

PM at Davos Economic Forum: Georgia Needs Clarity, Adequate and Relevant Reaction from EU on European Aspirations



BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili stated at a panel held within the Davos Economic Forum that Georgia is a reliable partner for the European Union. Gharibashvili delivered a speech on the panel on Rethinking the EU Partnership with the Neighborhood.

"This is the choice of our nation and does not belong only to the government. I would say that this is a civilized choice made by the Georgian people. We have shown a very loyal partnership with the EU because we share common values and principles," Gharibashvili said, recalling that in 2014, Georgia signed an association agreement with the EU, which is Georgia's guide to full membership.

Speaking about granting Georgia candidate status at the Davos Economic Forum, Prime Minister said Georgia has paid a 'very high price' since regaining

independence in the 1990s with two conflicts in the decade in its Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, and a large-scale war with Russia in 2008.

"The result of this war is a temporary occupation of our historic territories. We understand the concern that exists in the EU because they do not want to 'import' all these problems into the European family. But we also understand that granting a candidate status does not mean giving a membership. It's still a long process. We understand that. We have our homework to do, which is the Association Agreement. But we need clarity and we need an adequate and relevant reaction from the European Union."

At the forum, Gharibashvili asserted that there was a significant improvement in all areas in Georgia and that more than 45% of the Association Agreement had already been fulfilled.

"Since 2014, we have been pursuing

a very ambitious reform agenda and improving in all areas, be it the rule of law, justice reform, open governance. We have made significant progress in all areas and people are seeing it.

Now the question is - do we raise these expectations? Should we tell our people that Georgia will receive this symbolic, political recognition? Recognition that Georgia is part of the European family ... Or shall we explain to them that time is not ripe yet and we may have to think about doing so in the future?"

Gharibashvili also said that the war in Ukraine is a challenge not only for this country but also for the security architecture of Europe, as a whole. Speaking of solidarity with Ukraine, he also recalled the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, saying that 'unfortunately, then we did not see the unity we see today'. Hereby the PM welcomed this unity of the whole civilized world.

At the conclusion of his address to

Forum participants, Gharibashvili used a quote from a Georgian historical figure from the past century - famous Georgian scientist and co-author of the European Constitution, Mikheil Muskhelishvili, in a comment on Georgia's European aspirations.

"Georgia knows that it belongs to Europe, now Europe should make conclusions."

PM left for Switzerland on May 22 to participate in the annual World Economic Forum in Davos.

The Georgian delegation also includes the Deputy PM, Minister of Economy Levan Davitashvili, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilia Darchiashvili.

Georgia submitted its application for EU membership on March 3. On April 11, Georgia was officially handed a questionnaire on self-assessment of candidate status - both parts have already been completed and submitted by the government.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 2.8668 | EURO - 3.0706 | GBP - 3.5889 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.0950 | SWISS FRANC - 2.8689 |

Opposition Accused US Embassy of Discrimination and Crime, Kobakhidze Says

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Yesterday, the US Embassy in Georgia released a statement regarding the judicial system, where it is noted that the US embassy has been supporting Georgia's judiciary through different programs aimed at strengthening its independence.

"For 30 years, the United States has supported Georgia's judiciary through programs intended to strengthen its capacity and independence. Our non-partisan, apolitical support has been provided no matter the party in power. We are confident that our efforts comply with both Georgian and U.S. law," reads the statement.

Earlier, Formula TV reported that the court verdict for Nika Gvaramia, Director General of Mtavari Arkhi, prompted the US Embassy to exclude judge Lasha Chkhikvadze from a program, within the framework of which he was supposed to travel to the United States to attend a seminar. Gvaramia was found guilty of abusing power at his previous position as the director-general of Rustavi 2 TV, 'costing the company financial losses'. The majority of the Georgian opposition leaders consider the decision unfair and politically motivated.

Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream referred to the statement made by the opposition forces, saying that the opposition 'directly accused the US Embassy of exerting pressure on a judge, violating his judicial independence, as well as discrimination and informal governance attempts'. He also stated that it is a crime not to allow a judge to attend a seminar due to a specific decision.

Kobakhidze noted that it is inconceivable to him that the diplomats of Thomas Jefferson's country were interfering in the independence of the judiciary, "which is conceivable for the National Movement, Nino Lomjaria and others".

According to Kobakhidze, the Ruling party asked the US embassy to release information contrary to what the opposition had stated. As he noted, the embassy's statement confirms that the opposition was lying and accusing the embassy of crimes.

"If there is an anti-Western campaign, it is the very accusation of the US Embassy by the opposition of pressuring the court," Kobakhidze said, adding that "naturally, the US Embassy would never exert pressure on the court."



► Judge Lasha Chkhikvadze was supposed to go to Florida for a seminar, which was fully paid for by the US embassy.



► As Ana Natsvlishvili, one of the leaders of Lelo noted, this is the first a judge that 'executes political wills' is being sanctioned and the process would continue.

As Khatia Dekanoidze, the leader of the National Movement faction stated, Kobakhidze's statements confirmed that the judges and their 'clan' are very nervous. According to her, everyone in the Department of State, in the Senate, and in Congress, knows the first and last names of the judges who belong to the politically motivated 'clan', thereby, 'the concerns of those judges are relevant'.

Ana Natsvlishvili, one of the leaders of Lelo stated that Kobakhidze's statement is 'nonsense' in terms of law and it is 'absolutely' right to sanction the judges who execute the political will of the government. According to her, the government may gradually lose the judges performing political tasks, which is why the ruling team is panicking.

"If you no longer have these judges as butchers of the law, then how will you be able to conduct the politics in the country you are pursuing?" said Natsvlishvili in response to Kobakhidze's statement.

According to Natsvlishvili, this is the first sanctioned judge and the process will continue until the 'repressive systems collapse'.

THURSDAY		MAY 26	
Day		Sunny	High: 23°C
Night		Clear	Low: 11°C
FRIDAY		MAY 27	
Day		Sunny	High: 26°C
Night		Clear	Low: 13°C

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Parliamentary Opposition Addresses EU with a Joint Letter



BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Parliamentary opposition and the party 'Droa' address the heads of EU structures. The letters are addressed to Charles Michel, President of the European Council, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, and Joseph Borrell, High Representative of the European Union.

The letter from the parliamentary opposition expresses readiness that the opposition will take part in the implementation of all the reforms that will support Georgia's accession to the European Union. Opposition MPs are appealing to the European structures to positively consider the status of Georgia's candidate.

The letter reiterates that most of the population of Georgia supports the country's membership in the EU, which is the historical and cultural choice of our people. Joining the European family is an opportunity to uphold the rule of law,

the principle of separation of powers, an independent judiciary, media freedom, and the universally recognized fundamental human rights.

Authors emphasize the importance of the Eastern Partnership program initiated by the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Poland after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, followed by the Association Agreement with the European Union, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, and visa liberalization for Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.

"Today, when Russia aggressively opposes Ukraine's sovereignty and the modern European security architecture, when the West is united against Russia's revisionist policies, Georgia is the only pro-Western country in the region, 20% of which is occupied and has no security guarantees. We believe that Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a continuation of the 2008 military aggression against Georgia."

MPs argue that giving candidate status to the EU-affiliated trio of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova will be a vital response for us at this critical time for

Russia, which wants to divide the world into spheres of influence and distance the trio from the European future.

"We firmly believe that Russia's desire to return Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova to its orbit and limit our democracy and sovereignty will not be possible, and EU candidate status will give us hope, strength, and opportunity to fulfill the historic will of our nations to become full members of the European family."

Consequently, despite the challenges on the road to reform and the withdrawal of the ruling party from the April 19 political agreement, the signatory parliamentary opposition MPs declare their readiness to take part in the implementation of all the reforms that are important for Georgia's democratic development.

"Please consider positively granting Georgia the status of an EU candidate, which will be an additional breakthrough and a push for the strengthening of democracy in the country and the liberation of Georgia from Russian influence," the letter reads.

In addition to the parliamentary op-

position, the 'Droa' party wrote a letter to the EU.

"The Georgian people deserve to become an integral part of the European family. In addition, granting Georgia the status of an EU candidate will make the country's European future irreversible. For decades, the Georgian people have made great sacrifices for democracy, freedom, and security," the party said.

The letter states that the heroic battle of Ukraine opened a historic door for Georgia and Moldova and created an opportunity for the Associated Trio to become a member of the European Union.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine face similar threats related to Russia's goal of restricting their sovereign choice and striving for a European future. Therefore, the separation of Georgia from the associated trio will be a harmful message about the country's membership in the European family.

"We hope that in making the final decision, you will take into account the decades-long efforts of the Georgian people for a European future," Droa's letter reads.

Lawyer Says Saakashvili Became Briefly Unconscious on May 23

BY MESSENGER STAFF

According to lawyer Dimitri Sadzaglishvili, Mikheil Saakashvili became briefly unconscious on May 23.

According to him, doctors were able to help former President Saakashvili.

"I spoke to him and found out that he lost consciousness late last night, but the immediate intervention of doctors had eliminated the problem.

"We do not want to imagine the outcome if this happened in the 12th penitentiary," the lawyer said after Saakashvili's visit. According to him, the condition of the third president is dire.

On May 24, the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, issued an appeal regarding his health condition, noting that he has been diagnosed with a spinal cord injury and feels severe pain in his back. As Saakashvili points out, he needs a treatment completely free of politics, which is impossible to get in Georgia at this stage.

"Since there is a lot of speculation about my health, I decided to talk openly about how I feel. MRT confirmed a spinal injury, which I most likely received in Gldani, using force. This trauma, as I realized, requires surgical intervention today. Severe pain and sometimes several

times a day I am given a painkiller. I have strong tremors and dizziness in both hands and it is becoming increasingly difficult to bend the limbs, especially the left hand, I have constant strong pain in the lower extremities. The neurosurgeon who examined me suggested that the muscles might close soon and then it would be impossible to recover, I do not know what that means exactly, but what I do know is really that I find it increasingly difficult to move and I'm mostly in bed.

MRT also revealed some changes in the brain, about which I have no exact information. Added to all this is the complete intolerance of food for several days.

The thing is, just calling me not to smoke and eat is not right, otherwise, everyone who knows me knows that lying down is not my character, nor have I ever had a lack of no appetite. In the face of so many political statements about my health, unfortunately, my real cure here becomes impossible.

"We need a treatment completely free of politics, which is impossible to get in Georgia at this stage," Saakashvili said in a statement.

Clinic Vivamed published a statement, according to which, the president's health has not deteriorated during his stay in the clinic.