

President Zourabichvili Criticizes Georgian Government and Calls for International Action

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On February 5, following a meeting with EU ambassadors and four opposition political parties, President Salome Zourabichvili declared that the political situation in Georgia had reached a breaking point. In her statement, Zourabichvili emphasized that with the Georgian Dream (GD) government's decision to revoke the mandates of 49 opposition MPs, "political life in Georgia has effectively ended." She added that this move had eliminated any space for political discourse and that the constitution, along with basic rights such as freedom of expression and assembly, no longer held meaning.

Zourabichvili called for international pressure on the GD government to ensure new elections are held. She likened the GD's actions to a "Russian-style regime," stressing that as repression has resumed in Georgia, Western partners must respond with firm pressure. "There is no country or historical example where a regime is completely isolated from its population and its partners yet continues to rule in this way," she said, highlighting the government's inevitable downfall.

The President also criticized recent laws introduced by the



GD party, calling them repressive measures that target the opposition and restrict freedoms. She condemned the government's foreign policy, stating that it no longer exists in any meaningful way, with recent diplomatic visits reduced to empty gestures. Zourabichvili

pointed out that while the GD government has promoted a \$6 billion investment deal with EMAAR Properties in the UAE as a breakthrough, the specifics of the investment remain unclear, and the economy has come to a standstill. "The economy has been halted, investment has

been suspended, and there's no clear direction," she remarked.

Zourabichvili also addressed the recent purges within the Georgian Public Broadcaster, urging the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to take action to stop internal repression. She condemned the politicization of

the Ministry of Defense, declaring that silencing dissent within the armed forces is unacceptable. In a message to the military, Zourabichvili assured them that she would always stand by their side, supporting their right to defend Georgia as an independent, sovereign nation.

Georgian Dream Proposes Restrictive Laws on Civil Society, Media, and Drug Policies

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian Dream party leader Mamuka Mdinardze announced a series of restrictive laws aimed at tightening control over civil society organizations (CSOs), media, drug policy, ju-

venile justice, and migration. The laws are expected to pass within the next two months by Georgia's one-party parliament.

One of the most significant changes includes a new law targeting CSOs, which will require organizations receiving foreign

funding to register as foreign agents, mirroring the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). This is set to replace Georgia's existing Foreign Agents Law, which GD claims is "based on FARA," although critics argue it aligns more

closely with Russia's version. Mdinardze also noted that several large recipients of foreign funds have yet to register, and the full implementation of this law will be prioritized.

Furthermore, the GD is planning media reforms modeled after the British approach, which will limit foreign funding to media outlets, except for commercial advertising. Mdinardze also emphasized that the media law would define media objectivity and journalistic ethics, effectively curbing external influence.

The government will also take a harsher stance on drug policy, with increased penalties for drug dealers and "encouraging" consumers to reject drugs. However, there will be differing approaches to marijuana and heroin users. Juvenile justice laws will be made stricter, but Mdinardze promised the "unwavering protection of their rights."

Another major change will give ministers more control over appointing and dismissing heads of public legal entities, reducing

the role of public participation. Civil servants will also be restricted from accepting any benefits from foreign sources, including training, visits, or salary supplements, without ministerial consent.

Mdinardze also announced plans for tighter migration policies and stated that the government would create a foundation to fund civic initiatives that align with Georgia's national interests, further limiting foreign influence in domestic affairs.

These legislative moves come just after the GD passed several amendments on February 3, including harsher penalties for offenses such as insulting officials or assaulting police.

The GD leadership maintains that these reforms are necessary to protect Georgia's sovereignty and reject foreign interference. Mdinardze stressed that these measures would not be fast-tracked but would undergo consultation before implementation.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Dream Revokes Mandates of 49 Opposition MPs



On February 5, the Georgian Dream (GD) Parliament terminated the mandates of 49 opposition MPs from the Coalition for Change, Unity-UNM, and Strong Georgia. These opposition groups had requested the revocation of the mandates following the disputed October 26 elections, which they consider

rigged. Opposition leaders warn that this move could trigger further repression by the GD government, while the ruling party defends it as necessary to curb “political sabotage.”

The terminated mandates in-

clude 19 seats from the Coalition for Change, 16 from Unity-UNM, and 14 from Strong Georgia. GD Parliament also revoked the mandate of Irakli Beraia, who was appointed Deputy Minister of Justice. The decision strips opposition MPs of parliamentary immunity, which previously protected them from ar-

rests or searches without Parliament’s consent.

In response, opposition leaders predict escalating government repression. Irakli Kupradze from Strong Georgia accused Bidzina Ivanishvili of taking orders from the Kremlin to neutralize civil resistance figures. Other opposition members, like Khatia Dekanoidze, vowed to resist the GD’s pressure, with the aim of pushing for the regime’s downfall. Despite the GD’s move, Gakharia – For Georgia has refused to recognize Parliament’s legitimacy and has not submitted requests for mandate termination.

Opposition Questions Authenticity of New European Socialists Group

Following the Georgian Dream’s (GD) decision to revoke the mandates of 49 opposition MPs, three GD lawmakers: Ilija Injia, Varlam Liparteliani, and Nika Elisashvili, announced they were leaving GD to form a new opposition group called the European Socialists. The trio held a briefing where they expressed their intent to challenge

the influence of the United National Movement (UNM) and contribute to the creation of a “healthy opposition” in Georgia. Injia claimed that “without a healthy opposition, a healthy democratic system can never be established,” and voiced confidence that their efforts would significantly impact the country’s political development.

However, the formation of the European Socialists has been met with skepticism from opposition groups. Many believe the move is merely a staged attempt to

further the GD’s interests rather than a genuine effort to build an alternative opposition force. Critics point out that a similar situation occurred earlier when the People’s Power group, also leaving the GD, claimed to have the goal of fostering a “healthy opposition.” People’s Power has since been associated with the introduction of controversial laws like the Foreign Agents’ law and has been vocal in its populist-conservative stance, which often targets Western influence.



“Beyond self-protection, it’s important to protect your partner, too” – Why should we get the HPV vaccine?

“Nowadays, Georgia faces a major challenge, as over 200 women die annually from cervical cancer, primarily caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV),” says 24-year-old Elene Janukashvili, a sixth-year student at Tbilisi State Medical University and a future reproductive health specialist.

In January, Elene received her final, third dose of the 9-valent HPV vaccine, which is included in the immunization schedule for her age group. HPV is a sexually transmitted infection that is the leading cause of cervical cancer among women and girls.

The 9-valent HPV vaccine available in Georgia, which protects against even more oncogenic strains of HPV, is part of the national immunization

programme and is provided free of charge to girls and women aged 10–46, as well as to boys and men aged 10–26.

“We have the privilege in Georgia, which many other countries lack, to get such an expensive vaccine [for free], protecting not only ourselves but also our partners from the infection, which ultimately leads to oncogenic diseases such as cervical cancer and others,” says Elene.

Along with Elene, her friend, 24-year-old Givi Gvinjilia, also received the HPV vaccine. He is a sixth-year medical student at David Tvildiani Medical University.

There is a myth in Georgia that since men don’t have a uterus, they can’t get HPV. However, men can also get infected, and transmit the virus, endangering their partners.

“Beyond self-protection, it’s important to protect your partner too. Given the nature of HPV, which remains undetectable for a long time and manifests severely later, I believe it’s crucial

to prevent this problem from the outset,” says Givi.

Nino Inashvili, a 39-year-old HR specialist, had her older son vaccinated against HPV. Her younger child is seven years old and is not yet eligible for the vaccine under the immunization schedule, but she plans to have him vaccinated as soon as he reaches the appropriate age.

“As soon as I learned that boys could also be vaccinated against HPV, I became interested and did my research. At the time, my older son was 12, and he was eligible for the programme. First and foremost, we wanted to protect him from diseases caused by HPV (such as genital cancers), and also to protect the women

he may have relationships with in the future,” says Nino.

Most of the parents in Nino’s social circle have vaccinated their daughters and have been actively working to raise awareness of the importance of the vaccine:

“I often see photos and videos of girls getting vaccinated. Unfortunately, I haven’t heard of any boys being vaccinated. I hope that by sharing our stories, the parents of my son’s classmates will become interested and vaccinate their children as well,” Nino adds. She also notes that since the eligible age range for the vaccination programme has expanded, she will definitely participate in this campaign.

Cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In Georgia, where HPV is the primary cause of cervical cancer, this disease ranks fifth among the most frequently diagnosed oncological conditions among women.

The cervical cancer screening programme in Georgia was launched in 2009 with technical assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). To ensure universal access to screening, including for women living in rural and hard-to-reach areas, UNFPA — together with other UN agencies and with support from the European Union — is promoting the development of digital medicine in Georgia.

HPV vaccination and cervical cancer screening are available free of charge at primary healthcare facilities and national screening centres.



Photo credit: Dina Oganova/UNFPA

Weather

Thursday, February 6

Day Rain and Snow High: 4°C

Night Light Rain Low: 2°C

Friday, February 7

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 9°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 2°C

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