

The Messenger

"Impartial, Informative, Insightful"

GEL 3.00

#013 (5824)

MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2025

WWW.MESSENGER.COM.GE

Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Urges Georgia to Address Human Rights Concerns

By Liza Mchedlidze

Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, visited Georgia from January 21 to 23, 2025, to address pressing human rights issues. During his visit, he engaged with Georgian authorities, civil society organizations, and human rights defenders, praising their resilience amidst increasing challenges.

O'Flaherty expressed concerns over significant human rights shortcomings, particularly regarding accountability for alleged abuses during public demonstrations in April 2024 and November 2024. Despite reports of unlawful arrests and excessive force by law enforcement as well as masked individuals, known colloquially as 'titushkis', no officers have faced prosecution. The Commissioner reiterated his recommendation for all law enforcement personnel to display identification, to enhance accountability, in line with international practices.

The Commissioner raised alarm about recent legal changes that restrict peaceful assembly, including amendments to the laws on public protests and public service. These changes impose a blanket ban on face coverings during protests, expand grounds for administrative arrests, and introduce harsher fines. O'Flaherty criticized the rushed adoption of these laws without meaningful consultation, emphasizing that they un-



dermine fundamental rights.

O'Flaherty highlighted the case of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, who has been on hunger strike since her arrest on January 12, 2025, for allegedly assaulting a police officer. While refraining from commenting on the charges, he described her continued pre-trial detention as unjustified and expressed concern for her health.

The Commissioner criticized the "law on transparency of for-

ign influence," which requires NGOs and media who receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power." He called the law an unnecessary restriction on freedom of association.

Additionally, O'Flaherty condemned the recently adopted "law on protecting family values and minors," which prohibits positive references to LGBTI in-

dividuals, bans legal gender recognition, and criminalizes trans-specific healthcare. He described the law as discriminatory and warned of its harmful impact on LGBTI communities.

The Commissioner urged Georgian authorities to approach reforms with careful consideration of their cumulative impact on human rights and to uphold international standards. He stressed the importance of addressing legislative shortcom-

ings, ensuring accountability for human rights violations, and fostering an inclusive dialogue.

During his visit, O'Flaherty met with key government officials, including Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, and Justice, as well as the Public Defender of Georgia. He reaffirmed his commitment to engaging with member states to promote and protect human rights.

Ghost Database Leak Exposes Millions of Georgian Citizens' Data

By Liza Mchedlidze

A massive data leak involving millions of Georgian citizens has raised serious cybersecurity concerns after appearing on a cloud-based server and vanishing just as mysteriously, according to Cybernews. The leaked data, left unprotected, could leave sensitive personal information vulnerable to misuse by malicious actors.

The breach was discovered by cybersecurity expert Bob Dyachenko, owner of SecurityDiscovery.com, and the Cybernews research team. They identified an unsecured Elasticsearch index—a platform often used for real-time data analytics and search—hosted on

a server owned by a German-based cloud service provider.

The leaked database reportedly includes records for nearly five million individuals and over seven million phone entries linked with personal information. While some data may have been duplicated or included deceased individuals, the exposed details are alarming: ID numbers, full names, birth dates, genders, certificate-like numbers (potentially insurance information), and descriptive phone records.

According to Dyachenko, the data appears to have been aggregated from multiple sources, possibly including government or



CONTINUED FROM Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8834; Euro - 3.0247; GBP - 3.5846; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9464; Swiss Franc - 3.1843

Ghost Database Leak Exposes Millions of Georgian Citizens' Data

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

commercial datasets and number identification services. The entity responsible for managing the Elasticsearch index, how-

ever, remains unidentified. The server was taken offline shortly after the breach was detected, preventing further public access to the exposed information.

Dyachenko warned that such data could be weaponized by threat actors for both political and criminal purposes. "State-sponsored hackers can exploit the leak for political manipula-

tion, disinformation campaigns, or targeted harassment," he said. "Meanwhile, profit-seeking hackers can use the data for various malicious activities." Cybernews cautions that the

exposed information increases the risk of identity theft and financial crime, as cybercriminals may impersonate individuals or deploy social engineering techniques to hijack accounts.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Seismologist Tea Godoladze Leaves Georgia After Facing Charges and Alleging Political Persecution



Tea Godoladze, Director of Georgia's National Seismic Monitoring Center, has left the country, citing fears for her safety and accusations of a politically motivated campaign against her. Speaking to *Mtis Ambebi* just hours before her departure, Godoladze addressed the charges of domestic violence brought against her under Article 126 of the Criminal Code, which she denies, labeling them part of a "black campaign" to tarnish her reputation and silence her. The accusations stem from a complaint filed by Godoladze's former partner, who alleged that she had been violent towards a family member. Godoladze, however,

maintains that she is the real victim of physical violence in the relationship. According to the women's rights organization Safari, Godoladze's former partner had previously been convicted of violence against her. The Tbilisi City Court

issued a guilty verdict on June 7, 2024. However, in December 2024, the Tbilisi Court of Appeal overturned the conviction, a decision that Godoladze believes paved the way for her own prosecution. "There is already a real danger that I will not be able to return to the country under this regime," Godoladze told *Mtis Ambebi*. She added, "I have thought about staying and fighting until the end, even going to prison, but I cannot change much by sitting in prison. I will continue to fight from the outside." Godoladze has been an outspoken critic of Georgian Dream party's environmental and urban development policies.

Public Defender Faces Backlash Over Disclosure of Shelter Address



from both the Public Broadcaster and the Public Defender's platforms. Following hours of public outcry, the

Public Defender Levan Ioseliani has dismissed the controversy surrounding his recent statement as "absolutely artificial." The backlash came after he disclosed the address of a shelter for victims of violence during an interview with Public Broadcaster, sparking sharp criticism from various individuals and organizations. Former Deputy Public Defender Ekaterine Skhiladze and other concerned citizens criticized Ioseliani for revealing sensitive information, emphasizing that such details are kept confidential to protect the safety of victims. They demanded the immediate removal of the interviews

interviews were eventually deleted. Ioseliani maintains that his remarks caused no harm. Speaking to Public Broadcaster, he said: "It's good that they have started talking about shelters because I've been raising awareness about this issue for a long time. No one paid attention to the problems in shelters." He refuted allegations that he disclosed sensitive information, asserting, "It's as if I disseminated someone's personal information—such a thing never happened. The rest is a matter of interpretation. I cannot answer everyone's interpretation. I did not reveal any location. This outcry is absolutely artificial."

European Parliament condemns Russia's use of disinformation to justify its war in Ukraine

In a resolution adopted on Thursday, Members of the European Parliament condemned



the Russian regime's systematic falsification of historical arguments to justify its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. The text adopted by Parliament rejected historical claims by the Russian regime to undermine Ukraine's history and national identity as futile attempts to justify its ongoing illegal war. It also condemned Russia's failure to establish accountability for Soviet crimes, and for cracking down on attempts to carry out historical research and hold public debates on these issues,

saying such practices had contributed to the Moscow regime's ability to revive imperialist policies and instrumentalise history for its criminal purposes. Parliament also issued a strong call for the EU to expand its sanctions against Russian media outlets conducting disinformation campaigns championing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The resolution was adopted by 480 votes in favour, 58 against with 48 abstentions. (euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Monday, January 27

Day Overcast
High: 8°C
Night Clear
Low: -2°C

Tuesday, January 28

Day Clear
High: 10°C
Night Clear
Low: -1°C

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail. **The Messenger** Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements. **The Messenger** preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.