

President Zourabichvili Fears Imposed Sanctions on Judges will Negatively Impact Georgia's Pending EU Candidacy Status

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili responded to the US Department of State's decision imposing sanctions on four Georgian judges for being corrupt and harming Georgia's democracy, and said that she is not happy about it as she fears these sanctions will negatively impact Georgia's pending EU candidacy status and harm the country's image.

In her statement, Zourabichvili said that she fully supports the judicial reforms and acknowledges the negative impact four sanctioned judges had on Georgia's judicial system.

However, she thinks that the country does not deserve this issue becoming a reason for deepening polarization between internal forces and in relations with international partners, therefore she called on the authorities to fully investigate the case and work towards restoration of the country's reputation.

"This decision concerns only four persons and the visa restrictions of these four persons, as clarified by the Ambassador herself, the statement emphasizes the support of Georgia, despite this, the country's image is being somewhat damaged.

Georgia and the Georgian people are well aware of the responsibility of these people in forming a vicious judicial system. We all know and understand what should be done to improve the judicial system.

Our society knows very well what was not done and why it was not done. Therefore, we fully understand, share and support the need for judicial reform, as well



as the need to strengthen judicial independence and the need for professional and impartial personnel in the system, the 12 recommendations of the European Commission serve this and nothing else.

I am sorry that the country, with this decision, is included in the list of other sanctioned countries, while Georgia is waiting for the most important decision from its European partners - the granting of candidate status, and I am afraid that the US decision will be perceived as a negative signal in Europe.

Therefore, it is up to us to fix the image of the country, if we do not want to destroy the future of the country because of four people, effective steps are needed - be it a full investigation or a review of the composition of the Supreme Council of Justice, or the timely selection of non-judge members. The more effective steps are taken in terms of judicial reform, which all our loyal partners are watching and waiting for, the faster we will restore our country's reputation and trust in it.

The country really did not deserve this and does not deserve that this issue becomes a reason for deepening polarization. Neither between internal forces nor in relations with international friends.

A friendly country may have mercilessly told us what it had to say, but let's not be silent, let's not get angry, let's not be happy, but let's analyze what happened and why and what needs to be corrected. And let's show the world that we deserve another assessment and that we will achieve our goal," said the president.

Irakli Kobakhidze Says Georgian Dream Has Asked for Evidence on Sanctioned Judges

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



The Chairman of Georgian Dream party, Irakli Kobakhidze spoke about US imposed sanctions on four judges and said that there was a request from the management team to clarify what evidence and sources the US decision was based on.

According to Kobakhidze, because the Georgian government asked for evidence, the US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan had to 'back down' and say that it is a visa restriction and not a sanction.

Georgian Dream chair said that information obtained from open sources can not be used as a basis of sanctions:

"There were many meetings and at every meeting this question was asked, where is the evidence? Zero evidence - this became clear both in bilateral meetings and in public. Look at the TV interviews with the US Ambassador, there is zero evidence there either. It is not clear how it can be based on open source. Open

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.5330; Euro - 2.7655; GBP - 3.1513; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0692; Swiss Franc - 2.8023

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source means you have to read a newspaper or watch TV, we all watch TV and we all read newspapers. How can information obtained from open sources become the basis for sanctions?

After all, this needs investigation and

research, it needs an investigation, which did not happen. Actually, there is no evidence and it has been revealed. It was because we asked for evidence that the ambassador had to back down and say that this is not a sanction, but a similar thing. This is a visa restriction, not a sanction. In fact, it was a drawback because we de-

manded evidence," Kobakhidze said.

When asked whether the government thinks that there is a possibility that it may be a decision based on wrong information, Irakli Kobakhidze said that Anony Blinken is obviously not to blame for this and the questions should probably be asked to the US Ambassador Kelly

Degnan and the US Embassy.

"Now, Blinken is not guilty, is it not clear? Blinken, of course, cannot delve into the ongoing processes in Georgia, he has much more to do. Blinken is not the person to ask questions. Perhaps we should ask the Ambassador who is here, we should ask the embassy," said Kobakhidze.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President Salome Zourabichvili Says Georgia's Only Future is Europe



The President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, delivered a speech at the event dedicated to April 9 at the State Theater of Opera and Ballet, and said

that she is sorry that on such day she has to defend Georgia's European perspective.

"I am also sorry to have to defend on April 9 that our only and alternative future is Europe. What else? - Do we want a boot? Do we want shovels? Do we not

remember our history? We know very well what we want, what this country needs, we have no other alternative.

By slowly leaving here, they choose Europe, and I want them

to choose Europe here, here we get what we want from Europe, what is the strengthening of our identity, and here Georgia becomes a European state," stated Zourabichvili.

PM Irakli Gharibashvili Writes on 34th Anniversary of April 9 Tragedy

The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, published a statement on the 34th anniversary of April 9 and wrote that it is a day of pain and pride at the same time.

"On this day, all of Georgia, united by the idea of freedom, announced to the world the decision to build an independent, democratic, European country. The brutality of the Soviet regime only strengthened the will of the Georgian people, strengthened our desire for independence.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia said: "Everything can be taken away from the nation, but no one can take away the feeling of freedom." This feeling, which de-

finied our entire history, was most clearly manifested on April 9, 1989.

Today is a day of pain and pride at the same time. Once again, we will honor the bright memory of those heroes who



paved the way to freedom at the cost of their own blood. We express our gratitude to every citizen who determined the future of not only Georgia, but also the

countries of the Soviet Union with unanimity, dedication and support in those heroic days.

Our further progress towards a better Georgia should be based on such unanimity around the ideal of freedom."

On April 9 tragedy anti-Soviet, pro-independence demonstration was brutally crushed by the Soviet Army, killing 21 and injuring hundreds.

EU calls on EU and enlargement countries to step up efforts to combat anti-gypsyism and anti-Roma stereotypes

Ahead of the International Roma Day on 8 April, the EU called on EU and enlargement countries to implement all measures under the European Roma Strategic Framework and to step up efforts to combat anti-gypsyism and anti-Roma stereotypes.

The Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority with a population of around 10-12 million, of whom more than six million are living in the EU and four million in the enlargement coun-



tries (Western Balkans, Türkiye, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and Georgia).

"Together, we must build a culture of support and inclusion and honour Roma people's contribution to our European cultural heritage," says a statement issued jointly by Vice-President for Values and Transparency Vera Jourová, Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli,

and Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Olivér Várhelyi.

"We celebrate their diversity, language, arts and culture and their contribution to European history."

The Commissioners also said that progress in the fight against Roma discrimination is "too slow and too little".

"Too many Roma still do not have equal access to education, employment, healthcare or housing. We have to work together on local, national and regional level, and always together with Roma, to achieve real equality in their everyday lives," says the statement.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Monday, April 10

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 15°C

Night Showers

Low: 10°C

Tuesday, April 11

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 18°C

Night Light Rain

Low: 11°C

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