

Kobakhidze Accuses EU of Interfering in Georgia's Politics, Denies Sanctions Discussion with O'Brien

By Liza Mchedlidze

During the briefing, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze described the presence of foreign affairs committee representatives from EU countries at the protests against the "Foreign Agents" law as a clear demonstration of foreign influence. He emphasized that what was happening on stage was a visible display of foreign influence.

According to Kobakhidze it is "unacceptable" for foreign politicians to come to the rally and deliver speeches as it demonstrates "interference in Georgia's internal politics from outside".

"When deputies from specific countries appear on stage, I would say that, in principle, with this so-called Russian law, this represents the transparency of foreign influence. We are witnessing the transparency of foreign influence on the scene today. Foreign politicians are appearing directly on the political stage; imagine the scale of this interference. This event is absolutely unacceptable. Naturally, when outsiders attempt to interfere in Georgia's internal politics in favor of the collective national movement, this represents interference in everything. Society will draw its own conclusions about the rest," said Kobakhidze.

Kobakhidze responded to journalists' questions about possible sanctions by stating that discussing sanctions is not a serious matter.

He clarified that sanctions were not discussed during the



bilateral meeting with the US Assistant Secretary of State, James O'Brien.

"I will once again confirm that sanctions were not mentioned in any way during the two-and-a-half-hour meeting that took place between us. Regarding the briefing, I did listen to it, but sanctions were not

mentioned in any form during our bilateral meeting. We discussed de-facto sanctions that have already been imposed on Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili, but formal sanctions were not part of the discussion at this meeting," Kobakhidze said.

He also stated that the USA's reputation was "damaged" when

it sanctioned Georgian judges.

"If such a frivolous step is taken again, it will harm not the individual sanctioned, but the entity imposing the sanction, because people observe everything. We do not want the USA's reputation to be tarnished. Our appeal to our partners is to prioritize partnership and avoid

taking counterproductive steps, as these will be damaging primarily to them. It will not harm, of course, our political team; instead, it will further strengthen our political support. Therefore, once again, I call on everyone to be pragmatic," said the Prime Minister.

US Assistant Secretary of State Dismisses Georgian Dream's Conspiracies as Unfounded

By Liza Mchedlidze

US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, James O'Brien, highlighted that apart from the "Foreign Agents" bill, another crucial topic of discussion during his visit to Georgia was the attitudes of the leaders of Georgian Dream towards Georgia's partnership with the US.

"We came because the USA highly values its relations with Georgia and sees them as a strategic partnership. However, recent statements and decisions made by the Georgian government in parliament have raised questions about whether the Georgian government shares the same interests," said O'Brien.

Assistant Secretary of State O'Brien also mentioned the significant aid provided by the United States to Georgia over the past 30 years, amounting to six billion dollars, which has supported the construction of state institutions and military assistance.

"If this law remains in its current form and does not align with EU standards, and if we observe a weakening of democracy and violence against peaceful demonstrators, there will certainly be restrictions imposed by the US. Primarily, these restrictions will target the financial aspects and travel of specific individuals responsible for these actions and their families," stated James O'Brien.

He indicated that both the law itself and the process of its adoption fall short of these standards, and expressed hope for further discussions on the issue to ensure that transparency standards in Georgia align with those of Europe.

However, O'Brien emphasized that discussions about the law were just a small part of the broader conversation, where the topics of the Georgian Dream party and Ivanishvili's conspiracy theories held significant importance.

"The law was a small part of a broader



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6866; Euro - 2.9005; GBP - 3.3730; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9399; Swiss Franc - 2.9598

US Assistant Secretary of State Dismisses Georgian Dream's Conspiracies as Unfounded

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

conversation", he said, "and the broader conversation includes comments made by leaders of Georgian Dream that there is a global war party, and that Georgia must turn away from the commitments made

to the global war party, and that there is a conspiracy by the West to remove GD from office — despite 12 years of strong cooperation".

He mocked such conspiracy theories, saying: "this is like a Reddit page came to life".

"It is unreal, wrong, and a complete misunderstanding of the International community's relationship with Georgia", he added.

O'Brien cited one example of such conspiracy theories as Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze telling him Ivanishvili would

not meet him because the US had him 'under defacto sanctions'.

"There are no sanctions on him, at this point", for such an influential individual to be this badly misinformed is both shocking and disappointing." O'Brien said.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

'Foreign Agents' Law Passed Amidst Protests and Arrests

arrested for refusing to comply with police orders and engaging in petty hooliganism at the rally near the Parliament.

The draft law, having passed through three readings, will be sent to the Presi-

chairmen of the foreign affairs committees from Germany, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Finland.

The President's administration statement revealed that the delegation con-

as disturbing and noted that it will significantly damage and hinder Georgia's European integration.

The President emphasized that Georgia expects clarity and support from Eu-



The "Foreign Agents" law was swiftly adopted by the Georgian Parliament in its third and final reading at the plenary session, with 84 deputies in favor and 30 against. Concurrently, an ongoing protest rally titled "No to the Foreign Agents law!" took place near the parliament building.

According to information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 13 people were

arrested for refusing to comply with police orders and engaging in petty hooliganism at the rally near the Parliament. The President then has two weeks to decide whether to sign or veto the document.

President Salome Zourabichvili Meets with European Foreign Affairs Committee Chairmen

The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili held a meeting with the



denmed "Foreign Agents" law troubling and stated that it will significantly impede Georgia's European integration.

Zourabichvili emphasized Georgia's expectation of clarity and support from Europe to reassure the population, who are dedicatedly striving for a European future, that they are not abandoned.

"The delegation described the draft law

so that the population, which is fighting so selflessly for a European future, does not feel abandoned.

The President also highlighted the importance of conducting high-level visits at this stage. The delegation emphasized that their visit today is proof of their support for Georgia," the statement reads.

Georgia: PACE President condemns violence against politicians, civil society activists, media representatives and peaceful protesters

Strasbourg, 14.05.2024 - Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) President Theodoros Rousopoulos strongly condemned the attacks on civil society activists, media



Parliament in an unnecessarily hasty fashion." These attacks, as well as the reports of disproportionate use of force by the police, should be fully and transparently investigated by the authorities and appropriate action should be undertaken to protect the safety of protesters, civil society activists, journalists and members of parliament, irrespective of their opinion on this law", emphasised President Rousopoulos. Noting

that the opinion of the Venice Commission on the law on transparency of foreign influence that President Rousopoulos requested will already be available early next week, the PACE President urged the Georgian legislators to fully take into account the recommendations of the Venice Commission before this law is enacted.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Weather

Wednesday, May 15

Day Partly Cloudy High: 20°C

Night Cloudy Low: 10°C

Thursday, May 16

Day Showers High: 16°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 9°C

representatives and members of the opposition, as well as the use of disproportionate force by the police against peaceful demon-

strators who oppose the controversial law on transparency of foreign influence, that was adopted today by the Georgian

published by **The Messenger**

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

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.