



# GEORGIA ALERT

ISSUE 48 | January 16 – January 23, 2023

JOINT WEEKLY NEWSLETTER BY POLITICAL PARTIES DROA, STRATEGY AGHMASHENEBELI, UNITED NATIONAL MOVEMENT, LELO – FOR GEORGIA, GIRCHI – MORE FREEDOM, AND CIVIL MOVEMENT DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS.

## HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK:

### A new beginning in the liberal-democratic resistance against the Georgian Dream and Russia

On January 23, aligned opposition parties Girchi – More Freedom, Droa, and Strategy Aghmashenebeli, together with civil society members, academics, and other representatives of the public, [announced](#) solidarity to Ukraine demonstration on February 24. The rally will also underline the support for the Georgians fighting in Ukraine, whom the Georgian Dream has repeatedly attacked and belittled (Issue 43, for example). The movement aims to become a broad coalition of all pro-Western persons in Georgia. It perceives February 24 as the first step towards liberating Georgia from the Georgian Dream government, which it believes is a Russian collaborator to the detriment of the foundational values and aspirations of the Georgian people, their history and the state.

### The Georgian Dream welcomes praise from Sergey Lavrov, attacks Ursula von der Leyen

Sergey [Lavrov](#): “We see that Georgia, like other countries of the world, is under pressure from the West, which openly and shamelessly demands to join the sanctions against Russia. This small country and its Government have the courage to say that they will be guided by their own interests, economic interests, this deserves praise... I hope that we will be able to restore direct air traffic very soon.” Later, Sergei Gavrillov, the anti-hero in the 2019 “Gavrillov’s night” protests, [called](#) for restoring diplomatic relations with Georgia, receiving no condemnation or comments whatsoever from Georgian officials, just silence. As for Lavrov’s statements, the GD Chairman Irakli [Kobakhidze](#), the Tbilisi Mayor Kakha [Kaladze](#), and the Human Rights Committee Chairman at the Parliament Mikheil [Sarjveladze](#) welcomed the initiative, calling it a great comfort for the people and the Georgians living in Russia. GD MP Beka Odisharia [concluded](#) that Lavrov’s statement aims to rescue the UNM which is caught in chaos right now. According to the GD logic, the UNM is supported and encouraged for a revolt by both the West and Russia. GD MP Irakli Kadagishvili also [thinks](#) Lavrov just gave fuel to the opposition and tried to alienate Georgia from Europe, but that it is good if Lavrov and the Russians give due credit to the Georgian government. Meanwhile, Kobakhidze’s welcoming of the direct flights with Russia was not left unnoticed by Oleg Nikolenko, the spokesperson for the MFA of Ukraine, who [accused](#) the GD of “political treachery.” The UNM leader Nika Melia [noted](#) that the ban on direct travel was a sanction against the Georgians for June 20, 2019 events and rhetorically wondered how exactly Georgia has earned a prize from Russia now. MP Teona Akubardia [underlined](#) that the GD causes praise from the enemy and criticism among friends. Leader of Party Lelo for Georgia [stated](#) that the only aim of the GD policies is to please Russia, which they have now earned for real. Paata Zakareishvili, the GD government’s first-ever minister for reintegration issues, [noted](#) that the real tragedy is how welcome Lavrov’s praise is for the GD. Expert Sergi Kapanadze [believes](#) that even if Georgia is given the MAP for NATO right now, the GD will reject it, supposedly out of fear of Russia [if not for outright ideological unwillingness]. UNM MP Roman Gotsiridze [equated](#) Kobakhidze’s position to the confession that the GD supports Russia in the

war. (As discussed in our previous issues, Prime Minister Garibashvili has avoided answering the question of whom he supports, saying he supports Georgia). It is noteworthy that President Zurabishvili spoke against the restoration of direct flights with Russia, and [advised](#) the government to satisfy her request to ease the process of the Georgian citizenship acquisition for the Georgians of Russia if they care that much about the Georgians in Russia. The US Ambassador Kelly C. Degnan [expressed](#) her belief that the Georgians would rather have their territories de-occupied than the direct flights with Russia restored. In an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission was [asked](#) how it worked that the sanctions were imposed on Russia, but the goods still reached Russia through routes such as Georgia, to which von der Leyen responded that the 10th package of the EU sanctions will target individuals helping Russia with sanctions evasion. We have discussed accusations against Georgia before, including in the previous issue, 47. The government's anti-Western propaganda media POSTV then [dedicated](#) much time to how CNN and von der Leyen are now "the war party propagandists." GD MP Gia Volski [stated](#) he does not care if it's von der Leyen or Kubilius, or whoever, when they spread gossip and create gossip themselves against the country, the government has to defend the country. The Tbilisi Mayor Kaladze [called](#) von der Leyen's statements groundless just like all other similar accusations, whereas GD MP Giorgi Kakhiani [assessed](#) von der Leyen's response as waging war against Georgia and putting pressure on it. On January 23, the GD Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze published a Facebook [post](#) that was supposed to expose those accusing Georgia of sanctions evasions since trade with Russia has decreased this year compared to previous years, but attentive eyes have questioned suddenly increased trade with Armenia and Kazakhstan and have underlined that the graphs could be highly manipulative and subtle.

### **The Georgian Dream's further anti-Western propaganda – a possible preparation for outright rejection of NATO and the EU?**

"The People's Party" MP (until recently GD MP) Guram Macharashvili [stated](#) that NATO and the EU are not the a priori end goals for Georgia, they are just means, and that if the country's reunification and development are possible elsewhere, the party will not hesitate to advocate for it. The party most definitely means that if Russia promises (once again) to return the occupied territories if Georgia joins the Eurasian Union, for example, "the People's Party" will advocate for it. Lelo for Georgia MP Ana Natsvlshvili like most other opposition politicians believes that "the People's Party" is simply the mouthpiece of the GD. Even prior to Macharashvili's above-mentioned statement, Natsvlshvili had [stated](#) that the GD will try hard to undermine the European aspiration of the people as it feels comfortable in the Russian orbit and knows it cannot hold power under a European framework of statecraft, making "the People's Party" test waters for them first.

GRASS has published a [report](#) on the implementation process of the 12 recommendations, which is nowhere near completion despite Prime Minister Garibashvili having declared it practically fulfilled (Issue 45). Nevertheless, the Chairwoman of the European Integration Committee of the Parliament Maka Bochorishvili [feels](#) positive about the process, whereas President Zurabishvili [asks](#) the EU to grant Georgia the status despite Georgia "not being perfect."

MEP Rasa Juknevičienė questioned Georgia's European vector because of the politicized judiciary. "The People's Power" [stated](#) on January 23 that the West tries to capture the country's judiciary and dictate its rules, including with the help of the NGOs and USAID.

Ukraine's Charge d'Affaires Kasyanov [refuted](#) the GD claims that Ukraine asked for BUK air defense systems for free, and [stated](#) that Ukraine could have benefited from some help from Georgia, such as the Didgori armored vehicles or even field hospitals. Ukrainian MP Goncharenko [stated](#) that Georgia could have sent Ukraine a single bullet for the mere symbolism of support. GD MP Davit Matikashvili [called](#) Goncharenko "a part of the war party for whom it is important that there is fire here and the second front opens." GD MP Gia Volski once again [called](#) any sort of military aid an act of joining the war as a side. Kasyanov also [maintained](#) that disagreements should be put off until Ukraine wins over the common enemy. (However, as discussed in Issue 43, Kobakhidze finds it hard to name Russia as the common enemy).

## **Military sector cooperation with Russia?**

TV Pirveli's investigative journalist Nodar Meladze and his team paid attention to the investigative reports in the Ukrainian media and uncovered a suspicious military sector cooperation between Georgia and Russia. Georgian state-owned and merged with the Ministry of Defense aircraft company "LLC Tbilaviamsheni" holds 20% of shares in Russia's "NPK Shturmoviki Sukhogo OOO," which in turn currently implements 11 contracts with the Russian state, the state being its biggest client. The Chairman of Tbilaviamsheni's supervisory board is Giorgi Somkhishvili, whom the Ukrainian media outlets accused of lobbying the interests of Tamaz Somkhishvili, a 50% shareholder in another aircraft manufacturing establishment in Georgia, TAM Management. Tamaz Somkhishvili is a Russian citizen who sues Ukraine for USD 100 million and is accused by the Ukrainians of aiding Russia in fixing military aircraft.

## **Events surrounding Mikheil Saakashvili**

On January 19, Saakashvili [fell](#) and lost consciousness, rendering him unable to attend his court hearing on the sentence deferral request on January 20. The EU Ambassador in Georgia Pawel Herczynski [expressed](#) the EU's concern with Saakashvili's deteriorating health reports and the hope that the court hearings will be concluded soon. Zurab Tchiaberashvili, Georgia's former Ambassador to the CoE and the UN Office in Geneva [underlines](#) that if Saakashvili dies, public desperation and disillusionment with the Western efforts to save him will not only put an end to Georgia's European future, but will pose a danger to Europe – the strengthening of authoritarianism in Georgia implies its final return to the Russian orbit, and Russia successfully uses its subordinate states against Europe as we see from the example of Belarus. The Deputy Marshal of the Sejm of Poland Malgorzata Gosiewska [stated](#) that Georgian officials had directly told the Polish Ambassador to Georgia that Gosiewska will be banned from entering Georgia if she does not stop advocating for Saakashvili and commenting on the situation in Georgia. Gosiewska noted that she is already unwelcome in Russia and Belarus and that if Georgia joins their ranks, "everything will be clear." Georgian Dream MP Gia Volski [commented](#) that a diplomatic demarche can happen against a person who opposes the Georgian state and plays along with the plan of the UNM [causing destabilization and dragging the country into war with Russia]. Ukrainian Charge d'Affaires Andrei Kasyanov [expressed](#) his desire for the Ukrainian Ombudsman to be allowed visits to Saakashvili, for which Saakashvili's mother [thanked](#) him and Ukraine. In our Issue 47, we discussed how the GD's ideological and Parliamentary partner "the People's Power" insists that it is the West that wants Saakashvili dead [to cause unrest]. Strategy Aghmashenebeli MP Paata Manjgaladze [noted](#) that the statement is alarming as by blaming the West, they prepare an alibi for the Russian crime of getting rid of Saakashvili. Strategy Aghmashenebeli leader Giorgi Vashadze [saw](#) the GD's readiness to deal with Saakashvili's death in the above-mentioned remark, since "the People's Power" is widely perceived as the mouthpiece of the GD.

At Saakashvili's court hearing on January 17, James Cobey, MD, [underlined](#) that Saakashvili suffers from the hip joint and shoulder arthritis, possibly caused by poisoning. He also [stated](#) that unless several surgeries are performed, including on his neck, Saakashvili will be unable to walk. Attorney of the Special Penitentiary Service Gela Nikolaishvili [was](#) later triumphant that Cobey could not specify the time and circumstances when Saakashvili got injuries to his hip and neck. Otar Toidze, MD, [testified](#) that Saakashvili's cachexia began around 8 months ago, that he could end up blind in his right eye, [that](#) his nervous system is severely compromised and that he is running out of life resources. RCT Empathy's expert psychologist Liana Chokheli [noted](#) that his fixation abilities and short-term memory are compromised. RCT Empathy head Mariam Jishkariani once again [underlined](#) that Saakashvili's illnesses qualify him for a release. According to Saakashvili's attorney Shalva Khachapuridze, a Vivamedi Clinic nurse [testified](#) against the government propaganda that Saakashvili harasses the medical personnel.

## **Incidents at the occupation line**

The occupation regime of Tskhinvali illegally [arrested](#) yet another Georgian citizen. The occupation forces also [shot](#) in the air when the EU Monitoring Mission was carrying out its patrolling. Civil movement Democracy Defenders [created](#) a petition to bar the Parliament from stripping the fighters in Ukraine of Georgian citizenship, a possibility that arose after highly controversial remarks from the GD members (Issue 43).