

## Ex-Investment Fund Chief Accuses Ivanishvili of Political Vendetta in Court

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On January 23, Tbilisi City Court held the trial of Giorgi Bachiasvili, the former head of Bidzina Ivanishvili's co-investment fund, who faces charges of misappropriating cryptocurrency and laundering illegal income. During the hearing, Bachiasvili alleged that Ivanishvili had sent a mediator with a letter demanding monthly payments in cryptocurrency in exchange for halting his criminal prosecution.

Bachiasvili, who could face 9 to 12 years in prison if convicted, claimed the charges against him were politically motivated. Speaking to journalists before the trial, he declared the proceedings to be "Ivanishvili's personal process," accusing the Georgian Dream founder of acting as the complainant, prosecutor, and judge.

In court, Bachiasvili vowed to fight the case in both Georgian and international courts, pledging accountability for those he described as enforcers of an oppressive regime. He requested the removal of asset freezes and restrictions, which he said hinder his ability to manage his property. "I stand here as a completely innocent person. I should not be in this courtroom, just like many other young people unjustly targeted under this regime," he told the court.

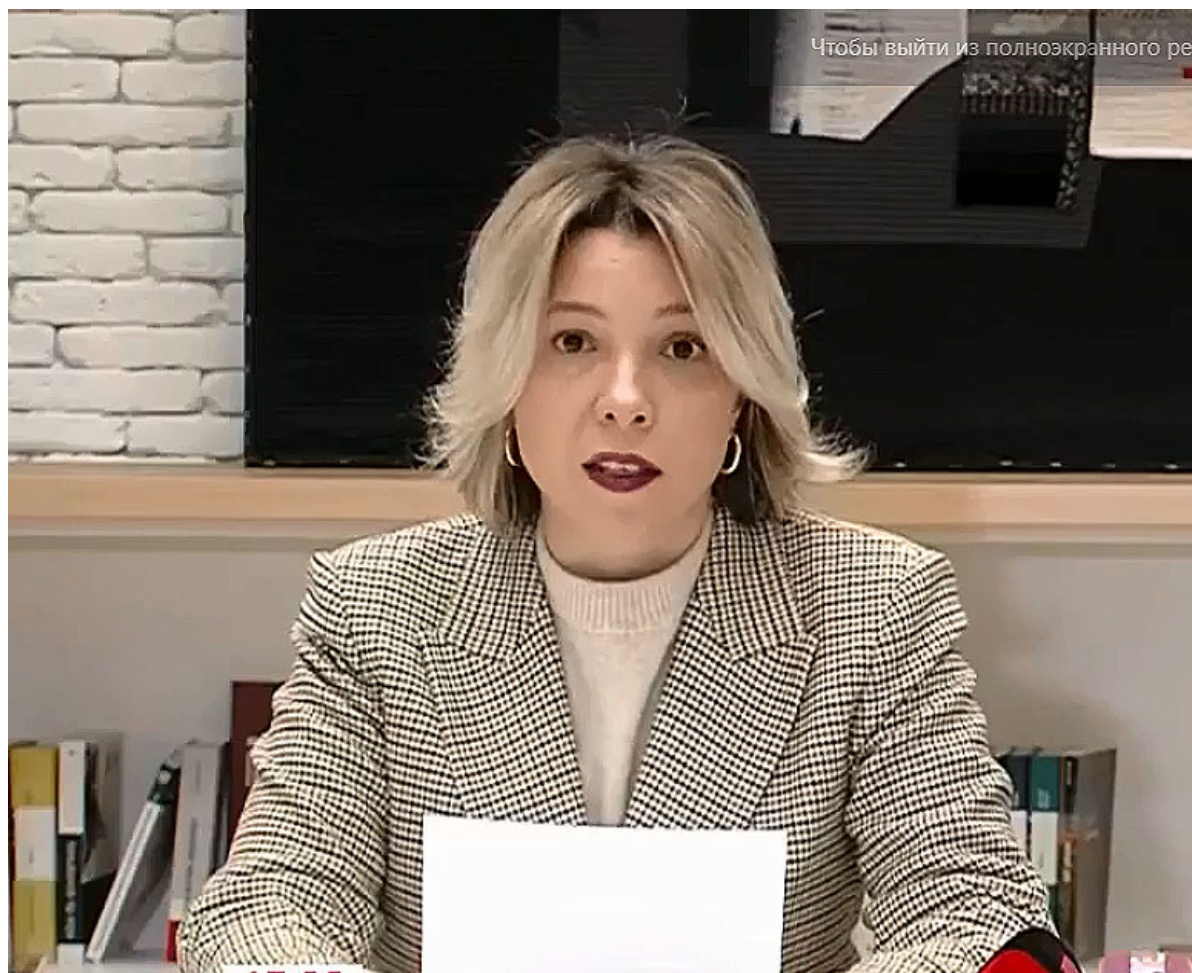


Bachiasvili also accused Ivanishvili of evading court appearances in various cases, citing instances where medical certificates were allegedly used to avoid travel to hearings. "I am waiting for the day Ivanishvili appears in court. During his presence, I will prove that all of this is his fabrication," he stated, promising to publish the letter detailing the alleged extortion.

Prosecutor Mikheil Sadradze announced that evidence examination would begin on January 24, with key witnesses expected to testify. However, Sadradze did not confirm whether Ivanishvili would appear in court.

The case against Bachiasvili dates back to October 2023, when he was accused of embezzling over 8,000 bitcoins worth \$39.2 million in 2017 from Ivanishvili and laundering the proceeds. Bachiasvili was released on bail for 2.5 million GEL and barred from leaving Georgia without notifying authorities.

In a recent interview with TV Formula, Bachiasvili mocked Georgian Dream's claims of a "deep state," asserting that he witnessed the narrative being fabricated. He also addressed Ivanishvili's financial maneuvers following U.S. sanctions, warning that continued misconduct could result in catastrophic consequences.



## Civil Society Groups Condemn Excessive Fines as Tools of Repression in Georgia

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Representatives of Georgian civil society organizations (CSOs) have criticized what they describe as the "unjustified use of sanctions" through excessive fines, calling them repressive measures aimed at silencing dissent. At a briefing on January 23, Nino Lomjaria, founder of the civic platform Georgia's European Orbit, condemned the fines as undemocratic and inconsistent with international human rights standards.

"This practice is a tool of repression against freedom of expression and, by its severity, is

tantamount to criminal liability," Lomjaria said. She called on judges reviewing administrative cases to resist participating in what she termed "this oligarchic punitive operation."

The CSOs argue that the fines, imposed without supporting photographic or video evidence, violate Georgia's obligations under international legal frameworks such as the Venice Commission and the European Court of Human Rights. Lomjaria warned that disproportionate sanctions, such as the recent financial penalties, risk suppressing freedom

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8627; Euro - 2.9821; GBP - 3.5286; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8938; Swiss Franc - 3.1580

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CONTINUED FROM Page 1

of assembly and expression. The sanctions follow controversial amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Manifestations and the Code of Administrative Offences. Passed by Georgian Dream in just five days last December, the amendments prohibit face coverings, the use of pyrotechnics, road blockages, and allow preventive detention. President Mikheil Kavelashvili signed the changes into law on December 29.

CSOs say the measures are being weaponized against participants in pro-European protests that have surged since November 2024. "The intensity and unjustified nature of these fines indicate that their purpose is to intimidate protest participants, weaken the momentum of protests, and create financial difficulties for rally participants," Lomjaria said. The fines have increased significantly, with penalties for road blockages rising from 500 GEL (\$175) to 5,000 GEL

(\$1,748) and up to 15,000 GEL (\$5,245) for organizers. Fines for wearing face masks now stand at 2,000 GEL, and hanging protest posters can result in penalties of up to 1,000 GEL. Lomjaria criticized the courts for favoring prosecutors in these cases, often imposing severe penalties without sufficient evidence.

CSOs continue to advocate for the protection of fundamental freedoms, urging the government to align its practices with democratic principles and international human rights standards.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Protester Alleges Police Assault and Fabricated Arrest in Batumi



Temur Katamadze, a protester detained on January 11 during a demonstration in Batumi, has accused local police of physical abuse and falsifying arrest reports. In a letter sent from prison to *Batumelebi*, Katamadze detailed his allegations, naming Batumi Police

Chief Irakli Dgebuadze and ten other officers as perpetrators of violence and misconduct.

"After my illegal arrest at the protest in front of the Batumi police station, Irakli Dgebuadze

flagbearer grandpa! I know you. Now you will have to be deported."

Katamadze also recounted enduring verbal abuse and racist remarks. "They called me a 'dog and Turk' and told me to get out of Georgia," he wrote. "I replied: 'Don't call me a Turk. I am not a Turk; I am Georgian in spirit and heart.'"

Katamadze further accused senior police officials, including Gela Basiladze, of orchestrating the creation of fabricated arrest reports. According to his letter, officers pre-prepared template documents, leaving spaces for detainees' names and details, and falsely attributed arrests to specific officers.

The incident began at a rally where Katamadze was peacefully protesting with a flag and a whistle. He claimed that, despite standing 20 meters from the front line, a group of officers singled him out, broke his Georgian flagpole, and ordered his arrest.

### Kobakhidze Criticizes Estonian Parliament's Statement as 'Anti-Georgian'

Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has strongly criticized the Estonian Parliament's January 22 statement on Georgia, describing it as "unequivocally anti-Georgian" and disrespectful to the Georgian people.

The Estonian Parliament recognized Salome Zourabichvili as the legitimate president, supported Georgia's democratic forces advocating for new parliamentary elections, condemned the repression of peaceful demonstrators, and called for the release of political prisoners.

In response, Kobakhidze ac-

is pressure on the Deep State in the United States, the Deep State is even more active in Europe. You know that especially in the Baltic countries the influence of the Deep State is very serious, this is reflected, of course, in Estonia," said Kobakhidze.

Despite his criticism,



cused Estonia of showing disrespect for the Georgian people. He also linked the statement to the Deep State conspiracy, asserting that its influence is particularly strong in Estonia and the Baltic region.

"In the conditions when there

Kobakhidze emphasized maintaining a "unilateral friendship regime" with Estonia. "Such statements are unacceptable and anti-Georgian, but we value the historical friendship that exists between the Georgian and Estonian peoples," he added.

### Armenian fashion and apparel SMEs take part in EU-funded study visit to Paris

Eighteen Armenian apparel and fashion SMEs took part in a study visit to Paris from 18 to 21 January, supported by the EU. The trip was timed to coincide with the international fashion exhibitions 'Who's Next' and the Salon International de la Lingerie.



This study visit provided an opportunity for Armenian apparel and fashion SMEs to gain insights about European market trends, quality standards, and sustainable fashion practices, which will enable them to form global partnerships and expand their presence in the EU market.

'Who's Next' is one of the world's largest fashion trade fairs, drawing over 50,000 visitors and more than 1,500 brands from over 100 countries. This event sets the stage for discovering and defining the latest fashion trends. The Salon International de la Lingerie, taking place simultaneously at Porte de Versailles in Paris, is the leading global event for lingerie, loungewear, and swimwear.

The study trip was part of the 'Building sustainable apparel and agribusiness value chains in Armenia' project, funded by the European Union and implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) in close coordination with the Ministry of Economy. The event was also supported by the Private Sector Development and Technical Vocational Education and Training in Armenia (PSDTVET) Project, funded by the German Government and implemented by GIZ.

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## Weather

Friday, January 24

Day Overcast High: 10°C

Night Overcast Low: 1°C

Saturday, January 25

Day Partly Cloudy High: 11°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 2°C

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