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# Formula journalist Vakho Sanaia attacked, three people arrested

SANAIA WAS ATTACKED ON FEBRUARY 25



► Sanaia talked about the incident and said that he felt a direct aggression from the attackers towards critical media

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia issued a statement regarding the attack on the Formula TV journalist Vakho Sanaia and one of his relatives. As the statement of the agency reads, three people were arrested. Formula TV also made a statement, saying that the incident happened yesterday, on February 25.

"The investigation revealed that the accused, who were drunk, physically abused Formula TV journalist and his relative," MIA statement reads.

Sanaia talked about the incident and said that he felt a direct aggression from the attackers towards critical media. He recalls that a rescue team was called to move the car due to icy roads, at which point, three people approached them. According to Sanaia, one of the three attackers was constantly 'provoking' and trying to 'challenge' him.

The newly elected Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, condemns the attack on journalist Vakho Sanaia. According to Gharibashvili, the response from the state will be adequate and the perpetrators will be held accountable according to the law.

According to Mamuka Mdinardze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, it does not matter if you like a person's

professional activity, there is no justification for violence.

"Violence against anyone, especially if it is against a journalist, is categorically unacceptable," reads the statement of Mdinardze.

Transparency International Georgia has also issued a special statement about the case. TI strongly condemns the violent attack against Sanaia. They call on the authorities to effectively investigate the incident and punish those responsible to the full extent of the law.

"This incident is the result of the government's aggressive and hateful rhetoric against the critical media, journalists and people who hold different opinions. Accordingly, these actions encourage this kind of violence which endangers freedom of speech and expression," reads the statement of TI.

The statement of TI also notes that the government has an obligation to ensure the safe working environment for journalists. Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria said that the assault against

Vakho Sanaia is extremely concerning and believes that the response from the authorities to such events should be strict. Public Defender's office called on the MIA to carry out an effective investigation and ensure adequate punishment of perpetrators.

The US Embassy in Tbilisi condemns the attack on journalist Vakho Sanaia and his family and calls on the authorities to fully investigate the case as well as other unsolved cases of violence against journalists.



► TI strongly condemns the violent attack against Sanaia

# 100 years since Soviet occupation of Georgia



By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On February 25, Georgia marked 100 years since the day Georgia was occupied by Bolshevik Red Army and lost its temporary, 3-year independence. In commemoration of the victims of Soviet occupation, national flags were flying at half-staff at the Georgian Parliament, Presidential palace, and other government

buildings. High-ranking government officials visited a cemetery in Kojori to pay a tribute to the Georgian cadets who died in a battle against the Red Army.

In his address commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Soviet occupation, newly appointed PM Irakli Garibashvili said that February 25 is one of the most tragic days in the history of Georgia, and the date reminds all of the coun-

try's citizens of the heroism of their ancestors, who died fighting for their homeland. He added that despite Russia's temporary occupation of the Georgian territories, the country is still moving forward towards a stronger economy and democracy, and, by achieving union within, Georgia will be able to secure more victories in the future. Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs David

Zakaliani tweeted "Exactly a century has passed since the brutal invasion of Soviet Russia's Red Army to Georgia, and the fall of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Today we honor the memory of the heroes, who stood up against the Soviet Occupation in 1921 and sacrificed their lives in order for us to enjoy Independence today!"

In his address Speaker of

the Georgian Parliament and member of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Archil Talakvadze reminded that although Georgia is now a sovereign country, some of its territories remain occupied, and added that he is sure that "we will complete our ancestor's fight for freedom."

Members of the Georgian opposition bloc, who also visited the cemetery to commemorate the victims of the Soviet occupation addressed the ongoing crisis and a "symbolic detention of one of the opposition leaders", just a day before the 100th anniversary, a move that, according to the opposition, jeopardized Georgian Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

On February 25, 1921, Red Army entered Tbilisi and overthrew the government which was appointed by free general elections. The day of Soviet occupation was first marked in 2010, following the Parliament's unanimous vote in favor of a yearly commemoration of the victims of repressions of the occupying regime on February 25.

## EU Delegation Spokesperson comments on Melia's arrest

MELIA IS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF GEORGIA'S MAIN OPPOSITION PARTY UNM



► Spokesperson of the delegation the government of Georgia to provide inclusive leadership.



► Melia was arrested on Tuesday.

The Spokesperson of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia has issued a statement regarding the ongoing events in the country.

"Following the arrest of Nikanor Melia, Chairperson of the United National Movement - the largest opposition party in Georgia, political polarisation in the country has regrettably further deepened. This polarisation risks undermining Georgia's democracy. The European Union urges all parties to step up efforts to de-escalate and come together to find common ground," reads the statement of the spokesperson.

The statement reads that it expects the government of Georgia to provide inclusive leadership, putting the interest of the Georgian people first. The statement also noted that independent and accountable judiciary is also paramount. The statement once again notes that the European Union continues to be very attentive to developments in this regard.

"It is crucial that the opposi-

tion plays a constructive role, including by joining the Parliament, to further consolidate democracy and the rule of law in Georgia, and to help shape the country's reform path," noted Spokesperson.

The statement of EU Delegation Spokesperson also reads that for deepening Georgia's partnership with the EU and the Association Agreement, political stability, with all sides avoiding

provocative actions and rhetoric, an inclusive parliamentary process, as well as judicial system that enjoys the trust of the Georgian citizens are very important and act as prerequisites.

Nika Melia, one of the leaders of the main opposition party in Georgia, United National Movement, was arrested early Tuesday. The decision was followed by large protests in the city, many more being announced.

FRIDAY		FEBRUARY 26	
Day		Cloudy skies	
		High: 8°C	
Night		A few clouds	
		Low: -2°C	
SATURDAY		FEBRUARY 27	
Day		Partly cloudy	
		High: 12°C	
Night		Clear	
		Low: -1°C	

published by **The Messenger**

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PREPARED BY LIZA NORWICH-GERWIK

## Public Defender believes that the state should respond strongly to Vakho Sanaia's attack



Georgia Public Defender Nino Lomjaria believes that the state response to the attack on Formula One journalist Vakho Sanaia should be tough. According to him, the profession of a journalist and his independence is the most important sign of the state's democracy.

"If a journalist is attacked for his or her activities, this criminal act requires an adequate and rigorous response to prevent similar incidents in the future. ... reads a statement issued by Lomjaria.

## Military exercises are underway in the occupied Tskhinvali region

In the villages along the occupation line, in Nikozi and Ergneti, you hear the sound of explosions and gunfire coming from the occupied territories in the morning.

The personnel of the occupation forces are undergoing military training at the occupied village of Dzartsemi in the Didi Liakhvi gorge. According to Ossetian media, the exercise began on February 19 with the training of snipers on mountainous terrain and the tactics of destroying conventional opponents. In recent days, artillery training is already underway.

The sound of explosions is so loud that the windows of houses in Georgian villages are ringing. Lika Kasradze, a resident of the village of Ergneti, says that the sound of explosions is a common occurrence for the people of Ergneti. "It has been going on for years. Exercises are held periodically.

The State Security Service also responded to the ongoing military exercises in the occupied territories. The SSU says that the occupying forces of the Russian Federation stationed in the occupied Tskhinvali region have been conducting illegal military exercises on the ground from time to time. The "hot line" is activated and the EUMM is informed.

"Illegal military exercises conducted by the Russian occupation forces are a key issue for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) and the Geneva International Discussions. Illegal military exercises significantly damage the security environment on the ground and aim to instill a sense of fear and insecurity in the local population. "The Russian Federation is responsible for all illegal actions in the occupied territories," the statement said.

The fourth military base of the Russian Federation was located in the occupied Tskhinvali region after the August 2008 war. The military servicemen of this base conduct drills at the occupied village of Dzartsemi from time to time. In the Georgian villages near the occupation line, you especially hear the sound of artillery drills.

## EMC considers the attack on Vakho Sanaia as a result of aggressive public rhetoric towards journalists

The Center for Human Rights Education and Monitoring believes that it is necessary to conduct a case of violence against Formula One journalist Vakho Sanaia without delay.

The organization believes that another part of the qualification of "violence" should be added, which provides for responsibility for crimes committed on the grounds of "hate".

"In our view, such cases are the result of polarization of the political environment, aggressive public rhetoric against opponents and critical media organizations and journalists, which exposes the risks of violence and confrontation to the micro-social level and creates an insecure and hostile environment for political, civic and media actors." In a statement.

## If Nika Melia pays bail, the prosecutor's office is ready to request a change of detention

Prosecutor Amiran Guluashvili held a briefing after the Court of Appeals declared Melia's complaint inadmissible.

According to him, if Nika Melia, the Chairman of the United National Movement, pays the amount [40,000 GEL] that the court order him on bail on November 3, the prosecutor's office is ready to apply to the court to change the detention.

"The prosecution has repeatedly stated that the detention of Nikanor Melia is not an end in itself of the prosecutor's office. "Accordingly, in case of fulfillment of the bail conditions set by the defense as determined by the judge on November 3, the prosecution expresses its readiness to apply to the Tbilisi City Court to change the bail used against the accused Nikanor Melia, " said the head of the Prosecutor's Office.

Yesterday, on February 25, the Tbilisi Court of Appeals did not accept Melia's appeal. Under the current legislation, the measure of restraint imposed during the substantive hearing of the case is not appealed in the Court of Appeals, although Melia's lawyers considered this norm unconstitutional. Melia's lawyer, Dimitri Sadzaglishvili, told RFE / RL that if a judge of the Court of Appeals appealed to the Constitutional Court to consider the norm unconstitutional, the case of Nika Melia would be suspended until the Constitutional Court rules.

On the night of February 17, the Tbilisi City Court granted the motion of the Prosecutor's Office and commuted the previous measure of restraint imposed on Nika Melia - bail. Prosecutors demanded Melia's arrest after he refused to pay bail. Prior to the court decision, the majority of the Georgian Dream in the Georgian Parliament lifted the immunity of Nika Melia MP.

As early as June 27, 2019, Melia was sentenced to 30,000 GEL bail as a deterrent, then the Parliament lifted his immunity for the first time. Melia paid 30,000 GEL for the first time, but after the electronic bracelet was demonstratively removed at a rally in front of the parliament in November 2020, the Prosecutor General's Office once again appealed to the court to release Nika Melia on 100,000 GEL bail, although the court set 40,000 GEL, which he did not pay. This was followed by a request from the prosecutor's office to aggravate the measure of restraint - imprisonment.

