

Georgian Dream Signals Intent to Ban UNM Following Local Elections, Says Mdinardze

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian Dream party has declared its readiness to face off against what it calls "agents' parties" in this year's local elections, promising a decisive victory followed by legal steps aimed at banning the opposition party United National Movement (UNM). The announcement was made by Mamuka Mdinardze, Executive Secretary of Georgian Dream.

Mdinardze revealed that the parliamentary majority has agreed to extend the mandate of the Temporary Investigative Commission by one month, allowing additional time for investigation into alleged abuses and misconduct by the United National Movement and its alleged affiliated political forces, collectively referred to by the ruling party as the "collective National Movement."

"At today's session, we made a clear decision to extend the term of the Investigative Commission by one month," Mdinardze stated. "This extension means that the collective



National Movement will be able to participate in the upcoming local elections, and no one will have the opportunity to claim that we rushed to ban them before the vote."

The Investigative Commission, chaired by Tea Tsulukiani, was initially set up to examine

alleged human rights abuses, misuse of power, and other crimes committed during the years 2003–2012 under the former UNM-led government. Recently, its scope has been expanded to include incidents and claims up to the present day, based on what Mdinardze de-

scribed as "hundreds of new submissions" received daily from citizens.

Mdinardze emphasized that the ruling party's strategy is twofold: first, to secure a strong electoral victory in the local elections; and second, to prepare a comprehensive and fact-based

constitutional lawsuit aimed at banning the UNM.

"After our victory in the self-government elections, we will be fully prepared to submit a solid, evidence-based constitutional claim. This will serve as the objective foundation for the Constitutional Court to consider and implement a ban on the collective National Movement," he stated.

Mdinardze stressed that this process must be conducted transparently and by the book to avoid any domestic or international accusations of political manipulation.

Mdinardze also made it clear that Georgian Dream would not tolerate accusations of using the commission's findings as a tool to undermine political competition ahead of elections.

"By extending the commission's term, we are demonstrating our commitment to due process and impartiality," he said. "We won't allow anyone, inside or outside the country, to say that we rushed the ban or manipulated the process for electoral gain."

Giorgi Gakharia Testifies Before Georgian Dream's Investigative Commission

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Giorgi Gakharia, former Prime Minister of Georgia (2019-2021) and current leader of the opposition For Georgia party, appeared before the temporary investigative commission on June 10. The commission, officially tasked with probing alleged crimes by the United National Movement (UNM), questioned Gakharia on key events during his tenure, including the violent crackdown on protesters during the 2019 "Gavrilov's Night" and the controversial Chorchana checkpoint incident.

Gakharia's decision to testify set him apart from other opposition leaders, many of whom have

refused to engage with what they consider an illegitimate, GD-dominated parliament. His party, For Georgia, is the only opposition force that has not formally resigned its parliamentary seats, though it does not recognize the legislature's legitimacy.

Commission chair Tea Tsulukiani greeted him with a pointed remark: "Thank you for coming. It seems you have recognized the Georgian Parliament and the credentials of our deputies." Gakharia fired back, accusing the commission of waging a "hybrid war" against Georgian citizens.

"I see that you are using this commission for information and psychological pressure," he said,

adding that his presence did not imply recognition of the body's legitimacy. He cited Tsulukiani's earlier dismissal of war hero Giorgi Antsukhelidze's death as a "senseless" PR stunt by Mikheil Saakashvili as a key reason for his appearance.

The hearing's most heated exchanges revolved around the June 20-21, 2019, protests, when riot police violently dispersed demonstrators angered by Russian MP Sergei Gavrilov's address from the parliamentary speaker's seat. The European Court of Human Rights later ruled that Georgia failed to properly investigate police brutality.

Gakharia admitted authorizing tear gas and water cannons but denied ordering rubber bullets, which were fired at close range, blinding several protesters. When pressed on who gave the command, he suggested officers may have acted independently in "self-defense."

"Once I learned rubber bullets were used, I restricted their use to situations where officers' lives were at risk," he said.

GD MPs contrasted his handling of the 2019 protests with the current government's response to anti-government demonstrations, praising Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri.

Tsulukiani argued Gakharia

should have resigned after protesters were injured. He countered that responsibility lay with those who invited Gavrilov, including GD chair Irakli Kobakhidze. "You've asked no questions about how Gavrilov arrived in Georgia?" he challenged. He also revealed receiving pressure from parliament to allow Gavrilov and other controversial figures into the country but did not name specific officials.

The commission revisited the 2019 Chorchana checkpoint crisis, when Georgian authorities established a police post near the South Ossetian occupation line. Tskhinvali responded with an ultimatum, threatening retaliation.

Gakharia defended the decision, citing deteriorating roads, new Russian-backed "border signs," and Georgian detentions in the area. He claimed the move was coordinated with the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and relevant ministries.

Aleksandre Tabatadze, then-deputy head of the State Security Service (SSSG), disputed this, stating the SSSG was "categorically against" the checkpoint. Tsulukiani dismissed Gakharia's explanation as lies, accusing him of bypassing protocol.

Gakharia retorted: "Did we coordinate with anyone before apologizing to the occupiers?" -

a job at Bidzina Ivanishvili's 2024 suggestion that Georgia apologize to Ossetians for the 2008 war.

When Tsulukiani claimed the checkpoint backfired by prompting further Russian encroachment, Gakharia sarcastically replied: "At the pace you're going, soon you'll be blaming me for starting a war."

The hearing concluded with questions about Gakharia's 2021 resignation, which came days before opposition leader Nika Melia's arrest. Gakharia stated that he had opposed Melia's detention, citing risks of escalation.

At the commission, he called Melia a "hooligan politician" who deserved arrest but argued it should have been handled differently to avoid later amnesty. Tsulukiani insinuated foreign pressure influenced his resignation, asking which ambassadors he met before stepping down.

After Gakharia could not recall names, she pressed: "Did you meet the U.S. Ambassador?" He confirmed but denied any suggestion that he was "secured in the opposition."

"The U.S. Ambassador can say whatever she wants, but the Prime Minister of Georgia makes decisions based on Georgian law," he said. He attributed his resignation to Bidzina Ivanishvili's shadow governance, claiming that despite Ivanishvili's public exit from politics, he "took over the decision-making process."



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7545; Euro - 3.1363; GBP - 3.6318; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.3460; Swiss Franc - 3.3674

Ongoing Political Crisis and Protest in Georgia

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The political crisis in Georgia continues along with the uninterrupted protest on Rustaveli Avenue, while the fifth President Salome Zurbishvili along with a few opposition leaders and civil society representatives coordinate efforts to draw international attention. Last month, a letter was sent to European leaders urging them to respond to the deteriorating situation in Georgia and to initiate high-level discussions about holding fair parliamentary elections.

As the opposition ramps up its efforts, Georgian Dream is working just as aggressively to suppress them. Protesters are being hit with steep fines of 5,000 GEL – many multiple times – as part of what critics describe as a financial crackdown on dissent. The government is fast-tracking

laws and making decisions that the opposition says signal a slide toward authoritarianism.

Two major developments have fueled the outrage: Former president Mikheil Saakashvili, currently imprisoned and held at Vivamedi clinic due to health issues, was recently handed two additional convictions. One case involves alleged embezzlement of public funds (around 9 million GEL), and the other concerns illegal border crossing. He's been sentenced to 12 years and 6 months. Due to sentence aggregation rules, he now faces prolonged imprisonment—an outcome all but guaranteed under Georgian Dream's rule.

The Prosecutor's Office froze the assets of five foundations that had been supporting detained activists – offering legal aid, financial assistance to families, and pledging to cover protest-related fines. The government

claims these organizations were backing anti-government demonstrations and says they spent over 2 million GEL since the protests began in late November. According to the prosecution, the funds were used to encourage illegal actions and support individuals accused of criminal behavior.

The opposition has slammed both moves. Nika Gvaramia, a leader from the Coalition for Change, called them “two steps toward dictatorship taken in a single day.” Former Public Defender Nino Lomjaria likened the government's tactics to Stalin-era repression.

While opposition figures have turned to Europe and the U.S. for support, Georgian Dream has adopted an openly dismissive tone toward Western leaders and diplomats, often responding with hostile and offensive language. Though the party still

praises former U.S. President Donald Trump and his allies, likely hoping for future political backing, its stance toward the broader Western political establishment remains combative.

Meanwhile the United National Movement has publicly criticized both President Zurbishvili and the Gakharia Party. The issue at the center is once again Saakashvili. Zurbishvili has been reproached for not pardoning him – a symbolic gesture that, while unlikely to secure his release, would have held political weight.

The Gakharia Party has drawn fire for refusing to vacate its parliamentary seats and for statements claiming Saakashvili is guilty and not a political prisoner. This prompted accusations that the party is acting as a “satellite” of billionaire and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, widely be-

lieved to control Georgian Dream behind the scenes. In response, Gakharia Party members have pushed back with sharp criticism of both the United National Movement and former members now aligned with the Akhali party, led by Melia and Gvaramia.

Despite these internal tensions, the opposition remains united in its core demands: the release of arrested protesters and the scheduling of snap parliamentary elections. Georgian Dream, on the other hand, is attempting to shift focus to the upcoming local elections, expected this autumn, and urging opposition parties to participate. So far, the response has been firm: no discussions about local elections until the demand for new parliamentary elections is addressed.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Georgian Dream Accused of Mass Dismissals of Public Servants



TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL GEORGIA

Transparency International reports that approximately 700 public servants have been dismissed from various state agencies since December 2024, with the organization suggesting these actions were politically motivated. According to the watchdog, the dismissals primarily targeted employees who had publicly opposed the government's policies, particularly regarding Georgia's Euro-

pean integration path.

According to the TI report, Georgian Dream party has amended the Law on Public Service four times since December 2024, significantly altering employment protections. Key changes include allowing the dis-

missal of middle-level managers with just three days' notice, restoring non-competitive appointments for key positions, and reducing compensation for wrongful termination to one month's salary. Diplomatic staff have also lost their lifelong tenure protections, while theater directors are now appointed directly by ministers or mayors. Public servants must now obtain written permission to engage in scientific, pedagogical, or artistic activities.

While official reasons cited for the dismissals include reorganization and contract expirations,

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The most affected agencies include the Ministry of Defense, Tbilisi City Hall, the National Agency of Public Registry, the Justice House, and the Central Election Commission. Regional institutions in Ajara and several municipalities also saw signifi-

cant staff changes. Two organizations: the Parliamentary Research Center and the Civil Service Bureau, were completely shut down.

While official reasons cited for the dismissals include reorganization and contract expirations,

Opposition Reacts to Gakharia's Parliamentary Testimony

Giorgi Gakharia's appearance before the Georgian Dream-led



investigative commission drew sharp criticism from opposition figures, including Mamuka Khazaradze and Tina Bokuchava.

Mamuka Khazaradze, leader of For a Strong Georgia, stated on social media: “When you participate in a farce, you are part of the farce! Participation in the parliament and the commission is the legalization of the Dream!”

Tina Bokuchava, United National Movement (UNM) Chair, rejected his characterization of

June 20 events, insisting the demonstration was “a self-organized public anti-Russian rally” without any “organized assault.”

The UNM leader accused Gakharia of avoiding the truth both as a government official and now as an opposition figure, claiming his only opposition activity has been attacking the United National Movement. She promised the UNM would soon present its own “Truth Commission” to counter what she called “Dream-Russian propaganda.”

Weather

Tuesday, April 15

Day Rain
High: 10°C

Night Showers
Low: 6°C

Wednesday, April 16

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 12°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 7°C

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