

Prime Minister Criticizes U.S. Sanctions, Opposition, and Civil Society Organizations

By MESSENGER STAFF

On September 18, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze addressed a range of issues with journalists, including recent U.S. sanctions, Georgia’s territorial integrity, opposition coalitions, upcoming elections, and civil society organizations.

Commenting on U.S. financial sanctions and visa restrictions imposed on 64 Georgian individuals, including senior officials, Kobakhidze said that “such steps, such decisions do not help to reset relations” between Georgia and the U.S. He emphasized the importance of restoring relations, which have been strained for four years, particularly due to the previous U.S. Ambassador. However, he stated that “resetting relations requires a healthy and fair approach” and that the sanctions “certainly do not encourage” such a reset.

The Prime Minister further called the sanctions “an extreme insult to our state” and described them as “unacceptable.” He expressed his concerns to the U.S. Ambassador and warned that if further actions are taken, Georgia would “have to discuss in a principled way the revision of certain positions.” He urged for “rational” and “just” actions for the benefit of Georgian-American relations.

Kobakhidze also suggested that the sanctions were an attempt to “destroy Georgian-American relations,” questioning who might benefit from such a move. He hoped that this would be the “last decision in the direction of destruction of relations,” acknowledging the U.S. Ambassador’s “constructive attitude,” but regretting that it was not enough to influence the overall decision-making process.

The Prime Minister speculated that the decision to impose sanctions was made without the knowledge of U.S. President Joe Biden, adding, “Of course, we can all see that Biden does not make such decisions.” He attributed the decision to “oligarchic problems” in the U.S. and reiterated that “Biden is not even aware of this decision.”



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Responding to claims of Georgia spreading anti-Western disinformation, Kobakhidze called the sanctions “the real disinformation.” He urged against spreading such “unfair statements” about Georgia and dismissed hopes that the sanctions would increase opposition votes in the upcoming elections. “Georgian Dream will win very decisively,” he declared, aiming for over 60% of the vote.

Kobakhidze was also asked about Bidzina Ivanishvili’s recent statement suggesting that Georgia might apologize for the 2008 August War, a remark that opposition figures have labeled “treacherous.” Kobakhidze retorted that the opposition had committed “treason” in August 2008, alleging that they were responsible for the war. He accused them of trying to “cover up their betrayal” with “false statements,” but stressed that “the public knows everything about this war.”

Addressing the issue of reconciliation with the occupied territories, the Prime

Minister stated that there are only two theoretical ways to restore Georgia’s territorial integrity: war or reconciliation. He emphasized that those against reconciliation “automatically choose war” and referred to the opposition as the “war party.” Kobakhidze underlined that reconciliation could only happen through “mutual forgiveness” after a fratricidal conflict.

When asked about praise from a Russian official regarding Ivanishvili’s statement, Kobakhidze dismissed external comments, asserting that “our national interests are the most important for us.”

Regarding the recent adoption of anti-LGBT+ legislation, which has been criticized by Western countries, Kobakhidze dismissed these concerns, saying that similar criticism had been made about the Foreign Agents law, which was passed to ensure “transparency.” He described the new law as regulating “the simplest thing, that a man should be a man and a woman should be a woman.” He rejected the notion that the law was influenced by Russia, stating that it aligned with

traditional Christian values, which he argued are central to Europe. “In the perception of Georgian society, Europe cannot be associated with opacity and LGBT propaganda,” he said.

Kobakhidze added that Georgia’s aspiration to Europe has always been rooted in common Christian traditions, and that “what unites Europe is, first of all, Christian values.”

The Prime Minister also criticized a new coalition formed between opposition parties Lelo and For Georgia, a move that was reportedly brokered by President Salome Zurbashvili. He condemned the President’s involvement as “unconstitutional,” arguing that the President should remain non-partisan. He dismissed the coalition’s chances of success and accused Zurbashvili of grossly violating the Constitution by directly involving herself in electoral processes.

Kobakhidze also ridiculed the coalition’s leaders, pointing out their previous harsh words against each other, and accused them of being “unprincipled” in their decision to unite. He claimed that this behavior proved they were “working on orders from outside” and described them as “ordinary agents” acting under external influence.

Finally, Kobakhidze addressed claims from the Central Election Commission that local observer NGOs were attempting to “discredit” the upcoming elections. He agreed, stating that this was the last resort of the “radical opposition” and the NGOs associated with it, as Georgian Dream was already poised to win with 60% of the vote.

He reiterated his long-standing critique of NGOs, describing them as “rich organizations” that are “completely externally funded” with political goals aligned with the opposition. Kobakhidze argued that there are no impartial election monitoring organizations in Georgia and that the NGOs involved in observing the elections were merely “political associations” linked to the opposition.

August War: The Struggle for Historical Memory

By MESSENGER STAFF



Last month marked 16 years since the five-day war in August 2008, a significant ordeal for Georgia and a herald of a new phase in Russia’s aggressive global policies. Unfortunately, in the years that have passed, Russian aggression has not subsided. This is evident not only in the continued occupation of Georgian territories but also in the ongoing battle over historical narratives.

Russia’s aggression against Georgia did not begin in August 2008. Moscow started a so-called “hybrid war” against Georgia back when the Soviet Union was beginning to collapse. This mainly involved sparking so-called “ethnic conflicts.” Gorbachev’s policies were taken over by Yeltsin’s Russia in this regard. Moscow pretended to be on the sidelines, claiming to play the role of a “peacemaker.”

Presenting itself as a “peacemaker” seems to be a role that any form of Russia enjoys. If we look at history, on February 11, 1921, the Russian Red Army attacked the Democratic Republic of Georgia from the direction of Soviet Armenia. They portrayed this as a local uprising, and the Soviet Russian ambassador at the time, a man named Shainman, appeared before the Georgian government, requesting to be sent to the “conflict zone” to investigate the situation and help establish peace. The Georgian army repelled the initial attacks on Tbilisi, and among the captured Red Army soldiers, orders were found that had been issued from Moscow to take Tbilisi.

Seven decades later, Shevardnadze’s Georgia accepted Russia’s “rules of the game,” probably hoping that a policy of concessions to Russia could restore

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7236; Euro - 3.0431; GBP - 3.6145; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9300; Swiss Franc - 3.2209

August War: The Struggle for Historical Memory

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Georgia's territorial integrity. However, it became clear that neo-imperial Russia could not accept the independence of the former Soviet republics.

For a long time, Moscow acted under the guise of a "peacemaker," using this cover to mask its occupation of 20% of Georgia's territory, as if Georgia was only fighting separatists. In 2008, Putin escalated to a new level of aggression by openly attacking Georgia. Putin's major offensive against Georgia, which began in 2008, was halted with Western support, allowing Georgia to maintain its independence.

Russia violated the August 11, 2008 agreement, which required it to withdraw its troops from Georgian territory. By recognizing the "independence" of the separatist regimes in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, Russia officially left its occupying forces in place. It can now be said that the Western reaction to Russia's aggression against Georgia was "tolerable" for Moscow and encouraged further ag-

gression. This led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the creation of separatist regions in Ukraine, and then February 2022, when Putin launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine, aiming to destroy the Ukrainian state. Ukraine's resistance was clearly unexpected for Russia, but it did not stop the aggression.

In 2008, Moscow was unable to overthrow the pro-Western government in Georgia through war, but it succeeded in doing so through elections in 2012. The West supported the rise to power of the "Georgian Dream" at that time. "Dream" and its leader Bidzina Ivanishvili promised to build "unprecedented democracy" in Georgia, and the path of Euro-Atlantic integration was enshrined in the constitution. At the same time, "Dream" actively moved closer to Moscow, justifying this by the need to "normalize relations."

However, Russia's attack on Ukraine has made everything clear. The results of the current Georgian government's policies are undeniable: growing Western criticism, discussions about the so-called "global war party," and the adoption of

the "Russian law." Today, relations with the West are completely deteriorated, and negotiations with the European Union are frozen.

This distancing from the West became even more evident on the anniversary of the August War. On April 29, 2024, in a speech, Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the "Georgian Dream," stated that in 2008, the West dragged Georgia into war with Russia, and that the West did the same with Ukraine, involving it in a war with Russia. This has been a claim of Russian propaganda for years.

On August 7, 2024, while representatives of Georgia's allied nations were making statements one after the other, demanding Russia respect Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the ruling "Georgian Dream" party issued a statement blaming the war on the "National Movement" and Saakashvili. They also announced that after the October 26 parliamentary elections, they will re-investigate the August War and punish those responsible.

On August 7, Georgia's current presi-

dent, Salome Zurbashvili, distanced herself from the "Georgian Dream" and visited the occupation line in Ergneti, where she paid a visit to the museum of the August 2008 war.

A real battle over the date the war began is ongoing. It is now well-known that the Russian army invaded Georgia at dawn on August 7, 2008, and that Georgia's government ordered a military operation on the night of August 7 at 11:35 PM. Russian propaganda, however, claims that they entered Georgia on August 8, allegedly to help the Tskhinvali regime. Today's Georgian government supports the Russian version of the war and, as mentioned, intends to confirm this through "investigation" after the elections and pledges to apologize to Ossetian people.

The main message of the "Georgian Dream" in the October 26 elections is the so-called fight against the "collective National Movement." As it turns out, the issue of the August War is part of the government's election campaign.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Mamuka Khazaradze Criticizes Gakharia for Withdrawing from Coalition Agreement



Mamuka Khazaradze, one of the leaders of the Strong Georgia coalition, stated that he is still willing to sign an agreement with Giorgi Gakharia's party. In a Facebook post, Khazaradze noted that Gakharia himself cancelled the negotiations, citing a statement made by Levan Tsutskiridze as the reason — a move Khazaradze described as "unserious".

Khazaradze explained that on September 18, a specific plan had been agreed upon with the president, which placed the Strong Georgia coalition and Gakharia's party on equal terms. According to the plan, they would unite under electoral

evening, he rejected the previously agreed terms in front of the president. His main argument was the interview given by Mr. Tsutskiridze to TV Formula, which looks unserious in the context of these negotiations.

I regret that our discussions have ended. I remain ready to sign the initial agreement. As for Gakharia, he will have to explain to supporters why he refused to take this step," Khazaradze wrote.

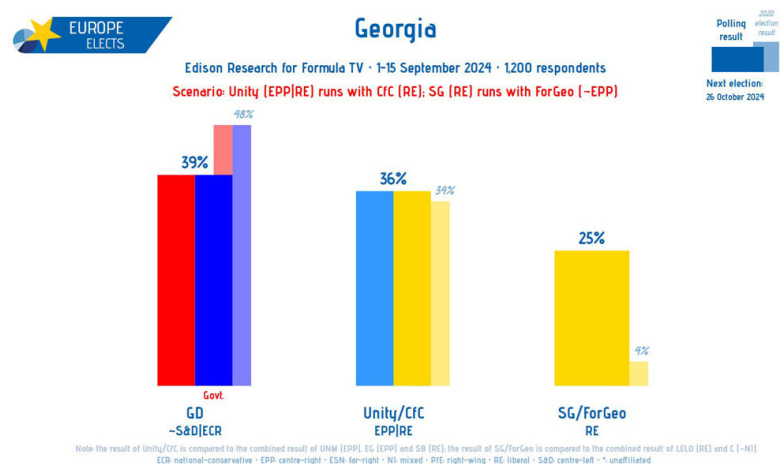
Edison Research Poll Reveals Support for Various Opposition Coalition Scenarios

As part of a public opinion poll conducted by Edison Research, voters were asked about the potential support for different configurations of opposition party coalitions, ranging from full unification to larger coalitions than currently exist.

According to the survey results, if pro-European opposition parties were to unite, the support would be distributed as follows:

- Georgian Dream / People's Power – 38%
- Pro-European opposition coalition (Unity, Coalition for Change, Strong Georgia, Gakharia - For Georgia, Labor Party, Girchi - Iago Khvichia) – 62%

In a scenario where the opposition splits into two major blocs—one with "Unity" and "Coalition for Change," and the other with "Strong Georgia" and "Gakharia - For Georgia"—the



results would be:
- Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia – 39%
- Unity, Coalition for Change – 36%
- Strong Georgia, Gakharia - For Georgia – 25%

The survey was commissioned and funded by TV Formula and conducted by the reputable American organization Edison Research. The poll was carried out from September 1 to September 15 across Georgia, excluding the occupied territories. A total of 1,200 Georgian citizens eligible to vote were interviewed face-to-face. The margin of error is +/- 2.8% with a confidence level of 95%.

Weather

Friday, September 20

Day Showers
High: 17°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 13°C

Saturday, September 21

Day Showers
High: 20°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 14°C

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Ambassador's Commendation Ceremony of Mr. Shota Khabareli

On September 18, at the Ambassador's official residence, Ambassador Ishizuka presented the Ambassador's Commendation Award to the MP Mr. Shota Khabareli, Former Judoka, and current member of the Japan-Georgia Parliamentary friendship group.

Mr. Khabareli was active as a Judoka for over 15 years and has devoted himself to the development of young Judoka in Georgia as the Vice President of the Georgian Judo Federation. The Khabareli (obi tori gaeshi), which originated during his active career, has roots in Georgian traditional wrestling, Chidaoba, and had brought a new style to the world of judo in Japan. At the Paris Olympics,

which opened in July 2024, the athletes that Mr. Khabareli coached during his tenure as a Head Coach, became coaches themselves and produced gold medalists, making a significant contribution to the development of the next generation.

On this day, Ambassador Ishizuka presented Mr. Khabareli with a certificate of commendation in recognition of

his achievement in promoting friendship and goodwill between Japan and Georgia through Judo. Ambassador of France, H.E. Ms. Sheraz Gasri, as a guest of honor and representative of the host country of the Paris Olympics, also congratulated Mr. Khabareli. Gold medalist Lasha Bekauri also made a speech.

*The Japanese Ambassador/Consul-General stationed in each country or region confers this award on individuals or organizations that have contributed to the promotion of mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and their respective countries or regions.

