

# Deputy Interior Minister Debunks Claims of Visa-Free Travel for 17 Countries

By Liza Mchedlidze

Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandre Darakhvelidze has strongly denied reports suggesting Georgia has opened visa-free travel to Afghanistan and 16 other countries, calling the claims a "complete lie."

In a public statement addressing recent controversy surrounding amendments to a government decree, Darakhvelidze clarified that the changes do not ease entry rules but instead impose stricter requirements on citizens from 17 countries. "There has never been and there are no plans to make such a decision," he said. "Unfortunately, the changes were misinterpreted as if we had opened visa-free travel to these countries, which is categorically false."

According to Darakhvelidze, since 2015, citizens of any country holding a valid visa or residence permit from a list of 50 designated nations, including EU and Persian Gulf states, were allowed to enter Georgia. However, the law did not previously specify a minimum validity period for those visas or permits.

"We identified 17 countries whose citizens were frequently found to be staying illegally in Georgia or submitting a high



number of asylum applications," Darakhvelidze said. "Under the revised rules, these individuals must now hold a visa or residence permit valid for at least one year in order to enter the country.

Before, even a five-day visa could grant them entry."

The affected countries include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ghana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire,

Congo, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Darakhvelidze emphasized that the move was driven by national security and migration

management concerns and followed consultations with relevant agencies. "This is not an opening of borders. On the contrary, we have imposed additional restrictions," he said.

## Natsvlishvili Accuses State Security Service of Advancing Moscow's Agenda

By Liza Mchedlidze

Ana Natsvlishvili, a member of the Lelo – Strong Georgia coalition, has sharply criticized a recent report published by Georgia's State Security Service (SSS), accusing the agency of promoting the interests of the Russian occupying state rather than those of Georgia.

Speaking in response to the SSS's annual report, Natsvlishvili claimed the document "was not written in the capital of Georgia," but rather reflected the views and strategic narratives of the Kremlin. "It is very clear from this report that it was not written from the prism of Georgia's national security," she stated. "It is a report written in Moscow. It assesses the Georgian issue exactly the same way Moscow does."

Natsvlishvili expressed alarm over the alignment of the report's

language and focus with Russian geopolitical interests. "It is difficult to see that on behalf of the State Security Service of Georgia, a report tailored to the interests of the Russian occupying state was prepared," she said, adding that it served as a "carrier of Moscow's interests, and not Georgia's."

The controversial report outlines alleged plans by certain groups to provoke civil unrest with the aim of forcibly overthrowing the government. It also claims that in 2024, foreign intelligence services made concerted efforts to establish contacts with various Georgian political figures in a bid to advance their own national agendas.

The SSS asserts that its counterintelligence efforts successfully thwarted these foreign-influenced activities, which it describes as a threat to Georgia's national interests.





The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF  
Zourabichvili Condemns Raids on Fund Managers, Says Regime Facing Internal Collapse



The 5<sup>th</sup> President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili has delivered a scathing critique of the current government, condemning recent searches conducted at the homes of several fund managers as symptomatic of an increasingly repressive and unstable regime.

Speaking at a briefing, Zourabichvili described the raids as “completely unthinkable in a normal country,” asserting that Georgia no longer meets the standards of democratic governance. “These repressions in all aspects that have been carried out in recent months are an indicator that the regime is actually unable to cope with the situation and is only trying to consolidate

itself through this,” she said.

Zourabichvili argued that internal instability is growing within the ruling elite. “Fluctuations relating to the regime continue and are getting stronger. People are leaving, including those from the innermost circle,” Zourabichvili noted, suggesting that the gradual departure of key figures is a classic sign of a regime approaching collapse.

The President also emphasized the significance of international sanctions, stating that their most serious impact is on those closest to the center of power—individuals with significant financial resources. “The first person, with his enormous wealth, is isolated and can no longer benefit from these finances,” she said, in a clear reference to billionaire ruling party founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, without naming him directly.

Bokuchava Urges Europe to Sanction Ivanishvili at EPP Congress

At the European People’s Party (EPP) Congress, Tina Bokuchava, Chairwoman of Unity - National Movement, delivered a speech condemning “Kremlin-backed repression” in Georgia and calling for targeted European sanctions against Bidzina

ing widespread protests sparked by the government’s suspension of EU integration, announced after what she called “fraudulent elections”, Bokuchava detailed a harsh crackdown by the ruling regime, including arrests, violence, home raids, and what she described as torture of detainees.

Despite 153 consecutive days of pro-



Ivanishvili and his allies.

Bokuchava began her address with a reminder: one seat in the Georgian delegation remained empty, the seat of former President Mikheil Saakashvili. “A man who stood up to Putin in 2008, who did not surrender Georgia’s sovereignty,” she said. “For that courage, he is now in his fourth year in political prison under a Russian-backed regime.”

She warned that while Vladimir Putin wages a conventional war in Ukraine, Georgia is facing a hybrid assault. Cit-

tests, Bokuchava emphasized the Georgian people’s determination to remain on a European path, stating, “The heart of Europe still beats in Tbilisi.” She called on Europe to act decisively, stressing that “in the Georgian context, action means sanctions” specifically against Ivanishvili and his allies.

“Putinist regimes thrive on complacency and division,” Bokuchava warned. “Europe must lead with unity and decisive action.”

EU-UNDP project in Armenia: construction of buildings begins at Meghri border crossing point with Iran



A joint EU-UNDP project to modernise the Meghri border crossing point (BCP) is entering the construction phase, the United Nations Development Programme announced in a

is expected to be completed by 2026, with the UNDP acting as the project management consultant to the Project Implementation Unit.

On 16-17 April, representatives from the UNDP and the State Revenue Committee conducted a joint field visit to the Meghri Border Crossing Point. The visit focused on reviewing the current status of works and discussing project implementation details on-site.

EBRD lends up to US\$10 million to Bank Respublika in Azerbaijan

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) announced on 28 April that it had granted a loan of up to US\$10 million (•8.86 million) in local currency to Bank of the Republic, one of Azerbaijan’s leading commercial banks and a long-standing partner of the EBRD.

Bank Respublika will lend the



proceeds on to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the country.

The loan seeks to boost the competitiveness of the private sector by providing medium-term local currency funding to Azerbaijani businesses. The majority of the proceeds will be lent on to MSMEs based outside the capital, with many located in rural areas across the country.

The transaction will benefit from a first loss guarantee un-

der the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) programme, which is backed by the European Union.

The EFSD+ financial inclusion programme is designed to empower MSMEs and foster their competitiveness and growth. The programme’s strong financial tools seek to encourage intermediaries to direct new lending to those firms that need it most.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Thursday, May 1  
Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 21°C  
Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 12°C  
Friday, May 2  
Day Mostly Cloudy  
High: 22°C  
Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 13°C

Facebook post.

The Meghri-Nordooz border crossing is the only border crossing point between Armenia and Iran. The Meghri BCP modernisation, financed through an EU grant and an EBRD loan,

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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