

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

UNM Leader Levan Varshalomidze Arrested in Kazakhstan

Levan Varshalomidze, the former head of the Adjara government and a member of the Unity - National Movement (UNM), has been arrested in Kazakhstan, according to his party. The arrest reportedly took place at an airport while Varshalomidze was crossing the border.

Levan Bezhashvili, one of the leaders of UNM, stated that the case is allegedly linked to information sent from the Russian Federation regarding a criminal case connected to Varshalomidze's political consulting activities with the Ukrainian government.

Bezhashvili dismissed the accusations as completely unfounded and warned of the risk of extradition, stressing the need for urgent diplomatic efforts.

"There is a risk of extradition, so at this moment, all of our resources are engaged to ensure proper communication with both the Ukrainian authorities and the Kazakh authorities, to provide real information and ensure that the Kazakh authorities make a decision that aligns with the best interests of both Georgia and Kazakhstan," Bezhashvili stated, adding that the case is allegedly based on information sent from Russia.

He further emphasized that the criminal case initiated by Russia is politically motivated, calling for immediate action to prevent what he described as "illegal detention."



Batumi City Court Fines Journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli Amid Protests



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Batumi City Court has found Mzia Amaghlobeli, founder of the publications *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, guilty of an administrative offense and imposed a 2,000 GEL fine. The ruling, issued by Judge Salikh Shainidze, was met with strong opposition from Amaghlobeli's supporters, who shouted "Unjust court" and "Fear the people's power" inside the courtroom.

The hearing was attended by Amaghlobeli's family, colleagues, and supporters, as well as representatives from various embassies.

Mzia Amaghlobeli was initially detained administratively on January 11, during a protest near the Main Police Department in Batumi. She was released after about two hours, only to be re-arrested shortly afterward under criminal law.

Following today's ruling, her lawyer, Nona Kurdovanidze, strongly criticized the court's decision, stating that Amaghlobeli was convicted without any evidence. Kurdovanidze announced that the case will be taken to the European Court of

Human Rights in Strasbourg.

"This case will also go to Strasbourg, and the truth will certainly be proven," Kurdovanidze wrote on social media.

She further accused the court of staging a legal farce, claiming that Judge Salikh Shainidze intentionally created an illusion of fairness during the hearing before ultimately ruling in line with the authorities' demands.

"Salikh Shainidze, whose removal we requested, found Mzia Amaghlobeli guilty of an administrative offense and fined her 2,000 GEL for the first episode of her detention (before she was arrested on criminal charges, this case concerns those events).

Judge Shainidze used a tactic that some judges often use—during the hearing, he creates the impression that he is fairly reviewing the case, fulfilling requests, questioning witnesses, giving remarks to law enforcement representatives, and sometimes 'irritates' them with his own 'fairness' to the point where the law enforcement representatives, frustrated, ask the judge in court, 'What's going on, is this selective justice?'

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

Batumi City Court Fines Journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli Amid Protests

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

However, this farce ends with what the system wants. The system wants Mzia to be convicted without evidence.”
Kurdovanidze further alleged that the Ministry of Internal Affairs fabricated the case, falsifying both the arrest and the violation report, and presenting irrelevant video evidence that had nothing to do with Amaghlobeli’s initial detention.

“There is not a single piece of evidence in this case that would prove Mzia committed any offense. The Ministry of Internal Affairs falsified both the arrest and the violation report, a police witness lied in court, and they presented videos taken two hours after Mzia’s administrative detention, which could not possibly show anything that would justify her being punished administratively.”
She reiterated her commitment to fighting the ruling, insisting that justice will ultimately prevail.

“This case will go to Strasbourg, and the truth will definitely be proven. Freedom for Mzia.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Parliament Passes ‘Foreign Agents Registration Act’ in Second Reading

18.03.2025

კენჭისყრის შედეგი

15:24:09

86

0

50

მომხრე

წინააღმდეგი

კვორუ

With 86 votes in favor, the Parliament of Georgia has unanimously adopted the “Foreign Agents Registration Act” in its second reading. The bill, introduced by the Georgian Dream party, establishes a framework for registering individuals and entities as agents of a foreign principal. Its enforcement will be overseen by the Anti-Corruption Bureau.

- The bill defines key terms such as “agent of a foreign principal” and “foreign force” while outlining the following regulations:
- Public disclosure of applications for registration as a foreign agent, along with relevant documentation.
- Mandatory submission of an annual financial declaration for registered foreign agents.
- Procedures for deregistration of entities previously classified as foreign agents.
- State monitoring mechanisms to identify foreign agents and ensure compliance with the law.
- Failure to register as a foreign agent or noncompliance with the law’s requirements will result in criminal liability.

Parliament Approves Bill on ‘Treason Against the Homeland’ in Second Reading

The Georgian Parliament has approved the initiative to reinstate the “Treason Against the Homeland” article in the Criminal Code, passing the bill in its second reading with 85 votes in favor.

The legislation introduces Article 307 to the Criminal Code, which establishes criminal liability for treason committed by Georgian citizens or stateless persons residing in Georgia. Under this provision, the following acts are classified as treason:

- Violating Georgia’s territorial integrity
- Entering into or negotiating unconstitutional treaties
- Compromising Georgia’s external security
- Collaborating with foreign intelligence services
- Undermining Georgia’s defense capabilities
- Disclosing state secrets
- Espionage
- Conspiracy or rebellion to overthrow Georgia’s constitutional order by force
- Sabotage
- Assisting foreign entities or organizations in hostile activities

It is notable that all these offenses are already punishable under various existing articles of the Criminal Code.

The bill was proposed by MPs from the Georgian Dream party and the political group Power of the People.

EU support for UNESCO initiative to preserve Jewish documentary heritage in Ukraine

UNESCO has launched a new Euro2.2 million project aimed at preserving and promoting the rich documentary heritage of Jewish communities in Ukraine.

The two-year initiative,

funded by the EU, will focus on digitising at-risk and damaged documents from ten memory institutions, training over 50 culture professionals in preservation techniques, and supporting artistic and research endeavours that highlight the



contributions of Jewish heritage to Ukrainian culture.

In light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the initiative will strengthen Ukrainian archives and memory institutions and their ability to preserve and create access to documentary heritage.

The project will also foster collaboration among researchers, artists, and journalists. Scholars will be supported to conduct studies on Jewish heritage, while journalists will be equipped to utilise archival materials for investigative and educational media projects.

Additionally, grants will be provided to artists for creative interpretations of Jewish cultural heritage through visual arts, film, literature, and music. These collaborations will culminate in public events and multimedia projects that amplify the historical and cultural narratives of Jewish communities in Ukraine.

“Ukraine has a very important Jewish heritage, which is also threatened by the war and must be protected. Thanks to the European Union, UNESCO will contribute to advancing histori-

cal research and preserving the archives of Jewish culture in all regions of the country,” said UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay.

This project joins other measures already taken by UNESCO to protect Jewish heritage in Ukraine. In December 2024, Babyn Yar, the site of one of the largest massacres of the ‘Holocaust by bullets’, was granted temporary enhanced protection by UNESCO under the 1954 Hague Convention, in addition to its inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2023.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Wednesday, March 19

Day Cloudy

High: 10°C

Night Showers

Low: 3°C

Thursday, March 20

Day Cloudy

High: 9°C

Night Showers

Low: 4°C

published by

The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof. Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze

Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000

E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge

http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli

Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze

Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili

Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia’s English language daily is an independent newspaper, and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.