

## De-oligarchization groups formed to work on EU conditions will be headed by Anri Okhanashvili



duced such issues that would not be acceptable to the Venice Commission or the European Commission," he said.

The working groups for de-oligarchization, judicial reform, anti-corruption measures, and further institutional strengthening of the Special Investigation Service and Personal Data Protection Service will be headed by the Chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee, Anri Okhanashvili, and the working group for the revision of the Election Code of Georgia will be headed by Givi Mikanadze, the first deputy chairman of the Georgian Dream party.

Working groups include members of the Georgian Dream party and the parliamentary opposition, as well as representatives of civil society (the Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum), state agencies, as well as other interested parties.

Representatives of the citizens, European socialists, and Girchi, as well as members of the non-partisan parliament, will participate in the activities of the working groups from the parliamentary opposition.

According to Anri Okhanashvili, the representatives of the President of Georgia, in accordance with their expressed wish, will monitor the activities of the working groups. Okhanashvili added that if desired, international organizations will also have the opportunity to monitor the process, including representatives of the United States Embassy and the Council of Europe.

On June 23, 2022, the European Council did not grant candidate EU status to Georgia. The council said it is ready to grant the country candidate status once a number of issues are resolved and presented a 12-point plan for Georgia to work on towards the candidacy.

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Legal Affairs Committee has created working groups to fulfill the conditions set by the European Union for Georgia to gain European Union candidacy, the meeting was held on August 4 and Anri Okhanashvili spoke to the media afterward.

Five working groups were created in the committee overall: development of the draft law on the issue of de-oligarchization, judicial reform, revision of the Election Code of Georgia, anti-corruption measures, and fur-

ther institutional strengthening of the Special Investigation Service and Personal Data Protection Service.

After the meeting of the working group ended, Okhanashvili spoke to the media regarding the de-oligarchization and said that Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the Georgian Dream party, is not considered an oligarch:

"All the main principles of the Ukrainian law on de-oligarchization should be transposed, Bidzina Ivanishvili, due to the fact that he does not fit into these criteria, he is not con-

sidered an oligarch according to this law," said Okhanashvili.

When asked whether "Georgian Dream" is planning to send the version developed by it to the Venice Commission, Okhanashvili says that it would not be logical, given that they do not plan to copy the law and should adapt it to the Georgian reality, as well as the context may be different.

"This law was approved by the European Commission in relation to Ukraine and there is a demand for its implementation, so to exclude any speculations, the work-

ing group aimed to adapt the law to Georgian compliance. At the same time, maybe the Venice Commission will draw a conclusion on the Ukrainian model, which was sent to the Venice Commission (by Ukraine).

The context and principles are the same everywhere when it comes to mitigating certain impacts and preventing risks. Considering that Ukraine has already sent, it is not logical for us to send the same model a second time. All the basic principles should be conveyed so that it does not turn out later that we intro-

### The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

#### Parliamentary opposition asks Georgian Dream to stop the disinformation campaign against the USA and the EU

The parliamentary opposition releases a joint statement and calls on Georgian Dream to immediately stop the slanderous



and disinformation campaign against Georgia's strategic partners - the United States and the European Union.

Deputies support Degnan and Hartzell and thank them for their hard work in helping Georgia on its western integration path.

"We, the representatives of the parliamentary opposition of Georgia, recognize the great merit of the United States of America and the European Union in maintaining the state-

hood of Georgia from the restoration of independence on April 9, 1991, until today, their great help in the development of our country and the aspiration of our people to become a full-fledged representative of Western civilization;

We echo the strongly expressed will of the Georgian people to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European

MORE NEWS IN BRIEF ON P. 3

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7244; Euro - 2.7775; GBP - 3.3216; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4985; Swiss Franc - 2.8397

## Georgian Dream members discuss Visa policy changes with Russia initiative from Lelo, call it 'irrational' and 'xenophobic'



Mamuka Mdinardze and Irakli Kobakhidze

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Chairman of the Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze told the media that imposing a visa regime for Russian citizens and changing the existing policy is irrational.

According to Kobakhidze, the visa policy that is in effect in Georgia today with respect to Russia was implemented under the previous government after the August 2008 war.

"Changing the policy that was implemented after the war, because of the war, is simply irra-

tional. The previous government, after our war, the Russia-Georgia war, implemented the visa regime that is still in effect today," he said.

Irakli Kobakhidze, chairman of the Georgian Dream, considers the imposition of a visa regime for Russian citizens as "xenophobia" and calls this demand of the opposition a "shameful" campaign.

"I would like to remind you that the previous government introduced a visa-free regime for Russian citizens after the August war, and today the same people call us to impose restrictions. Xenophobia is common and of course, we will have a strict response to this xenophobia," says Kobakhidze.

Responding to Lelo's initiative that due to the arrival of a large

number of Russian citizens in Georgia, it is necessary to introduce a visa regime, Kobakhidze called it a 'xenophobic campaign':

"This is a deliberate xenophobic campaign that is absolutely disgraceful. It does not fit into any norms. If someone wants to be European, they cannot prove it with xenophobia"

"Tourism is one of the main directions of our economy, and a lot of 'fakes' are spreading in this regard as well. In particular, one of the TV stations announced that the number of Russian tourists in Georgia today is 10% of the population of Georgia, which is a complete lie. If we actually take the data, it won't even be 1%. In total, 242,000 people entered and left. This is a xenophobic campaign based entirely on lies."

More than 10,000 people signed Lelo's petition in a few hours demanding changes of Visa policy with Russia.

Mamuka Mdinardze also responded to Lelo's initiative, saying that they 'themselves', meaning the opposition canceled the Visa regime in 2012 after the war:

"The narrative about the black hole and sanctions evasion is a lie, plain and simple. We have to make excuses for things that do not exist in nature. They themselves canceled visas and now they are talking about the problem of Russian tourists,

According to Mdinardze, the statement that an unprecedented number of Russian tourists have entered the country is not true, and in fact, their number is less than in previous years.

"This is part of the fabricated campaign of the people who in March 2012, a few years after the August war, imposed a visa-free regime on Russian citizens. This campaign against tourists is planned by those who imposed the visa-free regime. If they raise this issue, it should not be discussed, if there is a similar need, a similar initiative will appear anyway. Yesterday it was said that an unprecedented number of Russian tourists have arrived. According to 'Transparency International' research itself, in 2019, 1.5 million Russian tourists came to Georgia throughout the year, and in 2022, the number is 247,000. On the contrary, the number is less, if we compare it to the years before the pandemic" said Mamuka Mdinardze.

### Weather

Friday, August 5

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 34°C

Night Showers

Low: 21°C

Saturday, August 6

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 32°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 22°C

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# Ambassador of Japan to Georgia Speaks About 30 Years of Diplomatic Relations



Ambassador of Japan to Georgia H.E. Akira Imamura

30 years ago today, on August 3, 1992, we established diplomatic relations between Japan and Georgia, so today, to celebrate this milestone, both in Tokyo and Tbilisi we have exchanged letters between our respective Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers. In both letters we

congratulated each other on this important day, reviewing achievements in economic, political, and cultural fields, and expressing hope for strengthening relations in the future.

The messages have been twofold:

1. Japan and Georgia are important

and strong partners, sharing fundamental values and cooperating to establish and strengthen free and open international order, based on the rule of law and

2. We have significant potential for further enhancement of our relations.

To further comment on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations – Japan has been strongly supporting Georgia's independence and territorial integrity from the first day of independence. We consider Georgia's success – our success. The progress achieved over 30 years is significant and I'd like to celebrate this huge progress together. At the same time, we are facing huge challenges – especially, as we have witnessed the war in Ukraine, and we have continued occupation of two territories in Georgia. In this regard, we need to enhance cooperation to promote rules-based international order. We have been doing this in international forums – such as in the UN; for example, we have co-sponsored Georgia's proposal for UN General Assembly – resolution on IDPs; we have also worked together to refer the case of the Russian invasion in Ukraine to the international criminal court; so we are closely coordinating our response to the war in Ukraine.

There is also another challenge – bringing more Japanese companies to Georgia. We are already seeing increasing interest, for example, Japanese energy giant – TEPCO has made an investment in the Dariali power plant near Kazbegi mountain, close to the Russian border. But we want to bring more investments in the field of renewable energy and bring more of the Japanese technology for energy saving, to reduce emissions. In particular, this is important because Japan and Georgia share the common goal of reducing emissions of greenhouse gas and coming closer to decarbonized society. We are now discussing with the Georgian government how to create a favorable environment for bringing such technology to Georgia.

Lastly, I'd like to touch upon cultural

affairs – talking about Georgian culture in Japan, of course, we need to mention Sumo wrestlers such as Tochinoshin – who has been acting as an ambassador of Georgia in sports: many people in Japan discovered Georgia through Tochinoshin. And of course – thanks to your ambassador in Tokyo, Georgia's culture – especially wine and food especially, are becoming known to the Japanese people.

As for the Japanese culture, the Japanese language and animation are becoming popular in Georgia – we are celebrating this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary by organizing a series of cultural events. We have already done Sakura planting in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and other parts of Georgia – one of them in the botanical garden, Messenger wrote about it as well. This year we have done a tea ceremony in the Botanical Garden and another one in Batumi. We had pianists visiting from Japan, who performed in Tbilisi and Batumi. We would like to invite your readers to the Sushi exhibition opening on August 12, which will continue for five weeks – we're hoping many people will visit it after summer vacation.

It's interesting that people always think of Sushi as only something to eat – but this exhibition is about Sushi culture, Sushi history, Sushi business – anything related to Sushi, which can be interesting to Sushi lovers in Georgia.

On September 1-3 there will be Animation Festival in Nikozi village, Gori Municipality and we will be showing Japanese anime on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, called "In the Corner of the World". It is about war and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima – it is an award-winning animation in Japan, subtitled in Georgian. This is significant, in the background of the war on Ukraine and Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons. We strongly protest it, so for the young generation in Georgia especially, this film is worth viewing to understand the devastating effect of the atomic bombing and the immense suffering it brings. That's our plan for cultural events.

## The News in Brief

### CONTINUED FROM Page 1

Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which was reflected in the Constitution of Georgia;

We separate and condemn the slanderous and disinformation campaign of the "Georgian Dream" government against the main strategic partners of Georgia – the United States of America and the European Union." the statement reads.

Opposition members also wrote regarding the narrative that the 'West wants to drag Georgia into war in Ukraine', saying that Georgian Dream leaders are lying:

"Despite the numerous public statements of the above-mentioned ambassadors the United States and the European Union do not want and never wanted to get Georgia involved in Ukraine's war against Russia and such statements are not true, "Georgian Dream" stubbornly continues to circulate lies.

We appeal to "Georgian Dream" to immediately stop the

aforementioned slanderous and disinformation campaign against Georgia's strategic partners - the United States and the European Union.

We fully support the US Ambassador to Georgia, Ms. Kelly Degnan, and the former EU Ambassador, Mr. Carl Hartzell. We appreciate their hard work and efforts to help Georgia on the path of Western integration" the statement reads.

### Adam Kinzinger tells Georgian leaders to 'fight disinformation'

In an interview with the Voice of America, Adam Kinzinger talked about how the Georgian government's leaders' numerous statements that America wants to involve Georgia in a war against Russia sounds like Russian propaganda:

"I would say one thing to all leaders in Georgia: fight disinformation. We saw that Russia is a country that has no military power, it turns out that

they have no cultural power, moreover, people hate their own government. Trust me, you don't want to have the same in your country." said American congressman Kinzinger.

According to him, America is not trying to involve Georgia in any type of war.

"When I hear from certain forces in the government that America is trying to drag Georgia into the war, it really sounds like Russian propaganda. First, let's think of a logical explanation for this. One thing that, as a rule, no one should doubt is that America does not want a war in Ukraine at all. However, we also understand that Ukrainians are fighting for their freedom. We are with them, providing weapons so that not a scrap of their territory is lost, that is what we are fighting for.

Yes, we would like Georgia to support Ukraine, it would be extraordinary. But the very idea



that we are trying to involve Georgia in an active war with Russia is simply ridiculous. Every time I hear something like this, or when an attack is made on our ambassador, for example, on Mrs. Degnan, who works exceptionally well, the question always arises - what is the de-

sire of some members of the government of Georgia? Do they really want to be close to the United States of America, or are they just pretending that they are because they know that the Georgian people want to be close to America?" the interview reads.