

US-EU Summit Joint Statement Reaffirms Support for Georgia's Sovereignty and Euro-Atlantic Aspirations

By Liza Mchedlidze

The US-EU summit released a joint statement, which also addressed the reaffirmation of their unwavering support for Georgia's sovereignty and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. They emphasized the importance of all partners continuing to implement essential reforms to advance further on the European path.

"We remain fully committed to supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and its European perspective. We reaffirm our shared commitment to stability in the Western Balkans and our support to the EU perspective of the region. All partners should continue making the reforms required to progress on their European path," the statement reads.

The United States and the European Union, along with its member states expressed their strong commitment to a transatlantic partnership. They highlighted the significance of their relationship, which represents nearly 800 million citizens and is based on shared values and a highly dynamic economic partnership.

"The United States and the European Union and its Member States, representing nearly



800 million citizens, united by our values and bound together by the most dynamic economy relationship on earth, reaffirm our commitment to a transatlantic partnership that delivers for all our people. Since the last U.S.-EU Summit in June 2021,

the world has changed in unprecedented ways, and we have taken ambitious steps in response. Together, we are working to secure peace, stability, and prosperity regionally and across the world, including in our steadfast support for Ukraine. We are

deepening our cooperation to reflect the pressing challenges and opportunities of our time—strengthening our economic security; advancing reliable, sustainable, affordable, and secure energy transitions in our economies and globally; reinforcing

multilateralism and international cooperation; and harnessing digital technologies to work for, not against, our shared values of democracy and respect for human rights and the rule of law. We are more united than ever," the statement reads.

TI Georgia Calls for Veto on Controversial Amendments to Broadcasting Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

The non-governmental organization "Transparency International Georgia" is urging Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili to veto the controversial amendments passed by the Georgian Dream in the "Law

on Broadcasting".

According to TI, these amendments further worsen the already deteriorating standards of freedom of speech and expression. They also pose an additional risk of influence on broadcasters and include the threat of media censorship and punishment for

critical voices.

"Legal regulation of hate speech is risky given the government's attitude towards critical opinion, the absence of strong independent regulatory bodies, and low trust in the judicial system," the statement reads.

Transparency International (TI) believes that the review process of the bill was not inclusive.

"After the bill's initiation, during the first reading at the plenary session, a significant change was made to the draft law. While the original version of the project focused solely on the regulation of hate speech, after the first reading, the draft law was amended to also include the regulation of obscenity, shifting it from self-regulation to external regulation. This isn't the first instance where the management team, citing compliance with European directives, has hastily and non-inclusively considered and accepted changes," as stated in the assessment.

TI stated that the expedited review of the draft law, occurring concurrently with the impeachment process of the President in Parliament, raises a reasonable suspicion that this action was intended to circumvent a thorough and extensive discussion.

"The stance of media representatives and civil society on these issues is well-known to the Par-

liament and the majority of Georgia.

The Parliament has initiated the regulation of hate speech on multiple occasions, but it has never reached an agreement with the media and the public organizations dedicated to media freedom.

It is noteworthy that the Media Advocacy Coalition, in collaboration with broadcasters, developed an alternative proposal for an effective co-regulation mechanism. However, this proposal was not embraced by the ruling party.

"Each time, the debate regarding the regulation of hate speech sparked widespread discussion," TI stated.

According to TI's assessment, this law cannot achieve the goal for which the legal regulation of hate speech and obscenity is allowed in developed, democratic countries, and it may become a punitive lever that will be used against critical media.

"Transparency International-Georgia believes that changes of similar significance should not be adopted without consultation and broad involvement of the interested parties, as mandated by the European Directive on audiovisual media services," the statement reads.



Reflecting on 30 Years Since the Fall of Sokhumi: Georgia's Ongoing Struggle for Justice

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Last month marked the 30th year after the fall of Sokhumi. September 27, 1993, is the most tragic date in the recent history of Georgia, with the most severe consequences, which significantly hampered and still hampers the development of Georgia. Today, there is a consensus in the Georgian society that it was Georgia's war with Russia, which, with the support of the separatists, tried to maintain its influence on Georgia.

At the end of the 1980s, Soviet Moscow opposed Georgia's quest for independence by not only inciting Abkhazian and Ossetian separatism but also turning it into an armed conflict. Yeltsin's "democracy-oriented" Russia actively continued this policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

If it were not for the orientation of the Soviet and post-Soviet Russia to start a bloody conflict, independent Georgia would have managed to settle the existing problems peacefully. Let's recall the legislative change carried out by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, according to which Abkhazians were guaranteed more than half of the seats in the Parliament of Abkhazia.

What Yeltsin's Russia could not do in the Baltic countries, it compensated tenfold in the Caucasus. The authorities of Gamsakhurdia and especially Shevardnadze filled with Russian agents, overthrowing Gamsakhurdia and imitating civil conflict through armed groups, abundantly supplying Abkhazian separatists with weapons and thousands of North Caucasians and Cossack "volunteers" who came from the territory of the Russian Federation, who were acting alongside the elite special forces of the Russian army.

Official Moscow itself not only washed its hands of it but also assumed the role of "peacekeeper", claiming they would help solve the conflict. Shevardnadze's government agreed to this - "maybe somehow we can win the heart of the Russian government." Moscow's "mediation" always returned to Georgia as a new defeat.

In 1993, separatists and "volunteers" from Russia attacked Sokhumi several times, but without success. They stood up and signed a "ceasefire" agreement between the "opposing parties" on July 27, 1993 - the Georgian government agreed to withdraw its troops from Sokhumi, but the separatists broke their

promise and attacked Sokhumi on September 16. Russia claimed they had nothing to do with it.

On September 27, Sokhumi fell. The fall of Sokhumi ended with the expulsion of the Georgian population from the territory of Abkhazia. September 27 is associated with the loss of control over Abkhazia in Georgia and the ethnic cleansing of Georgians on the territory of Abkhazia. About 30,000 people died in the armed conflict, and 300,000 people, mostly Georgians, became displaced. Shevardnadze's government still relied on Russia's "peaceful mediation". He tried to make concessions to Moscow in order to restore territorial integrity. Georgia joined the "Commonwealth of Independent States" created by Moscow and agreed to place Russian military bases in Georgia, but these and other steps did not result in any "concessions" from Moscow. Moreover, in 2008, Russia launched a direct war against Georgia and declared the occupied territories of Sokhumi and Tskhinvali as "independent" states. Today, against the background of the war against Ukraine, Russia is preparing to join these "independent" republics with Russia.

In the circumstances of

Russia's attack on Ukraine and the war that has been going on for two years now, the West has already understood the Russian imperial policy towards the neighboring countries and can better understand the problems that Russia has inflicted on Georgia. During the entire post-Soviet period, Russia continuously waged a hybrid war against Georgia, which turned into a bloodstained war twice. What happened was not Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian ethno-conflicts, as claimed by Russian propaganda, it was the direct occupation of Georgian territories by Russia. Furthermore, it can be explicitly stated that Russia's policy towards Georgians has extended beyond ethnic cleansing to include genocide.

During the 11 years of its rule, the Georgian Dream government, naturally, marks the day every year, bringing flower wreaths as a tribute to the dead expressing the hope that the "conflict will be resolved", but has never mentioned Russia's responsibility and has not demanded an end to the Russian occupation.

Georgian Dream parliaments never discussed the tragedy in Abkhazia or passed any documents or appeals, even in con-

nection with the 30th year after the fall of Sokhumi. Unlike the current government of Georgia, the opposition insists more and more that it is necessary to tell the full truth about the crimes committed by Russia in Georgia, what happened three decades ago in Gagra, and two years ago the Russian army repeated it in Bucha, Ukraine. They consider it necessary to first recognize the genocide of Georgians on the territory of Abkhazia by the Parliament of Georgia, by issuing relevant legal conclusions.

It so happened that the 30th anniversary of the fall of Sokhumi coincided with the restoration of territorial integrity by Azerbaijan. Of course, no one expects the Georgian authorities to use the same methods to restore territorial integrity. It may happen that before the 2024 parliamentary elections, the issue of the occupied territories of Georgia will become one of the leading topics. The view was expressed that the Georgian Dream aims to project an image of Moscow as "understanding" of Georgia's territorial integrity restoration, whereas the opposition will prioritize discussing Russia's crimes against Georgia and advocating for the necessary legal actions.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Memorandum Signed Between the Parliament of Georgia and 'Georgian National Platform'



A memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Parliament of Georgia and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, represented by the Georgian National Platform. According to the Parliament, this signing represents another step toward the implementation of the 10th recommendation out of the 12 by the European Union. This recommendation focuses on ensuring the involvement of civil society at all levels in the decision-making process.

The memorandum was signed by the Chairman of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, and the Chairman of the National Platform, Nino Chkhobadze.

"We especially appreciate the relationship with the National Platform. On the one hand, it is a platform where more than two hundred non-governmental organizations are united, and they can speak on behalf of non-gov-

ernmental organizations. This is an invaluable source of professional advice and recommendations. On the other hand, this relationship is important and valuable because any reform and innovation needs to be accepted by society," said the Chairman of the Parliament.

As the Chairman of the Georgian National Platform, Nino Chkhobadze, stated, representatives of the civil sector will be more involved in the decision-making process, which is very important.

Ambassador Lasha Zhvania Announces Georgian Airways to Discontinue Tel-Aviv Flights

The Ambassador of Georgia to Israel, Lasha Zhvania, stated that Georgian Airways will no longer operate direct flights to Tel Aviv. The company's focus is shifting to the Larnaca-Tbilisi route, with additional flights being added. Ambassador

Zhvania made these clarifications during an interview on First Channel.

"The information about the airport's closure is incorrect. What we have learned is that Georgian Airways will discontinue its direct flights. It has come to our attention that the company is redirecting its flights to the Larnaca-Tbilisi route and adding additional flights," Zhvania stated.

He mentioned that flights are operated daily by 'El Al', 'Israil', and 'Arik'.

The Ambassador of Israel to Georgia added that over the last two weeks, more than 11,000 people have departed from Israel to destinations in Georgia, including Batumi, Kutaisi, and Tbilisi.

"We also monitor social media, and when someone cannot reach the hotline, we become aware of their needs through social platforms. Today, such a

situation occurred with a young mother and her three children. We were able to assist her by purchasing a direct flight ticket,



and she is now on her way to Georgia. The crucial aspect is the dissemination of accurate information. When incorrect information circulates, it can lead to anxiety among our citizens living in various cities across Israel. However, when they receive the correct information, they can make more informed decisions. Some choose to remain, while others opt to leave Israel for Georgia, and we are actively monitoring and assisting such individuals," Zhvania explained.

Weather

Monday, October 23

Day Clear
High: 21°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 12°C

Tuesday, October 24

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 25°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 13°C

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.
Zaza Gachechiladze
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

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