

By Liza Mchedlidze

Former President Saakashvili Sentenced to Nine Years in Jackets Case

Former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was sentenced to nine years in prison on March 12 by Judge Badri Kochlamazashvili in the so-called Jackets case, a trial centered on the misappropriation of state funds.

The court found Saakashvili guilty of misusing approximately 9 million GEL (roughly USD 3.2 million) from the state budget between 2009 and 2012. Prosecutors argued that these funds, allocated to the Special State Protection Service, were used for personal expenses, including luxury hotel stays, spa visits, cosmetic procedures, and clothing purchases for Saakashvili, his close allies, friends, and family members.

Saakashvili, who served as Georgia's president from 2004 to 2012, was initially charged with abuse of power in 2018 and sentenced in absentia to six years in prison. After returning from Ukraine in 2021, he was arrested, and his new sentence now extends his incarceration until 2030.

Alongside Saakashvili, former Special State Protection Service head Teimuraz Janashia was also sentenced in the case. Although the court found no direct evidence that Janashia personally spent the misappropriated funds, he was fined 300,000 GEL for allegedly "using his position against the public interest."



Following the verdict, Saakashvili denounced the ruling in a statement, calling it a politically motivated decision influenced by Georgian Dream party founder and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili.

"What a surprise, isn't the oligarch's verdict? The will of the occupier has been directly carried out. This is their response to the fact that I did not surrender Georgia. For the first time in centuries, we dared and

formed a successful Georgian state," Saakashvili wrote.

He further criticized the trial, arguing that after failing to find substantial evidence against him, authorities sentenced him to what he described as "practi-

cally life imprisonment" over official presidential office expenses.

"This is how Ivanishvili's mafia clan punishes devotion to the country and love of homeland. They will not intimidate us! Strength is in unity!" he declared.



GYLA Raises Alarming Concerns Over Government Surveillance of Protesters

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has raised serious concerns about the Ministry of Internal Affairs' targeted surveillance of protest participants, claiming that the government is unlawfully gathering personal information using facial recognition technology and live camera monitoring.

During a briefing, GYLA Chair Nona Kurdovanidze revealed that while reviewing a case related to road-blocking protests, the organization discovered alarming evidence of targeted surveillance. "It is unclear what legitimate purpose is served by the close-up of papers held by a protester with their back to the video camera and the monitoring for a certain period, which made it possible to read the existing text," Kurdovanidze stated.

She further explained, "This gives us grounds to assume that the camera control is being carried out mechanically by a specific person or persons."

According to GYLA, the Ministry of Internal Affairs continues to employ facial recognition cameras to monitor and identify protesters. The practice is particularly evident in cases related to road blockages, where photo evidence from these cameras is often the sole basis for identifying individuals accused of administrative offenses.

GYLA has criticized this approach, arguing that courts frequently accept such evidence without assessing whether the identification process was conducted legally or whether the officials involved had the proper access to protected databases under personal data protection laws.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7775; Euro - 3.0297; GBP - 3.5930; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2073; Swiss Franc - 3.1477

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“This practice is deliberately used both to intimidate citizens and to control the future behavior of protest participants,” Kurdovanidze warned. “It also has a chilling effect, discourag-

ing individuals from exercising their freedom of expression.”

A particularly concerning incident cited by GYLA involves video footage from a January 2025 protest on Rustaveli Avenue, presented as evidence in the Tbilisi City Court. The foot-

age reportedly shows a protester being followed by a camera in “live mode,” with the camera zooming in on a document the individual was reading, allowing authorities to discern its contents.

“This indicates that the protester’s movements and specific framing of the shots are being monitored in real-time,” said Kurdovanidze. “The video recording suggests that cameras can not only identify individuals but also gather other types of information, even when that information is not legally connected to an administrative offense case.”

The European Court of Hu-

man Rights has previously ruled that the use of facial recognition technology and live surveillance constitutes an interference with the right to privacy and freedom of expression. Kurdovanidze referenced the case of *Glukhin v. Russia* (no. 11519/20), in which the court found that such surveillance practices were incompatible with democratic principles and the rule of law.

GYLA argues that the Ministry of Internal Affairs is unlawfully collecting and processing personal data, raising serious legal and ethical questions. The organization has repeatedly called on the Personal Data Pro-

tection Service to investigate whether the government has conducted the necessary pre-assessments for data protection impact, whether data collection actions are being properly documented, and whether security measures comply with legal standards.

However, despite these calls, the status of the Personal Data Protection Service’s investigation remains unclear.

“We once again call on the Personal Data Protection Service to thoroughly and promptly investigate this fact and take effective action,” Kurdovanidze urged.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Businessman Giorgi Chikvaidze Declares Hunger Strike Amid Legal Battle



Businessman Giorgi Chikvaidze has announced the start of a hunger strike in pro-

test against what he describes as systemic oppression. His brother, Dimitri Chikvaidze, shared Giorgi’s statement on social media, in which he expressed his defiance against the authorities and vowed to stand

by this system! From today, I am going on a full hunger strike. This time too, I will stand out in my principles, even if it costs me my life, I will do this for the love of my country. The responsibility for what happened will fall on the Russian regime, Russian agent Bidzina Ivanishvili, and the corrupt Giorgi Gabitashvili. I would also like to appeal to our family’s relatives and acquaintances, all of whom are silent, are participants in this process. Friends, do not stop, the fight continues until victory,” Chikvaidze wrote.

On March 11, Tbilisi City Court Judge ruled to replace Giorgi Chikvaidze’s preventive detention with bail. The judge also upheld the bail conditions for his business partner, Irakli Papiashvili. The Prosecutor’s Office had sought to have both men imprisoned while awaiting trial.

Chikvaidze and Papiashvili are facing charges under Article 182 of the Georgian Criminal Code, which pertains to the misappropriation of a large sum of money through abuse of an official position with prior group coordination. According to prosecutors, their alleged actions resulted in financial damages amounting to 1,155,019 GEL.

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by his principles, even at the cost of his life.

“I will not tolerate oppression

Legal Issues Chair Rejects MEGOBARI Act, Calls It ‘Blackmail’



Archil Gorduladze, Chairman of the Legal Issues Committee in Georgia’s Parliament, has accused U.S. senators of using the MEGOBARI Act as a tool of political coercion, dismissing it as irrelevant and harmful to Georgia’s interests.

Speaking to journalists, Gorduladze accused the act’s initiators of hostility toward Georgia, claiming that it was designed to interfere in the country’s internal affairs.

“The MEGOBARI Act means nothing. Even if they call it an

act of brotherhood, kinship, sisterhood, and reconciliation, such an act was initiated by people like Jim Risch and Jeanne

Shaheen, who hate our country,” Gorduladze alleged.

He further accused the act’s backers of attempting to weaken Georgia’s sovereignty and supporting what he called “foreign-backed spy networks.”

“Against this backdrop of hatred, they initiate various acts and support the spies and agencies operating in our country, so that they can then talk about this act again as if something is happening and there are catastrophic events. This means nothing,” he claimed.

EU leaders welcome US-Ukraine talks in Saudi Arabia: ‘The ball is now in Russia’s court’

Weather

Thursday, March 13

Day Clear
High: 25°C

Night Clear
Low: 8°C

Friday, March 14

Day Clear
High: 26°C

Night Clear
Low: 11°C



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The European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen have welcomed yesterday’s news from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, concerning the US-Ukraine talks, including the proposal for a ceasefire agreement and the resumption of US intelligence sharing and security assistance.

“This is a positive develop-

ment that can be a step towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine,” both EU leaders said in their posts on X. “The ball is now in Russia’s court.”

They added that the EU was ready “to play its full part”, together with its partners, in the upcoming peace negotiations.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

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