

## President Zourabichvili Announces Free Legal Aid for Protesters Amid Rising Tensions in Georgia



### The News in Brief

#### Former Georgian Security Chief Resigns and Leaves Country, Thanks President and US Embassy

Irakli Shaishmelashvili, the former head of the Operational Planning Division of the Special Tasks Department at Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, has left the country with his family following his resignation in early December 2024. He shared a photo from Tbilisi International Airport on Facebook, expressing gratitude to President Salome Zourabichvili and the US Embassy in Georgia.

In his social media post, Shaishmelashvili wrote: "Special thanks to those strangers who showed incredible support and love. I hope that I will be given the opportunity to pay this respect in a dignified way. P.S. I will get back to you soon."

Shaishmelashvili's departure comes amid ongoing political tensions in Georgia. He resigned from his position on December 4, 2024, citing "family circumstances" in his official statement. His resignation and subsequent departure coincide with a period of significant unrest in the country, including protests against the government's decision to delay EU accession talks.



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili has unveiled a new initiative to provide free legal assistance to citizens, particularly those involved in ongoing protests against the government.

The president introduced a group of lawyers, coordinated by Eka Beselia, founder of the House of Justice, who will offer pro legal services to those in need. Zourabichvili emphasized the urgency of this support, stating that citizens require "daily and minute-by-

minute protection."

Zourabichvili expressed deep concern for demonstrators, especially young people who have been regularly taking to the streets. She highlighted the plight of those imprisoned, describing their conditions as 'very difficult'. The president also addressed a recent incident near the Orbeliani Palace, where a participant in a women's march was reportedly attacked.

Despite the current challenges, Zourabichvili expressed confidence that detained protesters would be released soon. She stated, "I am sure that they will

be released very quickly, because this regime will have no other way very soon."

The president framed the creation of this legal aid group as a crucial step in building a "real Georgian, free society." She praised the initiative as an expression of strong civic engagement, viewing it as a source of hope for the country's future. Zourabichvili emphasized that a well-established society with principled citizens cannot be challenged by any regime, suggesting that such a society will ultimately prevail.

#### Russian Occupiers Abduct Two Georgian Citizens Near Kvemo Nikozi



Russian occupation forces illegally abducted and detained two Georgian citizens near the village of Kvemo Nikozi in central Georgia's Gori municipality, adjacent to the occupied Tskhinvali region, on December 26, 2024. The State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG) immediately responded to the incident by activating "all existing mechanisms" to secure the prompt release of the detained individuals.

The SSSG informed the co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) and international partners about the incident. The Geneva International Discussions serve as the primary platform for addressing the consequences of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

The SSSG emphasized that "the occupying force bears responsibility for all destructive actions committed in the occupied territories of Georgia, as well as along the occupation line."

concerning trend of prolonged investigations and postponed court hearings, particularly in cases related to the foreign agents' law protests. The watchdog suggests that these delays may be politically motivated, aimed at preventing outgoing President Salome Zourabichvili from pardoning activists before her term expires in December 2024.

The report criticizes the widespread use of detention as a preventive measure, often without proper justification. Prosecutors routinely requested, and judges approved, detention even when less severe alternatives were appropriate. This practice disregarded individual circumstances such as age, health, and family responsibilities.

GYLA points out the problematic use of "organized group"

charges in cases where evidence of coordinated action was lacking. The report questions the validity of charges under Criminal Code Article 225, citing insufficient proof of collective intent in many instances.

The report names several individuals, including opposition leader Aleko Elisashvili, who allegedly suffered mistreatment or torture while in detention. These cases raise serious concerns about human rights violations within the Georgian justice system.

GYLA condemns the 'systemic failure' of the Special Investigation Service to investigate cases of police violence against protesters and journalists, despite clear evidence. This inaction suggests potential complicity in the abuse of demonstrators.

## GYLA Alleges Judicial Manipulation in Protest-Related Cases

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has released a damning report on the manipulation of criminal charges and proceedings against protesters in Georgia. The report, based on the analysis of 50 criminal cases, reveals a pattern of repression against demonstrators who participated in protests against the controversial foreign agent law and other government policies in 2024.

Key Findings of the report includes: Deliberate delays in criminal proceedings, Excessive use of detention as a preventive measure, Misapplication of "organized group" charges, Instances of mistreatment and torture and Systemic failure to investigate police violence.

GYLA's report highlights a



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8021; Euro - 2.9142; GBP - 3.5116; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8162; Swiss Franc - 3.1148

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

## Georgia is Grappling with Two Crises and Expecting a Third

With Georgia facing a deepening political and constitutional crisis, and an impending economic one, everyone's watching to see what happens next. The outcome depends on many uncertain factors.

Following the parliamentary elections of October 26, 2024, Georgia found itself in the throes of a severe political crisis that continues to deepen. The Georgian Dream announced election results and secured a fourth term for itself. However, the results were rejected by all opposition parties that had secured mandates. Despite a boycott called by the opposition parties, large-scale protests did not materialize in the next few weeks, and the Georgian Dream decided to finally settle accounts with its Western orientation. Irakli Kobakhidze, serving as Prime Minister, declared that negotiations with the European Union would be halted until 2028. The Georgian Dream's leaders may now regret this statement, as it was precisely the questioning of Western orientation that triggered mass protests, which the party has been unable to quell to this day. These protests are not led by political parties but are spontaneously organized by various groups. Moreover, the protests have spread beyond Tbilisi, encompassing virtually

every city in Georgia.

The Georgian Dream party has failed to secure international recognition of the parliamentary election results. With the exception of Hungary and Slovakia, European Union countries are supporting the re-holding of elections in Georgia, suspending cooperation with the country, and moving towards imposing sanctions. The political crisis in the country is linked to a constitutional crisis. The Georgian Dream is accused of numerous violations of the constitution, including Article 78, which directly obliges the Georgian government to do everything in its power to integrate Georgia into the European Union and NATO.

The election of the president by the electoral college has proven to be devoid of real substance in Georgian reality. Public opinion polls at the time showed that the majority of respondents opposed the abolition of the direct election of the president by the people. As a result, we have a president elected by a single party, using its regional and parliamentary representatives. For those who question the legitimacy of the parliament elected in 2024, the president

elected with its participation is also illegitimate. Consequently, the political crisis is deepening. The deepening political crisis, the wave of protests, and Georgia's growing isolation from the West are making an economic crisis in the country inevitable. This will negatively impact the situation of every ordinary citizen and will provide new impetus to the protest movement.

The Georgian Dream party anticipated the wave of protests following the elections and was well-prepared to deal with them. The Georgian Dream intended to suppress the protests through mass violence and proceeded to do so. This was a scenario tested in Russia and Belarus: intimidating the public through violence and quelling protests, ultimately establishing an authoritarian regime that would serve as a loyal satellite of Putin's Russia. Despite using violence, the Georgian Dream failed to stop the protests. Only after a phone call from French President Macron to Bidzina Ivanishvili did the overt violence by police forces cease. However, we cannot say that the Georgian Dream has abandoned the use of force to suppress protests.

The Georgian Dream party constantly talks about an alternative scenario, which they refer to as an attempt to organize a so-called 'Maidan'. This is a change of power 'through revolution.' They accuse the West, without any specifics, of organizing this, linking it to the so-called 'globalist party.' However, the protests have been extremely peaceful, and as long as the police or special forces do not confront the people gathered on Rustaveli Avenue, there are no acts of violence.

Opposition political parties and participants in the protests are demanding the immediate release of those arrested during the demonstrations and the holding of new parliamentary elections. It must be said that this would be the optimal and normal way out of the current crisis. Holding new elections is not something extraordinary in a democratic country, and especially not in a parliamentary republic like Georgia is supposed to be.

The Georgian Dream party is not even considering re-holding parliamentary elections in the current situation. This is understandable, as the rules for con-

ducting elections would have to be changed, and the electoral administration would have to be renewed. For the Georgian Dream, this would be an acknowledgment of election fraud, and in the event of new elections, even crossing the 5% electoral threshold could be questionable. So, what does this mean? Will the Georgian Dream resume the use of force to suppress the protests? If violence intensifies, will this lead to a backlash, and civil unrest? Some believe that this is a backup Russian scenario for Georgia if the Georgian Dream government fails to suppress the protests.

Despite the current circumstances, we cannot rule out the possibility of the Georgian Dream, or Bidzina Ivanishvili, agreeing to hold new elections. Certain conditions have been outlined under which the Georgian Dream would be forced to agree to elections. On the one hand, this includes a further escalation of protests and, on the other, strong pressure from the West. The West's position is linked to the election of a new US president. The Georgian Dream hopes to find favor with President Trump and for the talk of sanctions to cease. They are even more hopeful that the protest wave will subside, especially with the New Year approaching.

## Ambassador's Commendation Ceremony for Dr. Nana Gelashvili and Mr. Yasuhiro Kojima



On December 26, at the Ambassador's official residence, Ambassador Ishizuka held the awarding ceremony of the Ambassador's Commendation for the Head of Direction of Far Eastern Studies of the Faculty of Humanities at Tbilisi State University, Dr. Nana Gelashvili, and to the Linguist, Translator and Lecturer at the same university,

Mr. Yasuhiro Kojima.

Professor Gelashvili has long contributed to the promotion of the Japanese culture and Japanese language studies at the University, and to the establishment of the Japanese Studies major program at the University in 2023. She has also actively cooperated for many years in cultural events organized by the Embassy.

Mr. Kojima has been active as a linguist in Georgia for over 20 years and has been involved in publication and translation of a number of books related to Japan and Georgia, and has made contribution to the deepening of

mutual understanding between Japan and Georgia through languages and literatures.

On this day, Ambassador Ishizuka presented Dr. Gelashvili and Mr. Kojima with award certificates in recognition of their achievement in promoting friendship and understanding between Japan and Georgia through cultural exchanges.

\*The Japanese Ambassador/ Consul-General confers this award on individuals or organizations that have contributed to the promotion of mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and their respective assigned countries or regions.



### Weather

Friday, December 27

Day Cloudy  
High: 8°C

Night Cloudy  
Low: 3°C

Saturday, December 28

Day Light Rain  
High: 6°C

Night Cloudy  
Low: 4°C

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