

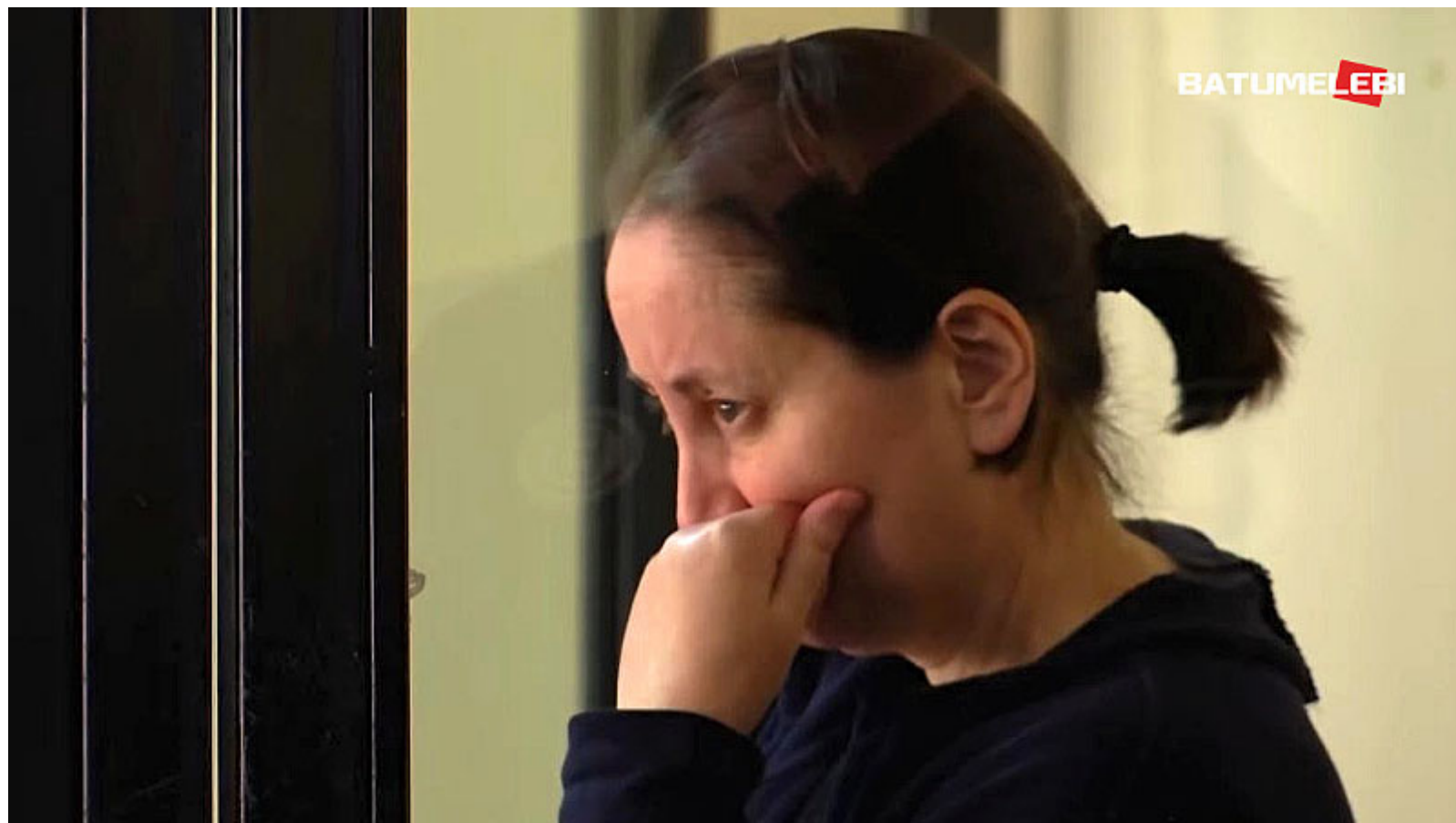
Mzia Amaghlobeli Remanded in Custody Amid Controversial Allegations

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On March 4, Batumi City Court remanded journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli, founder of *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, in custody. The decision was met with tension in the courtroom, where Amaghlobeli held up a piece of paper reading "Unjust Court."

Amaghlobeli had been on a hunger strike for 38 days, which she ended on February 18. Despite her health condition, she was present at today's hearing. The prosecution introduced new claims, alleging that Amaghlobeli had communicated with others in advance to plan an "attack on the police." They cited a detective's report dated February 15, which claimed that Amaghlobeli had been in contact with unidentified individuals regarding the attack. Based on this, the prosecutor requested access to her phone to extract data. However, Amaghlobeli's defense team opposed the request, arguing that it was an attempt to gain access to personal information without adequate evidence.

The prosecution also argued that Amaghlobeli posed a risk of absconding and destroying evidence, justifying her continued detention. The defense strongly contested this, asserting that



there was no legal basis for her imprisonment and that the remand was excessive. "A slap with the left hand is not an assault on a police officer," the defense argued.

At the hearing, Amaghlobeli declared, "I don't think I'm

guilty, I see myself as illegally imprisoned," expressing confidence that she and other prisoners of conscience would eventually prove their innocence.

Amaghlobeli's case has drawn significant attention, with supporters, including journalists,

human rights defenders, politicians, and diplomats, gathering outside the courthouse. Among those present were French Ambassador to Georgia, Shéraz Gasri, Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy in Georgia, Esther Wagner, and Head

of Political Affairs at the Swedish Embassy, Erik Malmberg.

Ahead of the hearing, the German Foreign Ministry had called for Amaghlobeli's immediate release, adding to the growing international pressure surrounding the case.



Europe Press Freedom: Georgia Faces Sharp Decline in Press Freedom

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The 2024 Europe Press Freedom Report highlights a rapid deterioration of media freedoms in Georgia, marking the country as having the highest increase in press freedom alerts among all Council of Europe member states. This decline has further distanced Georgia from democratic principles and hindered its European Union integration.

A fact-finding mission conducted for the report in October 2024 found that press freedom in Georgia is under severe strain. The mission documented increasing efforts to discredit and suppress independent journalism, particularly targeting critical media outlets.

The report notes that the 26 October 2024 parliamentary elections took place amid a

highly polarized and contested environment. While the ruling Georgian Dream party claimed victory, opposition parties, domestic observers, and a large portion of Georgian society disputed the results.

According to the 2024 Europe Press Freedom Report:

- At least 70 journalists were subjected to verbal and physical attacks, intimidation, and obstruction on election day.

- Several pro-opposition TV channels, including Mtavari TV, were fined by the Communications Commission for refusing to air political advertisements.

- Following the elections, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the suspension of Georgia's EU accession process until 2028, trigger-

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7858; Euro - 2.9783; GBP - 3.5725; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.1057; Swiss Franc - 3.1396

Europe Press Freedom: Georgia Faces Sharp Decline in Press Freedom

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violence against journalists escalated. The report warns of increasing nationwide protests, where

ing legal restrictions targeting independent journalism:

- The 'Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence' forces media outlets receiving over 20% of funding from foreign sources to register as 'agents of foreign influence', drawing comparisons to Russia's restrictive legislation.

- Journalists covering protests against the law faced violence, threats, and vandalism of their offices.

- A new law passed in December 2024 bans depictions of same-sex relationships in media, raising further concerns about freedom of expression.

The 2024 Europe Press Freedom Report also highlights increasing risks for journalists in exile:

- Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov was arrested in November and faces possible extradition.

- Foreign journalists, in-

cluding Ray Baseley and Arsen Kharatyan, have been denied entry into Georgia.

The 2024 Europe Press Freedom Report warns that Georgia's press freedom is in crisis, with escalating violence against journalists, restrictive laws, and political interference. The report calls for urgent action to reverse these trends and uphold Georgia's commitment to democratic values and European integration.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Tbilisi City Court Judge Remands 11 Protesters on Charges of Group Violence



Tbilisi City Court Judge Irakli Shvangiradze has remanded 11 individuals arrested in connection with organizing and participating in group violence during recent protests. The defendants include Andro Chichinadze, Onise Tskhadadze, Guram Mirtskhulava, Jano Archaia, Luka Jabua, Ruslan Sivakov, Revaz Kiknadze, Giorgi Terashvili, Valeri Tetrashvili, Sergey Kukharchuk, and Irakli Kerashvili.

The prosecutor's office sought their remand, citing concerns about potential flight risks, the possibility of further criminal activity, and the destruction of evidence.

The defense team for the accused contested the remand, arguing that the prosecution's claims were unfounded and lacked substantial evidence. They characterized the prosecution's arguments as generic and unsupported by the facts of

the case.

Giorgi Bachiasvili Secretly Crosses Border into Armenia, Faces Legal Charges

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has confirmed that Giorgi Bachiasvili, the former head of co-Investment Fund, illegally crossed the border into Armenia on March 2. According to the Ministry, Bachiasvili bypassed the border checkpoint, using a concealed hiding place in a car to evade detection.

The Ministry stated that the investigation is ongoing under Part 1 of Article



344 of the Criminal Code, which deals with the illegal crossing of Georgia's state border.

Upon reaching Armenia, Bachiasvili reportedly presented a Russian Federation passport at the Armenian border checkpoint, confirming his Russian citizenship. This document allowed him to

successfully cross the border into Armenia.

Bachiasvili has now been charged with a third offense, related to the illegal border crossing. The prosecutor's office has requested that Bachiasvili be sentenced to imprisonment as a preventive measure.

EBRD launches new investment strategy for Armenia

Weather

Thursday, March 6

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 13°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 4°C

Friday, March 7

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 17°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 3°C

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has published its investment strategy for Armenia for 2025-30.

The strategy is based on two priorities.

The first priority is to enhance the inclusivity and competitiveness of the private sector by improving financial intermediation, providing targeted support for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as refugees and host communities, and fostering

trade diversification.

The second priority is to invest in sustainable infrastructure with a view to accelerating the green economy transition. This will include financing energy-efficiency initiatives, expanding the Bank's Green Cities programme and enhancing energy security with an emphasis on renewable energy solutions.

Additional efforts will be made to support Armenia's Nationally Determined Contributions and low-carbon pathways.

published by

The Messenger

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The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

2019 to 2024, helping to drive significant economic progress. In 2024 alone, the EBRD invested a record Euro396 million in the country, with a strong emphasis on private-sector development and support for infrastructure to enhance Armenia's trade opportunities.

To date, the EBRD has invested almost Euro2.6 billion in 224 projects across Armenia, of which 84 per cent was in the private sector.

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