

Prosecutor's Office Initiates Prosecution Against Five Individuals for Operating Scam Call Centers

By Liza Mchedlidze

The General Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, in collaboration with Eurojust, the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, and relevant German agencies, has initiated criminal prosecution against three organizers of the 'call center,' one member of the organized group, and one legal entity, according to their statement.

The 'call center' employees contacted German citizens, using fictitious names, providing false information about their company's location. They offered participation in electronic trading of securities, shares, commodity assets, currencies, and cryptocurrencies using electronic platforms created by the criminal group.

Operators assured users that, with their assistance in electronic trading, substantial profits were guaranteed. In reality, the funds allocated by the victims for electronic trading were fraudulently obtained.

The prosecutor's office states that, in an effort to legitimize the illegally obtained funds, the criminal group engaged in multiple fictitious transactions on bank accounts. Consequently, the money was integrated into economic turnover through the purchase of various properties, including real estate. Under this scheme, the group successfully laundered tens of millions of GEL in illegally obtained income.

The investigative agency stated that criminal prosecution has been initiated against all five defendants for the act of legalizing illegal income, which carries a sentence of imprisonment ranging from



9 to 12 years.

Additionally, as per the investigation, real estate owned by the defendants, worth several million GEL, have been seized, preventing them from further disposing of or hiding these assets.

To ensure the confiscation of these properties of criminal origin in favor of the state, the prosecutor's office will carry out appropriate legal procedures.

The prosecutor's office reports that the

organizers of the crime have already faced charges in the Regensburg Regional Court of the Federal Republic of Germany, specifically for commercial and group fraud.

TI Reports Up to 45 Publicized Cases of Violence, Harassment, and Intimidation Against Media in 2023

By Liza Mchedlidze

Transparency International - Georgia reports that in 2023, 45 cases of various types of violence, harassment, and intimidation against media representatives were publicly recorded in Tbilisi and the regions.

The organization has released the 2023 statistics on media violence and state responses, along with a request for information from the Special Investigation Service.

According to the report from the Special Investigation Service, investigations into the illegal obstruction of journalists in their professional activities were launched in 14 criminal cases from January 1, 2023, to November 30, 2023. The investigation was concluded in one case, four cases were sent to court for substantive consideration, and in nine cases, the investigation is still ongoing. Additionally, within the framework of six criminal cases, the General Prosecutor's Office launched criminal prosecutions against nine individuals.

Transparency International

(TI) has identified three main categories of violence against journalists in their report: Examples of open attacks on media representatives; Threats and alleged intimidation attempts against media representatives; Violence against journalists during protests, their arrest, and fines.

"Possible crimes were committed against journalists that may not be directly related to their professional activities. However, these incidents caused fear and insecurity, and the journalists themselves perceived the context of their professional activities behind these crimes. For example:

In February, Nato Gogelia, a journalist at 'TV Pirveli,' experienced two robberies within a short period at her Ozurgeti residence.

In July, a hard drive was stolen from the car of Nodar Meladze, the head of the information service at 'TV Pirveli,' with expensive personal belongings left untouched.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6905; Euro - 2.9636; GBP - 3.4156; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9143; Swiss Franc - 3.1416

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Additionally, in July, journalist Vasil Dabashvili lost documents from his apartment, noting that he was being followed during the same period." TI

wrote. According to TI, attacks on journalists, threats against them, interference in their professional activities, frequent cases of intimidation, discrediting attempts, non-investigation

of crimes, and impunity are among the characteristics of a kleptocratic state. "Transparency International - Georgia emphasizes the critical importance, especially in the context of European integration

and the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2024, for the ruling party to guarantee a fear-free and safe media environment where journalists can carry out their professional activities unhindered and, consequently, in-

form the public properly. One prerequisite for this is the timely investigation of crimes committed against journalists and the end of impunity for the perpetrators," TI wrote.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Govt Mandate: Information Registration Required for IVF Clinics from January 2024

According to the information, the purpose of the change is to enhance traceability of used tissues, cells, embryos, and associated data and materials in contact. As of today, the administration has noted that 19 institutions provide services

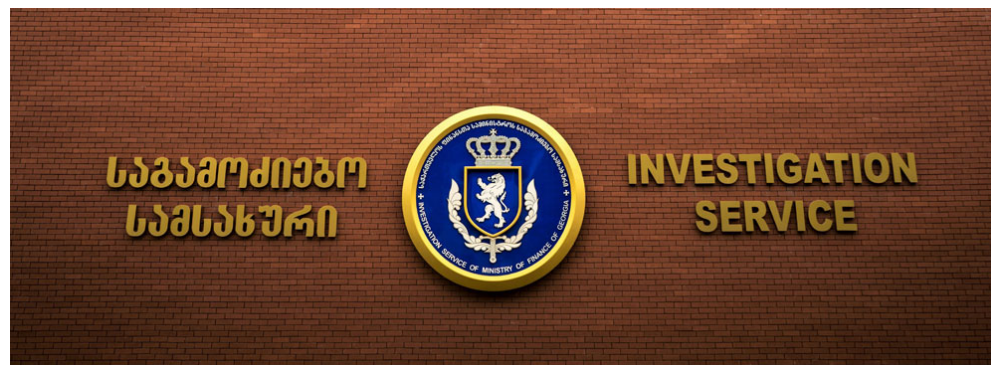
Director and Pharmacist Inflate Costs of Medical Services in COVID-19 Clinic in Kvemo Kartli

measures and investigative actions. The individuals were found to have fraudulently obtained a significant amount of money belonging to the state by abusing their official positions.



At the government's session on December 25, the administration discussed a draft law mandating all institutions offering assisted reproductive technologies to register information on reproduction-related activities in the Unified National Registry. The change will come into force starting January 2024.

with assisted reproductive technologies. The government stated that the implementation of the unified national register of activities related to reproduction complies with the requirements outlined in the Association Agreement with the European Union.



The director and pharmacist of the COVID-19 treatment clinic in Kvemo Kartli artificially inflated the cost of medical services for patients, fraudulently obtaining 108,032 GEL, according to the information provided by the investigative service of the Ministry of Finance. "Employees of the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia, in coordination with the Kvemo Kartli District Prosecutor's Office, exposed two individuals through operational search

The investigation found that one of the medical centers located in the Kvemo Kartli region, operating from August 1, 2021, to January 1, 2022, served as a medical facility for treating confirmed cases of COVID-19. During this period, the director and pharmacist of the mentioned institution artificially increased the cost of medical services provided to patients in the same hospital. Through this means, they fraudulently obtained a total of 108,032 GEL," the statement reads.

EU4Dialogue supports mobile clinics for women in Georgia

The EU4Dialogue project in Georgia has helped to set up mobile clinics visiting IDP communities, with 80 women accessing medical consultations in December.

Implemented by the 'Women's Foundation Sukhumi' NGO, the mobile clinic visited the municipalities of Khoni, Kutaisi, Senaki, Tskaltubo and Zugdidi, directly reaching IDP settlements.

During the counselling ses-

sions, women received medical advice on reproductive health, discussed the importance of timely diagnosis as well as health issues related to gender-based violence. The mobile clinic travels with equipment for mammography, echoscopy and various analyses.

The mobile clinic for IDP women project was supported by the European Union and UNDP through the EU4Dialogue: Support to Conflict Transformation in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova project. The project aims to improve socio-economic conditions for people, build livelihoods, promote gender equality and youth engagement and support the peaceful transformation of conflict.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Tuesday, December 26
Day Partly Cloudy High: 12°C
Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 5°C
Wednesday, December 27
Day Partly Cloudy High: 13°C
Night Partly Cloudy Low: 5°C

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