

## PM Garibashvili Pays Official Visit to Brussels

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Within the framework of an official two-day visit to Brussels, Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia holds bilateral meetings at the European Council, Commission, and Parliament, as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The main topics on the agenda are the European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, matters related to the EU Accession Questionnaire, as well as the regional security situation.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister met with Charles Michel, President of the European Council. According to the official statement, during the meeting, the parties held extensive discussions on the process of reviewing Georgia's application, also the country's progress toward implementing the Association Agreement and carrying out democratic reforms. Garibashvili thanked Charles Michel for his effort toward supporting Georgia's path to European integration.

"The Prime Minister underlined Georgia's historical choice to return to the European family, emphasizing in this context the importance of the European Commission's opinion and the European Council's decision on granting Georgia the status of a candidate country," the statement of the governmental press service reads.

The sides also focused on the regional security issues concerning Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, as well as the



Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili and President of the European Council Charles Michel.

state of affairs in Georgia's occupied territories. Garibashvili highlighted that ending the war in Ukraine is crucially important to everyone and that 'the consequences of this war will define the future of both the whole world and Georgia'.

The Prime Minister also met with the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and discussed the prospects of granting a status of an EU Candidate Country to Georgia. The Head of the Government of Georgia emphasized the unwavering support demonstrated by

the European Parliament and EU institutions in Georgia's path to European integration. The extended meeting was followed by a face-to-face meeting between the Prime Minister of Georgia and the President of the European Parliament. After the meeting, the prime minister wrote on Twitter that the submission of the membership questionnaire by the Georgian Government during the "recent geopolitical shifts" stood as another confirmation of the "irreversibility of European choice of Georgian people".

### The News in Brief

## MEPs on Gvaramia's Arrest: Selective Justice Threatens the Country's European Choice

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

MEPs have issued a joint statement regarding the arrest of Nika Gvaramia, Director General of the Main Channel, noting that this is a continuation of the deterioration of the rule of law in Georgia.

The statement issued by 8 MEPs stated that selective justice is irreparably damaging to Georgia's reputation and threatening its European choice to join the EU.

"The Georgian court's guilty verdict without convincing evidence against the CEO of the TV station, Nika Gvaramia, and his two associates, continues to undermine the rule of law in Georgia.

Unfortunately, the dubious court ruling echoes the widespread pattern of harassment, intimidation, and physical assault on critical media representatives.

Many of us have already spoken about Mr. Gvaramia's repeated attacks, including when a senior Georgian government official released Gvaramia's personal data from the rostrum of Parliament. Then our justified concern was met by representatives of the ruling party with arguments of 'redirection'.

The unsubstantiated decision of the Georgian court is the result of a long overdue judicial reform, which Georgia undertook under the April 19 agreement, but has never fulfilled.

Selective justice and further deterioration of democratic institutions are irreparably damaging to Georgia's reputation and threatening its European choice to become a candidate and eventually a member of the European Union.

"This is completely contrary to what the Georgian people want and what they deserve," the statement said.

The statement was signed by Andrew Kubilius, Anna Fotiga, Marchetta Gregorova, Michael Gallery, Petra Austrevichius, Rafael Glucksmann, Sven Mixer and Viola von Cramon.

On May 16, the Tbilisi City Court found Nika Gvaramia, General Director of the Main Channel, guilty and sentenced him to 3 years and 6 months in prison.

The prosecutor's office accused Nika Gvaramia, the founder of the main channel, of embezzling a large amount of property belonging to the TV station, commercial bribery, making and using a forged official document, as well as legalizing illegal income, while he was still the director of Rustavi 2.



Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili and President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola.



# Diplomatic Missions in Georgia Call for Decisive Action to Protect LGBTQI+ rights

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Marking the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia, UN Georgia and EU delegation, as well as the Head of EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and Embassies of 28 countries, including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, issued the joint statement expressing regrets that as in previous years, safety and security concerns prevent people from openly displaying their solidarity with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community.

“On the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), we reiterate our solidarity with community in Georgia. LGBTQI+ persons remain among the least protected and most marginalized in Georgia. They face discrimination and violence, which often are underreported, while the protection and realization of their rights remain a challenge.

We regret that as in previous years, considerations of safety and security prevent people from openly showing their solidarity with the LGBTQI+ community and raising their voices against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in Georgia.

We wish to stress that the Government of Georgia is responsible for safeguarding the right to peaceful assembly, preventing discrimination and violence, and ensuring that everyone in Georgia can commemorate IDAHOBIT openly and publicly in full confidence that their rights and safety are duly protected.”

The diplomatic corps focuses on the events that took place in Tbilisi on July 5 last year and calls on the authorities to pro-



ecute all instigators and perpetrators of violence.

“We take note that several individuals were sentenced to prison terms for their involvement in the shameful events of 5 July 2021 that led to the disruption of the March for Dignity and resulted in violence against LGBTQI+ persons and the media. We urge the authorities to bring all instigators and perpetrators of violence to justice.”

The signatories also note that the growing number of Georgian citizens supports diversity and believes that the protection of the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals is important.

“A recent survey points towards a continued increase in the percentage of Georgians who consider restrictions of the right to assembly and expression for LGBTQI+ communities unacceptable and believe that the State does not respond adequately to acts of violence and discrimination against the LGBTQI+ persons.”

The statement emphasized that the state policy and practice must align with Georgia’s international commitments and respond to these social changes by duly ensuring that LGBTQI+ rights are effectively protected, including through the forthcoming National Human Rights

Strategy and Action Plan. Enhanced social protection measures are needed to support vulnerable LGBTQI+ persons struggling with food and housing insecurity, an elevated risk of homelessness and barriers in accessing healthcare.

Diplomatic Corps urged Georgian state, political, civic and religious leaders to spare no effort to fight discrimination, stigma and violence within their respective areas of responsibility, including by embracing respectful and compassionate public discourse and engaging in constructive dialogue with LGBTQI+ communities in seeking solutions to the most pressing challenges.

“We stand united for the right of all people to live free and equal in safety and dignity and remain committed to supporting the people of Georgia in building an inclusive society that empowers and protects all its members.”

Public Defender has also issued a statement emphasizing the insufficient efforts of the state to reduce inequality. According to the Ombudsman, LGBTQI+ people and their supporters have not been able to celebrate this day publicly for years due to the risks of violence and the lack of state protection guarantees.

The Ombudsman emphasized that the issue of timely, effective and accountable investigation of hate crimes is a significant challenge. The state has not yet developed a unified strategy to combat hate crimes, and the state response to homo/transphobic crimes still fails to meet standards of efficiency, timeliness, and impartiality.

The Ombudsman also recalls July 5, 2021, when leaders and other members of far-right groups directly and publicly called for violence against members of the LGBT+ community and their support, and the police were not adequately effective in curbing violence.

“Although the visibility of the LGBT+ community has increased over the years and discriminatory attitudes in the society have decreased, this process is not accompanied by a consistent and sensible state policy. Moreover, state legal inaction encourages inequality against LGBT+ people. It leaves their quality of life vulnerable to violence and discrimination.”

Recall that on the day of the fight against homophobia and transphobia, in 2014 the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Georgia declared the Family Purity day. This year, an icon of the All-Holy Mother of God of

Atskuri was brought to the Sioni Temple from Kashveti to celebrate this day. Prior to the procession, the co-patriarch, reverend Shio, paid his respects. Before that, a service was held in Svetitskhoveli, from where the procession with icons started in the direction of Tbilisi.

The same day, the US embassy issued a security alert, urging U.S. government personnel are to exercise caution, avoid large demonstrations, and not participate in any events outside of official duties. Embassy wrote that it has received multiple reports of groups calling for demonstrations and marches on May 17 across Tbilisi against the LGBTQI+ community.

“These groups have indicated they will remain on the streets ‘until dark’ to prevent the LGBTQI+ community from gathering in celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia, and Transphobia. They also indicated that if, in their patrol of neighborhoods, they witness any LGBTQI+ gatherings, marches, or celebrations, they will physically confront the individual(s) or groups involved, remove signs and banners, and remove the LGBTQI+ participants from the streets.”

## Weather

Wednesday, May 18

Day Clear  
High: 24°C

Night Clear  
Low: 12°C

Thursday, May 19

Day Clear  
High: 25°C

Night Light Rain  
Low: 11°C

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