

Papuashvili Accuses International Organizations and Foreign Diplomats of Interfering in Country's Politics

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

During a press briefing on March 7, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili launched a series of accusations against international organizations, foreign diplomats, and Western governments, alleging interference in Georgia's political and judicial affairs.

Papuashvili criticized the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), calling it a "fraudulent organization" and accusing it of manipulating the results of the 2020 Georgian elections. He claimed ISFED's actions were intended to mislead the public and to destabilize the government. Papuashvili also alleged that in 2024, ISFED had "hidden" the results of its parallel vote count. "Together with the USAID leadership, both ISFED and the American and Georgian employees of USAID hid the real results and lied to us," he said.

According to Papuashvili, ISFED's decision to withhold the election results was "dictated to them by the donor," a claim he suggested confirmed ISFED's status as a "fraudulent organization" that had lost American funding. He further stated that ISFED was now being funded by Brus-



sels, a move he argued was part of an effort to destabilize Georgia's political landscape. Papuashvili reiterated the Georgian Dream party's stance that foreign funding for ISFED was a tool to undermine Georgia's sovereignty.

Papuashvili also turned his attention to foreign diplomats, specifically accusing those from Belgium, Lithuania, and the UK of undermining Georgia's sovereignty. He described the actions of these diplomats as part of a broader

attempt by the Baltic states to replace the Georgian government.

In his remarks, Papuashvili expressed strong disapproval of the proposed MEGOBARI Act, a bipartisan U.S. Senate bill that would impose sanctions on Geor-

gian government officials accused of human rights violations and undermining democracy. He denounced the bill, arguing that it represented unwarranted foreign interference in Georgia's internal affairs.

Council of Europe Urges Georgia to Repeal Anti-LGBT Law and Strengthen Minority Rights Protections

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) called on Georgian authorities to repeal the controversial anti-LGBT law Protection of Family Values and Minors. The law, which restricts LGBT rights, including freedom of expression and assembly, has raised significant concerns among European institutions.

The Committee of Ministers, which oversees the enforcement of European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rulings, adopted an interim resolution in the Identoba and Others cases against Georgia. This resolution stresses the country's obligation to uphold the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly in the areas of discrimination and hate crimes.

The cases focus on Georgia's failure to provide adequate protection for LGBT individuals and religious minorities against homophobic and religiously motivated violence. In some instances, authorities are accused of either turning a blind eye or being complicit in such attacks. The resolution also highlights the failure to protect the right of LGBT people to assemble peacefully and of religious minorities to freely practice their faith.

The Committee urged Georgian au-

thorities to accelerate investigations and legal actions in these cases, ensuring they follow the European Court's findings. This includes properly classifying crimes with bias motives and ensuring that victims are granted the status they deserve.

The Committee expressed its strong disapproval of the anti-LGBT law, describing it as a significant setback in Georgia's commitment to human rights. The law, it said, undermines the country's obligations to respect and implement the European Court's rulings, and the Committee called for its immediate repeal.

Furthermore, the Committee urged Georgian authorities to distance themselves from discriminatory narratives and take decisive action against all forms of discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes. It emphasized the need for a clear "zero-tolerance" message from the highest levels of government and immediate steps to end impunity for those responsible for hate-motivated violence.

The resolution also called on Georgia to ensure stronger protections for the rights of all citizens, guaranteeing freedom of assembly and religious practice. It stressed the importance of a robust criminal justice response to hate-motivated violence and comprehensive measures to prevent and protect vulnerable communities.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Striking Students at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film University Fined 5,000 GEL Each



Law enforcement officers have fined several students participating in a strike at the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film University of Georgia. According to the students, approximately 10 of them received fines.

The students claim they were fined 5,000 GEL each for violating assembly and demonstration regulations.

“They told us that protests are not allowed inside the university. Since we do not obey what the administration asks of us, we were all fined 5,000 GEL. At this stage, they are also writing down everyone’s name and surname and issuing fines,” said one of the students.

The students also reported that university officials began sanitary works on March 9 without prior warning, while

students were still on-site. The administration urged them to relocate their protest to another space, but the students refused, arguing that the alternative was too small. They also demanded another space within the university, which the administration declined to provide.

Freedom Square Political Movement Becomes Independent Party

The Freedom Square political movement has officially transitioned into a political party following its congress on March 8.

Founded in 2024 ahead of the October 26 elections, the movement initially ran under the Strong Georgia coalition. Now, it has announced its shift into an independent political force.

“We were in an electoral coalition, and we are very proud of it,” said Levan Tsutkiridze, the party’s leader and founder. “Now we are continuing our development independently.”



The newly established party has outlined justice, security, and freedom as its key priorities. Party leader Simon Janashia elaborated on these issues, stressing the need for non-discriminatory laws that serve the public good rather than individual power. He also underscored the importance of independent institutions, including police, prosecutors, and the judiciary, in upholding justice.

On security, Janashia emphasized strengthening both national and individual security, particularly through an improved social security system. Regarding freedom, he advocated for a positive understanding of the concept — one that goes beyond deregulation to include the necessary conditions for economic, cultural, and spiritual development.

EU’s Entry/Exit System: EU ministers approve phased launch of digital border system

On 5 March, home affairs ministers of the European Union agreed on a joint position on a regulation allowing for the progressive start of operations of the Entry/Exit System, an IT system for registering the entry and exit into the Schengen area of non-EU nationals who are travelling to the EU for a short stay.

This law will make it possible for member states to start the EES progressively during a six-month transition period before fully launching the new system.



Once members of the European Parliament (EP) reach their position, the Council and EP can start negotiations to settle on the final law.

Ministers also approved a revised roadmap for the roll-out of the so-called interoperability architecture, an interconnected system of IT tools used for border management

and law enforcement. According to the roadmap, which was adopted by the management board of eu-LISA, the EU agency in charge of building the IT infrastructure, the EES will start in a progressive manner in October 2025. The revised Eurodac, an EU biometric database that assists with the identification of asylum seekers, will enter into operation in June 2026. And the European Travel and Authorisation System (ETIAS) will finally be launched in the last quarter of 2026.

ETIAS is an online travel authorisation, not a visa. With a valid ETIAS travel authorisation, you will be able to stay in any of the 30 European countries for 90 days in any 180-day period.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Monday, March 10

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 18°C

Night Clear

Low: 4°C

Tuesday, March 11

Day Clear

High: 21°C

Night Clear

Low: 5°C

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