

The Messenger

“Impartial, Informative, Insightful”

GEL 3.00

#050 (5861)

THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2025

WWW.MESSENGER.COM.GE

Salome Zourabichvili and Opposition Appeal to European Leaders Over Georgia’s Political Crisis

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgia’s fifth President, Salome Zourabichvili, along with opposition parties and civil society organizations, has sent an urgent appeal to European leaders ahead of the European Council meeting. The letter, released by Zourabichvili’s press service, warns of an escalating crisis in Georgia, accusing the ruling authorities of establishing a “Russian-inspired regime” and calling for international intervention.

“We are appealing to you to give due consideration to the current highly concerning developments in Georgia, where a Russian-inspired regime is adding every day to its array of repressive measures against Georgian democracy, sovereignty, and its European future,” the letter states.

The appeal argues that Europe must focus on Georgia due to three key factors: democracy, sovereignty, and strategic security.

Zourabichvili and opposition leaders claim that the Georgian government is systematically dismantling democratic institutions and violating fundamental rights, reversing two decades of progress toward European integration.

“A one-man, Russia-supported dictator should not be allowed to defy European and American partners, nor to transform a determined pro-European popula-



tion, a Candidate country, into a Russian satellite,” the statement reads.

The letter also alleges that Georgia is part of a broader Russian strategy to exert influence over the region through hybrid warfare, rather than direct military intervention.

“What is happening in Georgia since the rigged elections and the November 28 decision to stop its European path is nothing else

but the attempt by Russia to test an alternative hybrid instrument to reestablish domination over a sovereign, independent, pro-European country,” the appeal claims.

The appeal urges European leaders to intervene diplomatically and facilitate a high-level discussion on holding new elections in Georgia. It warns that the current crisis, if unresolved, could lead to further destabiliza-

tion. “The only peaceful way out of such a dead end is new elections,” Zourabichvili states, emphasizing the need for European and American mediation.

The letter also calls for direct support for civil society, independent media, and political prisoners, arguing that Europe must take a stronger role in defending democratic values in Georgia.

“Europe has to stand up, when America leaves, not only on defense issues but in supporting civil society and essential freedoms,” the letter states.

The appeal concludes with a request for Georgia’s political crisis to be included in the agenda of the next European Council meeting, with Zourabichvili and opposition leaders offering to testify before the European Parliament.



საიას შეფასება თავდაცვის სამინისტროდან თანამშრომელთა გათავისუფლების შესახებ



Mass Dismissals in Georgia’s Defense Ministry Raise Concerns of Political Repression

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA) has reported that around 150 employees have been dismissed from the Ministry of Defense, with some receiving legal assistance from the organization. GYLA claims the dismissals took place without prior notice and lacked transparency, raising concerns about political motivations behind the layoffs.

According to GYLA, the dismissals stem from a reorganization process within the Ministry, which began without informing employees or conducting a thorough review. Some structural units were abolished, leading to automatic dismissals, while others were transferred to different positions without explanation.

“In parallel with the ongoing protests in the country, hundreds of employees

have been dismissed from public institutions. Some have not had their employment contracts renewed for various reasons,” GYLA stated. The organization linked the dismissals to amendments in the Law on Public Service, which were passed by Parliament on December 13, 2024, and are seen as weakening employees’ legal protections.

GYLA also noted that the Public Service Bureau and other institutions are being liquidated, suggesting a broader restructuring effort.

GYLA emphasized that many dismissed employees believe they were targeted due to their support for Georgia’s European integration process or for expressing political opinions within their institutions.

CONTINUED FROM Page 2

Mass Dismissals in Georgia's Defense Ministry Raise Concerns of Political Repression

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

"The dismissal of employees, given existing judicial practice, provides grounds for considering these dismissals as illegal," the statement said.

Additionally, on January 24, 2025, an amendment to Order No. 582 of the Minister of Defense introduced age limits for employees with special ranks, leading to further dismissals.

GYLA condemned the dismissals, stating that the process was unfair, non-

transparent, and violated public sector employees' rights.

"This process constitutes political repression against public officials. It is particularly worrying that some of those dismissed had signed a statement supporting European integration, which is an example of clear discrimination and a violation of freedom of expression," GYLA stated.

The organization has called on administrative bodies to immediately halt the illegal dismissals and protect the rights of public servants.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Parliament Approves Stricter Drug Laws in First Reading



The Georgian Parliament has approved a legislative package initiated by the Georgian Dream party that will impose stricter penalties for drug-related offenses, including those involving cannabis and marijuana. The bill passed in the first reading with 83 votes in favor.

The amendments span across eight different laws, including the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Offenses, and the Law on Organized Crime. The proposed changes increase prison sentences, expand the scope of drug-related crimes, and introduce new penalties for various offenses.

Under the new bill, penalties will be increased for the illegal manufacture, production, transportation, or transfer of narcotic and psychotropic substances,

including their analogues, precursors, and new psychoactive substances. Marijuana and cannabis-related offenses will also face harsher punishments.

Additionally, administrative liability will be tightened for individuals found

guilty of the illegal possession, transportation, or use of small quantities of drugs without a prescription. The penalties include:

- A fine ranging from 500 to 2,000 GEL
- Administrative imprisonment of up to 60 days
- Revocation of gun-related rights
- Suspension of a driver's license for three years

The bill also introduces mandatory treatment for drug-addicted offenders, giving judges discretionary authority to impose rehabilitation as a form of criminal punishment.

The legislation provides a clear definition of drug trafficking and specifies who qualifies as a family member, close rela-

tive, or associate of a trafficker. It also determines which assets may be considered the property of a drug trafficker, paving the way for stricter enforcement and asset seizure.

The bill was proposed by Georgian Dream and People's Power MPs and is expected to go through further readings before becoming law.

Parliament Approves Ban on Foreign Funding for Media in Second Reading



The Georgian Parliament has approved a bill in its second reading that prohibits television and radio organizations from receiving funding from "foreign powers." The bill was passed with 83 votes in favor after an article-by-article discussion.

Under the new amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, media organiza-

tions will no longer be allowed to receive direct or indirect monetary or material benefits from foreign entities. The legislation introduces several key restrictions, including:

- A ban on direct or indirect funding from foreign powers, including monetary payments or other material benefits.
- A restriction on foreign-funded social advertising, preventing media outlets from accepting payments in exchange for airing such content.

A prohibition on broadcasters receiving foreign financing for the production or airing of programs, except for commercial advertising and product placement.

The bill, backed by the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority, is set to undergo further readings before final adoption.

EBRD promotes economic inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Croatia

More than 4,000 Ukrainian

refugees across Croatia have received crucial employment support from an EBRD-backed technical assistance project, completed in March.

Croatia-based civil society organisations – the SVOJA Association and SOLIDARNA Foundation – have been working for the last two years as part of the EBRD's private sector for Ukrainian refugee integration Initiative, aiming to support greater participation of Ukraini-

ans in the Croatian labour market with a focus on the private sector.

Established in 2022 by Ukrainian women, SVOJA has become a network of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Croatia. It offers advice on employment and business creation, job applications, legal support, free Croatian language courses, and psychological support.

"Since our arrival, we have supported and witnessed many

Ukrainians in building successful business ventures in Croatia," said Nataliia Hryshchenko, director of SVOJA. "Ukrainians here are actively pursuing business opportunities and economic independence, and we are proud that our association continues to assist them in achieving these goals."

Under the EBRD-supported project, SVOJA has worked closely with SOLIDARNA, an

established Croatian NGO, to promote these goals and build its own organisational capacity.

The project is part of the EBRD's Civil Society Capacity Enhancement Framework, an innovative grant-based programme to establish partnerships and provide support to a wide range of civil society stakeholders in the Bank's countries of operation.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Thursday, March 20

Day Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night Rain
Low: 4°C

Friday, March 21

Day Rain
High: 8°C

Night Rain
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.