

President Salome Zourabichvili Refrains from Vetoing Two Laws Amidst Raised Questions Over Changes

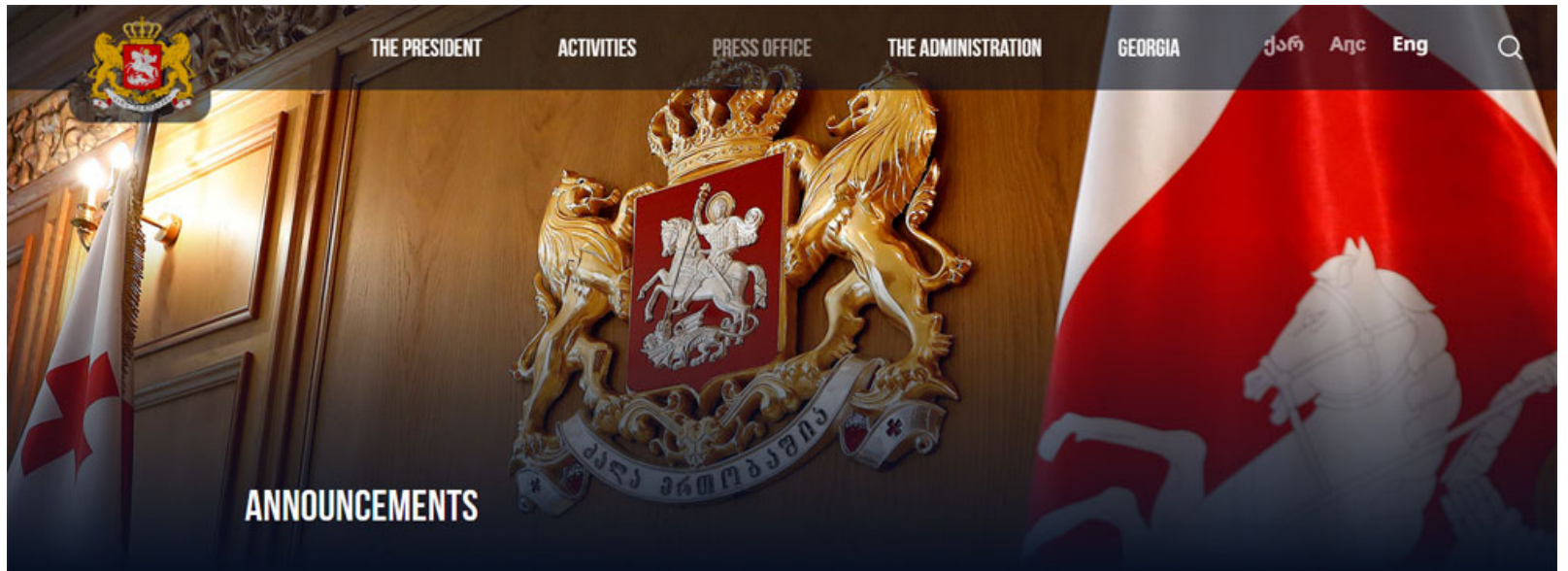
By Liza Mchedlidze

The President of Georgia has signed amendments to two laws that pertain to two vital areas for the country - the medical sector and the protection of intellectual rights, as reported by the presidential administration.

The statement addressed the recent signing of amendments to two laws in Georgia by President Salome Zourabichvili. These amendments pertain to two vital areas for the country - the medical sector and the protection of intellectual rights. The administration acknowledged that while there are some raised questions about the amendments in both laws, the President decided not to use the veto power due to the challenges and new needs faced by these sectors.

The first part of the statement discussed the amendments to the Health Protection Law, emphasizing their goals of reducing potential risks to health and life in the sector and enhancing quality control. However, there are concerns about the frequency and strictness of sector controls, which could pose hindrances to the healthcare system's functioning. The administration stressed the importance of closely monitoring the implementation of these new mechanisms to prevent selective application of the law and to ensure the health sector's full and independent operation.

The second part of the state-



ment focused on the changes in the copyright law. While these changes aim to align Georgian legislation with European standards and improve the protection of authors' rights to some extent, there is a risk that an organization directly subordinated to a Russian head company might gain an exclusive position in the creative and intellectual sector, as seen in other countries. According to Zourabichvili's administration, this scenario raises concerns about the potential misuse of this mechanism by Russia to strengthen its soft power and influence over the sector, which should ideally be the most free and impartial, without financial control. Additionally, the statement emphasized the responsibility of the authors of the

amendments, the authorities, and their supporters to avoid these potential dangers after the law's implementation.

President Zourabichvili's administration expressed readiness to collaborate with representatives of the sector and society in both directions, demonstrating a commitment to address concerns and work towards effective implementation of the amendments.

"The amendments to the Health Protection Law aim to reduce potential risks to health and life in the sector and enhance quality control, which are both commendable and non-controversial goals. However, the frequency and strictness of sector controls might pose hindrances to its functioning.

Conducting unplanned con-

trols without prior court permission and frequently planned controls provide administrative supervision and certain leverage to influence the sector if desired. Therefore, it will be crucial to closely monitor the implementation of these new mechanisms to prevent selective application of the law and to ensure the health sector's full and independent operation.

Regarding the changes in the copyright law, it can be argued that with their adoption, our legislation will be more aligned with European standards, as it aims to improve the protection of authors' rights to some extent.

However, these changes also carry the risk and possibility that an organization directly subordinated to the Russian head company might occupy an

exclusive position in this space, similar to what has occurred in other countries.

This scenario presents certain dangers for the country: this mechanism may become a tool in the hands of Russia to strengthen its soft power and influence on the creative and intellectual sector, which, by nature, should be the most free and impartial, without financial control.

Therefore, after the law's implementation, the authors of the amendments, the authorities, and the supporters of these changes bear a great responsibility to avoid these dangers.

The President expresses readiness to collaborate with representatives of the sector and society in both directions," Administration's statement reads.

Georgian Parliament Members Raise Concerns Over Land Transfer to Russian Businessman in Racha-Lechkhumi-Lower Svaneti

By Liza Mchedlidze



During a joint briefing, parliament members Khatuna Samnidze, Teona Akubardia, and Tamar Kordzaia stated that the government granted businessman Davit Khidasheli a territory of 104,712 square meters in Racha-Lechkhumi-Lower Svaneti for a mere 11 GEL, valid for a period of 49 years.

The MPs expressed their concern over the transfer of lands and forests in Racha-Lechkhumi-Lower Svaneti, emphasizing that prioritizing the interests of a Russian businessman over the well-being of the local population amounts to enmity and betrayal of the country.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6247; Euro - 2.9082; GBP - 3.3903; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9174; Swiss Franc - 3.0438

Georgian Parliament Members Raise Concerns Over Land Transfer to Russian Businessman in Racha-Lechkhumi-Lower Svaneti

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“A few days ago, Khatuna Samnidze, Teona Akubardia, and I were in the Racha-Lechkhumi-Lower Svaneti area, examining the territories that the Georgian government granted to companies under the influence of Russian oligarchs for a 49-year management. The scale of these territories is 104,712 square meters, which accounts for 4.1% of Georgia’s total territory. These lands were given to Khidasheli, a well-known figure to Georgian citi-

zens as the instigator and creator of the Davit Gareji conflict. Moreover, he is regarded as an unreliable partner due to his failure to fulfill investment obligations after purchasing a hotel in Akhtala. Numerous legal disputes related to this matter are ongoing, both in the court and the prosecutor’s office. However, Davit Khidasheli seems to be untouchable, and no issues have been brought forward, as both non-governmental organizations and local residents are involved in the disputes,” Kordzaia said. Kordzaia expressed that they

firmly believe that the encroachment on lands, forests, and the interests of local residents in Racha, Lechkhumi, and Lower Svaneti, in favor of Russian businessmen, constitutes an act of enmity and betrayal towards the country. According to MPs, the betrayal lies in the fact that the World Wide Fund for Nature offered to buy it at \$45 per meter to preserve its ecosystems. However, to their dismay, the Georgian government instead sold it to the Russian businessman Khidasheli for a mere 11 GEL. According to Khatuna

Samnidze, the fact that Mr. Sabanadze, the former mayor of Oni, was employed by Davit Khidasheli’s company indicates a corrupt deal. “This is a corrupt deal. The fact that Mr. Sabanadze, the former mayor of Oni, was very soon appointed as one of the directors of Mr. Khidasheli’s company raises doubts about it. 224 plots of land have been transferred to the prosecutor’s office - the state is disputing the ownership of its own citizens because these lands were included in the territory transferred to

Khidasheli,” said Samnidze. According to Teona Akubardia, the transfer of the territory to a businessman with connections in Russia is, in fact, equal to Russian occupation. The deputies state that they are initiating a study of this issue. They point out that the matter was not thoroughly examined from a security standpoint, and environmental protection concerns were not taken into account. Tamar Kordzaia mentioned that the state has not disclosed the exact border of Khidasheli’s property.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

US Embassy in Tbilisi Denies Involvement in Lobbying for Mikheil Saakashvili and Refutes False Allegations

U.S. EMBASSY IN GEORGIA

JULY 26, 2023

U.S. EMBASSY COMMENT ON DISINFORMATION REGARDING ACKERMAN FARA FILINGS

The United States, in Tbilisi and in Washington, has raised our concerns with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the disinformation carried by some media outlets and amplified by political figures in recent days regarding the work of the U.S. Embassy and our employees.

As we have made clear, no one at the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi has engaged in lobbying on behalf of former President Saakashvili or helped to schedule any meetings for his lobbyists. Malicious stories alleging or implying that Embassy employees received money from lobbying firms are categorically false and irresponsible.

The US Embassy in Tbilisi explicitly stated in their release that they did not engage in any form of lobbying for former president Mikheil Saakashvili, nor did they assist his lobbyists in

arranging any meetings. In their official statement, the US Embassy firmly refuted the damaging claims or insinuations suggesting that their employees received money from lobbying firms, categorically declaring such allegations as false and irresponsible.

political figures in recent days regarding the work of the U.S. Embassy and our employees. As we have made clear, no one at the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi has engaged in lobbying on behalf of former President Saakashvili or helped to schedule any meetings for his lobby-

Counter-Terrorism Operation Leads to Arrest of Two Georgian Citizens Linked to ‘Islamic State’



The counter-terrorist center of the State Security Service of Georgia, within the framework of the ongoing investigation into the terrorist crime, arrested two citizens of Georgia.

“As a result of investigative actions, flags with the symbols of the terrorist organization ‘Islamic State’ and various types of electronic information-carrying devices were seized. In addi-

tion, ammunition, explosive devices, and explosive substances were seized from the residences of the detainees.

The counter-terrorist center of the State Security Service con-

ducts the investigation under Articles 327 and 236 of the Criminal Code. Active operational-investigative activities are continuing both to reveal the nature of the participation of the detained persons in the activities of the terrorist organization ‘Islamic State’ and to identify other persons involved in the crime,” the information released by the State Security Service reads.

How Russia is changing the ethnic balance in occupied territories of Ukraine – Watch new YouTube episode on propaganda

With the beginning of the war against Ukraine in 2014 and the start of its new phase in 2022, Russia is deliberately changing

the national composition of the occupied territories of Ukraine. A new video episode of the project “What propaganda is silent

about”, published on YouTube, explains why this happened and in what ways it is similar to the actions of Nazi Germany.



Forced deportations of Ukrainian children to Russia and those unwilling to obtain Russian passports, and active settlement by Russians – this is how the Kremlin is deliberately changing the ethnic composition of the population in the supposedly “historically Russian” territories. Eighty years ago, a similar attempt to “replace” Ukrainians and other peoples on their lands was already made by Hitler as part of the Nazis’ Ost plan, the

episode reminds.

The story is available in Russian with English subtitles.

The YouTube series ‘What the propaganda is silent about’ addresses Russian-speaking audiences with reliable information about the war, and combats Kremlin propaganda and myths, which are actively promoted in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and the wider EaP region.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Thursday, July 27

Day ☀ Clear
High: 34°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 23°C

Friday, July 28

Day ☀ Clear
High: 34°C

Night 🌧 Partly Cloudy
Low: 19°C

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