

EU Ambassador Urges Georgia to Ensure Fair Elections, Warns of Consequences for Reform Delays

By MESSENGER STAFF

EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczyński, spoke on September 20, following a meeting with ISFED, a local election monitoring group, emphasizing the crucial role of the upcoming parliamentary elections in shaping Georgia's future with the European Union. He stressed the importance of "free, fair, competitive, transparent and inclusive elections," urging all political parties, especially the Government, to ensure a peaceful campaign. "Of course, the Government has an additional responsibility to ensure that the elections are conducted in accordance with the best international standards," he stated.

Herczyński reaffirmed the EU's support for civil society organizations, particularly those monitoring elections, calling their role "key" to maintaining high electoral standards. He expressed optimism about post-election reforms, hoping "we will have a new government and whoever will win the elections...this new government will restart reforms needed for Georgia to advance on the EU path."

When asked about the potential suspension of visa-free travel for Georgian citizens, Herczyński acknowledged the possibility, noting, "In case things deteriorate, of course, we are in a position to use different elements of our toolbox and the temporary suspension of the visa free regime is one of them," while also stating that "all options are



on the table" depending on how the situation evolves.

Expressing concern over Georgia's recent backslide on reforms, he said, "We are clearly concerned that instead of introducing reforms that would bring Georgia closer to the European Union, unfortunately, in the recent months, we had several de-

velopments that are increasing the distance between Georgia and the European Union." Despite this, Herczyński remained hopeful for a shift in direction, particularly if reforms are prioritized by the next government.

On the subject of the upcoming elections, Herczyński urged all citizens to participate, de-

scribing voting as both a constitutional right and civic duty. "It is for Georgians to decide in what country they want to live," he remarked, but added that if Georgia hopes to continue its path toward the EU, it must adhere to certain "non-negotiable" principles, including the rule of law and respect for hu-

man rights, with special attention to minority rights.

In response to concerns about the fairness of the elections, Herczyński warned that if the elections are not free and fair, the EU may consider actions similar to those taken in Belarus. He explained, "The elections in Belarus were stolen and this is why we have introduced a wide range of different measures," but he also emphasized that this is the "worst-case scenario" and expressed hope that Georgia's elections will meet international standards.

When asked about the likelihood of Georgia opening EU accession talks, Herczyński was skeptical, saying it was "highly unlikely" that the European Commission would issue a positive recommendation. He attributed this to the country's lack of progress on reforms, stating, "We have wasted so much time, practically the whole year." However, he did note that "this can be reversed" if the new government prioritizes reforms, reaffirming the EU's readiness to support Georgia's efforts moving forward.

When questioned about Bidzina Ivanishvili's statement suggesting that Georgia should apologize to Ossetians for the August war, Herczyński declined to comment directly. Instead, he reiterated the EU's firm support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, placing the blame for "chaos and destruction" on Russia, not only in Georgia but also in Ukraine and other regions worldwide.

Abkhazia's Bzhania Defends Ties with Russia Amid Funding Cuts, Criticizes Opposition

By MESSENGER STAFF

De-facto Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania, during a September 19 interview with a local TV station, addressed relations with Moscow in light of recent funding cuts to the region by Russia. He criticized opponents of the 2014 "treaty on alliance and strategic partnership" with Russia and the agreements that followed.

Bzhania defended the August 19 protocol from his meeting with Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Dmitry Kozak, which called for Abkhazia to meet its obligations to Russia. He explained that after the protocol was issued, "A document was received from the Russian Federation, which states that [from September 1]

co-financing of salaries of certain categories of state employees is suspended until the Abkhaz side fulfills the conditions laid down in agreements between Sokhumi and Moscow."

When asked if the cuts would impact Abkhazians, he acknowledged that "Suspension of the funding process will certainly affect a large number of citizens of Abkhazia – teachers, health care workers, cultural workers and many others." He added that the regional leadership "is engaged in solving this issue."

Bzhania attributed the funding cuts to Abkhazia's delays in implementing commitments to Moscow under the 2014 treaty. He explained that the treaty established a "qualitatively new



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7277; Euro - 3.0441; GBP - 3.6243; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9473; Swiss Franc - 3.2121

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level of interstate relations," including coordinated foreign policy, common defense, and a shared socio-economic area. He emphasized that "this agreement is in the interest of Abkhazia" and that the region "cannot avoid the implementation indefinitely."

He stressed, "Russia is our only strategic partner, so I am asking since when do we not trust the leadership of Russia?"

and committed to implementing the treaty's provisions as they align with the interests of the Abkhaz people.

Bzhania also highlighted the "agreement on mutual recognition of arbitration court rulings," which he claimed would create opportunities for economic growth and investment. He acknowledged Abkhazia's economic struggles, specifically its difficulty in attracting investment.

He dismissed concerns about

the risks posed by the agreement, noting that "We can only have investments from the Russian Federation, and an investor will come to the country if there are security conditions and guarantees for doing business." He pointed out that 90% of construction in the region is funded by joint Russian-Abkhaz companies.

Emphasizing the importance of relations with Russia, "which is our only strategic partner," Bzhania criticized those who

claim "such agreements are allegedly not in the interests of the Abkhaz" and attributed these views to "dirty political fighting."

Despite the funding cuts, Bzhania downplayed any notion of a crisis with Russia, viewing the situation as minor obstacles.

He outlined the "very difficult circumstances" facing Abkhazia, referencing factors like Ukrainian calls for opposition forces in Georgia to stage a coup, attacks on Russian cities by Ukraine and its allies, and Abkhazia's

ongoing conflict with Georgia, which seeks to reclaim Abkhaz territory.

He concluded by asserting that "the only force we rely on is the volition of people of Abkhazia and support of Russia," criticizing those who create tensions with Russia. He added that individuals who sow distrust should give up their Russian passports, and supported Russia's right to revoke the citizenship of those undermining inter-state relations.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President Zourabichvili Pardons Activist Giorgi Shanidze Days After Sentencing



President Salome Zourabichvili has pardoned Giorgi Shanidze, an activist involved in protests against the controversial Foreign Agents Law, just days after he was sentenced to four years in prison. Shanidze, who was arrested in May during demonstrations, had been convicted for damaging surveillance cameras and cultivating cannabis. His supporters criticized the sentence as an "exemplary, demonstrative punishment" meant to deter govern-

ment critics ahead of key elections.

The president's office announced the pardon on September 20, but initially withheld the identity of the individual. The statement simply noted that the convict had been "fully released

from the subsequent serving of the prison sentence in a penitentiary institution."

Shanidze was released from prison the same evening. Speaking to reporters, he expressed surprise at the pardon, saying the decision was "unexpected." Although he admitted to the charges, Shanidze argued that

the punishment was excessive.

This marks the second time President Zourabichvili has pardoned an activist involved in protests against the Foreign Agents Law. In April, she pardoned Lazare Grigoriadis, who had been sentenced to nine years for allegedly throwing a Molotov cocktail at a police officer and setting fire to a police vehicle during the March 2023 protests—charges Grigoriadis denies.

U.S. Prepares Sanctions Against Georgian Dream Founder Bidzina Ivanishvili

The Voice of America has revealed that the U.S. State Department and U.S. Treasury are finalizing a sanctions package targeting Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder and honorary chair of Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party.

A "high-level official," speaking anonymously to VoA, explained that while sanctions against Ivanishvili had been considered previously, the new development is that a package is now fully prepared. However, the exact timing of its enactment remains uncertain, leaving open

the question of whether it will be rolled out before or after the October 26 elections.

Another official claimed that Ivanishvili had taken steps to foster closer ties with Russian oligarchs, granting Russia favorable access to Georgia's market. The source added that some of these actions were allegedly carried out following directives from Russian intelligence services. The sanctions will be implemented under Executive Order

14024, which authorizes action against "harmful foreign activities" by the Russian government.

A source close to the discussions confirmed that the readiness of the sanctions package serves as a clear message. "Biden's administration wants to demonstrate its seriousness, hoping that members of the Georgian government will take notice," they said. Although the timeline for execution remains unknown, a source close to the administration noted that the necessary preparations are complete. The U.S. still holds out hope that the Georgian government will steer back toward a democratic path.



This news comes shortly after the U.S. Treasury sanctioned several Georgian police officers and far-right extremists over serious human rights violations.

A source close to the discussions confirmed that the readiness of the sanctions package

European Parliament: Ukraine must be able to strike legitimate military targets in Russia

In a resolution, adopted on 19 September with 425 votes in favour, 131 against and 63 abstentions, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) demand that EU countries lift current restrictions hindering Ukraine from using Western



weapons systems against legitimate military targets in Russia. The text states that without

lifting current restrictions, Ukraine cannot fully exercise its right to self-defence and remains exposed to attacks on its population and infrastructure.

Parliament insists that insufficient deliveries of ammunition and restrictions on their use risk offsetting the impact of efforts made to date, and deplores the

declining volume of bilateral military aid to Ukraine by EU countries.

The resolution calls for EU member states to maintain and extend the Council's sanctions policy against Russia, Belarus, and non-EU countries and entities providing Russia with military and dual-use technologies.

MEPs also said that accountability for war crimes and Russian reparations are essential elements of any peaceful solution. (eunighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Monday, September 23

Day Cloudy
High: 25°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 15°C

Tuesday, September 24

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 26°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 15°C

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Reception to promote Japanese Food and Food Culture Exchange

On September 20th, 2024, a Reception dedicated to “Promotion of Japanese Food and Food Culture Exchange” was held at the Marriott Tbilisi Hotel, co-organized by the Embassy of Japan in Georgia and Marriott Tbilisi.

Food Culture Exchange between Japan and Georgia celebrated the rich culinary traditions of both countries, which were recognized in 2013 by UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage, when “Washoku”, Japanese traditional dietary cultures and “Qvevri”, Georgian tradi-

tional wine-making method, were inscribed together in the list.

The event featured an exceptional blend of culinary artistry and performances that captivated all attendees. The evening’s program was highlighted by a live cooking demonstration from two exceptional chefs: Head Chef at the Japanese Ambassador’s Official Residence, Ms. Yuko Kanezaki, and Head Chef of Marriott Tbilisi, Mr. Leri Darsavelidze, as well as performance from world-renowned pianist, Mr. Toshiki Usui, who

performed classical music pieces, along with songs from a beloved Georgian composer, late Mr. Vazha Azarashvili.

Each chef presented a signature dish from their respective cuisines, offering guests a firsthand look at the craftsmanship involved in preparing these beloved dishes.

Ms. Yuko showcased the art of sushi-making, a tradition that embodies the precision and elegance of Japanese cuisine.

On the other side, Mr. Leri demonstrated the preparation of Khinkali, a dish deeply rooted in Georgian culinary tradi-

tions. This hearty dumpling filled with spiced meat and broth, represents the warmth and hospitality of Georgia.

This event was a vivid demonstration of how food serves as a powerful medium for cultural exchange, bringing people together to appreciate and celebrate both differences and similarities. The Embassy of Japan, with help of Marriott Tbilisi, is proud to have facilitated this memorable evening and looks forward to continuing its mission of promoting cultural understanding between Japan and Georgia.

