

The struggle for Georgia enters a fierce phase ARVAK Center comment, 22.09.2024¹

On the eve of the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 26, 2024, internal political tension in Georgia continues to grow. Both the ruling party “Georgian Dream” and the opposition, mainly represented by the “United National Movements” (UNM) and a number of small satellite parties, say the autumn vote will be a “*general battle*” for the country’s future. Both sides have something to lose, since it is expected that either side in case of its victory will take political and legal steps to dismantle the opponent’s political base. In the process of the struggle that flared up with renewed force related to the “*Law on Foreign Agents*,” enough negativity and mutual accusations have accumulated so that a “political vendetta” on the part of the victors seems to be a highly likely scenario for further internal political processes in the country.

For example, the current authorities openly accuse President S. Zurabishvili, who supports the radical opposition, in “*treason against the Motherland*”^{2,3}. There is also information, circulating about the preparation of investigation case against the informal leader of the Georgian opposition, Mikheil Saakashvili, who is to be held criminally responsible for Georgia's involvement in the August War of 2008, which had effectively put the republic on the brink of destruction. The article on “*treason*” is present in this case as well⁴. In turn, the radical Georgian opposition promises its supporters to sooner or later hold the founder of the ruling “Georgian Dream” party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, and representatives of the ruling cabinet accountable for deviating from the “*nationally approved*” Western vector and liberal values, “*solely acceptable for the future of Georgia*”.

The both sides promise to resort to the political elimination of opponents after the parliamentary elections. The opposition promises to do this just after the victory in elections, since it currently does not have power. The ruling party also strives to win the vote first to secure the unconditional support of the majority of citizens and fully legitimize its radical measures. “*It is exactly in the conditions of parliament of the next convocation that the “National Movement” with its satellites and successor parties must be sued*”, – stated Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze on the matter. – *Whoever crosses the threshold [of elections], none will escape justice for the crimes they committed, first during their nine years in power and then over the twelve years they spent in opposition*»⁵.

Thus, the autumn parliamentary elections become a *Rubicon*, beyond which the processes of radical change of the political landscape may begin in Georgia, regardless of the

¹ The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 17.09.2024.

² «Мэр Тбилиси обвинил президента Грузии в измене и связи с «предателями»: RTVI (15.07.2024), <https://rtvi.com/news/mer-tbilisi-obvinil-prezidenta-gruzii-v-izmene-i-svyazi-s-predatelyami/> (download date: 13.09.2024).

³ «Премьер Грузии обвинил президента в измене родине»: ТАСС (26.05.2020), <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20906417> (download date: 13.09.2024).

⁴ «В Грузии могут возбудить против Саакашвили уголовное дело из-за войны с Россией»: Газета RU (08.08.2024), <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2024/08/08/23642323.shtml> (download date: 15.09.2024).

⁵ «Ираклий Кобахидзе нашел себе неудачный пример»: Эхо Кавказа (23.08.2024), <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/irakliy-kobahidze-nashel-sebe-neudachnyy-primer/33090339.html> (download date: 14.09.2024).

outcome of the voting. Such a development is even more fraught with destabilization, if considering that the course of elections in this South Caucasian republic is associated with the danger of armed provocations, a coup attempt and, possibly, a civil war. Both Georgian authorities themselves and well-informed Russian services keep saying that such a scenario is highly likely. In particular, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) has made direct accusations against the West regarding planned unconstitutional actions after the elections in Georgia⁶. According to it, Western actors doubt the ability of Saakashvili's UNM party and its other bloc satellites to take revenge on the “Georgian Dream” in the elections of October 26, 2024, and therefore are deliberately preparing the ground in Tbilisi for an armed coup in the country. The FIS described in detail the actions allegedly programmed by the West, in which special functions are assigned to President Salome Zurbishvili, opposition parties and to the Georgian NGOs operating under American-European supervision. According to the Russian intelligence, the coup attempt will be conducted by “*standard patterns long practiced by the West*”: with a wide-spread propaganda campaign in the controlled media resources, with mass acts of disobedience, riots and “*sacred sacrifices*” to serve as a trigger for the seizure of power by the “street”.

One cannot rule out that the Russian FIS statement is just an information leak, designed to provide the current Georgian government with a free field for maneuvering and greater radicalization of its actions against the opposition, having an open anti-Russian stance. One way or another, the actually direct interference of Sergei Naryshkin's agency in the Georgian foreign policy processes testifies to their primary importance for Moscow. The same could be confidently said about the West, especially if the information disseminated by the Russian FIS has substantial grounds.

Georgia has essentially become one of the key points on the geopolitical map of Eurasia, where the collective West, led by the USA, has entered into a direct clash with its global rivals, RF and PRC. Free from excessive Western influence, Georgia for Russia is a promising trade and energy route to the south, to Turkey; it is a fairly impressive coastline of stability on the Black Sea; and, finally, an additional guarantee of security of its Caucasian frontiers, which is extremely important in the context of the complication of military activities around Ukraine. For China, Georgia is also of key importance in the context of the "Middle Route of the Great Silk Road" architecture. It is Georgia that completes the network of multimodal communications through Central Asia and the Caspian Sea, designed to connect China with the European markets. Therefore, the final loss of control over this South Caucasian republic will jeopardize the strategy of the United States and its allies aimed at isolating Moscow and containing the growth of Beijing's political and economic expansion on the Eurasian continent.

Thus, the Georgian domestic political agenda is not so much a matter of independent choice by this small country's regarding its vector of development and integration, which will determine its own fate, but rather a problem on the solution of which a disposition of forces and interests of the global actors in the region depends. According to the Georgian officials

⁶ «США готовят переворот в Грузии» что замыслили на Западе»: РЕН ТВ (09.07.2024), <https://ren.tv/longread/1238846-ssha-gotoviat-perevorot-v-gruzii-kakie-rychagi-davleniia-est-u-zapada> download date (14.09.2024)

and pro-government analysts, the “*Global War Party*”, ruling in the West, is seeking to bring to power in Georgia the forces that would facilitate the country’s involvement in the war against Russia and, in doing so, implement the plan of opening the “*second front against the RF*”⁷. This is something that Russian political circles constantly talk about. According to them, the main goal of Washington and the EU in reformatting the power in Georgia is just Tbilisi’s involvement in the war⁸. In turn, the acting opposition in Georgia and representatives of the collective West do not stop asserting that the narrative about the “*Second front*” and “*Ukrainization*” of Georgia is a lie having nothing to do with the reality⁹.

In the conditions of intensive political and informational activities of the parties around the “*Georgian geopolitical game*”, it is difficult to determine which of points of view is closest to reality. Most likely, the truth is somewhere in the middle of the declared narratives. It seems unlikely that the US and its allies would be able to organize the aforementioned “*Second front*” in Georgia in a short period of time, and it is doubtful that Georgia itself is ready in political, economic and demographic terms to implement such ambitious projects. However, this will not prevent the West, in case of a change in the political power in Tbilisi, from modeling a situation in Georgia, transmitting discomfort and tension to Russia. In particular, the issue is the high probability of establishing bases and training centers for Ukrainian forces in this country, similar to the complexes in Romania that were set in a brief period of time near the Moldovan border. It is also possible that the Georgian territory could be used for mass treatment and rehabilitation of Ukrainian soldiers. In addition, an intensive equipment of Georgia with new NATO air defense, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems both in the Black Sea area and over the skies of the Southern Russia may be expected. As for the economic component of the plan to reform Georgia, there is no doubt about the expected steps to eliminate the schemes helping the RF to bypass sanctions. The issue is related to the possibilities of re-export to Russia through Georgia, the “*shadow banking operations*” in the RF interests and other financial and economic transactions falling under the sanction measures by the US and EU. It could not be ruled out also that, under the Western pressure, Tbilisi will denounce the agreement on transferring the project of building the Anaklia deep-water port and the associated extensive logistic infrastructure in Georgia to the Chinese-Singaporean company CCCC, which was once entrusted to the Americans. This, in turn, will have a huge impact on the close political and economic cooperation established between Tbilisi and Beijing, based on the “*Declaration on Strategic Partnership*”, signed on July 31, 2023¹⁰.

⁷ «В Грузии заявили о планах влиятельных глобальных сил открыть «второй фронт» против РФ»: Интерфакс (22.05.2024), <https://www.interfax.ru/world/961865> (download date: 13.09.2024).

⁸ «Запад не оставил идею открыть на Кавказе «второй фронт» против России, уверен Джабаров»: Вместе – РФ (23.08.2024), <https://vmeste-rf.tv/news/zapad-ne-ostavil-ideyu-otkryt-na-kavkaze-vtoroy-front-protiv-rossii-uveren-dzhabarov/> (download date: 14.09.2024).

⁹ «Посол США в Тбилиси опровергает ложный нарратив об отношениях США и Грузии»: Голос Америки (14.06.2024), <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/posol-ssha-v-tbilisi-oprovergaet-lozhnyj-narrativ-ob-otnosheni-yah-ssha-i-gruzii/7656217.html> (download date: 15.09.2024).

¹⁰ «Грузия и КНР опубликовали совместное заявление о стратегическом партнерстве»: Civil Georgia (31.07.2023), <https://civil.ge/ru/archives/553863> (download date: 13.09.2024).

In general, the unlimited access to the Georgian geopolitical resource thanks to loyalty of the new authorities will give the US and its allies the opportunity not only to gain a foothold in the South Caucasian republic, but also to strengthen their positions in neighboring Armenia and expand the tools of pressure on Azerbaijan, which since 2020 has demonstrated some attempts to achieve a greater independence from the West and integrate into political and economic blocs under the RF and PRC auspices.

If, in case of a change of the Georgian power, the West achieves implementation of the above-mentioned points of its Georgian agenda, then it is they, taken in complex, that could become that very “*second front*” against Russia, for which, in this case, it is not necessary to recruit Georgian population and launch military actions. It is obvious that in Russia they see very well the real plans of the US and its allies, and also realize the high probability of their implementation, and therefore, for their part, they are seeking to thicken the colors of the “*revolutionary perspectives*” as much as possible and trying to warn Georgian society of an “*inevitable bloody war*”. After all, even considering the strong external interference from both Washington and Brussels, and Moscow and Beijing, a lot will depend on Georgian citizens themselves and their ability to soberly assess the current geopolitical situation around their country.