

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Urges Parliament not to Adopt Draft Law on 'Agents of Influence'



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

In a letter sent to the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, the Commissioner for Hu-

man Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatovic, expressed concern over the draft law 'On transparency of foreign influence' and wrote that its adoption may have a seriously disturbing effect on the

activities of civil society in Georgia.

The Commissioner called on the Parliament not to adopt this or any similar bill and to make an unequivocal commitment to promote diverse and vigorous

civic engagement in public affairs, as well as to ensure the functioning of civil organizations, human rights defenders and people-friendly civil society.

"While transparency may be a legitimate concern, it should not be achieved at the expense of the rights and freedoms of non-profit organizations and media outlets and their legitimate activities," the letter reads.

According to the letter, any intervention in this area must be based on the principle of necessity and proportionality, as established by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, the Commissioner noted that the Committee of Ministers has recommended the legal status of NGOs in Europe, and it allows NGOs to request and receive funding, including from foreign sources.

In addition, Mijatovic pointed out to Papuashvili the decision of the Strasbourg Court, according to which the 'Russian law' on Agents violated Article 11 of the European Convention.

According to the European Court of Justice, the creation of a special status and legal regime for organizations receiving foreign funding was not justified, and such initiatives had a significant chilling effect on NGOs and their ability to perform legitimate civil society functions.

Minister of Justice Rati Bregadze Says that EU representatives Have Not Requested Transfer of Mikheil Saakashvili

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Minister of Justice, Rati Bregadze, in connection with the démarche of the ambassadors of the EU states, stated that the ministry introduced information about Mikheil Saakashvili to the ambassadors of the EU and Sweden at the meeting. According to him, it is not true that the ambassadors demanded to transfer the ex-president abroad.

"As for yesterday's meeting, it was a meeting with the ambassador of the European Union, as well as with the ambassador of Sweden, who voiced démarche; In particular, it was an appeal on behalf of the member states of the European Union, which was related to concerns about Mikheil Saakashvili's health. We presented them with information about what the Georgian state is doing to protect Saakashvili's rights and his health and treatment.

...the media was talking about the fact that there was a request from the representatives of the European Union to transfer Mikheil Saakashvili to Poland. Then a slogan which said that Mikheil Saakashvili will be transferred abroad, and I pointed out in a fairly correct way that the 3 pieces of information spread in a short period of time were untrue," said

Bregadze.

According to the Minister of Justice, the Ministry has nothing to hide from the public and there is no evidence of its torture and inhumane treatment.

Rati Bregadze also called on the opposition and said that they should stop politicizing the issue, and Mikheil Saakashvili should obey the doctors' recommendations.

"We have nothing to hide and on the contrary, we want the public to know the truth. During this period, a very large flood of slander has flowed, not only against the Ministry of Justice, but also against the entire state," he said.

"Together with the Ambassador of Sweden, which represents the country holding the presidency of the European Union, we handed over an official demarche to the Minister of Justice," EU Ambassador Pawel Herczynski told reporters on February 27.

According to Herczynski, the demarcation refers to the former president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili.

"We are very concerned about the reports of his deteriorating health. What is very important is that all 27 member states of the European Union agree to this demarche," the EU ambassador said.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President Zourabichvili opens the 'Political Forum for Gender Equality'



The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili opened the political forum 'Political Forum for Gender Equality' and addressed the invited guests and forum participants.

The President spoke about the importance of women's participation in politics and reviewed the state policy and practice in this regard.

According to her, there has been significant progress in recent years in terms of women's quotas, but now there is a need for women to have a real role in decision-making.

"The main thing is not quotas (I have always thought that quotas are needed and this path is still to be followed), but a real place and real participation in decisions. In this respect, the situation is not very favorable. Women, unfortunately, we cannot yet say that they make the main decisions. I believe that the time will come when women in Georgian politics will be at the forefront, they will make decisions, they will have financial and other resources in order to say their word and this word will be weighted and heard.

...I'm going to New York, where I will participate in the

67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and there, if any of your recommendations are presented, I will be your voice and your representative.

...It is necessary to fight against what is called violence against women and political violence because this is one of the biggest obstacles for women to entering politics. When women look at what is happening, and what women go through who are directly involved in politics, it is not very attractive for young people. All other fields are open to them and they can be professionally represented elsewhere and more appreciated than in politics - this should also be overcome," said the President.

Ned Price Says 'Agents of Influence' Law May Undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Integration

According to the press

spokesman of the US State Department, Ned Price, the United States has repeatedly expressed its deep concern with the Georgian authorities about the draft law on "agents of foreign influence".

According to Ned Price, the approval of the bill could undermine the country's Euro-Atlantic integration.

"We are deeply concerned about the possible impact of this bill on freedom of speech and democracy in Georgia. We have repeatedly expressed this concern directly to the Georgian authorities. The initiated bill will stigmatize and stifle those independent voices in Georgia who are working hard to create a better future for their community.

We believe that the law may undermine the Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia and the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the Georgian people, which they have clearly expressed in recent decades", said Ned Price



at the February 27 briefing.

According to the spokesperson of the State Department, they got acquainted with the draft law and it is not American, but similar to Russian or Hungarian laws.

"It is a clear lie to say that this draft law is based on our law - the "Foreign Agents Registration Act". "The bill we read seems to be based on similar Russian and Hungarian legislation, not American," said Ned Price.

Opinion & Analysis

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgia's Loyal Policy to Russia: At What Cost?

In the Russia-Ukraine war, the government of Georgia pursues an extremely loyal policy towards Russia, and Moscow is preparing for the annexation of the occupied territories of Georgia. The opposition talks about the collapse of the government's foreign policy, and the government still blames the opposition.

On the anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war, the representatives of the Georgian government do not go to Kyiv despite the invitation, the representative of the Georgian government, let's say the president, was not in Warsaw to listen to US President George Biden. Georgia has disappeared from the world's agenda - in the extensive speech of the US President, everyone - Poland, Moldova, Belarusian opposition, but not Georgia - was thanked. Our country was not included in the list of states that fight for Western values.

Instead, the Georgian govern-

ment talks about a 'global war party' that wants to involve Georgia in the war against Russia. According to Mamuka Mdinardze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, if a second front is opened in Georgia, it will detain at least 50 thousand Russian soldiers, "it will help Ukraine a lot and weaken Russia a lot", but they do not think that as a result, Georgia will collapse.

In exchange for Georgia's loyal policy towards Russia, they talked in Moscow about restoring air flights and canceling the visa regime, which the Georgian government is not against and claims that it will make life easier for "Georgian citizens in Russia".

However, these possible steps taken by Moscow are not at all derived from the interests of Georgia and are more aimed at "making life easier" for tens of thousands of Russian citizens settled in Georgia, and for tying Georgia to Russia even more economically.

The loyal policy of the Georgian Dream does not necessarily stop Moscow's aggressive policy. In the conditions of the not-very-successful war in Ukraine, Moscow is trying to

strengthen its positions in all possible directions. A number of experts say that the Kremlin is preparing for the annexation of the occupied territories of Georgia - Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions.

According to one version, this will happen by creating a "new allied state" in which Belarus, the occupied regions of Sokhumi and Tskhinvali will join Russia. However, in Putin's rhetoric, the idea of restoring the "union state" has long been overshadowed by the idea of restoring "historical Russia". On the anniversary of the war in Ukraine, Putin said in his speech that "Russia is fighting for its historical lands". Therefore, it is more likely that Moscow will directly annex the territories of Georgia and will not bother with signing the "Alliance Agreement".

In any case, on February 21, the so-called President of Abkhazia occupied by Russia, Aslan Bzhania, arrived in Minsk and met with the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, which represented another aggressive step towards Georgia. This was a continuation of Lukashenko's step, who arrived in occupied Sokhumi in September 2022.

This was a violation of Georgia's 'Occupation' law, but the Georgian authorities did not actually notice it at the time. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili responded strongly to Bzhania's appearance in Minsk.

"This is another flagrant violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Salome Zourabichvili wrote on Twitter. At the end of the day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia issued a statement and called on Belarus to "respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within the internationally recognized borders".

The reaction of the opposition was harsh. Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, who joined the opposition, considered Lukashenko's meeting with the president of occupied Abkhazia as "the collapse of the government's foreign policy" and called on the ruling "Georgian Dream" to "stop labeling Georgia's true friends as enemies" and "immediately mobilize the support of the West". He also strongly criticized Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is behind the Georgian Dream. Because of this criticism, it is not excluded that legal proceedings will be initiated against the former prime minister.

ated against the former prime minister.

Franak Vyachorka, the adviser to Belarus oppositionist Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, condemned Lukashenko's actions and called on the Georgian authorities to "act quickly and firmly" and cut all ties with Lukashenko.

The government of Georgia is not going to do much more. "The radical opposition wants the maximum escalation so that somehow Belarus recognizes the so-called independence of our regions - we cannot tolerate such provocations in any way," said the chairman of the Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze. According to widespread information, the second leader of the separatists from Tskhinvali, Alan Gagloev, was supposed to meet Putin in Moscow, but he was diagnosed with COVID-19 and the meeting was canceled.

The movement of separatist leaders to Russia and Belarus shows two things: on the one hand, Russia continues its policy of seizing Georgian territories, and on the other hand, the current government of Georgia is simply ignoring this and has no plan to restore the country's territorial integrity.

Weather

Wednesday, March 1

Day Partly Cloudy High: 17°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 7°C

Thursday, March 2

Day Partly Cloudy High: 13°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 6°C

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