

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Prosecutor's Office of Georgia Issues Statement on Global Fraud Scheme

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia issued a statement responding to Eurojust regarding the special operations held in several countries, including Georgia.

According to the information of the prosecutor's office, the planned investigative activities were carried out simultaneously in several countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Israel and Georgia, as a result of which 5 persons involved in possible crimes were arrested in the territory of another country.

The investigation with international cooperation in the case continues in order to identify and expose the members of the criminal group, as well as other natural or legal persons engaged in similar activities.

"We would like to respond to the statement issued by Eurojust today regarding a special operation held in several countries, including Georgia, aimed at identifying fraudulent online platforms and persons involved in crime.

One of these operations was held in March of this year, to identify the persons involved in the crime, whose actions caused 89 million euros of damage to at least 33,000 victims, citizens of different European countries.

The criminal fraud network, which allegedly operated in the period of 2019-2021, through advertisements placed on social media and other public spaces and so-called call centers, prom-



ised citizens benefits from investing in various European countries. Victims lost their investments, which were distributed to the bank accounts of the criminals.

The operation held in Georgia was led by the Prosecutor's Of-

fice of Georgia, in coordination with the Liaison Prosecutor of Georgia in Eurojust.

The planned investigative activities were carried out simultaneously in several countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Israel and Georgia, as a result of

which 5 persons involved in possible crimes were arrested in the territory of another country.

Also, the persons in contact with the alleged crime were questioned, and a lot of documents and electronic information carriers were seized.

The investigation and international cooperation in the case continues in order to identify and expose the members of the criminal group, as well as other natural or legal persons engaged in similar activities," the statement reads.

Alexei Navalny Calls on Georgian Gov't to Pardon Mikheil Saakashvili

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



Алексей Навальный

I want to say a few words about Mikheil Saakashvili.

I do not know him personally and have never met him.

I don't know anyone from his team, nor did anyone ask me to write this post. ... See more

Putin's political prisoner, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny wrote about Mikheil Saakashvili's situation.

Navalny apologized for insulting statements made by him used towards Georgians in 2008 and said that he was influenced by the news he heard about his friend being fired upon in Tskhinvali.

Navalny said that the torture of the former president is horrible and heartless and said that the whole of Georgia will be affected by this revenge.

Navalny called on the Georgian authorities to take a 'Christian' step and pardon Saakashvili.

"I want to say about Mikheil Saakashvili that I don't know him and have never met him, I don't know anyone from his team and no one asked me to write this post.

I, to my shame, have a rather weak idea of Georgian politics, and I might be wrong. Much to my shame, I, under the influence of the fact that my friend was under bombardment in Tskhinvali, wrote a post in 2008

with offensive epithets addressed to Georgians.

I apologized for that and I apologize again, although I know that my opinion in this regard does not have much weight in Georgia.

However, I still decided to write as a human being and as a Christian because it is so hard to watch.

Saakashvili is suffering, his family is suffering, and all of Georgia is suffering because of what is happening, and it is not good for those who want Saakashvili to stay in prison until he dies.

I believe in a happy European future for Georgia. It is a great country that has everything for development. I believe that political conflict (and where isn't it?) will be resolved peacefully and safely.

But this imprisonment of the former president is horrible and heartless. This damages the European path. This stunts the development, reducing the chances of a normal future. It lowers morale and fills the country with evil," Navalny's statement reads.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President Zourabichvili Postpones European Parliament Appearance, Blames Georgian Dream



The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili's planned appearance to deliver a speech at the European Parliament on April 18 was postponed.

The President's administration published a statement re-

garding the postponement and cited the process of receiving 'artificially prolonged approval' from the Georgian government as the reason.

As mentioned in the statement of the press service, the "appropriate time" for the speech in the European Parliament will be selected together with the President of the European Parliament.

"Due to the artificially protracted approval process on the part of the Georgian government, the President of Georgia has decided to postpone the most important visit to the city of Strasbourg, because the President believes that this should be a step towards depolarization and not the other way around.

The address to the European Parliament and the opportunity to meet with the highest representatives of the European Union should be used as much

as possible to strengthen our candidacy status, and therefore the appropriate time for the speech will be selected together with the President of the European Parliament," the statement reads.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan Responds to BBC's Investigative Piece regarding Davit Kezerashvili

The US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan responded to the question regarding David Kezerashvili's alleged global fraud scheme.

The question asked whether the BBC information is reliable for the USA and if the USA is considering the sanctioning of Davit Kezerashvili.

"We do not prejudge sanctions. This is a good example of how important investigative journalism is, the investigations carried

out by the authorities to provide such information to the public, obtained from open and closed sources, which form the basis for

the BBC's is an important component. I hope that the Georgian authorities will have the opportunity to investigate such accu-



these types of measures.

Of course, we ourselves carry out a thorough process to evaluate information before taking any action. An investigation like

sations and conduct the investigation themselves.

This is the type of information that could become a part of all of this," said Kelly Degan.

Opinion & Analysis

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgia's Possible Candidacy for EU Membership: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Based on its sources in Brussels, "Radio Liberty" reported that the European Commission is ready to issue a recommendation for Georgia's status as a candidate for EU membership in October 2023. This information was immediately followed in Georgia by discussing how such a decision would affect the internal political situation in Georgia.

As is known, in contrast to Ukraine and Moldova, the European Union has imposed 12 conditions on Georgia, upon fulfillment of which it would be granted the status of a candidate for EU membership. Initially, a 6-month deadline was set for the fulfillment of these requirements, and then this deadline was extended for another year. After naming the 12 demands, a great debate broke out between the government and the opposition in Georgia.

The Georgian Dream claims that they have actually fulfilled the conditions of the European Union for a long time, while according to the opposition, The Georgian Dream only imple-

ments bogus reforms and does not really think about fulfilling these requirements. Why does The Georgian Dream not fulfill the 12 requirements of the European Union? The opposition has two clear answers to this, which, in principle, complement each other. According to one answer, this is the government headed by the Russian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili and acting according to the instructions received from Moscow, and according to the other answer, the fulfillment of 12 demands, which means freeing the government from oligarchic influences, ensuring the independence of the court and electoral reform, will actually be the end of the existing governance system.

The opposition claims that as a result of the sabotage of the Georgian Dream, Georgia will not be able to receive the status of a candidate for EU membership. In case of such a development of events, protests are expected. Both the government and the opposition in Georgia already know very well that society reacts very painfully to everything that threatens Georgia's Western orientation. The Georgian Dream already claims in advance that the radical opposition is preparing for a 'revolu-

tionary scenario'.

The Georgian Dream has been preparing for a long time in the event that Georgia is denied the status of a candidate for the European Union. According to their statements, the West is trying to drag Georgia into the war and they demand that it open a second front against Russia. Government officials claim in advance that not receiving candidate status will be a 'punishment' for not complying with the request to join the war. Accusations have been heard for a long time also against the 'radical' position, which, according to The Georgian Dream, is trying in every way to prevent Georgia from receiving the candidate status.

Denial of the candidate status for Georgia will not only strengthen the anti-Western propaganda on the part of the government but also increase the disillusionment with the West in the society and create a favorable situation for the pro-Russian forces.

"The West has abandoned us again", "Western orientation is an illusion", "Georgia should be with Russia" - such messages are already heard in the pro-Russian media, and refusing the candidacy will only create additional arguments for further dis-

tancing from the West.

But how will things develop, if in October 2023 Georgia, despite everything, still receives the status of a candidate for the European Union? It has already been suggested that this will strengthen the positions of The Georgian Dream and will be a heavy blow to the opposition, which claimed that the current government is deliberately blocking the fulfillment of 12 demands.

If we take into account the fact that in 2024 the parliamentary elections of Georgia are expected, the positions of The Georgian Dream will be stronger than that of the fragmented opposition, especially since the elections should still be held in the presence of the 5% threshold. By this logic, it follows that receiving the candidate status will strengthen The Georgian Dream and the existing authoritarian rule.

However, if we take a closer look, receiving the status of a candidate for the European Union brings several benefits: 1. It eliminates the basis for anti-Western propaganda as if someone oppresses Georgia for 'not joining the war'; 2. By establishing a clear prospect of joining the European Union, Georgia will

strengthen the forces of Western orientation, and show that the Georgian people are not alone. 4. Receiving the status of a candidate does not mean that reforms will not be necessary, on the contrary. The opposition will have more opportunities to continue the discussion on the implementation of the 12 demands.

It is also noted that the possible acceptance of the EU membership candidate status may have negative consequences for The Georgian Dream - Russia's resentment towards the Georgian government, which The Georgian Dream is seriously afraid of. However, whether Georgia will receive the status of a candidate for EU membership, it will be known after 6 months.

And it is also noted that this readiness of the European Union is accompanied by an unofficial reservation that during this 6-month period, Georgia will not do anything to distance itself from the European Union and will continue to work on reforms. During this period, Georgia will continue to live in conditions of severe polarization, where with the US sanctioning of four judges, a new factor may enter in terms of stimulating the implementation of real reforms.

Weather

Friday, April 14

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 14°C

Night Clear
Low: 6°C

Saturday, April 15

Day Clear
High: 20°C

Night Clear
Low: 7°C

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