

Illegally Detained Georgian Citizen Released From Tskhinvali Prison

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Gela Gochoshvili, a citizen of Georgia illegally detained by the occupation regime for 'crossing the border' on August 14, has been released, the State Security Service (SSG) reported on Sunday.

As Gochoshvili told journalists, he was visiting his uncle in the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region to bring him medicine and was arrested while he was on his way back to Tbilisi-controlled territory. He was initially transferred to a Russian military base and later to a temporary detention center in occupied Tskhinvali. As Gochoshvili noted, he had 3 packs of cigarettes with him and the occupying forces accused him of smuggling. The de-facto court initially sentenced him to one-year imprisonment, however, the sentence was reduced to six months after appealing the decision. Finally, as a result of measures taken by the Georgian government, Gochoshvili was released in four months. He reported that he was not subjected to psychological or physical pressure dur-



Illegally detained Georgian citizen was accused of crossing the border and 'smuggling'.



SSG holds the Russian Federation fully responsible for the destructive actions carried out on the ground.

ing his detention.

According to the SSG, the issue of immediate release of a Georgian citizen from illegal detention was regularly raised by the Georgian central government at the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) and the Geneva International Discussions.

"illegal detention of Georgian citizens by the Russian occupation forces violates fundamental human rights and damages the security environment on the ground," the SSG noted in the statement.

Unlawful detentions of Georgian citizens near the occupation line is a common issue. Currently, three other Georgian citizens remain in custody. According to the SSG, the central government of Georgia is actively using all the mechanisms at its disposal to release other illegally detained Georgian citizens. SSG holds the Russian Federation fully responsible for the destructive actions carried out on the occupation line and in the occupied territories.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.0958; Euro - 3.4964; GBP - 4.1038; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.1862; Swiss Franc - 3.3621

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

In November, the Georgian government announced new regulations for online gambling businesses, and the draft bill of the regulations was submitted to the parliament on December 13.

Per the legislative document, online gambling businesses will see up to a 70% increase in taxes, gambling advertisements will be banned completely and the lower age limit for gamblers will increase to 25 years of age. The bill was supported in two hearings and parliament will make a final decision by the end of the year. The legislative package consists of several bills, one of which includes amendments to the Law on Advertising and Broadcasting.

The bill, among other factors, was criticized in this regard. According to the Media Coalition, the impact of the changes envisaged by the project on the revenues of broadcasters is not properly assessed.

It's no surprise that this decision is not supported by Gambling companies. When the bill was first initiated, the Gambling Business Association released a statement, saying if this law was adopted, they would have to cancel their funding of sports.

On December 20th, the Association held a press conference regarding the termination of funding for Georgian sports sponsorship. The expected legislative regulations and the need to optimize costs arising from these regulations were discussed at the press conference.

According to the Association, the approval of the draft law will make it impossible for gambling companies to further invest in sports, which will harm the development of sports in Georgia.

Representatives of Georgian sports attended the conference in support of the Gambling Business Association. Athletes stated that increased taxes for the business will not allow it to further sponsor sport in Georgia and

Georgian Athletes in Support For Gambling Business Association



The Head of the GGA Mamulaishvili said that if legislative restrictions are approved by the parliament, gambling "businesses will no longer have the opportunity to make large investments in various fields."

thus "will put many kinds of sports in a difficult situation and kill prospects for development."

Arm wrestler Levan Saginashvili believes that if these regulations come into force in the form in which they are now presented and because of this the gambling business will stop funding sports, it will be disastrous for the sport:

"I can say that I will either have to leave the country or I will have to give up sports. The state has a very small number of athletes who have a decent salary and income. I have nothing from the state. I am dependent only on the sponsor," Saghinashvili said.

Weightlifter Lasha Talakhadze notes that if the ath-

letes who are now funded by the gambling business stop receiving funds, it will be unfortunate.

A statement issued by the Georgian Gambling Business Association said that the expected regulations will put the heaviest pressure on companies operating in the gambling business sector.

"Despite our great concern, this will automatically lead to the need to optimize costs and make it impossible to further invest in the development of Georgian sports. Unfortunately, in the conditions of approval of the announced legislative restrictions, the gambling business sector will have to refuse to sponsor sports, which will harm the development of sports itself.

Also, the industry will have to reduce or abandon sports broadcasts. Accordingly, today we have invited representatives of sports to express our heartache around these events, to share with you our next steps. No matter how painful it is for us to make such a decision, if the government had left us another way, we would have acted differently."

The Head of Georgian Gambling Association Giorgi Mamulaishvili in his turn added that adoption of this law will harm not only one specific area but also the population. People who want to play will enter the illegal market and no one should have the illusion that this will change for the better.



Prohibition of gambling advertising in the media and raising the gambling age limit 25 years will be postponed until March 1.

Nika Melia to Meet Salome Zurabishvili

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

UNM Chairman Nika Melia says he will meet with Salome Zurabishvili next week.

As he said, this information was given to him by Khatia Dekanoidze, who met with the President today, on December 21.

"As Khatia told me, a meeting between me and Ms. Zurabishvili is scheduled for next week. She will call us and I, along with several members of my party, will be happy to come. It will appear very soon before this process. But it is a parallel process. "Mikheil Saakashvili should not be im-

prisoned," Melia said.

After Salome Zurabishvili said that she was starting an inclusive process of national consent, she also started meeting with members of the opposition.

On December 21, the President met with UNM member Khatia Dekanoidze, as well as Movement for the People leader Ana Dolidze, Independent MP Salome Samadashvili, and members of Lelo and Girchi.

Tomorrow, on December 22, Zourabichvili will meet with the leader of Droa, Elene Khoshtaria, and the leader of Girchi-More Freedom, Zurab Paridze.



Nika Melia

Weather

Wednesday, December 22

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 4°C
Night Partly Cloudy Low: -4°C

Thursday, December 23

Day Partly Cloudy High: 2°C
Night Partly Cloudy Low: -5°C

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