

Kobakhidze Welcomes U.S. Foreign Funding Freeze, Calls It a Blow to Opposition

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Irakli Kobakhidze has welcomed the U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to suspend all foreign funding for three months, stating that he hopes the freeze will last longer. He argued that halting the funding would "contribute to the stable development" of Georgia and described it as "a black day for the radical opposition."

Kobakhidze linked the funding halt to alleged past U.S. efforts to destabilize Georgia, claiming that the previous U.S. administration had used grants to "cause unrest, organize revolutions, and destabilize countries." He referenced past political turmoil in Georgia, particularly protests against the foreign agents law in 2023 and 2024, saying that transparency demands regarding foreign grants had triggered "two attempts at revolutions."

Accusing the former U.S. administration of financing "revolutionary processes and unrest," Kobakhidze specifically criticized the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its funding of a 2022 training program by the Center



for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS). He alleged that the program trained activists "how to bulldoze government buildings" and reiterated claims of four attempted revolutions in Georgia between 2020 and 2024.

Kobakhidze also sought to align the Georgian Dream government with the new U.S. administration, suggesting that Trump's stance mirrors GD's long-standing position. "What we have been talking about for the last three years, and therefore accused of being pro-Russian and anti-Western, the new [U.S.] administration is repeating word for word today," he said, also referencing statements about Ukraine's sacrifices in the ongoing war.

Expressing optimism about the political climate in Washington, he added, "We have great hope that the 'Deep State' will finally be defeated in the U.S., and in such a case, the approach towards Georgia will change completely." Kobakhidze said GD aims to renew its strategic partnership with the U.S. "from a clean slate" with a roadmap delivering tangible results for both sides.

Papuashvili's Accusation of Promoting Unlawful Protest Rebuked by Media and CSOs

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian Dream (GD) Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili has accused the online media outlet Publika of promoting unlawful activity by sharing a statement from the organizers of a planned February 2 protest. Simultaneously, he criticized the European Union, which partially funds Publika. The media outlet defended its journalistic duty, while several civil society organizations (CSOs) condemned Papuashvili's remarks as an attack on press freedom, accusing him of attempting to intimidate journalists and incite hostility against them.

The pro-EU demonstration aims to block the main highway leading into Tbilisi. In a Facebook post on February 1, Papuashvili asserted that blocking a highway is a criminal offense and accused Publika of "advertising the commission of a criminal offense." He further stated that, as Publika is funded by the EU budget, "the EU Embassy, as the representative of Publika's financial sponsor, bears responsibility for the consequences of the planned action."

Two days earlier, on January 31, the GD government passed a decree adding "highways of state and international importance" to the list of strategic and specially important facilities, thereby criminalizing their blockage.

Publika's editorial team responded by emphasizing that their coverage of the protest was part of their journalistic re-

sponsibility to inform the public. They noted that their reports had also covered the government's recent decision to classify international highways as "strategic facilities" and the Ministry of Internal Affairs' (MIA) preventive statement regarding the protest.

"Shalva Papuashvili is attempting to exert pressure on our editorial independence, encouraging hostility and violence against us, as evidenced by the comments on his post. Papuashvili's statement is perceived as a threat by Publika employees," the outlet stated.

Several CSOs condemned Papuashvili's remarks as an attack on press freedom. The Social Justice Center (SJC) called his Facebook post "a clear attempt to pressure and intimidate the media," adding, "It is particularly unacceptable that he interferes in the content of critical media work. It is alarming that the ruling party perceives media coverage of protests as the promotion of crime, which is entirely contrary to the principles of free media and freedom of expression." SJC expressed solidarity with Publika and pledged to support them if necessary.

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics also rebuked Papuashvili, stressing that freedom of speech and expression is the cornerstone of democracy and that the media has a professional duty to impartially cover events. "Holding the media accountable for covering an event constitutes a blatant attempt to interfere with its editorial independence. Through

his post, Shalva Papuashvili deliberately incited hostility toward independent online media," the organization stated. It called on Papuashvili to respect press free-

dom as guaranteed by the Georgian Constitution and international conventions and "cease the persecution and harassment of independent media."



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8563; Euro - 2.9651; GBP - 3.5470; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8925; Swiss Franc - 3.1360

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Man Who Set Himself on Fire at IDP Agency Dies After Five Days



Zamir Kvekveskiri, the man who set himself on fire in the yard of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Agency, has died after battling for his life for five days. The Ministry of Health confirmed his passing on February 1. "Doctors at the Simon Khechinashvili University Clinic fought selflessly for five

days to save the life of 44-year-old Zamir Kvekveskiri. On January 27, he inflicted severe self-inflicted injuries on his body. He was taken to a medical facility, but unfortunately, despite the efforts of doctors, he died," the Ministry's statement read.

Kvekveskiri's son spoke to TV Pirveli about the circumstances that led to his father's tragic decision. He stated that the family had been requesting state-provided housing for years but had been repeatedly ignored.

"No one paid attention to us. He was in poor health, his leg was paralyzed. He had undergone six leg surgeries in Tbilisi. Finally, when we sent him to Germany, they let him go with a paralyzed leg, and they didn't perform the surgery here either—they said the necessary techniques weren't available."

The son described his father's prolonged suffering, stating that he had been in pain for four years and saw no way out. "He said, 'I don't have a house, I can't do anything,' and he decided to do this."

The family had been waiting for housing assistance for 13 years. "We were always told we were on the list, that we would

be given an apartment, but no one ever knew when or where," Kvekveskiri's son said.

Public Defender Levan Ioseliani Calls for Investigation into Police Violence at Tbilisi Mall Protest



Public Defender Levan Ioseliani has condemned the police violence that took place during a protest near Tbilisi Mall on February 2. Video footage has surfaced showing excessive force against citizens, journalists, and opposition leaders, including the arrests of Nika Melia and Gigi Ugulava.

"I am concerned about the facts of police mistreatment and excessive force, as depicted in video footage shared publicly," Ioseliani said, expressing particular concern over reports of a police officer injuring a journal-

ist from TV Pirveli and the verbal abuse directed at women, including female politicians.

The Public Defender has called on the Special Investigation Service to launch an immediate investigation into the incidents and ensure criminal accountability for those involved. He has also urged the General Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to conduct an internal review of the officers' actions.

Ioseliani stated that Public Defender representatives will visit all detained individuals, including politicians, and more details will be provided to the public soon.

Salome Zourabichvili Meets with Youth and Activists in Poti

Georgia's 5th President Salome Zourabichvili, met with youth, activists, and representatives of the non-governmental sector in Poti to discuss ongoing protests and reported intimidation tactics.

According to her press service, locals informed Zourabichvili about instances of pressure, intimidation, and ha-



arrassment aimed at discouraging participation in protests. They asserted that these tactics were intended to instill fear in society and suppress dissent.

Zourabichvili emphasized that the main force behind protests in the country is the unity of society, collective support, and shared solidarity. She highlighted the importance of the widespread nature of the protests, noting that their reach into all regions of Georgia is a positive development. "We know that the smaller the city, the more difficult activism is," she stated.

Expressing her support for the protesters, Zourabichvili reassured attendees, "I stand with you, and we will see this through together to the end!"

UNFPA and TIKA donate gynecologic chairs and a hysteroscope to the Georgian National Screening Center for women with disabilities



In January, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) donated 4 accessible gynecological chairs and a hysteroscope to the Georgian National Screening Center.

With its mechanism, the accessible gynecological chairs, donated to the National Screening Center, enables women with locomotor

disabilities, older women, and those overweight, equally use the screening programme and prevent cervical cancer timely.

"The cooperation spearheaded by the UNFPA and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency marks an important endeavor to ensure that no one is left behind the development, and everybody has equal access to quality services. This is the possibility to implement crucial initiatives to support the health and well-being of women and girls in Georgia" - said Head of UNFPA Georgia Country Office, Mariam Bandzeladze.

From 131 803 people with disabilities registered in Georgia, 49

803 are women and girls. The joint initiative of the UNFPA and TIKA aims to improve their accessibility to cervical cancer screening, and overall - to sexual and reproductive health services in Georgia.

"By supporting women's health, particularly for those with disabilities, we aim to contribute to a brighter and healthier future. It is an honor to collaborate with UNFPA on this vital initiative and to stand together in advancing the health and rights of women in Georgia" - said TYKA Tbilisi Coordinator, Zeynep Bayrak.

Women and youth with disabilities lack access to basic services and information, including on sexual and reproductive health, which has been caused by nonexistence of an accessible environment, including gynecologic chairs, as well as the lack of knowledge and practice of the medical personnel.

"The National Screening Center cares about ensuring quality healthcare services for citizens, including by providing an accessible environment for people with disabilities so that they could use all the services available. Our branches are equipped with the pandouses and now within the joint effort of the UNFPA and TIKA, medical equipment, which

makes our services more inclusive and accessible" - said Director of the National Screening Center, Eter Kiguradze.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death among women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. To increase early diagnosis of cancer

in Georgia and reduce mortality, the UNFPA Georgia has been providing technical assistance to the National Screening Center in the implementation of cervical cancer screening programs since 2009. To reduce the cancer death rate, at least 70% of the population should be screened.



Weather

Monday, February 3

Day Partly Cloudy High: 12°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: -1°C

Tuesday, February 4

Day Partly Cloudy High: 12°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: -2°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.