

## Protesters gathered at Pushkin Square demand publication of culture ministry's plans for Fine Arts Museum



► The engineering study commissioned by the ministry contained conclusions on the current state of the Museum of Fine Arts, which said that the side of the venue facing the adjacent Gudishvili Street side 'might not be commercially viable'.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

A rally was held at Pushkin Square to save a multi-year building in the center of Tbilisi, where the Art Museum is located. Yesterday, two rallies were organized with similar demand; however, given the current epidemic situation, the organizers of the rally invited only vaccinated citizens.

"The building with the status of a cultural heritage monument of national importance, the Shalva Amiranashvili Art Museum, the collection preserved in it, is a treasure of Georgian culture and its function should not be changed!" - say the organizers of the rally.

The requirements of the rally are:

The project of strengthening and restoration of the building of the Art Museum should be performed by specialists of high professional qualification and inviolable reputation.

A detailed plan for the evacuation of museum funds and exhibits should be made public, indicating the responsible persons, the exact location of the temporary placement of the exhibits, and the process should be avoided by unqualified officials.

The Ministry of Culture should ensure public involvement in decisions related to the Art Museum and full transparency of the process.

According to the decision of the Minister of Culture, the evacuation of the Art Museum should start on August 5, and the building should be completely emptied of thousands of exhibits in a few months. The 10-page evacuation plan does not say where the museum's golden exhibits are transferred to.

Protesters say they have no confidence in the government and it is important that all exhibits that leave the museum are returned after rehabilitation. Protesters plan to apply to the Ministry of Education and collect signatures.

Recall that on July 4, 2021, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs of Georgia, Tea Tsulukiani, issued a special statement informing the public that the Shalva Amiranashvili State Museum of Art has entered a special mode of management. The reason is the breakdown of the building and the insecurity of the exhibits.

The statement said that the Ministry, in April 2021, began to study the condition of the Shalva Amiranashvili State Museum of Art in April 2021 and finally decided to restore the museum, which houses more than 80% of Georgia's art.

It should be noted that the expert report does not recommend the dismantling of the building and, in general, does not mention the need for this size. We read in the conclusion that as a result of a number of measures, it is quite possible to strengthen the central part of the building, to ensure its safe operation. The events surrounding

the Art Museum following this announcement have provoked protests from a section of the public, although the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Education has said nothing about the potential restoration and is starting to empty the museum.

The conclusion of the engineering study commissioned by ministry led opposition-minded media channels, a part of the public and culture field professionals to conclude the ministry was preparing grounds for "demolishing" the museum for the benefit of a recently constructed nearby hotel belonging to the highly controversial Panorama Tbilisi, a \$500 million development project implemented by the Georgian Co-Investment Fund - established by Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Despite the ministry's plans to restore the museum, announced back in April and again in the 10-year action plan presentation the claims were made and they were aided by managerial changes made by the ministry, including a removal of Eka Kiknadze, the former manager of the museum, from the evacuation plan of the venue's exhibits in April. She said a new plan for the evacuation, made after her demotion, had not been made available to her despite her administrative letter with the demand which has led to suspicions.

Local offices of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS Georgia) and International Council of Museums (ICOM Georgia), as well as the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield have issued a joint statement last week which called the state authority's plan to evacuate all exhibits from the museum to neighbouring Georgian National Museum venues within 6 months impossible and unrealistic. The statement also noted that the preservation of the monument 'would only be acceptable through safeguarding its authenticity and integrity'.



► The rally 'Save the Art Museum' was attended by civil activists, politicians and representatives of the cultural sphere.



# Mariana Choloiani, arrested for Luka Siradze's case released from prison

CHOLOIANI WAS SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS IN PRISON IN SEPTEMBER 2020



► GYLA assed the decision as a direct incitement to any crime that may be committed by law enforcement

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

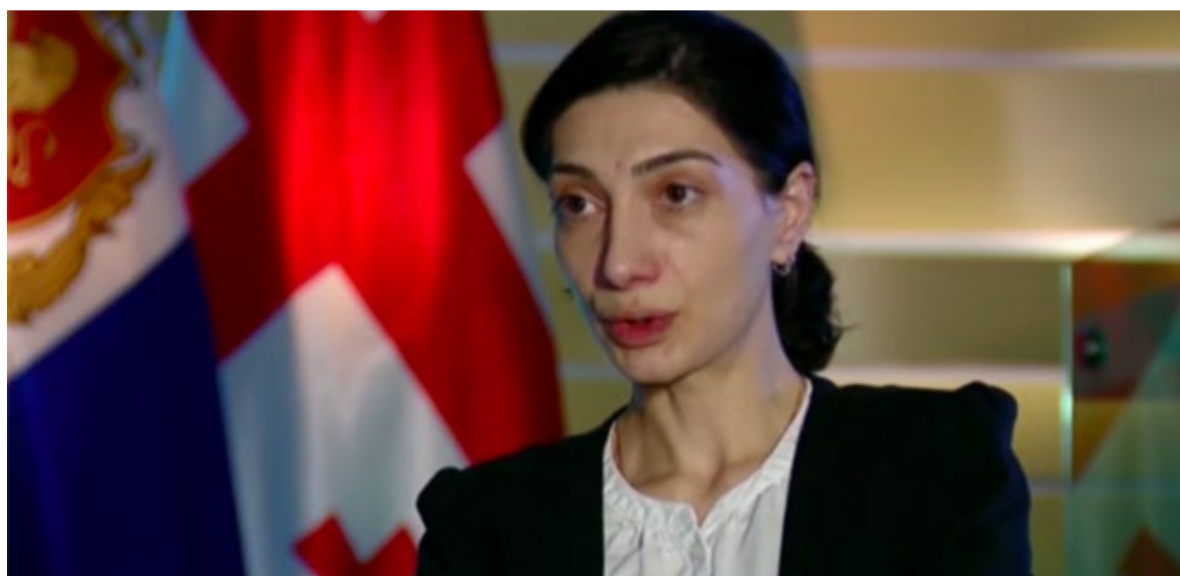
Investigator Mariana Choloiani was released from prison, the information was confirmed by her lawyer, Gagi Mosiashvili. Choloiani was arrested after 15-year-old Luka Siradze committed suicide. She was accused of coercing the victim into admitting to the crime.

Siradze's brother talked about it with Formula TV, calling it unacceptable and derogatory. She was sentenced in September 2020 to three years in prison for coercion to testify.

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association issued a special statement saying that this is a direct incitement to any crime that may be committed by law enforcement. According to them, only one person was arrested in the case of Luka Siradze, and the investigation was ineffective concerning other parts.

According to the GYLA Chairman, the commission was not interested in the position of Luka Siradze's family and all this indicates that there is no fair investigation in the country.

According to the organization, Luka Siradze was summoned to the police station in December 2019 for questioning because of the graffiti on the walls of the Green School. The questioning, conducted by Mariana Choloiani but also involved other police officers. It was con-



► Choloiani was accused of coercing the victim into admitting to the crime

ducted under psychological violence. Following the interrogation, he attempted suicide and died on December 17, 2019, as a result of the injuries received.

The Green School appealed to the police to launch an investigation because on the territory of the school someone had left various inscriptions late at night. According to sources, it was believed to be done by 15-year-old Luka Siradze, who was a former student of the Green School.

According to GYLA, during the interrogation, Luka Siradze was confronted with his former classmate and was psychologically abused during questioning, after which he jumped from the ninth floor. For several days he was in a coma.

According to GYLA, Choloiani is also present on May 26, 2011, the so-called Kintsvisi case, when Nikoloz Goguadze was arrested. According to the statement of the organization, Goguadze was arrested near the Kintsvisi Monastery Complex, after which, he suffered from psychological and physical abuse at the hands of the investigators in an attempt to coerce him into pleading guilty.

Choloiani denied accusations of abuse in court. However, in 2019, the European Court of Human Rights has established that mistreatment took place.

## THE NEWS IN BRIEF

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

### EU report: Finalise the reform of the Supreme Court by bringing the selection procedure for judges fully in line with Venice Commission recommendations and with European standards

Overall, Georgia continues to fulfil the visa liberalisation benchmarks and has taken action to address the Commission recommendations. However, further efforts are needed to address the issue of unfounded asylum applications in Member States as well as in the areas of anti-money laundering, the prevention and fight against corruption and against organized crime, - reads 4th report on the monitoring of the EU visa-free regime with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Commission makes several recommendations to Georgia: "Continue to proactively address the issue of unfounded asylum applications in Member States; tailor the information campaigns on the visa-free regime to relevant migrant profiles, including as regards vulnerable groups, overstays and unfounded asylum applications.

Improve the efficiency of anti-corruption institutions and law enforcement agencies in order to better address the cases of high corruption; ensure that all such cases are investigated.

Finalise the reform of the Supreme Court by bringing the selection procedure for judges fully in line with Venice Commission recommendations and with European standards; 26 finalise the reform of prosecution, including by the separation of functions between investigators and prosecutors; finalise the operational development of the FIU by ensuring that (a) it is able to obtain necessary information from reporting entities and (b) has full access on a timely basis to the necessary financial, administrative and law enforcement information to undertake its functions properly; continue the efforts in the prevention and fight against organised crime, in particular against the laundering of profits from illegal activities; continue efforts to fully align national legislation with the EU acquis on AntiMoney Laundering and Counter Terrorist Financing.

Ensure further alignment of Georgia's visa policy with the EU lists of visa-required third countries, in particular as regards those third countries which present irregular migration or security risks for the EU," reads the statement by EU.

FRIDAY		AUGUST 6	
Day		Mainly sunny	High: 37°C
Night		Clear skies	Low: 22°C
FRIDAY		AUGUST 7	
Day		Partly cloudy	High: 36°C
Night		cloudy	Low: 22°C

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