

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## President Zourabichvili Announces October 26 for 2024 Parliamentary Elections

President Salome Zourabichvili officially announced October 26 as the date for Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections. She signed the decree live on August 26.

President Zourabichvili emphasized the significance of these elections, stating they are not just ordinary polls but an "existential" choice for the country. She refuted claims suggesting the elections are a choice between war and peace. "They want to convince us that it will be a kind of choice between war and peace!" she said. "This is a lie, because the threat of war cannot be prevented by elections, and no one ever chooses war."

She assured that no one in Georgia wants war or is preparing for it. "Isolation, internal conflict, blurring of your priorities and goals increase the enemy's appetite, i.e., the threat of war," she explained.

Zourabichvili framed the elections as a pivotal referendum on Georgia's future direction—whether towards Europe or Russia. "And it is true that we should prepare for elections, which (I say this from the first day) will be equal to the referendum—Europe or Russia," she noted. "This requires us to be fully mobilized, to dispel our fears and to understand our own responsibility."

She criticized Bidzina Ivanishvili, stating, "On April 29, Ivanishvili addressed us with a war speech: he declared war on his people, his youth, and patriots inside the country, and on our loyal partners outside the country." Zourabichvili accused Ivanishvili of leading the coun-



try to a critical juncture, where the choice is between a European, democratic future or a return to Russian influence. "He accused everyone separately and all together of treachery," she said.

The President acknowledged

the challenges facing the elections, including threats and attempts to intimidate. "We already hear the threats voiced at all levels of government. They scare us with war, sword, arrest, but this means nothing, because there is no gov-

ernment that will go against the people and win," she said.

Zourabichvili emphasized Georgia's resilience and urged all citizens, both inside and outside the country, to participate in the elections. She highlighted that Geor-

gia has endured many hardships, but its faith in the future remains strong. She expressed confidence that no one would remain indifferent and that all Georgians would take part in shaping the country's future through their vote.

## Anti-Corruption Bureau Instructs Opposition Parties to Disclose Funding Amid Accusations

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Razhden Kuprashvili, the head of Georgia's Anti-Corruption Bureau, has accused several opposition parties of failing to fully disclose their funding sources, which he argues poses a significant threat to the fairness of the upcoming elections.

In a recent briefing, Kuprashvili stated, "The opposition parties, including European Georgia, United National Movement, and Girchi - More Freedom, have not provided full transparency regarding their financial sources." He added, "This lack of disclosure suggests that these parties might be receiving funds from foreign donors through non-governmental organizations affiliated with them."

Kuprashvili specifically criticized the political movement Freedom Square, led by Levan Tsutskiridze. He claimed, "Although Freedom Square engages in political activities, it has not registered as a political party. This evasion of registration means that its financial dealings are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as those of registered parties."

He also raised concerns about the Democratic Festival, which is organized by the East European Center for Multi-party Democracy and supported by the Danish Institute of Parties and Democracy. "The festival appears to have a political agenda, favoring certain opposition parties and excluding others," Kuprashvili said. "This selective participation undermines the fairness of the event."

According to Kuprashvili, the Anti-Corruption Bureau has instructed all political entities to submit their financial records for the past eight months by August 31, 2024. "It is crucial that all electoral subjects ensure transparency in their financial dealings," he emphasized.

Additionally, Kuprashvili called on international organizations such as the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to publicly disclose any grants provided to Georgian political groups. "Transparency from international donors is equally important to maintain the integrity of our electoral process," he said.





Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6990; Euro - 3.0134; GBP - 3.5681; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9645; Swiss Franc - 3.1873

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

# Potential Russian Interference in Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

As the October 26 parliamentary elections approach, the issue of potential Russian interference is becoming increasingly relevant. This concern is periodically raised, and in February of this year, it was first highlighted by Georgia's President Salome Zourabichvili. More recently, the U.S. State Department also expressed concern over the matter.

On February 27, in an interview with Sky News, President Salome Zourabichvili expressed her worries about possible Russian interference in Georgia's "very important" 2024 parliamentary elections. She pointed out that there are unfortunate experiences in other, much stronger countries of Russia's interference in their elections. Regarding Georgia's own experience, she mentioned cyberattacks, anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda, and Moscow's funding of marginal pro-Russian parties and groups.

Given the nature of Russian interference in various countries' elections, this interference typically has two main goals: first, to influence voters in favour of a particular candidate or party, often by discrediting their competitors and launching negative campaigns against them. Second, to undermine public trust in democratic institutions and the electoral process, intensify polarisation, sow fear, and create destabilisation.

Cyberattacks aimed at influencing elections could target electoral administration, soft-

ware or hardware providers, political parties, the media, and the NGO sector. As for informational operations, the activities aimed at increasing polarisation usually target groups that are sensitive to ethnic, religious, minority rights, or other sensitive issues.

Countering such interference is the responsibility of the state and requires a serious approach. One of the European Union's demands was to strengthen the fight against Russian disinformation and Kremlin propaganda. However, the current Georgian government views statements about threats from Russia made by President Zourabichvili and others as artificial speculation and accuses the President of preemptively damaging the electoral process. According to a member of the parliamentary majority, Irakli Kadagishvili, Zourabichvili's statement about potential Russian interference in the elections was a "political vendetta" against the ruling party, Georgian Dream.

Representatives of the Georgian government have been speaking about possible Western interference in Georgia's elections since last year. They accuse USAID and the European Union of meddling. For instance, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili mentioned three

components of Western interference: a) training people to have a "radical agenda"; b) supporting radical protests; and c) shielding these individuals when they break the law, particularly when they are arrested during protests.

In October 2023, the State Security Service launched an investigation into the so-called "training case" funded by international partners. At that time, the chairman of Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, claimed that the training funded by USAID was "directly aimed at preparing a revolution in Georgia."

This year, following President Zourabichvili's statement about possible Russian interference in the elections, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili again pointed to threats from the West, noting that opposition parties are directly funded from abroad through NGOs, which, during an election year, is "equivalent to foreign interference in the elections."

Experts argue that Georgian Dream cannot imagine relinquishing power and fears it will not succeed in the upcoming elections, particularly regarding the West's position. As Khatuna Lagazidze noted, the government's stance seems to be "preemptively securing election fraud."

In this context, Russia appears as a peculiar ally of the Georgian government, with its representatives periodically claiming that the United States plans to change the government in Georgia, orchestrate another 'colourful revolution' or 'Maidan'. This time, on July 9, the press service of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service claimed that Washington is determined to ensure a change of government in Georgia after the October 26 parliamentary elections. According to the Foreign Intelligence Service, the Biden administration has developed a "massive informational campaign" aimed at discrediting the ruling party in Georgia. The Russian government asserts that President Salome Zourabichvili is expected to play a key role in fomenting anti-government sentiments. Additionally, they claim that "American handlers" have already instructed the opposition to begin protests in the country parallel to the parliamentary elections.

This is not the first time this year that a statement has been made in Russia regarding anticipated unrest in Georgia this fall. On June 4, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin stated that the West is attempting to implement a new "Maidan" in Georgia by October. Following the reintroduction of

the "agents law", representatives of the Georgian government, as well as the State Security Service, began talking about the threat of a "Maidan scenario" and the overthrow of the government.

The Russian intelligence statement was first responded to by Giorgi Gakharia's party, For Georgia. The party claims that the statement is a direct attempt to interfere in the October elections and assist Georgian Dream in election fraud, which is coordinated with Moscow. The main tool for influencing voters and election fraud is Russian-style propaganda, which falsely claims that the West is planning to interfere in the elections and orchestrate a revolution. In reality, this falsehood is invented to cover up Russian interference in the elections.

At a briefing on July 9, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller responded to Russia's accusations, calling them "completely false" and "absurd". He also noted that Russia itself occupies 20% of Georgia's territory and makes these absurd accusations against another country.

As the elections draw nearer, statements about "Western interference" are likely to become even more intense, with the backdrop of active "Russian interference" unfolding.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Freedom Square Denounces Anti-Corruption Bureau's Accusations

The Freedom Square movement has condemned the Anti-Corruption Bureau's recent statements, calling them "shameful and unfortunate". The movement, which is part of the Strong Georgia coalition, denounced the accusations as false and damaging.

According to Freedom Square, the attacks from the ruling Georgian Dream party are intended to undermine their credibility

and reputation. The movement stated, "The charges against us are not only an attack on our movement but on the values we stand for."

Freedom Square claims that Georgian Dream is afraid of the



emergence of new and reliable leaders in the political sphere. They argue that the ruling party fears the challenge posed by their movement and is trying to sup-

press dissent. The statement reads, "It is becoming increasingly clear that Georgian Dream is afraid of the appearance of new and reliable leaders in the political sphere. They fear the challenge we pose to their status quo. The desperation of Bidzina Ivanishvili's party is obvious. They fear fair and competitive elections."

The movement emphasized that the attacks are an attempt to silence their efforts and suppress democratic values. They said, "The society clearly sees the attempt of the Georgian Dream to silence and suppress dissent. We continue to fight for democracy, freedom, and the European future of Georgia."

### Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy Responds to Anti-Corruption Bureau's Claims

The Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy (EECMD) has issued a response to the Anti-Corruption Bureau's recent statements, calling them misleading and an attack on the public Democracy Festival.

The EECMD criticized the Anti-Corruption Bureau's briefing, asserting that the bureau's claims align with "Foreign Agents" law and do not reflect the truth. The organization refuted allegations that the festival undermines transparency

and democracy.

According to the EECMD, the Democracy Festival invited a wide range of participants, including 18 political parties and movements, numerous non-governmental organizations, representatives from diplomatic and international organizations, and hundreds of small entrepreneurs. The EECMD stated that both opposition parties and the ruling party were invited to participate in the festival.

The statement from the EECMD emphasized that the ruling party, Georgian Dream, had previously declined invitation to the festival.

In a recent briefing, Razhden Kuprashvili, head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, claimed that opposition parties have failed to fully disclose their funding, which he described as a threat to the fairness of the election process.



## Weather

Wednesday, June 28

Day Clear  
High: 33°C

Night Clear  
Low: 20°C

Thursday, June 29

Day Clear  
High: 32°C

Night Clear  
Low: 20°C

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

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