

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## Irakli Kobakhidze Delivers Speech at Sabino Arana Fundazioa Awards

The Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze was presented with the award of the Sabino Arana Fundazioa for deepening the Georgian-Basque friendship and protecting democracy and human rights in Bilbao.

In his speech, Kobakhidze spoke about Georgia's EU integration and economic growth, the Ukraine war, the Russian occupation of Georgian territories, and challenges the country is facing.

According to him, the main goal of the government of Georgia was to avoid war in the country, which he said was successfully achieved.

Kobakhidze spoke about the ongoing war in Ukraine and said that Georgia firmly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemns Russia's military aggression in all international forums. At the same time, the government pursues a pragmatic policy to prevent escalation.

"Twenty percent of our territories are occupied by the Russian Federation, and its peaceful de-occupation is one of the main national goals of my people. In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, there was a danger that the military conflict would spread to Georgia as well. It was the main goal of our government to avoid war in our country in the first place, and we have successfully achieved it. Georgia firmly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and condemns Russia's military aggression in all international forums. At the same time, we are pursuing a pragmatic policy to prevent escalation and promote peace in the region."



Georgia is also trying to play the role of a facilitator between two neighboring countries - Armenia and Azerbaijan. Finally, we believe that there is no alternative to peace and development, and all nations must consistently follow this path," he said.

Irakli Kobakhidze also spoke about economic growth and said that the 'double digit' economic

growth was achieved thanks to the peace and consistent policies by Georgian authorities:

"Despite being a small country, Georgia plays an important role in the international community both politically and economically. Georgia geographically connects Europe with Asia and has great potential to further develop its transit function

and capabilities. With a liberal economic policy, we provide a fertile ground for economic activity and investment in our country. Thanks to peace and consistent policies, we managed to achieve double-digit economic growth in 2021 and 2022. With this trend, Georgia becomes an even more attractive country for cooperation for all its friends and

partners," said Kobakhidze.

In addition, Irakli Kobakhidze spoke about Georgia's European integration and noted that he hopes for support:

"We submitted an official application and hopefully Georgia will receive the EU candidate status in December of this year. Your support is very important to achieve this goal," Irakli Kobakhidze said.

## PACE Calls on Political Forces to Address Polarization in Georgia



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution in which Georgia is discussed. The resolution reads that PACE remains concerned about an 'extreme' polarization in Georgia and encourages political forces to address this issue.

"The Assembly welcomes the progress made by Georgia in honouring its obligations and commitments and encourages all political forces to address the remaining recommendations and concerns expressed in this resolution.

In that respect, it remains concerned about the extreme political polarisation in the country, which affects the reforms and stakeholder participation in the reforms needed for further democratic consolidation and Euro-Atlantic integration of the country.

The Assembly calls on the government to conduct a thorough, independent evaluation of judicial system reforms to guide future reforms to ensure a truly independent judicial system in

the country.

The Assembly urges the authorities to implement a thorough, independent evaluation of its reforms of the judiciary with a view to guiding future reforms to ensure a genuine, independent judiciary in the country.

It takes note of recent developments with regard to the media and concerns expressed in that regard. It encourages the authorities to take all possible steps to reduce the tensions in the media environment.

The Assembly reiterates its full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its concern and condemnation of the illegal occupation and creeping annexation by the Russian Federation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia.

It encourages the authorities to address the 12 recommendations of the European Union so that it can be given the candidate status for European Union membership that it rightfully aspires to", the resolution reads.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6393; Euro - 2.8745; GBP - 3.2677; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.8004; Swiss Franc - 2.8666

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Giuli Alasania Says Mikheil Saakashvili's Return to Georgia was Kremlin's Order



Mikheil Saakashvili's mother Giuli Alasania responded to Saakashvili's interview with Spiegel where the former president of Georgia said that there is a possibility that some people who planned to get him back in October 2021 were agents sent by Russia.

According to Alasania, there is speculation in society as to who is meant by the statement. "No Georgian is meant there, in any way. This is talking about Ukraine, this is a very common term, very popular in Russia is IPsO, which means informational psychological special operation.

You know what it was in the case of my son, they went to different places where they could see him, an airport or a cafe or some street, they went and assured that his arrival is urgent and it should happen before October without fail.

Why? Because this very operation was being prepared in Ukraine, and at that time he should not have been by Zelensky's side. That was the order. And this order was achieved, the Kremlin achieved it. And they have him locked up here now, how long has it been, a year and four months? In fact, they are killing him. The Kremlin is doing this, this is a special

operation of the Kremlin, which, unfortunately, is being done by the hands of the Georgian government," said Giuli Alasania.

### PM Irakli Gharibashvili meets with the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development and his deputies

The Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili held a working meeting with the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Levan Davitashvili, and his deputies.

According to the government administration, the prime minister reviewed the plans and main priorities to be implemented in 2023 at the working meeting. According to their report, the conversation touched on the dynamics of implementation of "Georgia's Development Strategy - Vision 2030".

"At the meeting, the major projects on which the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development

plan of Tbilisi Airport, including the development of the new terminal and airfield infrastructure,



is working on the instructions of the Prime Minister were discussed: the Minister and deputies of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development provided information to the Prime Minister regarding the Tbilisi International Airport development project. It was noted that in 2023, the work on the long-term general development

will be completed. The importance of the development of Tbilisi and other airports for ensuring the rapid economic development of the country and the growing dynamics of tourism was emphasized, and it was noted that several hundred million dollars will be invested in the development of Tbilisi International Airport," the statement reads.

## Opinion & Analysis

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The dispute over the implementation of the 12 points of the European Union became another reason for the polarization between the government and the opposition, which is one of the main points to overcome in the conditions put forward by the European Union.

The Georgian Dream government claims that it has actually fulfilled the requirements of the European Union, while the opposition and the non-governmental sector are of the opposite opinion. The final assessment, of course, belongs to the EU. It is also known that the preliminary evaluation from the EU will be done at the end of January and will be highly critical.

Georgia's fulfillment of the 12 points of the European Union is a precondition for granting the country the status of a candidate for membership. At the end of last year, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili announced in his annual speech to the Parliament that the recommendations of the European Union have already been fulfilled.

# Inquiry Into Compliance with Article 12 of European Union

The official rhetoric has been claiming for a long time that if Georgia does not receive the status of a candidate for EU membership, it will be a political decision of the European Union and a punishment for Georgia for not "engaging in the war against Ukraine".

While waiting for the initial conclusion of the European Union, the Georgian media is actively discussing the extent to which the 12 requirements of the European Union have been fulfilled. Among these points, depolarization (paragraph 1), judicial reform (paragraph 3), strengthening of anti-corruption efforts (paragraph 4), de-oligarchization (paragraph 5), appointment of an independent public defender (paragraph 12) are considered especially important.

In fact, the issue of the imprisonment of Saakashvili and Gvaramia is added to the 12 points, on the solution of which the European future of Georgia will depend significantly.

Nobody disputes that depolarization has not decreased in Georgian politics. However, the government blames the 'radical opposition' for this, they specifically aggravate the situation and

are not constructive.

Depolarization should, as a rule, lead to cooperation based on the common desire to obtain EU candidate status. However, today it is already difficult to say that the desire for integration with the West unites the entire Georgian political spectrum. For a long time now, many of the main political forces have been openly criticizing the West and distancing themselves from it.

In Georgian politics, they could not agree on the consequences of transferring Saakashvili to another country for treatment - according to the opposition, this will be an important step towards depolarization, while according to the government representatives, on the contrary, it will lead to the indignation of people who were offended during Saakashvili's presidency and will deepen polarization.

The goal of judicial reforms is to ensure the independence of this branch of government, which will dramatically improve the existing political system in Georgia. It is known that the Legal Committee of the Parliament has prepared a package of amendments to 5 laws, it is not known to what extent these

planned amendments will satisfy the European Union. At the end of November last year, it became known that the package prepared by the official team was sent to the Venice Commission for a conclusion.

In order to strengthen the fight against corruption, Georgian Dream decided to set up an anti-corruption bureau, which was approved by the Parliament of Georgia on November 30, 2022, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> reading in an accelerated mode. Everything is ready for the selection of the head of the anti-corruption bureau, who will be appointed by the Prime Minister of Georgia for a period of 6 years.

The Georgian Dream will launch the anti-corruption council in the near future, but the opposition believes that the agency will not be independent of the government as planned and will not actually strengthen the fight against corruption.

There is a big dispute between the government and the opposition regarding the issue of 'deoligarchization'. The draft law prepared by the ruling party is taken from the relevant Ukrainian law. According to the official interpretation, the law,

if enacted, will not affect Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The opposition suspects that the Georgian Dream will declare as oligarchs those persons who act as financiers of the opposition. The ruling party was fast-tracking its version of the anti-corruption law. However, before the third hearing, on November 21, the EU delegation requested the opinion of the Venice Commission on the draft law on 'deoligarchization'.

Georgian Dream initially stated that it did not see the need for this. Still, on November 28, it became known that the ruling party would send the project to the Venice Commission and promised that the 3<sup>rd</sup> hearing will not be held until this conclusion is received.

Point 12 - the issue of the election of the ombudsman - has actually failed. In 2022, Georgian Dream changed the procedure for electing the ombudsman. If earlier the ombudsman was an 'opposition candidate', now with the increase in the number of ombudsman candidates, the government found the candidates supported by the opposition unacceptable. As a result, the public defender could not be elected.

If the EU's preliminary conclusion turns out to be critical, it is likely to intensify the anti-Western rhetoric in official circles, but it will not change anything in the EU's position.

## Weather

Monday, January 30

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 10°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 1°C

Tuesday, January 31

Day Mostly Cloudy  
High: 5°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: -1°C

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