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RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs makes an ambiguous statement on Georgia joining 3+3 platform, with the MFA clarifying the official position

Talking [live](#) on Georgian Public Broadcaster, Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, **David Zalkaliani**, has made an **ambiguous statement about Tbilisi's**

position with regard to the 3+3 regional cooperation platform, the idea first voiced by Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in December 2020, which envisages forming a group of countries consisting of **Russia, Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia**.

According to Zalkaliani, while it is “very difficult” for Tbilisi to join the platform, Georgia should in some form or another, engage in major geopolitical projects and relations, and **“we must not be lagging behind processes developing in the region.”** The head of the Georgian MFA did, however, underscore that the sovereignty and territorial integrity are the “red lines” for the Georgian government and that therefore the **engagement should not take place at the expense of national interests and concessions to Russia**.

Zalkaliani’s remarks came a day after Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, [met](#) with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in Moscow. Following the meeting, Lavrov made statements during the joint press conference: “We discussed today the initiative to create a “3+3” format to include the three South Caucasus countries and the three “big” neighbours, namely, Russia, Iran and Turkey. Our Iranian friends are supportive of this initiative, as are Azerbaijan and Turkey. We are working on it with our Armenian colleagues.” Lavrov called on Georgia to defend its regional interests through joining the platform, saying: “We hope that despite its current problems, Georgia will be able to realize its fundamental interest in creating such a mechanism for consultations and approving decisions for the accelerated development of this region, which had been held back for a long time by the ongoing conflicts.”

The MFA of Georgia [reacted](#) to the [reports](#) on Zalkaliani’s statement, declaring that various local media outlets have distorted the context and the integrity of the minister’s message. The MFA reiterated its **“repeatedly stated position that Georgia is not considering participation in the 3+3 format together with the Russian Federation.”** The official statement reads: “Reference here is to our participation in the strategically important projects which play a significant role in connecting Asia and Europe, and substantially contribute to Georgia’s economic and political independence.”

After the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the Kremlin’s increasingly aggressive behaviour in the international arena, Tbilisi has been wary of engaging with Moscow without the proper counterbalance from its Western allies. The 3+3 platform, designed, on the one hand, to be dominated by Russia, Turkey and Iran, and on the other hand, to exclude the Western powers in the South Caucasus, is incompatible with Georgia’s state interests and therefore joining such a platform would threaten the country’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations.



ECHR rules wartime crime claims against Georgia inadmissible

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has **ruled** two Russian cases submitted to the court related to the 2008 August War inadmissible: 'Shavlokhova and others vs. Georgia' and 'Bekoyeva and others vs. Georgia'. The complaints were put forward by several Russian citizens - who either resided in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia during the conflict or had family members affected by the war - **claiming that Georgia had breached their human rights.**

The applicants maintained that Georgia violated the European Convention on Human Rights, namely Article 2 - the right to life (the deaths of their various family members which had allegedly occurred as a result of the disproportionate use of military force by the Georgian armed units on either 8 or 9 August 2008); Article 3 - that the military offensive of the Georgian armed forces had caused them serious mental suffering and that they had been obliged to find shelter in the basements of the blocks of flats where they had lived in Tskhinvali; Articles 13-14 - that the respondent State had discriminated against them on the basis of their ethnic origin and, as an additional corollary to that discriminatory motive, that they had not had effective domestic remedies at their disposal; and Article 8 of the Convention and Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 concerning the destruction of her flat during the hostilities.

In its decision, the Court explained that exercise of jurisdiction is a "necessary condition" for such a ruling and that "the Russian and Georgian armed forces resorted to massive bombing and shelling of the territories within the same period of time," making it "impossible to track" and identify the party responsible for the applicants' distress and suffering.

The Georgian Minister of Justice, Rati Bregadze **commented** that "the ECHR fully agreed with the arguments presented by Georgia that during the war, the Tskhinvali region was actively being bombed by the Russian Federation, while the Georgian armed forces did not control the town of Tskhinvali and its surrounding areas. Therefore, it is impossible for Georgia to be deemed responsible for any infringements".

GEORGIA'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Negotiations between Russia and de facto president of Abkhazia

De facto president of Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania, held **meetings** in Moscow with the Deputy PM of the Russian Federation, Marat Khusnullin, the Head of the Federal Agency for Air Transport, Aleksandr Neradko, and Gazprom representatives. With Khusnullin, apart from general cooperation between Abkhazian and Russian sides, Bzhania discussed the "socio-economic development issues of Abkhazia for 2022-2025", which can be viewed in the context of a plan to create a common space for socio-economic development envisaged the 2014 Russo-Abkhaz "Treaty of Alliance and Strategic Partnership" (the so-called treaty is widely viewed as a step towards the annexation of Abkhazia by Russia).

During the talks with the Federal Agency for Air Transport, reconstruction of Sokhumi Airport and restoration of traffic between the occupied region and Russia were discussed. **According** to Bzhania, they are already in the phase of signing the "treaty", funds have already been allocated by the Russian government and the project is due to be finalised by the end of 2024.

An agreement has been reached with Gazprom, as well. It was **announced** that Gazprom is working on a plan of creating a roadmap for the gasification of the occupied region of Abkhazia. In this regard, significant progress has been acknowledged by both sides.

MAIN DISINFORMATION CASES

Watch the video version of the disinformation about elections



Three Fake Pages Under the Name of the Civil Election Commission

On September 3, a new platform, the Civic Election Commission, by the joint initiative of the Civil Movement "Shame" and the Association of Public Initiatives (PIA) was set up to promote conducting democratic elections. Later on, three fake pages under the

name were created on Facebook on September 24 and September 25. The fake pages copied posts from the real Civic Election Commission's page and published the identical posts during the pre-election period, however on the election day one of the fake pages started publishing disinformation. It is noteworthy that the Information Protection Center, which was created by the central election commission to tackle disinformation on election day, [accused](#) the civil election commission of spreading fake news. In the video prepared by the Information Protection Center, one of the posts published by the fake page was mentioned, however the speaker did not indicate that it was not a genuine page of the Civil Election Commission.

Disinformation about Georgia's membership to NATO

On October 11, hosts of pro-Kremlin extremist TV channel Alt-Info [claimed](#) that **Joining NATO means joining Turkey and in case of NATO membership, Turkish troops will be deployed on the territory of Georgia**. The message about "Turkish NATO" has been a part of Kremlin propaganda and anti-western rhetoric for years. Joining NATO does not automatically imply that military forces will enter a new member-state, every such decision is made by consensus – only if all member-states unanimously agree.

Manipulation about the ECHR and sovereignty of Georgia

On October 7, hosts of the pro-Kremlin Alt-Info channel proclaimed that the ECHR is limiting Georgia's sovereignty and without Strasbourg's decision the state is powerless to enforce the law. They brought the example of Armenia which they claim benefits from a higher degree of autonomy from Russia. In fact, the Georgian Constitution is above any international agreement including the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and Georgia could not accede to the Convention if any part of it contradicted the Constitution of Georgia. The European Convention protects fundamental human rights, which are [guaranteed](#) by the Constitution of Georgia as well, making these two documents coincide. See more [here](#).

Georgian-language website's efforts to promote Chinese interests amplified on Facebook

A network comprised of at least two Facebook pages and one Facebook group is working in coordination to promote a Georgian-language website - Eagblog.ge - that publishes articles supportive of China and critical of the United States, an example of how China's interests are increasingly being promulgated in Georgia.

Despite declaring itself to be an "alternative news portal" and featuring five thematic topics (politics, world, economics, technology, and Asia) on its navigation bar, most of Eagblog.ge's articles appear to serve one of two agendas, either promoting China and its president, Xi Jinping, as aspirational partners and world leaders, or attempting to discredit the United States by attacking its leaders, its system of government, and its international activities.

While there is no current evidence directly connecting the website or Facebook campaign to the Chinese government, their content aligns with the Chinese Communist Party's newly invigorated approach to reputation-building online, part of a

strategy it refers to as "[discourse power](#)." As Georgia continues to integrate more deeply into the Euro-Atlantic community, China has [expanded](#) its economic, political, and cultural ties with the country — a move assessed by some local experts as a threat to the country's national security. **Read more [here](#).**

CHINA' S INFLUENCE

Covert mobilization of Chinese IT specialists in Batumi

At the end of September, Georgian opposition parties, along with the Georgian media, uncovered a new **series of shady machinations of the Georgian business/political elite with China**. More specifically, it has been several weeks since numerous [IT specialists brought from China live in five-star hotels in Batumi](#). Consequently, hotels such as "Intourist Palace Batumi", "Sky Tower Hotel" and others have been converted into their residences and are closed to tourists for at least half a year. The purpose of their visit is unknown, but according to opposition parties, **their arrival is linked to Bidzina Ivanishvili, as the latter has decided to set up an illegal crypto lab and online casino**. [According to Georgian media](#), the illegal business also involves Galip Öztürk, a Turkish businessman and a trustee of the Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili, who owns hotels in Batumi occupied by Chinese IT specialists. The Turkish businessman is also illegally building their permanent residence in Batumi.

Upcoming Georgia-China action plan under the BRI

On September 8, the Ambassador of Georgia to the People's Republic of China, Archil Kalandia, said in an interview with Chinese media outlet "CGTN" that a [new agreement will be signed between the Chinese and Georgian sides](#) in the near future. It will be presented in the form of an action plan and envisages the **deepening of Georgia-China relations** within the framework of the BRI. Ambassador Kalandia did not elaborate on the details of the agreement but said the latter would focus on deepening ties in areas such as the environment, the economy, energy and infrastructure sectors, culture, education, and tourism. Moreover, he highlighted that in 2020, the BRI not only withstood the pandemic but also helped strengthen China-Georgia relations.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

On October 13, **Civic IDEA** published report #8 "[Pandora's box opened: Bidzina Ivanishvili's connections with the Chinese companies](#)", which explains the links between the scandalous Chinese state-owned company CEFC China Energy and the former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and his trustee, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, Ivane Chkhartishvili. The report brings to light how the two branches of government: the judiciary and the executive branch, handed over one of the most critical strategic objects of Georgia - Poti Free Industrial Zone, to the bankrupt Chinese company CEFC China Energy and after the latter's official bankruptcy, how it was brought under the unlimited control of Bidzina Ivanishvili and Ivane Chkhartishvili. The findings presented in the reports published by us over the

years are fully corroborated by the Pandora documents published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists in late September 2021, portraying the links between the former Prime Minister of Georgia and Brightstone Finance Limited registered in the Virgin Islands.

MDF has launched a new project '[EaP Media Hub](#)' together with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and hosted the first session meeting on October 15. The project aims to build cooperation and a working platform for journalists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia to exchange their ideas and work together to promote regional topics in local media outlets.

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