Georgia Backs Ukraine at the UN While Bilateral Rift Persists

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Executive Summary: On September 23, Georgia joined over 50 UN member states urging Russia to end its war, as Georgian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili invoked Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

- Georgian analysts call this a familiar balancing act. Since 2022, Georgian Dream has backed international declarations and sent humanitarian aid but refused national sanctions, pairing anti-Western rhetoric with efforts to avoid appearing pro-Russian.
- In January, Kyiv appointed its first ambassador to Tbilisi since 2023. Despite this, ties remain strained over former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's imprisonment, blocked volunteer fighters, and alleged political interference.

On September 23, during the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, more than 50 UN member states, including Georgia, adopted a joint statement in support of Ukraine, urging Russia to agree to a complete ceasefire and engage in negotiations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; Ukrainska Pravda, September 23). The partner states expressed their solidarity with Ukraine as it continues to fight against Russia's war of aggression. "Russia must cease its aggression, agree to a ceasefire, and engage substantively in negotiations to achieve a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in accordance with international law," the statement reads (SOVA News, September 23).

Georgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maka Botchorishvili joined the statement and stressed, at the sixth International Crimea Platform Summit in New York, that for Georgia, "the issue of Ukraine is not merely another item on the international agenda. We know all too well what the violation of a state's sovereignty and territorial integrity means" (SOVA News, September 23). According to Botchorishvili, Russia's occupation of two Georgian regions continues to this day and remains one of the primary security challenges facing the country.

"We are well aware of how devastating the impact of occupation can be on people, families, and society. It is based on this experience that Georgia attaches particular importance to solidarity, respect for international law, and unwavering commitment to the principles upon which a peaceful and secure international order must rest," Botchorishvili noted. She further stated, "Georgia stands firmly with the Ukrainian people and reaffirms its unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders" (JAM News, September 24).

Botchorishvili's remarks and Georgia's decision to join the statement drew significant reaction in political and expert circles, given ongoing tensions between Tbilisi and Kyiv. These tensions stem from the Georgian government's refusal in 2022 to allow volunteers to travel to Ukraine to assist its army, as well as from the arrest of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, a Ukrainian citizen (see EDM, October 4, 2021; Guriis Moambe, March 3, 2022; Rustavi 2, January 13, 2025).

David Avalishvili, a journalist with the independent outlet Nation.ge, argued that supporting an international document condemning Russian aggression is nothing new for Tbilisi. "Georgia has

joined and supported hundreds of international resolutions, declarations, and joint statements backing Ukraine's sovereignty and condemning Russian aggression since 2022" (Author's interview, October 2). Avalishvili noted that Georgia has consistently co-sponsored and voted in favor of UN General Assembly resolutions demanding that Russia withdraw its forces and respect Ukraine's territorial integrity (1TV, March 25, May 27, 2022). Tbilisi has also supported multiple resolutions, decisions, and recommendations on Ukraine within the Council of Europe and joined the invocation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) "Moscow Mechanism" to investigate human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law following the start of the full-scale invasion. Georgia was among the states that referred the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in March 2022 to investigate alleged war crimes (1TV, March 3, 2022).

The Georgian government has also periodically aligned with EU statements and declarations on sanctions and solidarity with Ukraine. According to Avalishvili, "Since the Russian aggression in 2022, the ruling Georgian Dream party adopted the following strategy: Tbilisi supported international declarations and sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine but did not impose national sanctions against Russia" (Author's interview, October 2).

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili have repeatedly accused the Ukrainian leadership and the West of attempting to "open a second front against Russia on Georgian territory" and of supporting Saakashvili to incite instability in the country (Interpressnews, July 21, 2022; Georgia Today, September 4, 2025; SOVA News, May 5).

Kyiv has taken steps to normalize relations with Tbilisi. In January, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appointed Mykhailo Brodovych, a career diplomat and former ambassador to Slovenia, as Ukraine's ambassador to Georgia, filling a post that had been vacant for nearly four years (1TV, January 27). Zelenskyy recalled then-Ukrainian Ambassador to Georgia Ihor Dolhov in March 2022, shortly after the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, citing the Georgian government's refusal to impose bilateral sanctions on Russia and its decision to block volunteer fighters from flying to Ukraine (Civil.ge, March 1, 2022).

Georgian experts attribute the authorities' conflicting messages on Ukraine to a desire to "maintain a balance." Georgian political scientist at Ilia State University Ghia Nodia argued that the Georgian government is extremely anti-Western in its domestic rhetoric and portrays the West (The United States and Europe) as the enemy, yet seeks to present itself to the Georgian public as trying to improve relations because it does not want to appear openly pro-Russian. "It explains why Georgia usually supports pro-Ukrainian resolutions," Nodia said. The government's latest steps, he argued, "are a sign of solidarity with the West not the Ukraine" but "Kyiv continues to be the enemy, at least a very unfriendly actor because Saakashvili's party United National Movement is pro-Ukrainian." According to Nodia, the ruling Georgian Dream party "cannot openly present itself as siding Russia against Ukraine. That's the explanation of its inconsistency" (Author's interview, October 2).

Other experts argue that the core problem lies in the bilateral political relationship. The Georgian government has objected to Ukrainian criticism of its domestic policies and to Kyiv's engagement with Georgian opposition figures (Front News, June 17, 2024; Kyiv Independent, December 5, 2024). It has also protested the role of wanted former Georgian officials in Ukraine and Kyiv's stance on Saakashvili (European Pravda, March 11, 2024). In addition, Tbilisi resents Kyiv's pressure over Georgia's position on Russia's war against Ukraine and sanctions, which, in its view, ignores the situation in Russian-occupied Georgia (Georgia Today, February 27; SOVA, May 5). Georgian political scientist Ghia Abashidze, who supports the Georgian Dream party, argued that meaningful normalization requires Kyiv to recognize Georgia's government as a legitimate sovereign counterpart and refrain from what Tbilisi regards as political interference. "It should also enable the

Georgian ambassador to return to Kyiv, restore the full-fledged activity of its own ambassador in Tbilisi, and reconsider the continued employment of fugitive Georgian officials in Ukrainian state structures, including the possibility of their extradition to Georgia in the future," Abashidze said (Author's interview, October 1).

Georgia has had no ambassador in Kyiv since July 2023, when Ukraine asked Georgian Ambassador to Ukraine Giorgi Zakarashvili to leave over the deteriorating health of the jailed Saakashvili (JAM News; Ukrainska Pravda, July 5, 2023). This shows that Georgia and Ukraine remain far from normalizing relations, a situation that further strains Georgia's relationship with the West.

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