

Mdinaradze Responds to Borrell, Denounces EU Accusations



By Liza Mchedlidze

The leader of the majority, Mamuka Mdinaradze, has strongly criticized the European Union following a statement by Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Mdinaradze denounced the accusations leveled against Georgia, warning against the imposition of "unjust" sanctions on the country.

"It is inconceivable that Georgia should be accused of something it did not commit. It is inconceivable that our country should be sanctioned because of the accused case. I hope that the representatives of the EU bureaucracy, who treated their citizens like 'Nazis', will not treat Georgia like this," Mdinaradze said in his response to Borrell's statement.

Mdinaradze emphasized that if the European Union bureau-

cracy wrongly accuses Georgia and its government, sanctions may become a recurring issue. He insisted that the core problem lies in the baseless accusations rather than the sanctions themselves.

"I hope that the representatives of the EU's top bureaucracy, like the Nazis treated their citizens, will not treat Georgia like that. Innocent people were accused and punished. If the same thing happens

again today, but on a larger scale, that is, if the EU bureaucracy wrongly accuses Georgia and its government of something – the Russianness of this law, the decline of democracy due to this law – then sanctions may become commonplace. But the problem is in the blame, not in the sanctions," Mdinaradze asserted.

He further argued that it is impossible for high-ranking officials in the European Union to

not recognize that laws modeled after those in Canada, France, and the United States cannot be deemed "Russian" simply because they are implemented in Georgia.

"It is impossible for high-ranking officials in the European Union not to know that what is Canadian in Canada cannot be Russian in Georgia, what is French in France cannot be Russian in Georgia, what has been American in America for decades cannot be Russian in Georgia," Mdinaradze said.

Mdinaradze's comments came in response to Borrell's assertion that due to the adoption of the "Russian law", political contacts with the Georgian authorities will be reduced, support for the government will be frozen, and European credit financing lines will be revised. Borrell stated that these measures can be taken immediately.

Mdinaradze stated he does not expect sanctions to be imposed on Georgia or any high-ranking officials based on "unfounded accusations". He criticized the shifting narratives around possible sanctions and visa liberalization, suggesting they are inconsistent and lack basis in reality.

"For a while, they talked about visa liberalization, but then they realized that this story did not fit in PR. Yesterday they said that candidate status was granted to the people; now it is no longer possible to punish the people and now we should punish the high-ranking officials. Therefore, if you accuse, then you will be punished. We do not expect Georgia or any high-ranking official to be punished," Mdinaradze concluded.

By Liza Mchedlidze

According to a recent report published by the non-governmental organization International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), the ruling party Georgian Dream has initiated an "unofficial pre-election campaign".

The report assessed the political environment leading up to the 2024 parliamentary elections and stated that Georgian Dream has embarked on a large-scale social projects campaign well before the official pre-election period, which starts 60 days prior to the elections. According to ISFED, these initiatives demonstrate a mobilization of state resources for electoral gain.

"Although the official pre-election campaign begins 60 days before the elections, the ruling party has started mobilizing available resources, including state resources, and launched an unofficial pre-election campaign a long time ago," the report states. "Traditionally, this cam-

paign is characterized by the implementation of large-scale social projects. State initiatives were identified, which contain signs of using administrative resources for electoral purposes."

ISFED highlighted several specific instances where administrative resources were allegedly used:

April 29 Rally: Georgian Dream used state resources for preparatory work for a rally supporting government policy and the "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law.

Pension Increases for Military: In February 2024, the government proposed increasing military pensions.

Debt Write-Offs: The government announced initiatives to write off fines and tax debts in the months leading up to the elections.

Loan Interest Reductions: In February 2024, the government announced reductions in loan interest for pensioners.

Paid Internship Programs: The Minister of Educa-

ISFED Assesses Georgian Dream's 'Unofficial Pre-Election Campaign'



ISFED

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
FAIR ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

tion, Science and Youth announced a paid internship program for students in February 2024.

Salary Increases in Education: Pre-election salary in-

creases were recorded in the education sector.

The report also noted that the recent sanctions imposed by the US on Georgian legislative and executive authorities will likely

influence the pre-election campaign's nature.

The document outlined several main trends in the political

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8357; Euro - 3.0410; GBP - 3.5985; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2270; Swiss Franc - 3.1751

Opposition Seeks Pre-Election Configuration Ahead of 2024 Parliamentary Elections

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

With increasingly less time remaining before the 2024 parliamentary elections, the opposition has yet to decide how to group together in order to defeat the Georgian Dream. It is already clear that the opposition will not be united and is discussing the formation of several electoral lists.

From the outset, it should be noted that by "opposition", we mean those pro-Western political forces that seek to remove Georgian Dream from power and view this as the only way to maintain Georgia's Euro-Atlantic foreign policy course. Current government representatives refer to such political forces as the "radical opposition", in contrast to the "constructive opposition", which are actually satellite parties of Georgian Dream.

Leading up to the 2024 elections, the ruling Georgian Dream has done everything to shape the "rules of the game" to its advantage. It refused to lower the electoral threshold, keeping it at 5%, and also banned the creation of electoral blocs by par-

ties. Political forces wishing to participate in the elections must present a unified electoral list, with the calculation that they can overcome the 5% barrier.

The imprisoned former president of the country, Mikheil Saakashvili, is calling on the pro-Western opposition to run with a unified list and is ready to allocate 50% of the places on the United National Movement's list to other political forces. This call has been met with a negative response from a large part of the opposition, citing several reasons.

Uniting the opposition around the United National Movement is again in Bidzina Ivanishvili's interests, as a bipolar political spectrum is beneficial for him. A significant portion of the electorate finds both the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement unacceptable. Thus, if the opposition creates a unified list, it will receive fewer votes than if it ran separately. Additionally, some pro-Western opposition factions find it unacceptable to create a unified electoral list with the United National Movement. The former ruling

party is accused of ignoring democratic principles and establishing an authoritarian system.

It is assumed that the offer from the United National Movement will be received by those political groups that recently left the United National Movement for various reasons. This includes Grigol Vashadze's Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Zurab Japaridze's Girchi - More Freedom, and others. They will still not be able to shake off the image of the United National Movement, which has both positive and negative implications for the elections. Overall, the United National Movement should not struggle to overcome the 5% threshold. Representatives of this party still consider themselves the main opposition force, although some other political groups dispute this.

Rejecting a common list with the United National Movement is one thing; forming an alternative electoral list that can easily overcome the 5% barrier is another.

Many consider Nika Melia and Nika Gvaramia's newly formed party Akhali as one of such po-

litical forces. Both leaders were previously associated with the United National Movement, but they have since established themselves as a separate political force. Another question is whether they will be able to establish a different image among the electorate and attract opposition voters for whom the United National Movement is unacceptable.

Two other political forces that are not associated with the United National Movement and are considered candidates for overcoming the 5% barrier are Giorgi Gakharia's party For Georgia, formed by the former Prime Minister of Georgian Dream, and Mamuka Khazaradze's Lelo, created by a former banker. Gakharia and Khazaradze had a tense relationship, but recently Gakharia did not rule out forming a joint list with Lelo. There has been no definite response from Lelo yet, but the representatives of the government and pro-government experts have expressed great outrage, saying that the opposition is completely unprincipled, remarking that the former enemies might unite for

the elections.

There are three or four pro-Western electoral lists likely to surpass the 5% threshold. The main issue they agree on is foreign policy and the maintenance of the Western political vector. As for domestic political issues, debate is still minimal. In this sense, the upcoming parliamentary elections indeed have the character of a referendum, as President Salome Zourabichvili states.

Will these pro-Western forces be able to fully attract the protest electorate, especially the youth, who were the main force behind the protests against the Russian law? The answer is still unclear. The past has shown that protest movements and opposition political parties operate separately.

What will happen if all three or four mentioned pro-Western opposition forces overcome the barrier and enter parliament? According to current forecasts, they will be able to gain a majority and form a government. This is perhaps the most optimal scenario, but what if the upcoming elections are marred by significant violations, and the election campaign is unfair and violent? No one is talking about this domestically yet, but additional sanctions are being considered in the West for such a case.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Hurricane Causes Severe Damage to Alaverdi Monastery Complex in Kakheti



The Georgian Cultural Heritage Agency has reported significant damage to the historic Alaverdi monastery complex in Kakheti following a devastating hurricane. According to agency officials, the monastery complex, a cultural treasure of Georgia, suffered extensive structural and infrastructural damage during the natural disaster.

"The hurricane has left the dome's tin cover damaged, windows on the western side of the temple shattered, and structural elements like the bell tower's tin roof and the episcopal palace's tile roof severely affected. The balcony of the palace collapsed, and even a cross fell from the temple's dome," stated the Georgian Cultural Heritage Agency.

Currently, experts from the National Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Georgia are assessing the full extent of the damage.

The Georgian Cultural Heritage Agency emphasized that immediate steps will be taken to restore the damaged sections of the monastery complex and ensure its preservation as an integral part of Georgia's cultural heritage.

Michael Roth: Georgia's EU Negotiations Blocked by Anti-European Government

Michael Roth, Chairman of



the Foreign Relations Committee of the Bundestag, criticized Georgia's delayed accession negotiations with the European Union due to an "anti-European

government" in Tbilisi.

"The accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova are finally starting. Unfortunately, the anti-European government is blocking Georgia's opening of long-delayed [accession] negotiations with Brussels. We need to learn from our mistakes with the Western Balkans: ultimately we need more speed, ambition and a precise road map. Expansion should not be an empty promise, but an achievable goal. If Montenegro continues to reform quickly, it could have the job done by 2028. We need role models who will give us the courage to believe that the effort is really worth it," Roth wrote.

ISFED Assesses Georgian Dream's 'Unofficial Pre-Election Campaign'

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landscape ahead of the October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections:

Anti-Western Messaging: Alongside efforts to strengthen ties with the European Union, anti-Western and Eurosceptic messages have become more

prevalent in Georgia.

Foreign Influence Law: Despite significant domestic and international opposition, the Georgian Parliament passed the "Foreign Influence Transparency" law in May 2024, overcoming a presidential veto. The law is expected to negatively impact local observation organizations

monitoring the elections.

Sanctions and Human Rights Violations: The report mentions the US-imposed sanctions on Georgian officials and outlines concerns about human rights violations, including legislative amendments targeting the LGBTQI community.

Electoral Legislation Changes: Despite some reforms, ISFED notes that recommendations from international bodies and local monitoring or-

ganizations have not been fully implemented.

Deteriorating Media Environment: The media environment has reportedly worsened, with increased polarization on social media.

ISFED's report called for greater attention to the issues raised and urged both government agencies and Parliament to consider the recommendations provided to ensure a fair and democratic election process.

Weather

Wednesday, June 26

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 27°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 17°C

Thursday, June 27

Day Clear
High: 28°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 17°C

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