

Prime Minister Kobakhidze: Past Government Employed Vetting to Control Georgia's Judiciary



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

In a recent statement, Irakli Kobakhidze, the Prime Minister of Georgia, once again discussed the concept of vetting, casting doubt on its compatibility with the principle of the rule of law. Addressing journalists, Kobakhidze asserted that there are substantial concerns regarding the implications of vetting,

suggesting that it may infringe upon Georgia's sovereignty and the fundamental tenets of the rule of law.

However, despite Kobakhidze's doubts about vetting, he expressed a readiness to engage in discussions on the matter. He stated that if someone could provide convincing arguments proving that vetting doesn't violate Georgia's sover-

eignty or the rule of law, his government would be open to reconsidering their stance.

"We have said many times, and I can repeat again, that this topic is absolutely closed. It contradicts not only the current Constitution of Georgia but also fundamentally contradicts constitutional and legal principles. First of all, it contradicts the principle of judicial indepen-

dence. That is why Vetting is unacceptable for us. Constitutional law, the rule of law, and the principle of judicial independence are above all.

Under no circumstances will we allow these principles to be violated. We are open to consultation. We have strong arguments that vetting violates the rule of law. If someone proves to us with arguments that this is

not the case and that vetting does not violate our sovereignty or the rule of law, we are ready to consider all arguments. However, thus far, no one has presented, nor can present, arguments demonstrating that vetting does not violate the principle of the rule of law. We are also awaiting arguments regarding the principle of separation of powers, but none have been forthcoming thus far," Kobakhidze stated.

According to Kobakhidze, vetting was utilized by the past government to control Georgia's judiciary. He accused the opposition of trying to do the same thing now. Kobakhidze stressed that his government is committed to keeping the judiciary independent and protecting human rights.

The Prime Minister also stated that vetting is not a matter that concerns or involves the European Union.

"The European Union represents values for us, and unfortunately, Adeishvili's visits to the offices are against the values of the European Union. Similarly, the statements regarding vetting contradict the values of the European Union. Therefore, our starting point is the European Union. If there are arguments, we will listen. We will be completely open to consultation, but when we present arguments, we expect arguments from the other side. This aligns with the values of the European Union. Everyone should present arguments when they ask something," said the Prime Minister.

NGOs Assert Conference of Judges Aims to Prevent Vetting, Contradicting European Commission Recommendations

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The non-governmental organizations released a joint statement asserting that the conference of judges scheduled for March 24 aimed to prevent vetting, directly contradicting the 9 recommendations outlined by the European Commission.

As mentioned in the statement, the initial agenda item for the conference is the "discussion of developments around the court." NGOs assert that judges with a strong aversion to integrity verification will attempt to circumvent the integrity test by shielding fellow judges participating in the conference.

The signatory organizations appealed to each judge, urging them not to allow themselves to

be used as a weapon against Georgia's integration into the European Union.

"As known to the public, after obtaining the status of a candidate for EU membership, Georgia is obligated, within the 9 steps defined by the European Commission, to undertake a comprehensive reform of justice. This reform includes the establishment of an extraordinary mechanism for assessing the integrity of individuals in prominent positions within the judicial system, as well as judicial candidates.

Instead of the authorities urgently developing a plan to fulfill the above-mentioned request of the European Commission,

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7000; Euro - 2.9214; GBP - 3.3974; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8920; Swiss Franc - 2.9987

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the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament announced that the issue of checking the integrity of judges is 'closed'.

The European Union, in an emergency statement on March 22, 2024, once again confirmed that Georgia is expected to create an emergency system for

checking the integrity of judges, with international experts playing a decisive role, in order to address systemic flaws in the judicial system. In the same statement, the European Union called on the Georgian authorities to cease attacks on individual judges who have expressed opinions regarding the integrity check.

Based on Article 78 of the Con-

stitution of Georgia, constitutional bodies are obliged within their powers to take all measures to ensure Georgia's full integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Two days before the judges' conference, the European Union's emergency statement, emphasizing the importance of the independence of individual

judges, reaffirms support for all judges who have expressed their willingness to check the integrity of judges working in leadership positions.

We are aware of the attitude and support of a significant portion of the judges towards European integration. Therefore, we would like to remind them that, on one hand, the European future of our country is at stake,

while on the other hand, the personal interests of an influential group of judges are also at stake. Their stance can profoundly influence Georgia's process of European integration. Hence, we urge each of them not to allow the group to manipulate the judiciary to impede Georgia's progress towards the European Union," the statement reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Judges' Conference Unites Against Vetting, Citing Threats to Judicial Independence



On March 24, the 32nd conference of judges was held. The assembled judges supported the statement presented by the Supreme Court, expressing concern about the integrity check of judges, known as vetting. According to the statement, vetting

unequivocally, essentially, and fundamentally undermines the independence of the court and individual judges.

According to the Supreme Council of Justice, 295 judges attended the conference.

"Today was very important. In whatever conference I have

to check good faith and is actually aimed at undermining the authority of the court," said US sanctioned judge Levan Murusidze after the end of the conference.

According to Murusidze, at the conference of judges, Vasil Mshvenieradze and Levan Tevzadze were elected as members of the Supreme Council of Justice, and they supported the candidacy of Nikoloz Marsagishvili for the position of secretary. According to Murusidze, they were elected with an absolute majority of votes. Levan Murusidze, Vasil Mshvenieradze, Levan Tevzadze, and Nikoloz Marsagishvili are all regarded as members of the 'clan of judges'.

Prime Minister Kobakhidze: Opposition Aims to Discredit CEC

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze stated that the opposition's agenda revolves around attempting to discredit the Central Election Commission (CEC). He added that this endeavor will fail due to the opposition's lack of credible

evidence.

As Irakli Kobakhidze pointed out, the opposition knows that it will lose the elections until the end, and most of the parties know that they have no chance to overcome the barrier.



"The only one is the National Movement, which has reached 15% and has a chance to overcome the threshold. In such conditions, all their activities are aimed at discrediting. They have nothing more to do, therefore, they will try their best, however, due to the fact that the Central Election Commis-

sion has been working properly and conducting elections properly for all these years, they have no reason to discredit the Central Election Commission.

Do you remember how much they campaigned in 2020 and

still they didn't succeed because the elections were not rigged. The results of the then parallel vote counting were falsified. All this was forged by one of the non-governmental organizations, on the order of the radical opposition," said Kobakhidze.

EU, UNDP and partners launch new framework for local economic development – the Pathways for Economic Growth (P4EG)

This March, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the United Nations De-



velopment Programme (UNDP) and their partners launched the Pathways for Economic Growth (P4EG) framework. This meth-

odology is developed to design a new generation of local economic development plans in the context of the EU-funded project – May-

ors for Economic Growth (M4EG).

Partner organisations include Arup, EIT Climate-KIC, and Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech).

The P4EG framework helps cities assess the best social, environmental, and economic factors in local development, as well as the potential for scaling up their projects in cooperation with central governments, donors, and European and International Financial Institutions.

Thibault Charlet, Programme Manager for Digital Transition and Local Economic Development in DG NEAR, said that the P4EG framework will play "a key role in building pipelines of investment projects at

the local level, which will help cities mobilise more public-private financing under the EU's Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership region".

The P4EG Guidance Note and the P4EG introduction course are already available for users from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The M4EG Facility draws on the Mayors for Economic Growth Initiative, launched and funded by the European Union (EU) in 2017. Since 2021, the EU-funded M4EG Facility has been managed by UNDP in close cooperation with the EU, local authorities and a range of diverse partners.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Monday, March 25

Day Showers
High: 11°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 2°C

Tuesday, March 26

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 11°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 4°C

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Italian Design Day in Georgia - 2024

On March 21, the event organized by the Italian Embassy in Georgia and the Italian Trade Agency (ITA) was celebrated with great success. The event

included two digital exhibitions, a lecture by Giovanni Podesta, leading architect of the Fuksas architectural bureau; presentations by Professor of the Marangoni

Institute Carlos Gago Rodriguez and the founder of the Tbilisi Arch Week (TAW) Mariam Botchorishvili, as well as awards for young Georgian designers who won

the competition announced by the Marangoni Institute in collaboration with the Italian Embassy.







