Otherwise, the statement is considered to be premeditated disinformation, an extremely unfriendly and provocative step aimed at provoking internal unrest in Georgia, which, willingly or unwillingly, serves only the interests of the forces hostile to Georgia. At the same time, I would like to emphasize that Georgia continues to support Ukraine, both politically and practically, in both bilateral and international formats."

The State Security Service of Georgia had also applied to the Ukrainian side with a request to present evidence.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan says Ukraine's smuggling accusations are 'serious allegations' and 'strongly urges' governments to take the matter to the appropriate channels, where it will be investigated and decided. She also added that the issue should not be resolved in front of the media and it's only Russia, who would benefit from such confrontation.

"The Georgian government has said it will not allow such a thing to happen. It is often said that no one can stop this brutal war. Of course, Putin can, because he started this war. The sanctions are there to put pressure on him, and they have to be consistent, united, and obeyed by everyone." Degnan commented. EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzel also told reporters that these allegations should be taken seriously and recalled that Georgian

authorities made a clear response that 'such a thing is not happening, neither in terms of practice nor risk.' He said that it's important that both sides continue to exchange information in order to resolve this situation in a timely manner.

"As for what we expect from Georgia. We look forward to solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainians, which we all share. Also, take the necessary steps to isolate Russia and ensure that their position is unshakable. We call on Georgia and others to actively support this as much as possible. We very much want to see that no country will open the back door to Russia to undermine our sanctions. We saw an important example at the beginning of the war, when we took financial steps towards specific banks and Georgia took very right steps, it did so very quickly when it came to VTB Bank, which was under our sanctions. We expect this in the future as well."

### NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

#### Bill Submitted to Duma to Allow Prosecutor's Office to Close Down Media Outlets

A bill that has been submitted to the Duma might allow the prosecutor's office to close down media channels. According to the document, the Prosecutor General's Office will have the right to request from Roskomnadzor to revoke the licenses of the media outlets that spread 'fakes' about the armed forces. In addition, the Prosecutor General's Office will have the right to ban foreign media outlets from operating in the country in response to the closure of Russian media outlets abroad. In addition, journalists will be held responsible for copying material from other publications that contain 'inaccurate information' about the armed forces. Currently, the law exempts editors from similar responsibilities. Like the publication, Meduza writes, under the current law, the forced suspension of the media can be done only by a court decision.

#### The US Imposes Sanctions on Putin's Children and Lavrov's Family

The United States has imposed sanctions on the children of Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was announced by high-ranking officials of the Presidential Administration.

There is a suspicion that Putin is hiding his assets with his daughters Maria Putin and Katerina Tikhonova.

"We have reason to believe that Putin, many of his friends and oligarchs are hiding their property, assets with family members, who have invested their assets and wealth in the US financial system," the administration spokesman said.

The sanctions list also includes the wife and son of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, as well as members of the Security Council - Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin.

Washington imposes sanctions on Sberbank and Alpha Bank, in addition to energy-related operations.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.0857 | EURO - 3.3822 | GBP - 4.0500 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 3.6624 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3326 |

# NATO to Step Up Support for Georgia, NATO Sec-Gen Says



► "Georgia is a partner which is important for NATO", NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.



► US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that the United States is considering ways to provide additional assistance to Georgia.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has announced that members of NATO are ready to do more for other Alliance partners who are vulnerable to future threats and invasions from Russia, including Georgia and Bosnia, and Herzegovina. As he noted yesterday, one of the issues that will be discussed at the foreign ministers' meeting (April 6-7) is how to step up support for

all the Alliance partners. According to him, by activating political and practical support, NATO can help its partners strengthen resilience and prevent any future aggression. He also noted that Georgia is among the alliance's close and highly-valued partners. "I believe that one of the lessons we should learn from the invasion of Ukraine by Russia is that all those who believe in democracy and rule of law

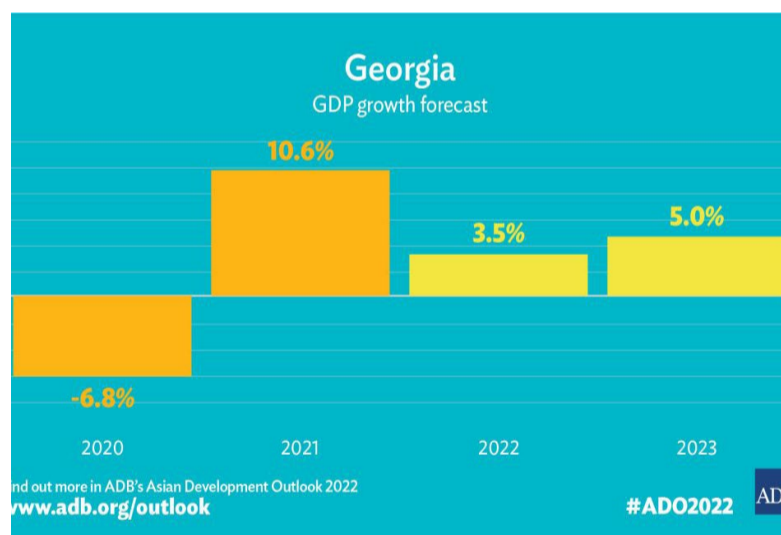
must provide support to close and highly-valued partners like Georgia," NATO Sec-Gen noted, adding that "It is better to support them soon than later". Stoltenberg emphasized that Russia controls part of Georgian territory and stated that NATO would look into ways to provide more support and strengthen Georgia in resisting pressure from Russia. As he stated at the briefing on Tuesday, NATO could support Georgia in developing its

cybersecurity capabilities and provide additional personnel to the NATO Liaison Office in the country. He also mentioned increasing the support for the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, including the areas of situational awareness, secure communications, resilience, and cyber. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has also stated that the United States is considering ways to provide additional assistance to non-NATO allies,

including Georgia. According to Voice of America, during a discussion of the 2023 fiscal year budget project at the House Armed Services Committee of the United States Congress, Austin stated that Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine poses a historic challenge to transatlantic security. He stressed that the US must continue to make significant investments in all areas of European security. On Wednesday, the United States House Foreign Affairs Committee approved an act in support of Georgia's territorial integrity and security. During discussions, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Gregory W. Meeks, Congressman Gerry Connolly, and Adam Kinzinger reiterated unwavering support for Georgia against the background of Russia's full-scale intrusion in Ukraine. As congressman Kinzinger underlined in the comments on the act, "this act underscores US support for Georgia's territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty, reflected in growing support for security."

## Georgia's Economy to Grow by 3.5% in 2022 — ADB

TBILISI, GEORGIA (6 April 2022) — The Georgian economy is expected to slow to 3.5% in 2022 because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, after promising double-digit growth in 2021, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report. In Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2022, the bank's flagship annual economic publication, ADB projects Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) growth to recover slightly to 5% in 2023 due to increased internal and external demand, fueled by faster credit growth, with exports facilitated by structural reforms to trade and connectivity. "Georgia is going to see the effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the form of diminished tourism, exports, and remittances," said ADB Country Director for Georgia Shane Rosenthal. "To help the economy grow, the Georgian government needs to



carefully prioritize expenditure after 2 years of expanded pandemic-related spending. It should also invest in urban areas in line with decentralization and invest in social sectors. And to ensure that all can participate in the economy, it is crucial to ensure

high-quality education that reaches all parts of the country." Inflation is forecast to slow to 7% in 2022 and 4% in 2023. The current account deficit is projected to widen to equal 10% of GDP in 2022 with a forecast rise in oil prices before narrowing to 7.5%

in 2023. Exports are projected to increase by 12.1% in 2022 and 14.9% in 2023. As economic sanctions cut growth in the Russian Federation, remittances are forecast to decrease to \$1.8 billion in 2022 and \$1.7 billion in 2023. The ADB report highlights the need for Georgia to strengthen subnational public finances that will enable more efficient and equitable provision of services, including complex services that are critical for large population centers, water supply and sanitation systems in secondary cities and towns, and health care, education, and social protection for disadvantaged populations. Fiscal decentralization would improve service delivery and support growth. Georgia can benefit significantly by building capacity in municipalities. The success of fiscal decentralization will depend on developing financial

management capacity in local governments and training local officials in policy development and implementation skills, such as health and education budgeting and social service delivery. ADB has supported Georgia since 2007 and is one of the country's largest multilateral development partners. Sovereign and nonsovereign loans to Georgia total \$3.9 billion. ADB's key development priorities in Georgia include fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth, reducing poverty, enhancing regional connectivity, and improving public service delivery. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members - 49 from the region.

**THURSDAY** APRIL 7

Day Light rain  
High: 12°C

Night Light rain  
Low: 8°C

**FRIDAY** APRIL 8

Day Partly cloudy  
High: 18°C

Night Partly cloudy  
Low: 10°C

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