

President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili Delivers a Speech at the 2024 Munich Security Conference

By Liza Mchedlidze

President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili delivered a speech at the 2024 Munich Security Conference, emphasizing the 'existential' importance of EU enlargement. She stressed the necessity for countries to stand united, more democratic, and confront autocracy, terrorism, and cyber-attacks, all emanating from Russia.

"If we look at the global picture, we will see that Russia is not only conquering countries, threatening our countries with cyber attack, hybrid war, but also wants to engage in space war, which will threaten our countries' communication and logistics.

I think there should be a push for creativity that will allow us to solve these issues and accelerate reforms in Georgia, but nothing will change the fact that together, we have no other alternative than to be united, more democratic, and confront the alliance of autocracy, terrorism, and cyber-attacks – all threats coming from one direction," Zourabichvili said.

Zourabichvili stated that it's crucial for both Georgia's security and the interests of the European Union to prevent Russia from gaining exclusive power in the Black Sea region.

"EU membership for Georgia is a necessity, a security. This is the only perspective for a country that shares European values from the point of view of civilization. However, today, the main issue is security. The need for security is something that the European Union should also recognize.



What Russia is doing now was actually announced in 2007: that it would not allow the West to enter the Black Sea region. In 2008, the events in Georgia occurred, followed by Crimea, once again involving the Black Sea region and the

war in Ukraine. Russia stated its intentions and is following through with them.

I think it is crucial, in the interests of the European Union and for Georgia's security, to prevent Russia from becoming an exclusive power in the Black Sea re-

gion, as it is currently attempting to do. This is vital for the future, particularly for communication, which will be increasingly significant in the coming years and decades. We must take steps to prevent such a scenario," stated the president.

Georgian Foreign Minister's Diplomatic Engagements at Munich Security Conference

By Liza Mchedlidze

During the Munich Security Conference, Georgian Foreign Minister Ilya Darchiashvili held meetings with Susanne Baumann, Secretary of State at the German Federal Foreign Office, and James O'Brien, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eur-

asian Affairs. The talks centered on Georgia's European integration, bilateral relations, and regional security.

The Foreign Minister Darchiashvili met with Susanne Baumann, the Secretary of State at the German Federal Foreign Office, during the Munich Security Conference.

Their talks primarily centered on

Georgia's European integration process, highlighting the European Council's decision to grant Georgia candidate status. Minister Darchiashvili expressed gratitude for Germany's steadfast support of Georgia's European aspirations and emphasized the importance of ongoing support, particularly from Germany. The meeting also recognized the positive dynamics and strong partnership in bilateral relations between Georgia and Germany, emphasizing the value of high-level visits. Minister Darchiashvili thanked Germany for its consistent support of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Darchiashvili also met with James O'Brien, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, discussing the strategic partnership, regional security, Georgia's peace efforts, and the occupied territories. They also talked about sectoral cooperation and Mr. O'Brien's past visit to Georgia, aiming to strengthen cooperation further.

While evaluating the Georgian delegation's participation in the Munich Security Conference in Germany, Foreign Minister Darchiashvili stated that the meetings aimed to ensure the security and prosperity of Georgia and focused on garnering support from partner and

friendly nations on matters vital to Georgia's interests.

According to Darchiashvili, discussions during the conference revolved around the successful process of the country's European integration and the importance of support from leading countries of the European Union, such as Germany and France.

"It is Germany and France that are among the main powerful countries in the European Union that support Georgia. I had a very interesting meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of France; he promised me support in the process of our European integration.

Today, we will continue discussing this with our German partners and colleagues. We want France and Germany, two strong countries in the European Union, to be consistent and support our country on the path of future integration, which is complex. Although the support of these countries is very important for us," said Darchiashvili.

The Foreign Minister reported that productive meetings took place with Georgia's primary strategic partner, the US delegation, during which they discussed ways to further enhance the existing relations between the two countries.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6432; Euro - 2.8467; GBP - 3.3273; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8474; Swiss Franc - 2.9999

President Challenges Georgian Dream in Parliamentary Address

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The president took the initiative to establish a special 'unity platform' aimed at accelerating the country's European integration efforts. While the President's speech faced criticism from the Georgian Dream, it garnered support from a significant portion of the opposition.

Salome Zourabichvili's speech was eagerly anticipated across the political spectrum. However, the Georgian Dream has chosen to disregard the president following the unsuccessful impeachment attempt. This disregard was evident as parliamentarians did not rise when Zourabichvili entered the session hall, and during her speech, journalists observed them making mocking faces and showing disinterest.

A number of questions were expected to be answered after Salome Zourabichvili's speech. One central question was about Zourabichvili's relationship with Bidzina Ivanishvili. The president's heated confrontation with the Georgian Dream has been going on for a long time, but without mentioning Bidzina Ivanishvili.

After Bidzina Ivanishvili's return to politics, Zourabichvili did not make any comments in this regard. Bidzina Ivanishvili, who returned to politics, did not

criticise Zourabichvili. Therefore, some expected that Zourabichvili's speech in the parliament would be more moderate than before, which would confirm the version about the secret connection between Zourabichvili and Ivanishvili.

Salome Zourabichvili put an end to this version with her speech. She asked several questions to Bidzina Ivanishvili, as the real ruler of the country, about what the statements made after his return to politics on the existing corruption meant. She asked about the country's foreign policy and also noted that the society expects an answer from Ivanishvili as to how and when he intends to transition from the "one-party, one-person and vertical model" of governance to the "democratic, European model", asking when the real transformation of the judicial system would take place.

Following the president's statement, the Georgian Dream launched a fresh wave of criticism, accusing the president of aligning with the opposition and speaking as if she were one of its leaders. There has been long standing speculation that Salome Zourabichvili might resign from the presidency and assume a leadership role within one of the opposition blocs as the parliamentary elections draw near.

This scenario might have been desirable for the Georgian Dream. Under the new rule, the electoral college, consisting of 150 parliamentarians and 150 representatives from self-governments, would elect the Georgian Dream's preferred candidate as president. In the best-case scenario, Zourabichvili could potentially surpass the 5% threshold with her bloc.

In her parliamentary address, Zourabichvili definitively stated her intention to serve out her term, ruling out any early resignation. She affirmed her commitment to remain in office until the end, at which point, following the election of a new parliament as stipulated by the existing constitution, the question of selecting a new president will be addressed. Experts laud Zourabichvili's decision, recognizing that her continued presence as president will play a crucial role in ensuring the democratic integrity of the upcoming elections and maintaining the country's European orientation.

Zourabichvili's latest initiative, dubbed "the formula for getting out of the deadlock", urges all pro-Western forces to collaborate on establishing a 'unity platform for Europe' to secure the country's European future. As part of this initiative, the president is tasked with set-

ting up a coordination centre to consolidate "all concrete proposals on European priorities". However, Giorgi Gakharia's party outright rejected the president's offer from the outset, citing their unwillingness to engage in any unity that involves the National Movement. On the other hand, other opposition parties have not dismissed the possibility of initiating consultations with the president regarding this matter.

Representatives from Lelo and Japaridze's Girchi have already held a meeting with the president. However, several experts remain sceptical about the potential success of this union. Similar initiatives have been proposed by Zourabichvili in the past, but they have not yielded significant results.

This time, there are declarations emphasising that the aim isn't merely the consolidation of parties or the formation of a coalition, but rather the unity of the nation towards a European future. The envisioned union would revolve around shared principles, potentially culminating in the creation of a common document. This document would garner support not only from political parties but also from representatives of civil society. A number of opposition forces, first of all the National Movement who came to the president,

may actively raise the issue of Mikheil Saakashvili's pardon.

As the parliamentary elections draw near, it's imperative for the pro-Western opposition to determine their strategy for participation. The existing rules present challenges, particularly the unchanged 5% threshold. Votes for opposition parties that fall below this threshold effectively contribute to the Georgian Dream's electoral piggy bank..

According to current assessments, experts identify three opposition blocs that are likely to aim to surpass the 5% threshold. The first is the National Movement, which, despite internal divisions, remains a significant opposition entity capable of surpassing the barrier. The second bloc is associated with the party of former Prime Minister Gakharia. Lastly, the third bloc comprises pro-Western opposition parties that are not associated with either the National Movement or Gakharia's party.

Melia, along with his supporters from the National Movement, and Nika Gvaramia are speculated to be part of this bloc, although definitive decisions have yet to materialise. Despite this, the Georgian Dream persists in its rhetoric of an impending victory, previously claiming a 60% win and now raising expectations to 75%.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Two Georgian Citizens Illegally Detained by Russian Occupation Forces in Kareli



STATE SECURITY SERVICE OF GEORGIA

The Russian occupation forces have illegally arrested two Georgian citizens near the village of

Knolevi in Kareli municipality. As per the State Security Service of Georgia, the incident occurred within the occupied territory. Upon receiving this report, the European Union Monitoring Mission activated its hotline. Furthermore, the co-chairs of the Geneva international discussions and international partners were promptly briefed.

"All existing mechanisms have been activated to release illegally detained Georgian citizens in the shortest possible time. Responsibility for all destructive actions committed on the occupied territories of Georgia, as well as along the occupation line, rests with the occupying power," the Security Service's statement reads.

However, the de facto security agency of South Ossetia stated that Georgian citizens were arrested for 'vandalism'.

"Two citizens of Georgia, under the influence of alcohol, illegally entered the territory of South Ossetia and vandalised the engineering facilities used for the protection and security of the

interstate dividing line. The perpetrators recorded their illegal actions on mobile phones, presumably to report to the overseers of pro-Western non-profit organisations aiming to promote 'European' values, including LGBT values, in the region, and to destabilise South Ossetia and Georgia ahead of the pre-election campaign," the KGB statement reads.

President Zourabichvili Speaks on Coalition Governance Potential to Reduce Polarisation

In an interview with EURACTIV, in response to the question about pressuring the government to implement EU reform recommendations, particularly concerning polarisation, President Salome Zourabichvili expressed less concern about polarisation, citing the struggles of even developed nations like European countries and the United States to reduce it.

Zourabichvili suggested that the outcome of elections might

influence polarisation, especially if a coalition government forms, forcing parties to govern together and potentially reducing polarisation.

"I am not too concerned about

ment – maybe it is time for Georgia to test [that]. And if that is the case, that will be the end of the polarisation, because we will have to learn to govern with one another.

Weather

Monday, February 19

Day Snow Showers
High: 6°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

Tuesday, February 20

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 8°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

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UNFPA Georgia Country Office celebrates its 25th anniversary with the launching of Friends of UNFPA Georgia

2024 is an important year for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Georgia Country Office. To celebrate 25 years of UNFPA in Georgia, the anniversary event and the presentation of the Friends of UNFPA Georgia were held at the Wyndham Grand Tbilisi Hotel on February 15.

At the anniversary event, the guests were addressed by Mr. Shalva Tsiskarashvili, Director of International Organizations Department at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ms. Mariam A. Khan, UNFPA representative in Türkiye and Country Director for Azerbaijan and Georgia, Dr. Sabine Machl, UN Resident Coordinator in Georgia, and Ms. Lela Bakradze, Head of the

Georgia office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Certificates of appreciation were granted to the agencies and organizations which, in cooperation with the UNFPA, made a special contribution to the achievement of the goals and priorities of the Programme of Action of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

The presentation of the Friends of UNFPA Georgia was also held at the anniversary event. The Friends of UNFPA Georgia is an initiative of the UNFPA Georgia Country Office, within the framework of which, celebrities and representatives of various fields will join efforts to advocate for the goal of developing a society where every person, espe-

cially women and girls, can enjoy fundamental human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), live in an equal environment free from gender-based violence and harmful practices, and realize their full potential.

The UNFPA Georgia Country Office was established in 1999. For 25 years, the UNFPA Georgia team has been actively working to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. By promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, strengthening the policy frameworks and systems, striving for the elimination of harmful practices and combating violence against girls and women,

supporting youth development, collecting quality data on population dynamics and supporting their application for planning the country's sustainable development, the UNFPA is making a strong contribution to the advancement and development of Georgia as a democratic state.

The UNFPA Georgia team, together with its partners: state agencies, non-governmental organizations, representatives of the private sector, religious denominations, experts in various fields, activists, artists and athletes, directly contributes to the realization of fundamental human rights and actively continues to work to ensure that individuals, their rights and choices are always at the centre of sustainable development.







