

## ECHR Finds Georgia Violated Rights in Protest-Related Detention Case



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled that Georgia vio-

lated the rights of Lexo Matchavariani, a protester detained in 2020, by failing to properly assess the legality of his detention. The judgment, announced today,

found a breach of Article 5, paragraph 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to liberty and security.

According to a statement from Transparency International – Georgia, the Strasbourg Court held that domestic courts should have examined whether Matchavariani's arrest was lawful, necessary, and proportionate. Matchavariani had been detained during a 2020 protest and held in administrative custody for 22 hours before being fined 1,000 GEL.

The Court emphasized that compliance with the formal 48-hour detention limit does not in itself render the detention lawful. Even when administrative offenses provide a legal basis for detention, national courts are still obligated to assess the necessity and proportionality of such measures in the context of individual circumstances.

"The domestic courts' failure to conduct this assessment, and their practice of directing detainees to file separate civil lawsuits to challenge the legality of their detention, was found by the ECHR to be unjustified," Transparency International – Georgia noted.

While the Court upheld Matchavariani's claim under Article 5, it dismissed his complaints under Articles 10 and 11, which relate to freedom of expression and assembly, as well as his Article 6 complaint concerning the right to a fair trial.

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Nika Gvaramia, leader of the Coalition for Change, has described a recent court hearing in his case as a procedural win, even though the judge did not rule in his favor. After the session, Gvaramia emphasized that the judge's choice to deliberate at length rather than issue an immediate decision was a significant development.

"What the judge did - taking an hour instead of a minute, is already a benefit and a result for us," Gvaramia said. "Had he issued a ruling in favor of my motion, it would have meant that all prior decisions had to be annulled, including the rulings in the cases of Nika Melia and Zurab Japaridze."

The court session focused on Gvaramia's motion challenging the criminal charges brought against him under Article 349 of the Criminal Code. He is accused of failing to comply with a request from Parliament's Temporary Investigative Commission, an offense punishable by a fine or up to one year in prison, along with possible disqualification from public office or professional activity for up to three years. Gvaramia has been assigned bail of 30,000 GEL, which he has publicly stated he will not pay.

His defense team argued that the alleged offense is administrative, not criminal, and is also addressed under Article 173 of the Administrative Offenses Code. They claim that in cases where the same act is defined under both codes, the one

with the lighter penalty must apply.

"There are two norms that define the exact same action under the exact same title but with different sanctions," Gvaramia said in court. "In any such case, criminal proceedings must be halted, and if anything proceeds, it should do so under administrative procedures."

He also criticized the Temporary Investigative Commission, chaired by Tea Tsulukiani, for bypassing the administrative process and initiating criminal prosecution. "The authority to impose an administrative sanction in this case lies with the commission itself and its chairperson, Tea Tsulukiani, who, as a known enforcer, decided to bypass everything and go straight to criminal prosecution," he stated.

Although the judge did not grant the motion, Gvaramia said the outcome showed hesitation that works in his favor. "We had no illusions about that outcome. But we must understand what the judge really said. He said, I cannot make this decision — let another judge decide it."

He ended his statement with a political message aimed at the ruling party. "I don't know who he'll hand it over to, but I can tell you directly, before anyone gets the chance to pass it on, Georgian Dream will be finished, and we are completely confident in that."

The case will now proceed to a full trial, where a different judge will consider its merits.

## Gvaramia Calls Judge's Delay a Victory as Case Moves to Trial



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER  
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Three Georgian  
Citizens  
Detained by Russian  
Forces Near Khurvaleti,  
One Released



Three Georgian citizens were illegally detained on May 20 by

Russian occupation forces near the village of Khurvaleti, located in the Gori Municipality, according to a statement released by the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG). One of the detainees has since been released and returned to Georgian-controlled territory,

while the other two remain in unlawful custody.

In response to the incident, the SSSG immediately activated the “hot line” mechanism managed by the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). Additionally, the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) and other international partners have been notified. The agency emphasized that all available diplomatic and legal mechanisms have been mobilized to secure the swift release of the remaining detained individuals. “The responsibility for all destructive acts committed in the occupied territories of Georgia, as well as along the occupation line, lies with the occupying power,” the SSSG stated.

**Georgia Extradites Suspects Wanted in France for Human Trafficking**

Georgian authorities have extradited several individuals to France who were wanted for trafficking-related crimes linked to a transnational criminal network, the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia announced on Monday. According to the statement, the suspects were arrested on

Georgian territory by the Ministry of Internal Affairs following coordinated efforts between Georgian and French law enforcement agencies. The individuals had been sought by France since 2024 via Interpol Red Notices. French investigators allege the suspects were part of a transnational organized group that operated under the guise of a “Tantra Yoga” enterprise. Within this framework, the suspects reportedly participated in the trafficking and sexual exploitation of at least seven victims in France.



“The leaders of one of the group’s divisions facilitated the transfer and sexual exploitation of these individuals on French territory,” the Prosecutor’s Office cited from the French investigation. Georgian courts at all levels approved the extradition, with the final decision signed by the Minister of Justice on April 16, 2025. The suspects were subsequently handed over to French authorities by personnel from Georgia’s Special Penitentiary Service.

**EU approves 17<sup>th</sup> sanctions package against Russia**

The European Union today approved its 17<sup>th</sup> sanctions package of economic and individual restrictive measures, cutting off Russia’s access to key military technology and curbing Russia’s energy revenues by heavily targeting Russia’s ‘shadow fleet’ of oil tankers, their operators, as well as a major Russian oil producer. The package was approved by the EU Foreign Affairs Council, taking place in Brussels. “This round of sanctions on Russia is the most wide-sweeping since the start of the war, together with new hybrid, human rights, and chemical weapons-related sanctions,” EU High Representative Kaja Kallas said. “While Putin feigns interest in peace, more sanctions are in the works. Russia’s actions and those who enable Russia face

severe consequences. The longer Russia persists with its illegal and brutal war, the tougher our response will be.” **Russia’s ‘shadow fleet’** The Council doubled the number of vessels included in the list of those subject to a port access ban and ban on provision of a broad range of services. A total of 189 vessels originating from third countries were targeted today, bringing the total of designated vessels to 342. Those vessels are part of Russia’s ‘shadow fleet’, and responsible for transporting Russian oil while practicing irregular and high-risk shipping practices, or supporting Russia’s energy sector. Restrictive measures on the shadow fleet are intended to dismantle its operational capacity, thereby reducing the oil revenues that support Russia’s war economy.

In addition, the EU imposes individual sanctions (assets freeze and prohibition to make funds available) targeting the shadow fleet ecosystem, namely on actors enabling the operation of the shadow fleet. These measures cover shipping companies responsible for the transportation of crude oil and oil products by the sea and engaging in dangerous practices at sea while transporting Russian oil, including entities from the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye and Hong Kong. The list also includes one important insurer of the Russian oil shipping industry. Since the EU introduced the oil price cap and sanctions on the shadow fleet, relevant Russian revenues have decreased by • 38 billion. Russian revenues in March 2025 were 13.7% lower than those in March 2023 and 20.3% lower than those of March 2022. **Energy** The EU imposed restrictive measures on Surgutneftegaz, a major Russian oil company which provides substantial revenues to the Russian government, directly fuelling its war effort. An important Russian oil

shipping company is also listed. **Military-industrial complex** The EU imposed sanctions on more than 45 Russian companies and individuals providing the Russian army with drones, weapons, ammunition, military equipment, critical components and logistical support. The EU also extended the targets to industrial enablers, such as Russian and Chinese entities supplying machine tools to the Russian military and industrial sector. The EU also continues to address support from third countries by adding three Chinese entities – including state-owned – a Belarusian and an Israeli one providing critical components to the Russian military, including for drones production. The Council of the EU also added 31 new entities to the list of those subject to tighter export restrictions concerning dual use goods and technologies, due to their support to Russia’s military and industrial complex in its war of aggression against Ukraine. Some of these entities are located in third countries (Serbia, the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye, Vietnam and Uzbekistan) and have been involved in the cir-

cumvention of export restrictions, including on Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or computer numerical control machine tools. The EU also introduced further restrictions on exports of goods which contribute to Russia’s military and technological enhancement, the development of its defence and security sector, the development or the production of its military systems, including chemical precursors to energetic materials and spare parts for machine tools. **Occupied territories** The newest set of listings also targets looting of cultural heritage in Crimea and illegal exploitation of Ukraine agricultural production. With today’s addition of 75 new listings (17 persons and 58 entities), the EU restrictive measures now apply to over 2400 individuals and entities. Those designated are subject to an asset freeze and EU citizens and companies are forbidden from making funds available to them. Natural persons are additionally subject to a travel ban, which prevents them from entering into or transiting through the territories of EU member states. (euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Wednesday, May 21

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 23°C

Night Clear

Low: 9°C

Thursday, May 22

Day Clear

High: 24°C

Night Clear

Low: 14°C

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