

President Zourabichvili against flight resumption between Russia and Georgia, calls it a 'trick'

By Liza Mchedlidze

The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili released a statement against the resumption of direct flights between Georgia and Russia.

According to the statement released by the presidential administration, Zourabichvili said the position of the Georgian government 'incomprehensible'.

"At a time when all our partner countries, by word or deed, express their maximum solidarity with the war of Ukraine, for me and I am sure for the majority of the society, the position of the government and the ruling party is, to put it mildly, incomprehensible.

I cannot agree with the argument that is used to support this position, that is, as if it serves to alleviate the problems of Georgians living in Russia. Not least because for months, despite all my efforts, I have not been able to achieve a result regarding the simplification of the criteria for granting citizenship - an issue that most worries our compatriots abroad, including Russia.

At this time, if we remember anything about Russia's already outdated tricks, we should understand that the Kremlin will 'throw out' such topics when it hopes to create a rift between us and our Western partners.

This can not be allowed!

Instead, as I have repeatedly urged the government, it is necessary to seriously study the issue of the influx of Russian citizens, with all its social and political parameters, so that the public feels that its national interests and security are taken into account and protected. We need regulations - regarding work rights, business registration, property acquisition, or the opening of Russian-language schools.



Also, instead of resuming flights, the government should take care of the country's reputation, categorically respond to the ac-

cusations made against the country - about circumventing sanctions through Georgia! All of this requires a serious state approach

and rejection of accusations, which will be categorical and supported by facts!," the President's statement reads.

Kelly Degnan on flight resumption between Georgia and Russia and Buk Missile systems

By Liza Mchedlidze

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan answered some questions from reporters. When asked about Sergey Lavrov's statement regarding the resumption of direct flights between Georgia and Russia, she responded with "Georgians would prefer Russia to withdraw its forces from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali and fulfill the 2008 ceasefire agreement, I think most, rather than restore direct flights to Moscow."

Kelly Degnan said that according to Georgian history, Russia has been violating the identity, language, independence, and sovereignty of the country for centuries.

"As far as I learned from the history of Georgia, this is a country for which Rus-

sia has been violating the conditions given to it for centuries. Russia is trying to take away Georgia's identity, language, independence, sovereignty. I think most Georgians would prefer Russia to withdraw its troops from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali and implement the 2008 ceasefire agreement rather than resume direct flights. I don't know whether Georgians living in Russia have a problem returning to Georgia if they want to, but we know for sure that a lot of Russians are coming to Georgia," the US ambassador said.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan was also asked regarding the statement of the Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine in Georgia Andrei Kasyanov,

CONTINUED ON Page 2



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6594; Euro - 2.8820; GBP - 3.2878; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.8657; Swiss Franc - 2.8941

Kelly Degnan on flight resumption between Georgia and Russia and Buk Missile systems

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

who said that Ukraine appealed to the authorities of Georgia with a request to return the Buk missile systems handed over during the 2008 war, to which she responded that they have been encouraging both Georgia and Ukraine to discuss important issues privately, not publicly, and she continues to do so.

“The US has asked all its partners and allies to see what they can do to support

Ukraine, and Georgia has done a lot, especially from a humanitarian point of view, by voting in an international forum. It is important for each country to decide what is convenient for them to do. I think everyone is very well aware of the sensitive situation Georgia is in, because 20 percent of your territory is occupied by Russia. Such is the context, and we once again call on Georgia and Ukraine to discuss this issue personally,” said Kelly Degnan.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Sergey Gavrilov calls restoring diplomatic relations with Georgia ‘necessary’



Russian MP Sergey Gavrilov told a Russian media outlet that it is necessary to restore diplomatic relations with Georgia.

“Taking into account Georgia’s independent position on the issue of Ukraine and the war-related sanctions launched against Russia, it is necessary to restore not only air traffic, but also full-fledged diplomatic relations between our countries. The presence of the embassy and consulate will contribute to the expansion of our contacts and opportunities to support our citizens living in Georgia,” Gavrilov said.

According to him, the restoration of relations will contribute to the increase of trade and the development of tourism.

“The number of airlines, including those from friendly countries, that will carry out shipments between Russia and Georgia should increase,” added the Duma deputy.

Ukraine is ready to help Saakashvili, Oleksiy Goncharenko says

The member of the Rada of Ukraine, Oleksiy Goncharenko,

said that Saakashvili’s health condition worries him and that the former president of Georgia who is now the citizen of Ukraine



has the right to receive medical assistance.

“First of all, Mikheil

Saakashvili is a human being. He has the right to be treated as a human being, to receive medical care. Even in this difficult situation, Ukraine is ready to help our citizen. I am sure there will be many countries in the world who are ready to offer him medical care. Not because he was president, but because he is human. This is the most important thing. I am very worried about his health condition. I want to see him recovered and healthy. This is the right of any other person on this planet,” said Oleksiy Goncharenko.

Opinion & Analysis

Georgia greets 2023 with polarized politics

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgian politics emerged at the beginning of 2023 with a polarized government and a polarized opposition. The main topic of internal political controversy is Mikheil Saakashvili, whose sending abroad is increasingly being demanded by the authorities, and this demand is already taking on a global character. As for foreign policy, the differences of opinion between the government and the opposition are caused by the Russia-Ukraine war and the issue of fulfilling the 12 demands of the European Union.

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and President Salome Zourabichvili congratulated the citizens of the country on the new year. However, the media and commentators saw different accents in their short congratulations. Last year, Georgia did not receive the status of a can-

didate for the European Union, which should be considered a serious failure. . In the first moments of the new year, the Prime Minister claimed that 2022 was a year of success and progress. Earlier he said that the 12 points of the European Union have already been fulfilled and Georgia did not get the candidate status because it did not enter into a war with Russia. The Prime Minister’s New Year’s address showed that in 2023, the Georgian dream is not going to change anything in its relations with Russia. In his New Year’s address, the head of the government also avoided naming the events. The Prime Minister wished Ukraine peace, not victory, and did not mention Russia at all.

Unlike the Prime Minister, the President’s New Year messages were clearer. He mentioned that the last year was unsuccessful and full of disappointments. Zourabichvili wished victory to Ukraine and the de-occupation of Georgia. Neither the Prime Minister nor the President has forgotten the occupied territories of Georgia, although in this case it was said differently. Zourabichvili ac-

caused the Georgian government of inaction in this direction.

On January 4 of this year, the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia turned 90 years old. The Prime Minister and the President unanimously congratulated the Patriarch. Among the foreign congratulations to the Patriarch, the media singled out the congratulations of the President of Belarus Lukashenko, who arrived in occupied Abkhazia last year on the instructions of Putin, as well as the Patriarch of Russia, who traditionally congratulated Ilia II on his birthday and also traditionally referred to him with an incomplete title, - did not mention that the Patriarch of Georgia is the Metropolitan of Abkhazia. This causes dissatisfaction in society, and the patriarchate traditionally does not notice the abbreviated title of patriarch.

In 2023, Mikheil Saakashvili met the new year for the second time in prison. So far, he has spent 15 months in prison. During this time, the health condition of the 3rd President of Georgia deteriorated sharply. There is information about his poisoning in prison. His trial is endlessly delayed.

One of the demands of

Saakashvili’s defenders is to hold court sessions on a daily basis in order to speed up the judge’s decision. Mikheil Saakashvili requests that he be allowed to personally attend court sessions.

The second way to transfer Saakashvili for treatment is to have him pardoned by President Salome Zourabichvili, however, so far, both of these possible ways to transfer Saakashvili to treatment look rather vague. Saakashvili’s supporters believe that the 3rd president of Georgia is ‘Putin’s personal prisoner’. President of Ukraine Zelensky also asked the Georgian authorities to release Saakashvili and transfer him abroad for medical treatment, President Sandu of Moldova joined this request. The movement to save Saakashvili took a large-scale character.

On January 4, a global rally in support of Mikheil Saakashvili was held in 40 cities in Georgia and a number of countries around the world. Russian human rights defender Mark Feigin and adviser to the President of Ukraine Oleksi Arestovich came out with such a call. Of course, the main rallies demanding Saakashvili’s transfer to the hospital were held in Tbilisi and the regions of Georgia.

According to the organizers of the rally, full responsibility for Saakashvili’s health lies with the Georgian Dream and the infor-

mal leader of the country - Bidzina Ivanishvili. Mikheil Saakashvili thanked the participants of the rally “for their support and solidarity.”

During the rallies, some dissatisfaction was caused by the fact that Saakashvili’s party ‘National Movement’ was divided into several groups due to internal problems and held rallies in different places. Nika Melia’s leadership is questioned by various groups within the party and internal party elections should be held in the near future to find out who is the legitimate leader of the party. There is a great chance that the elections will lead to the party’s shutdown.

The government of Georgian Dream is not going to release Saakashvili for treatment yet, and they met global protest with indifference. According to Irakli Kobakhidze, the goal of the campaign for Saakashvili’s release is the same as the one they had during his arrest - “one more time to disrupt the country and ultimately open a second front.” Other leaders of the ruling party do not spare critical statements towards Saakashvili and the National Movement. The 90th anniversary of the patriarch was opposed to the January 4 protest in its own way. The political elite of the Georgian Dream gathered in the Opera Theater to celebrate this anniversary.

Weather

Monday, January 23

Day ☀ Clear
High: 7°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: -2°C

Tuesday, January 24

Day ☀ Clear
High: 7°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: -3°C

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