

Kobakhidze Addresses Imprisoned Journalist's Hunger Strike Amid Calls for Meeting

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

During his visit to Batumi, Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze addressed questions from reporters regarding imprisoned journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, who has been on hunger strike for 29 days. He also commented on the statement by Eter Turadze, editor of Batumelebi, who expressed readiness to meet with him over the case.

This comes after Kobakhidze had previously stated on January 29 that he was open to discussions on Amaglobeli's case, saying: "If anyone wants to discuss any issue publicly or privately, specifically the issue of Mzia Amaglobeli, come and see me, I am ready to meet tomorrow and discuss this issue."

At a rally near the Government Chancellery, Turadze emphasized that Amaglobeli's hunger strike is not aimed at securing her release due to her profession but because of what they consider an unjust imprisonment. "We are demanding her release because she is an unlawful prisoner. We are saying that Article 353 Prima of the Criminal Code brought against Mzia Amaglobeli



is inadequate," she stated.

Kobakhidze, however, underscored what he saw as a lack of remorse in the case, pointing to the alleged assault on a police officer. "The main problem here is that we don't see any remorse. A police officer was punched in the face, and there is zero remorse in this regard, neither from the accused nor from her colleagues. This is extremely disturbing," he said.

Regarding the possibility of a meeting, Kobakhidze noted that he had expected some expression of regret from those seeking discussions. "If someone were to express regret, of course, that would be very important, it would be an expression of respect for the state. But when you see that not only do they not express remorse for a specific violation of the law, but on the contrary, they are trying to encourage such violations, this is completely unacceptable," he stated.

The case continues to draw attention, with supporters of Amaglobeli arguing that her detention is politically motivated, while government officials maintain that the charges are legally justified.

EU Officials Condemn Georgia's Democratic Backslide, Kobakhidze Dismisses Criticism

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The European Union has strongly criticized recent actions by the Georgian Dream government, warning that they represent a significant departure from democratic standards. In a joint statement, European Commission High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas and Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos expressed deep concern over legislative changes and the treatment of journalists and political opponents in Georgia.

Kallas and Kos pointed to the rushed adoption of amendments to the Code on Administrative Offences, Criminal Code, and the Law on Assemblies and Manifestations, arguing that these changes will have "far-reaching effects on Georgian society" by undermining fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly, and media.

"These developments mark a serious setback for Georgia's democratic development and fall short of any expectations of an EU candidate country," the statement read. The EU officials urged the Georgian authorities to halt these measures, de-escalate tensions, and await the opinion of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), as requested by the Public Defender.

The EU statement also condemned the use of "intimidation tactics and violence" against peaceful protesters, journalists, and opposition politicians. One of the most alarming cases highlighted was that of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, who is currently on hunger strike in detention.

"Mzia, currently on hunger strike, is a symbol of courage of all those unjustly detained. Those responsible for the violence must be held accountable," the statement added.

The European Union called for the immediate release of all journalists, activists, and political detainees who have been unjustly imprisoned. The statement also urged the Georgian government to engage in dialogue with opposition forces and civil society representatives to restore trust.

In response, Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze dismissed the EU's criticism as a "blatant lie." He strongly rejected claims that Amaglobeli was detained for exercising free speech and accused European officials of fabricating misinformation.

"You heard one of the international responses yesterday, where it is said that a specific person is in prison for allegedly expressing free speech. You see how shameful lies are being fabricated, and this lie was fabricated at the highest level in the European Union," Kobakhidze stated.

He further asserted that Amaglobeli was detained for allegedly assaulting a police officer, not for journalistic activities. "Everyone should have a healthy reaction to this, and not the one expressed yesterday, for example, by the highest officials of the European Union, who fabricated a shameful lie and said that a journalist is in prison for expressing a free opinion. This is a shameful lie and we cannot have any reaction to such shameful lies."



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7940; Euro - 2.9010; GBP - 3.4794; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8840; Swiss Franc - 3.0801

Georgian Dream Set Out to Shape a New Political Spectrum

BY MALKHAZ MATSABRIDZE

Georgian Dream has revoked the parliamentary status of 49 opposition MPs from three electoral entities – something these MPs had long been demanding. But the story doesn't end there. A commission has been established to “investigate the crimes” of the government that was in power from 2003 to 2012. Ultimately, the plan is to prosecute the so-called “Collective National Movement” and ban these parties altogether. Meanwhile, with Georgian Dream now alone in parliament, it has already created two opposition parties from within its own ranks.

During the 2024 election campaign, Bidzina Ivanishvili repeatedly emphasized the need to secure a constitutional majority, citing “revitalizing the political spectrum” as one of the key reasons. The goal was to put the so-called “collective National Movement” on trial and replace it with new, “good” political parties.

Despite everything, in the October 2024 parliamentary elections, Ivanishvili's party failed to secure a constitutional majority. The CEC recorded 89 seats for Georgian Dream, while the remaining seats went to four opposition blocs. Accusing the government of electoral fraud, these opposition parties not only refused to take up their mandates but three of them (except for Gakharia's party) demanded

the withdrawal of their party lists. Their request was categorically denied – since 100 MPs were required to recognize parliament as legitimate. As a result, with no other option left, the now-isolated Georgian Dream recognized the mandates of all 150 MPs.

For a while, Georgian Dream representatives mockingly claimed that the opposition would soon enter parliament, recalling the events of the 2020 parliament. However, they seemed to forget that back then, Charles Michel played a decisive role in resolving the crisis.

If the opposition were to enter parliament now, it would serve only as political decoration, effectively legitimizing the October 26, 2024 elections. The main demand of both the opposition and ongoing protests is the holding of snap parliamentary elections, a demand that has also been endorsed by the Council of Europe. However, Georgian Dream categorically rules out snap elections and is instead intensifying its wave of repressions.

On February 5, the Georgian Dream-controlled parliament revoked the mandates of 49 opposition MPs from three political alliances:

“Coalition for Change – Gvaramia, Melia, Girchi, Droa” – 19 mandates

“Unity – United National Movement” – 16 mandates

“Strong Georgia – Lelo, For the People, For Freedom!” – 14

mandates

As a result, the 150-member parliament shrank to 101 members.

The only opposition party nominally remaining in parliament is “Gakharia – For Georgia”, which won 12 seats in the disputed October 26 elections. However, while this party's representatives do not attend parliamentary sessions, they have also not formally requested the revocation of their mandates.

Georgian Dream justified its move by citing the need to prevent “political sabotage.” According to Irakli Kobakhidze, the opposition had not been stripped of their mandates earlier because time had been given not to the “radical opposition” itself, but to their patrons – “the Deep State, the Global War Party.” However, these actors did not change their decision to keep the opposition out of parliament.

Opposition leaders now expect a new wave of repression from the government, as the revocation of their parliamentary mandates also strips them of their immunity, allowing the police to arrest them. They fear arrests not only for participating in protests but also for past actions.

Meanwhile, the Georgian Dream's parliament has created a temporary investigative commission tasked with examining the crimes committed by the regime in power from 2004 to 2012 – essentially, the rule of the United National Movement. Ac-

ording to Irakli Kobakhidze, this was a “foreign-controlled, bloody regime” that launched the August 2008 war, violated human rights, and more.

“We need something like the Nuremberg Trials,” Kobakhidze declared.

The Georgian Dream has long threatened to organize such a process. The criminal prosecution of the United National Movement and the banning of the so-called collective National Movement were among Georgian Dream's main promises during the election campaign.

According to this statement, the “collective National Movement” must be prosecuted – a term that now encompasses all pro-Western political forces, including Western-funded NGOs. Gakharia's party will not be spared either, as it is also considered part of this.

“There is no place for the United National Movement in parliament,” declared Irakli Kobakhidze.

However, Georgian Dream does not want to be alone in parliament and is trying to create pseudo-opposition forces, which it calls a “healthy opposition”. In the 11th convocation of the now one-party parliament, Georgian Dream was once again ‘split’, with “People's Power” emerging as a separate faction. Meanwhile, alongside the revocation of 49 opposition MPs' mandates, three more MPs left Georgian Dream, announcing the re-establishment

of “European Socialists.”

In the previous 10th convocation of parliament, both of these groups played a key role in promoting anti-Western narratives. Now, by playing the role of the opposition, these breakaway MPs will create the illusion of a multiparty system, occupy parliamentary opposition quotas, take up positions meant for the opposition, and fill opposition seats in parliamentary delegations.

Georgian Dream is no longer concerned with its international image and no longer cares what the West thinks. However, the ruling party hopes that President Trump will be too preoccupied to impose sanctions and expresses solidarity with the so-called “Deep State” struggle, which it blames for all of Georgia's misfortunes – past and present.

It is clear that the prosecution of pro-Western political forces and the arrests of opposition leaders will trigger stronger Western sanctions. The adoption of repressive laws by Georgian Dream led to a meeting between opposition leaders and the ambassadors of EU member states, attended by Georgia's 5th President, Salome Zourabichvili.

“Today, political life in Georgia has effectively come to an end,” declared Zourabichvili. She emphasized that as repression intensifies in Georgia, Western partners must increase pressure on Ivanishvili's Russian-style regime.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Journalist Afgan Sadygov's Health Deteriorates Amid Ongoing Hunger Strike and Risk of Extradition

The Social Justice Center (SJC) raised alarms over the deteriorating health of Afghan Sadygov, an Azerbaijani journalist on a hunger strike for 142 days. Sadygov is at risk of being extradited from Georgia to Azerbaijan, a move that follows a ruling by the Tbilisi City Court on January 31 to extend his pre-trial detention. This decision came despite an interim mea-



sure by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on January 14, which prohibited his transfer.

Sadygov escalated his protest on February 2 by declaring an absolute hunger strike after months of refusing food. By February 5, his condition worsened, and he lost consciousness for several hours before being stabilized with medical intervention. As of now, he remains in a critical state, weighing 56 kilograms – a loss of over 40 kilograms since

his detention. His health is at serious risk, with the SJC warning that further damage could be irreversible.

The SJC confirmed that, upon family and legal advice, Sadygov agreed to receive water, though he remains on hunger strike. The organization vowed to continue monitoring his condition and provide updates on the case's progress at the ECtHR.

Khazaradze Urges Gakharia's Party to Renounce Mandates, Calls for Internal Isolation of GD

Mamuka Khazaradze, leader of the opposition coalition Strong Georgia, has called on Giorgi Gakharia's party, Gakharia for Georgia, to officially renounce its

parliamentary mandates. He argued that just as the international community has isolated the “illegitimate” Georgian



Dream (GD) government, the opposition must do the same internally, leaving GD without room to maneuver legally.

At a press briefing on February 7, Khazaradze stated that remaining in parliament means aiding Bidzina Ivanishvili's “Russian government” and un-

dermining efforts to challenge its legitimacy. He pointed to the February 5 decision by GD's parliament to revoke opposition mandates, effectively reducing the legislative body to 89 active MPs. This, he argued, prevents it from making key constitutional decisions requiring higher vote thresholds.

Although Gakharia for Georgia has declared the GD-led parliament illegitimate and abstained from participation, it has yet to formally relinquish its 12 mandates.

Khazaradze stressed that by retaining these seats, the party is facilitating the “covert legalization and promotion” of GD's rule. He urged them to take decisive action, aligning with other opposition forces that have fully withdrawn from the legislature.

Weather

Monday, February 10

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 4°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: -4°C

Tuesday, February 11

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 7°C

Night Clear
Low: -3°C

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