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Gakharia resigns, international partners react to ongoing events

FORMER PM RESIGNED OVER THE ISSUE OF MELIA'S SENTENCING.



► Giorgi Gakharia has resigned as the Prime Minister of the country

BY NIKA GANTSEMLIDZE

Giorgi Gakharia announced his decision to resign as Georgian Prime Minister yesterday. Gakharia cited differences of opinion within the Georgian Dream team over Nika Melia's arrest warrant. As the former PM said, the arrest of the chairman of the United

National Movement would be a dangerous political move and it would end up escalating the already unstable and polarized political situation.

The Former Prime Minister of the country has also criticized Nika Melia for not disregarding the law and once again said that he is responsible for encouraging protests on June 20, 2019.

On Sunday, the Tbilisi City Court made a decision to arrest Melia for the violation of the conditions of the bail. This has led to mass protests in the country, and the international partners of Georgia reacted harshly.

The opposition of the country is demanding snap elections and welcomes the PM's decision to resign. Melia himself

noted that he appreciated the decision of the former Prime Minister and said that there is an urgent need for the government to start thinking about snap elections.

Melia noted that Gakharia's decision essentially means that he is admitting that the government of the country is ready for 'bloodshed and violence'. According to Melia and many other representatives of the opposition, the only way to overcome the crisis in the country is to hold snap elections.

The members of the Georgian Dream have reacted to Gakharia's decision. The Chairman of the party Irakli Kobakhidze said that the arguments of the former PM were simply not good enough and called on Melia to obey the law and said that he would still be detained.

The international partners of the country have already reacted to the ongoing events, calling Gakharia's decision to resign 'the right move'. The British agency has also commented on the ongoing events saying that the crisis is not in the best interest of any party and that the people of the country 'deserve better'.

The Parliament has to choose a new Prime Minister and cabinet in two weeks, if they fail to do so, in four weeks, the President will be able to break up the parliament and call for snap elections.



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GD nominates Defense Minister Gharibashvili as PM candidate for second term



► Irakli Gharibashvili served as the Georgian PM between November 2013 and December 2015.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Georgian Dream ruling party has nominated former PM, current Defense Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, 39, as prime ministerial candidate earlier yesterday, following the resignation of Giorgi Gakharia over UNM chair Nika Melia's coming sentencing on 18th of February.

Gharibashvili served as a prime minister between November 2013 and December 2015. He was the second PM under the Georgian Dream leadership, replacing the founder of the party Bidzina Ivanishvili.

In his resignation address in 2015 Gharibashvili said that 'posts are temporary. The only thing permanent is God and the homeland. So I have decided to leave my post.' Gharibashvili returned to politics in March 2019 as the political secretary of the ruling GD party. In September 2019, he was appointed as the country's defence minister.

MP Kobakhidze hailed Minister Gharibashvili as a 'professional with a distinguished experience, who can successfully lead the government and tackle challenges facing our country,' adding that GD's Political Council unanimously decided to put his candidacy forward.

GD leader Mamuka Mdinardze does not see a connection between Gharibashvili's appointing as PM and the ruling

party Bidzina Ivanishvili's involvement in it. He noted that Gharibashvili has a guaranteed support in the Parliament of Georgia. Mdinardze recalled that Gharibashvili's name is associated with many successful projects, including association agreement and emphasized the success of activities carried out by the Ministry of Defense in terms of Nato cooperation. The MP believes that Gharibashvili will play an important role when Georgia announces its desire to join the EU in 2024.

Gharibashvili himself named the COVID-19 pandemic and unemployment as the two most pressing issues for the new government to address. "we will soon restore order and balance, that is important for the country to function normally within the

frames of the constitution," he said.

Gharibashvili joined politics in late 2011 and served as the Interior Minister for a year before becoming the PM in November 2013 when Ivanishvili stepped down. In December 2015, Gharibashvili resigned and left the party. Before commencing a political career, the PM-nominee worked in Bidzina Ivanishvili's companies for 8 years in the business sector. He majored in International Relations at Tbilisi State University before studying Political Sciences at Sorbonne University in France.

Back in 2015, analysts linked Gharibashvili's resignation to sinking confidence ratings of the government, as well as the need to refresh the cabinet ahead of the 2016 Parliamentary elec-

tions. As the ex-PM explained, he considers it unjust to arrest the UNM's chairman as it poses a risk of political escalation. Gakharia that he could not reach an agreement with the team on Melia's case. "I have announced my resignation in the hope to reduce polarization and to deescalate the situation," he tweeted after the press briefing. In response, the MIA temporarily postponed the planned detention of Melia.

The PM's resignation means that his cabinet is also suspended and the parliament will have to approve the new PM and cabinet within the coming two weeks. If parliament fails to do so, the president will dismiss the parliament and snap parliamentary elections will be scheduled.

FRIDAY		FEBRUARY 19	
Day		More clouds	High: 4°C
Night		Cloudy	Low: -2°C
SATURDAY		FEBRUARY 20	
Day		Cloudy skies	High: 3°C
Night		Cloudy	Low: -1°C

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Nino Kavelashvili
Design and Layout

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EU, US Embassy call to avoid escalation



► “The US Embassy appreciates the restraint shown by the authorities and the opposition in the wake of the developments involving Nika Melia.”



► “Political deadlock can only be resolved in dialogue.” Peter Stano wrote on Twitter.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The European Union urged both the Georgian Government and the opposition “to act with utmost restraint and responsibility to avoid further escalation” in the wake of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia’s resignation over United National Movement Chair Nika Melia’s pre-trial detention ruling.

The EU strongly believes that the political deadlock can only be resolved through sincere political dialogue. They called for immediate de-escalation in the

interest of the country and of all Georgian citizens.

“Political courage and genuine democratic leadership are required to reach cross-party agreement and to avoid deepening polarisation. Broad political unity is needed to defuse tensions and further consolidate democracy in Georgia, including through ambitious and inclusive judicial and electoral reforms. Political stability and an inclusive parliamentary process are also pre-requisites for effectively addressing the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences,”

said Peter Stano, Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in the February 18 statement.

The EU’s statement underscored that the organization stands ready to continue supporting Georgia in this endeavour.

The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi also shared the statement last evening saying that “it is imperative that all those involved commit to de-escalating the current tensions so that a way forward can be agreed upon.”

“Georgia is facing extremely

serious challenges,” stated the U.S. Embassy, adding that “it is in the best interests of the people of Georgia that this political crisis be resolved quickly and peacefully.”

The Embassy stated they appreciate the restraint shown by the authorities and the opposition in responding to the events surrounding the case of Melia. The statement highlighted that the US remains ready to help to facilitate constructive dialogue in support of maintaining peace, stability, and the democratic process in Georgia.

“The United States stands ready to assist Georgia in finding a solution to the current crisis and to return focus to creating jobs, reducing poverty, and rebuilding the economy,” the Embassy emphasized.

The UK Embassy urged all involved to act responsibly, diffuse tension and allow Georgia’s continued progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration. “A protracted crisis is in no-one’s interest. The people of Georgia deserve better,” the UK embassy concluded.

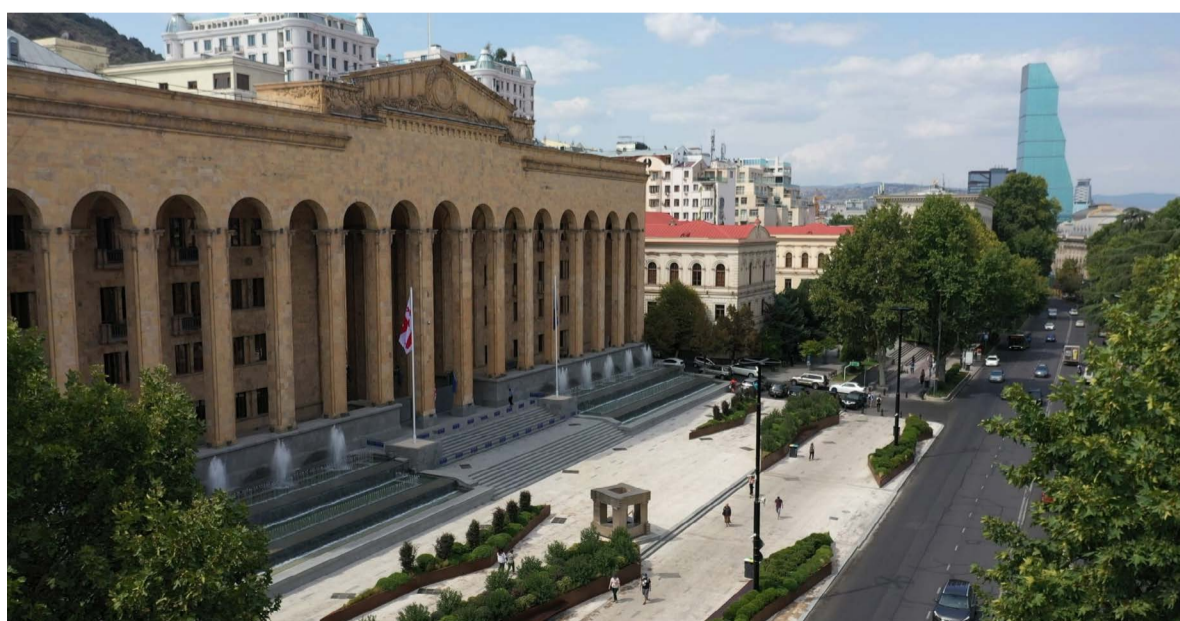
Special Commission of Georgian Parliament to investigate possible election violations

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On February 17, the Georgian Parliament announced the creation of a temporary commission that will investigate the conduct of the October 2020 Parliamentary Elections and assess whether any of the alleged violations took place.

The bill to create a special commission, authored by the member of the ruling Georgian Dream party Mamuka Mdinardze, was passed with 78 votes. The commission is created for three months, and, according to Mdinardze, members of the opposition bloc are welcome to join the commission to clear out any questions regarding the election results as the door to participate in the committee ‘remains open’.

As of now, the only members of the opposition bloc who expressed their readiness to participate in the investigation are the former members of the Alliance of Patriots party and the



founders of the new European Socialists party Davit Ziplimani and Prison Injia. Members of the Citizens party, Levan Ioseliani and Aleko Elisashvili, attended the plenary hearing during which the bill to form a commission was discussed but refused

to join the committee without other politicians, including the members of the United National Movement.

Speaker of the Parliament and a member of the Georgian Dream Archil Talakvadze said that according to the interna-

tional observers, the Parliamentary Elections of October 2020 were both competitive and carried out with the respect for fundamental freedoms. He added that it is in everyone’s interest to determine the shortcomings of the past elections that the

international observers cited in their reports, and to find out the truth together.

A large number of opposition parties believe that the parliamentary elections of last year were rigged, and, to this day, boycott their mandates and demand the repeat elections to be held. Last year, the ruling party promised to satisfy the repeated calls for re-elections if the investigation of the special parliamentary commission determines that at least 1% of votes were rigged or falsified.

The current Chairman and a former Executive Secretary of the Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze announced in December last year that he is confident that not even 0.1% of votes received by the ruling party are illegal. Despite the efforts of the diplomatic corps who mediated the talks between the ruling party and the opposition, the agreement to end the ongoing political crisis has not been reached yet.