

## Botchorishvili Meets Ukrainian Counterpart in Chisinau, Reacts to Tskhinvali Treaty

By MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Dream Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili attended the 135<sup>th</sup> session of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in Chisinau on May 14-15, where she held bilateral meetings and addressed participants, using her speech to react publicly for the first time to Russia's alliance treaty with the occupied Tskhinvali region.

Botchorishvili met Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha on the margins of the session, a further step in a flurry of recent high-level exchanges between Tbilisi and Kyiv that appear aimed at restoring ties after years of strained relations. The contacts, reportedly all initiated by the Ukrainian side, included a May 6 phone call between the two ministers and a May 4 pull-aside meeting in Yerevan between Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the margins of the European Political Community summit.

Georgia's Foreign Ministry said discussions in Chisinau "focused on Georgia's consistent political and humanitarian support for Ukraine," while also noting that "the Georgian side underscored the existing challenges in Georgia-Ukraine relations, including steps taken by the Ukrainian authorities in recent years and positions that continue to hinder the normalization of bilateral relations." Both sides reaffirmed readiness



to continue dialogue. Sybiha said on X that the two discussed bilateral cooperation, GUAM, and "the latest political dynamics in the shared values-based space from Europe to the South Caucasus."

In her address, Botchorishvili reacted to Moldova's denial of accreditation to three Georgian pro-government TV channels, Imedi, POSTV, and Rustavi 2, saying journalists were "denied entry into Moldova" and that "it is deeply troubling when freedom of speech and media freedom are interpreted selectively."

She also pushed back against Western criticism of the Georgian Dream. "It is hypocrisy to

lament a so-called 'democratic backsliding' while simultaneously encouraging radical forces that are rejecting elections; to claim 'support for the Georgian people' while demonstratively distancing oneself from the government elected by those very people; to speak of the rule of law while at the same time seeking ways to circumvent law and justice," she said.

On the Tskhinvali treaty, Botchorishvili said Russia "continues to disregard its international obligations and is taking further steps toward the annexation of Georgia's regions," citing the agreement signed on May 9 between Moscow and the

Tskhinvali occupation regime as evidence. It was the first public reaction by Georgian Dream authorities to the treaty, which Russia's State Duma had already ratified. She also addressed the war in Ukraine, saying "no country can truly be secure if international law is applied selectively, if occupation is gradually accepted as a 'new normal,' and if force is allowed to prevail over law."

On the margins of the session, Botchorishvili also met with Luxembourg Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Xavier Bettel, where talks focused on EU relations, regional connectivity, and Georgia's eco-

nomics development. She met Serbian Foreign Minister Marko Duricovic to discuss bilateral cooperation, trade, and European integration. She also met Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities President Gunn Marit Helgesen, briefing her on ongoing political processes and reforms in Georgia.

Notably, Georgia was not among the 36 countries and the EU that expressed intent to join the new Enlarged Partial Agreement establishing the Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine, announced during the session.



## Georgia's New Patriarch Leads Family Sanctity Day Marches, Calls for Anti-Gender Laws

By MESSENGER STAFF

Large crowds and Georgian Dream party officials joined marches across Georgia on May 17 as the Georgian Orthodox Church celebrated the Day of Family Sanctity and Respect for Parents, with newly enthroned Patriarch Shio III leading the festivities and delivering a speech warning against abortion, "harmful gender ideologies," and what he described as a demographic threat to Georgians.

Shio III, enthroned less than a week ago following the death of Patriarch Ilia II in March, called on the faithful to join the

processions and led the liturgical service at Tbilisi's Holy Trinity Cathedral. Georgian Dream officials, including Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili, and GD-elected President Mikheil Kavelashvili, attended and addressed crowds. Tsothe Ivanishvili, the youngest son of Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, also took part in the Tbilisi procession.

In his address to the crowd, Shio III covered several contentious topics. On demographics, he warned that Georgia faces a real danger of being outnumbered in its own country. "If we

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