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Parliament Advances Legislative Amendments, Including FARA, in First Reading

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The parliament has approved a series of legislative amendments in their first reading, covering parliamentary procedure, gender equality laws, the criminal code, public service regulations, and broadcasting laws. Among the measures passed was the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which has been a subject of significant debate.

Restrictions on Parliamentary Rules of Procedure

The amendments to parliamentary rules limit the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in public decision-making. Under the new law, NGOs may still participate in discussions but will no longer have a mandatory role in decision-making processes.

Davit Matikashvili, GD Chairman of the Committee on Procedural Matters and Rules, defended the amendment, citing concerns over foreign influence on CSO activities. He referenced allegations against USAID, stating:

"It was revealed how not only USAID, but also other funds were financing protests and organizing revolutions against democratically elected governments in various countries through non-governmental organizations."

Additionally, the amendment changes the procedure for electing members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), eliminating the requirement for a three-fifths majority vote for candidate appointments.

Gender Equality Law Revisions

The GD-led parliament also passed amendments to the Law on Gender Equality with 83 votes in favor. The changes replace the



term "gender equality" with "equality of women and men" and remove the legal definition of "gender" from the law.

Matikashvili argued that the original terminology had been influenced by external factors, stating:

"This was a kind of reflection of the global processes taking place in the world."

The amendment also removes the obligation to establish gender equality councils in parliament, autonomous republics, and municipalities.

However, Matikashvili emphasized that this change "does not mean that both the Parliament of Georgia and local self-government bodies should not focus on unwaveringly upholding the principle of equal-

ity between women and men." **Amendments to the Criminal Code**

The parliament introduced stricter penalties for treason, including espionage, conspiracy to overthrow the government, and other offenses related to national security.

Rati Ionatamishvili, one of the amendment's initiators, argued that:

"Treason is the most serious crime, and the state must create the most solid and firm guarantees for the protection of the country's sovereignty."

Public Service Law Changes

The approved Public Service Law amendments introduce a new category of individuals

"equated with civil servants" and alter appointment procedures. The simplified competition rule for appointing heads and deputies of Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPLs) has been removed, granting direct appointment powers to relevant ministers and agencies.

Tornike Cheishvili, First Deputy Chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee, claimed that the change streamlines appointments and ensures that employees dismissed due to reorganization or staff reductions receive adequate compensation.

Broadcasting Law Amendments

Parliament also approved amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, introducing restrictions

on foreign funding for media organizations. Under the new provisions, broadcasters will be prohibited from receiving direct or indirect foreign funding, except for revenue from commercial advertising, teleshopping, sponsorship, and product placement.

The law also restricts foreign governments from purchasing broadcaster services or co-financing content production and airing.

Rati Ionatamishvili, Chair of the Committee on Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration, defended the changes, stating:

"Georgia is a sovereign state, and our democratic institutions, including the media, should not be managed from the outside."

He argued that when the media is "externally managed", it prioritizes foreign interests over public information.

Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)

The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which has drawn significant attention, was approved in its first reading. The law would require organizations receiving foreign funding to register as foreign agents, submit annual financial declarations, and face criminal liability for non-compliance.

Committee chairman Archil Gorduladze defended the measure, stating:

"The country should have regulations that, on the one hand, prevent external interference and, on the other hand, ensure the transparency of any funds spent in Georgia."

He further justified the bill by drawing a parallel to U.S. legislation, stating:

"Just as the American people have the right to protect their sovereignty, the Georgian people have no less a right to strengthen their sovereignty, independence, and for the public to know who is transferring funds and for what activities."

Former Ivanishvili Aide Claims Forced Exile Amid Political Persecution

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Giorgi Bachiasvili, a former aide to billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, took to social media today, March 4, to announce

that he had been "forced to leave Georgia." The 39-year-old, who previously served as Ivanishvili's financial advisor, stated that he is facing fabricated charges and fears impris-

onment.

Bachiasvili, who has been the target of two separate lawsuits filed by Georgian prosecutors, claimed that the charges against him were part of a larger political persecution campaign orchestrated by Ivanishvili, the Georgian Dream founder, and key figures within the judiciary. He named several individuals in his post, including Judge George Gelashvili, Chairman of the Tbilisi Court of Appeals Mikheil Chinchaladze, High Council of Justice member Levan Murusidze, Prosecutor General Giorgi Gabitashvili, and Prosecutor Mikheil Sadradze, accus-

ing them of being complicit in the alleged persecution.

In his statement, Bachiasvili emphasized the lack of justice in Georgia, asserting that "this is not a legal system where truth prevails, nor one where rights are protected—especially for those like me who have been deliberately targeted by Bidzina Ivanishvili and his corrupt machinery."

Bachiasvili further revealed that he had received credible threats to his safety, adding that these threats held deadly weight in the current political climate of Georgia. "In prison, I would be left absolutely defenseless, face to face with Ivanishvili's executioners... in the very prison where Ivanishvili threatened to crush me," he warned, implying that his life would be at signifi-

cant risk should he be detained.

He stressed that his departure from Georgia was not an act of "surrender" but rather a "strategic decision." Bachiasvili expressed confidence that he could contribute more to the battle against what he perceives as political injustice from outside a prison cell. "I can contribute far more to this battle from outside a prison cell than within one," he said.

Giorgi Bachiasvili's Lawyer Levan Makharashvili stated that he learned about his departure from a Facebook post.

"I found out just like everyone else. My first communication with Giorgi was after his post. I don't know which country he is in—only that he's willing to testify remotely," Makharashvili said.

CONTINUED ON Page 2



George Bachiasvili
8K followers • 0 following

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7905; Euro - 2.9350; GBP - 3.5509; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.1256; Swiss Franc - 3.1315

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The Day Georgia Lost Its Independence – And How It’s Remembered Today

Last month marked the anniversary of a pivotal moment in Georgia’s history – the loss of its independence. February 25 holds a significant place in modern Georgian political memory. Ideally, such a date should unite the nation, yet the ruling party “Georgian Dream,” and the opposition marked it separately, drawing different conclusions from the past.

On February 25, 1921, the 11th Red Army of Soviet Russia entered Tbilisi without resistance. The attack on Georgia had begun on the night of February 11-12 from Armenia, followed by an invasion from Azerbaijan on February 16, while simultaneous offensives took place along the Black Sea coast and through the Caucasus mountain passes. Ironically, just a year prior, on May 7, 1920, Soviet Russia had recognized Georgia’s independence and promised to establish good neighborly relations.

Despite the surprise attack and the imbalance of forces, the Georgian army repelled two major assaults on Tbilisi on February 19 and 23, even capturing around a thousand Red Army soldiers as prisoners. It is said that among them was a young Nikita Khrushchev, the future leader of the Soviet Union. The immediate threat seemed to have passed, but on the night of February 24, Tbilisi faced the risk of encirclement. At that moment, Georgia’s military commander, General Giorgi Kvinitadze, made the decision to withdraw from Tbilisi to prevent its destruction and regroup in Gori, with the hope of launching a counteroffensive with reinforcements from western Georgia. Militarily, this strategy

may have been sound, but politically, it had catastrophic consequences – while Tbilisi was fighting, the whole country was fighting; but when Tbilisi was abandoned, many lost hope for victory.

Soviet-Bolshevik propaganda further exploited the situation, claiming that Georgia’s independence was not at risk and that only the ruling Georgian Mensheviks would be replaced by Georgian Bolsheviks, who, after all, had once belonged to the same party.

Despite these events, the war continued for another three weeks. On March 17, 1921, the Georgian government, led by Noe Zhordania, left Batumi and headed for France, hoping to secure European support. Just a few weeks earlier, at the end of January 1921, Georgia had received legal recognition of its independence.

On February 25, 1921, the Red Army entered Tbilisi without a fight. Sergo Ordzhonikidze, who later became synonymous with betrayal in Georgia, sent a famous telegram to Lenin and Stalin in Moscow: “The red flag flies over Tbilisi.”

Initially, February 25 had little political significance. Since Soviet authorities outwardly maintained the rhetoric of Georgia’s continued independence, an unusual situation occurred – on May 26, 1921, Georgia’s Independence Day was officially celebrated even under the occupation. However, it was clear to all that this was not truly a holiday for the new rulers. In 1922, Georgia’s national

movement organized a protest against the occupation on February 11, the anniversary of the Soviet attack. But soon after, the Bolsheviks played a propaganda trick – on February 25, 1922, they adopted the Soviet Constitution of Georgia and declared it the country’s real Independence Day. From then on, celebrating May 26 was banned. Over time, the constitutional pretext faded, and February 25 became officially recognized as the day of the founding of Soviet Georgia, celebrated as a national holiday.

From that moment on, February 25 – the day of Soviet occupation – was set in direct opposition to May 26, Georgia’s true Independence Day. The Soviet regime lasted in Georgia for seventy years and came at a heavy cost to the country.

The official commemoration of Soviet Occupation Day in Georgia began after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. In 2010, the Georgian Parliament unanimously passed a resolution instructing the government to organize annual memorial events on Febru-

ary 25 in honor of the hundreds of thousands of victims of the communist occupation.

On February 25, 2025, Georgia marked the 104th anniversary of the Soviet occupation. The ruling party, Georgian Dream, lowered the national flags, government officials visited memorial sites, and their central message was: “February 25 must never be repeated.” However, they framed the threat of another February 25 as originating from the “global war party” and the “deep state,” claiming that these forces had pushed Georgia into war with Russia in 2008 and had since attempted to drag the country into war again. According to Georgian Dream, their government’s policies had successfully shielded Georgia from such dangers.

The opposition and protest movements, which had been demonstrating for 90 consecutive days, saw things differently. In their view, Georgia is currently under the rule of a Russian-backed regime led by Geor-

gian Dream, which must not be allowed to block Georgia’s European path and bring about another Russian occupation. On February 25, protests and marches were held in 23 locations across Tbilisi and other regions. Protest marches also took place in eight major cities: Kutaisi, Batumi, Akhmeta, Telavi, Zugdidi, Chkhorotsku, Akhaltsikhe, and Gori.

At a protest rally on February 25, former President Salome Zourabichvili addressed the crowd, stating that “people have gathered not just to remember a tragic day but to ensure that February 25, 1921, never happens again.” She criticized contemporary propaganda, which, just like in 1921, claims that Russia only seeks peace while blaming an imaginary “war party” for any conflict. Zourabichvili emphasized that “Russia’s empire of evil must ultimately be defeated – in Georgia, in Ukraine, in Moldova, and beyond. The era of the Russian empire must be consigned to history.”

Former Ivanishvili Aide Claims Forced Exile Amid Political Persecution

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

He noted that Bachiashvili’s passports had been confiscated and questioned why he should be expected to explain how Bachiashvili left the country.

Prosecutor Mikheil Sadradze also stated that authorities are unaware of how Bachiashvili, who is facing charges in two separate criminal cases, managed to leave Georgia.

“His passports were confis-

cated. We have the facts we have. This requires further examination, and an investigation will be launched,” Sadradze said.

In 2023, Bachiashvili was charged with embezzling a large sum of bitcoins, leading to an order to pay GEL 2.5 million (approximately USD 898,000) in restitution and a ban on leaving Georgia. Just last week, prosecutors filed new charges, accusing Bachiashvili of negligence in his role as the general director of Ivanishvili’s co-investment fund. The court imposed a bail of GEL 50,000 (about USD 18,000) and renewed the travel ban. Throughout both legal proceedings, Bachiashvili has maintained that the charges were politically motivated.

Weather

Wednesday, March 5

Day Clear

High: 12°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 2°C

Thursday, March 6

Day Clear

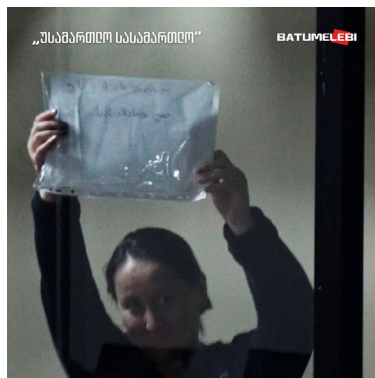
High: 13°C

Night Clear

Low: 4°C

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Batumi Court Keeps Journalist Mzia Amaglobeli in Custody



Mzia Amaglobeli, co-founder and director of *Netgazeti/Batumelebi*, will remain in custody following a ruling by Batumi City Court Judge Viktor Metreveli. The decision was made during a pre-trial hearing on March 4, where the court reviewed the possibility of revising her preventive measure.

During the hearing, it was revealed that Amaglobeli’s case includes a detective’s report from February 15, which alleges that she planned to attack a police officer and communicated about it over the phone. Based on this claim, the prosecutor’s office requested access to data from Amaglobeli’s phone.

Amaglobeli rejected the charges in court, calling her detention unjust and politically motivated.

“I do not agree with the charges. I consider myself an unlawful prisoner. Fortunately, dictatorship has not yet fully gained control in our homeland. Therefore, I believe that I and the prisoners of conscience will be able to prove our innocence,” she stated.

Kobakhidze Dismisses Venice Commission’s Criticism of Protest Law Amendments



Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has rejected the Venice Commission’s concerns over recent amendments to Georgia’s Code of Administrative Offenses and the Law on Assemblies and Manifestations, dis-

missing the body as “one of the most frivolous” European institutions.

The Venice Commission concluded that the amendments impose excessive restrictions on freedom of assembly and other fundamental rights, arguing that they fail to meet principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. The commission urged Georgian authorities to revise the legislation.

Kobakhidze, however, dismissed the criticism outright, claiming the commission’s conclusions “cannot be taken seriously.”

“There is absolutely no legal basis for their request. In general, I can say that the Venice Commission is one of the most frivolous European structures. Even within the broader frivolity of European institutions, the Venice Commission stands out,” he stated.

According to Kobakhidze, the commission has shifted from a legal expertise center to a political body serving the ‘global war party.’

“Without any legal justification, it writes political conclusions, which is not its role. We cannot take their conclusions seriously. If they make legal assessments, we will consider them, but politics is not the business of the Venice Commission.”

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