

Washington Imposes Sanctions on Georgian Officials for Human Rights Abuse and Anti-Democratic Actions

By MESSENGER STAFF

The U.S. Department of the Treasury has imposed sanctions on four Georgian individuals, including two government officials and two far-right media figures, for their roles in violent crackdowns on peaceful protests and marginalized groups. The sanctions, issued under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, target key figures involved in what U.S. officials describe as serious human rights abuses in Georgia.

The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced that Zviad Kharazishvili, Chief of Georgia's Special Task Department, and his deputy, Mileri Lagazauri, were sanctioned for overseeing the violent suppression of peaceful protests in May 2024. These protests were sparked by the controversial "foreign influence law," passed by the ruling Georgian Dream party, which critics argue restricts media freedom and civil society.

According to U.S. officials, Kharazishvili and Lagazauri were responsible for directing security forces that violently attacked protestors, opposition leaders, and journalists. The protests, which drew significant international attention, opposed legislation that required organizations receiving more than 20% of their funding from foreign sources to register as foreign agents. The



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, had previously condemned the law, stating it would undermine fundamental freedoms in Georgia.

"These sanctions underscore our concern about the consequences of anti-democratic actions in Georgia," said Bradley T. Smith, Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. Smith emphasized that the U.S. remains committed to holding accountable those who use violence and intimidation to stifle democratic processes.

In addition to sanctioning the two government officials, the Treasury also targeted Konstantine Morgoshia, founder of the far-right media outlet Alt-Info, and media figure Zurab Makharadze. Both are accused of inciting violence against marginalized communities during protests in 2021 and 2023. According to U.S.

officials, Morgoshia used his platform to spread disinformation and hate speech, leading violent attacks on activists and journalists. Makharadze is said to have played a key role in organizing and funding these violent actions.

As a result of these sanctions, all assets and property belonging to the designated individuals in the U.S. will be frozen, and U.S. citizens are prohibited from engaging in any financial transactions with them. The Treasury noted that this action aims to block their access to the global financial system and pressure them to cease their repressive activities.

The sanctions were issued under Executive Order 13818, which builds on the Global Magnitsky Act, a law designed to target human rights abuses and corruption worldwide. U.S. officials stated that the sanctions send a clear message

against the violent suppression of free expression and peaceful assembly, which are fundamental rights.

In a broader context, these sanctions reflect growing international concerns about Georgia's political trajectory. The U.S. has been increasingly critical of the Georgian government's actions, especially after the passage of the "foreign influence law," which many believe is modeled on similar legislation in Russia. Human rights groups have warned that the law could erode democratic institutions and further isolate Georgia from the West.

The sanctions come at a time when Georgia's government faces mounting criticism for its handling of protests and its crackdown on civil society. U.S. officials expressed their hope that these measures would prompt a reevaluation of such policies by the Georgian government.

Former National Bank President Warns Georgian Banks Over U.S. Sanctions

By MESSENGER STAFF

A member of parliament and former president of the National Bank of Georgia, Roman Gotsiridze, has responded to the U.S. decision to impose

financial sanctions on several Georgian individuals. Gotsiridze warned that Georgian banks serving these sanctioned individuals could face international sanctions themselves starting tomorrow, potentially leading to the isolation of the

entire Georgian banking system.

Gotsiridze emphasized the need for immediate enforcement of the sanctions by commercial banks to avoid dire consequences for the country's financial sector. "If banks fail to enforce these sanc-

tions promptly, Georgia's entire banking system could be internationally isolated, which would be tantamount to financial collapse," Gotsiridze stated.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury recently sanctioned four individuals, including senior officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and members of the far-right media platform Alt-Info, for their involvement in human rights abuses and undermining democratic processes. These sanctions, according to Gotsiridze, are not visa-related but financial, similar to those imposed on former Prosecutor General Otar Partskhaladze.

He noted that the National Bank of Georgia had previously issued a ruling in Partskhaladze's case, stating that sanctions against Georgian citizens would only be enforced following a Georgian court decision. However, Gotsiridze highlighted that the current situation places Georgian banks in a difficult position: whether to follow the National Bank's ruling or comply with international sanctions.

"Starting today, Georgian banks face a dilemma—whether to comply with the National Bank's ruling or follow international sanctions," Gotsiridze added. He urged immediate action to avoid potential financial isolation.

The U.S. State Department recently sanctioned more than 60 members of the Georgian government and parliament, including their family members, for "undermining democracy." The U.S. Treasury also sanctioned Ministry of Internal Affairs officials Zviad Kharazishvili and his deputy Mileri Lagazauri, as well as Alt-Info members Zurab Makharadze and Konstantine Morgoshia.



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6985; Euro - 3.0010; GBP - 3.5620; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9626; Swiss Franc - 3.1946

Georgian Dream Aims for Constitutional Majority with New Electoral List Headed by Ivanishvili

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Georgian Dream was the first among participants in the upcoming elections to present the top twenty members of its electoral list. The leaders of Dream claim that this list, headed by Bidzina Ivanishvili, will not just bring them a simple victory, but a constitutional majority. However, according to the opposition, the electoral list clearly shows the inevitable defeat of Dream in the upcoming elections.

On September 10, Georgian Dream introduced the first twenty members of its electoral list for the parliamentary elections on October 26. At the top of the list is Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder and honorary chairman of Georgian Dream. Until now, Dream has participated in three parliamentary elections, but Ivanishvili has never been part of the parliamentary list.

Bidzina Ivanishvili founded Georgian Dream in 2011 and has since left politics twice. He first announced his departure from politics in 2013 after stepping down as Prime Minister, but he returned as party chairman in 2018. In 2021, he again announced his exit from politics, but by the end of 2023, he had returned once more, becoming

the honorary chairman of Dream.

Ivanishvili's appearance at the top of the electoral list sparked many comments. According to Mamuka Mdinardze, the executive secretary of Georgian Dream, the sole reason for naming Ivanishvili as the first on the electoral list is to secure a constitutional majority in the 2024 elections.

Some experts suggest other reasons, notably that Ivanishvili seeks parliamentary immunity, although it's hard to imagine him regularly attending parliamentary sessions. Others speculate that Ivanishvili may be a candidate for president, a position elected by an electoral college a month after the parliamentary elections. The electors include 150 members of parliament and 150 regional representatives, who are mostly from Dream. However, Mdinardze insists it is "absolutely impossible" for Ivanishvili to take up the presidency or any other position, as he "is not interested in office," which he "proved by leaving politics."

Ivanishvili's frequent comings and goings from politics suggest he often changes his mind, and his potential candidacy for the presidency should not be ruled

out. Ivanishvili has had poor luck in selecting presidential candidates, as he previously clashed with both of his chosen candidates, Margvelashvili and Zurabishvili, especially with Salome Zurabishvili, who now openly calls Ivanishvili an "oligarch" with "suspicious ties to Russia."

While Dream has yet to name a presidential candidate, current President Salome Zurabishvili has announced her intention to run for a second term, with hopes of receiving opposition support. The opposition may struggle to find another candidate who is equally acceptable to all factions, but Zurabishvili's second term would only be possible if the opposition wins decisively in the elections.

Only seven candidates from the top twenty in Georgian Dream's 2020 list made it into the new list. Missing from the current list are Archil Talakhvadze, who was second on the 2020 list, and others including Mariam Lashkhi, Victor Sanikidze, David Kacharava, Beka Davituliani, Giorgi Kakhaiani, Mikheil Sarjeladze, Maia Bitadze, and Giorgi Amilakhvari.

The second spot on the list is held by Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, followed by Geor-

gian Dream chairman Irakli Garibashvili, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili, and Majority Leader Mamuka Mdinardze. The top twenty also includes two members from People's Power and only five female candidates, as in the previous list, with a few new faces from the business and arts sectors.

Particularly notable criticism from the opposition came over the inclusion of two Olympic champions in the ruling party's list. Georgian weightlifter and three-time Olympic champion Lasha Talakhadze is seventh on the list, while wrestler Geno Petriashvili is tenth. Their appearance on the list is clearly linked to their recent victories at the Paris Olympics. According to opposition members, Dream is using athletes to cover up its negatives.

Athletes, who were widely loved following their Olympic victories, will now inevitably face criticism due to their inclusion in the Dream list. "People who are successful in other fields are doomed to be discredited by entering politics, as the negatives associated with Georgian Dream will overshadow any positives," said Gedevan Popkhadze.

The athletes themselves remain optimistic. Lasha

Talakhadze has already supported the controversial "Russian Law", while Geno Petriashvili stated that he joined a "great team" and plans to do many good things in parliament alongside Dream. It's also noteworthy that Tea Tsulukiani, ending her long tenure as a minister, is included in the top twenty. Mdinardze stated that Tsulukiani would be a "strong opponent" for the National Movement.

The opposition has harshly criticized Dream's top twenty, asserting that the list confirms Dream will lose the election. Naming Ivanishvili as the top candidate, they claim, is proof of the ruling party's serious legitimacy and support crisis. "If anyone doubted that the ruling party is completely bankrupt, they should go down this list and see that this is a political force with no political resources left, neither for novelty nor renewal, nor anything to offer society," said Salome Samadashvili, one of the leaders of the Strong Georgia coalition.

Now, the opposition faces the task of presenting its electoral lists, which won't be easy and will surely become a target for criticism from the ruling party.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Protest Rally Planned for September 19 Against Bidzina Ivanishvili's Remarks on 2008 Conflict

A protest titled "Get Angry and Come Outside" is scheduled to take place on September 19 at 8:00 PM in Freedom Square, Tbilisi. The rally is being organized by the civil movement Talgha in response to recent remarks made by Bidzina Ivanishvili regarding the 2008 conflict with South Ossetia.

The protest comes after Ivanishvili's controversial speech in Gori on September 14, where he stated, "After the October 26 election, we must find

Talgha on Thursday, September 19, at Freedom Square."

The demonstration aims to express opposition to Ivanishvili's comments, which

the controversial Foreign Agents Law has been sentenced to four years in prison. The decision was handed down by Judge Mikheil Jinjolia.

person's property that caused significant harm. The second charge, under Article 265, relates to the cultivation of narcotic substances (cannabis),



the strength within ourselves to apologize for the actions of the treasonous National Movement, which in 2008 engulfed our Ossetian brothers and sisters in flames."

The organizers of the protest urged citizens to gather at Freedom Square around the Saint George Monument, stating, "Get angry and come outside! Join

many see as an attempt to shift responsibility for the conflict.

Giorgi Shanidze Sentenced to 4 Years in Prison for Protesting Against Russian Law

Giorgi Shanidze, who was arrested during protests against



A protest is currently taking place outside the Tbilisi City Court in response to the verdict.

Shanidze was charged under two articles of the Georgian Criminal Code. The first charge, under Article 187, involves the damage or destruction of another

which was added to his case at a later stage.

Shanidze's sentencing has sparked further protests, with demonstrators criticizing the harsh penalties imposed on activists involved in anti-government protests.

Weather

Tuesday, September 17

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 23°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 16°C

Wednesday, September 18

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 21°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 15°C

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Celebration of Italian Sports World Day in Georgia

In connection with the Italian Sports World Day, which was celebrated for the first time this year, the Embassy of Italy, in cooperation with Sports Orient, offered sports lovers and fans a unique event: on September 11, a relatively new, but one of the fastest growing, sport - padel - tournament was held in Tbilisi, in which a special guest from Italy took

part, a veteran player who left an important mark in the history of world football: Luca Toni, winner of the 2006 World Cup and the first Italian player to win the Golden Boot.

Along with the former player of the Italian national team, Shota Arveladze, the former player of Ajax, Glasgow Rangers and Alkmaar and recognized as the

all-time best scorer of the Georgian national team, Levan Mchedlidze, the former player of Palermo and Empoli football teams, and one of his time participated in the padel tournament. Jano Ananidze, recognized as one of the most talented Georgian midfielders.

At the end of the tense and emotional tournament, Italian Ambassador H.E.

Massimiliano D'Antuono awarded the winners and noted that "Today, people of different ages and nationalities have gathered here with the love of sports, sports spirit and enthusiasm to celebrate together the Italian Sports Day - an event that is a close friendship between our two countries it's another opportunity to show off."

