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# Three Georgians illegally detained by Russian occupation forces near Zugdidi



By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On January 18, at about 8:30 in the evening, three Georgian citizens were illegally detained by the Russian occupation forces near Khurcha village of Zugdidi Municipality. The State Service of Georgia has already activated a hotline and demanded an immediate release of the detained persons.

According to the statement released by the State Security Service of Georgia, a representative of occupied Abkhazia has already confirmed the illegal detention of three people living in the occupied territory via the hotline and added that the persons in question have already been released.

The statement read that the incident is a "deliberate provocation from the

occupying regime's side, and it significantly damaged the overall security environment and posed a significant threat to the stability and security to the region in general."

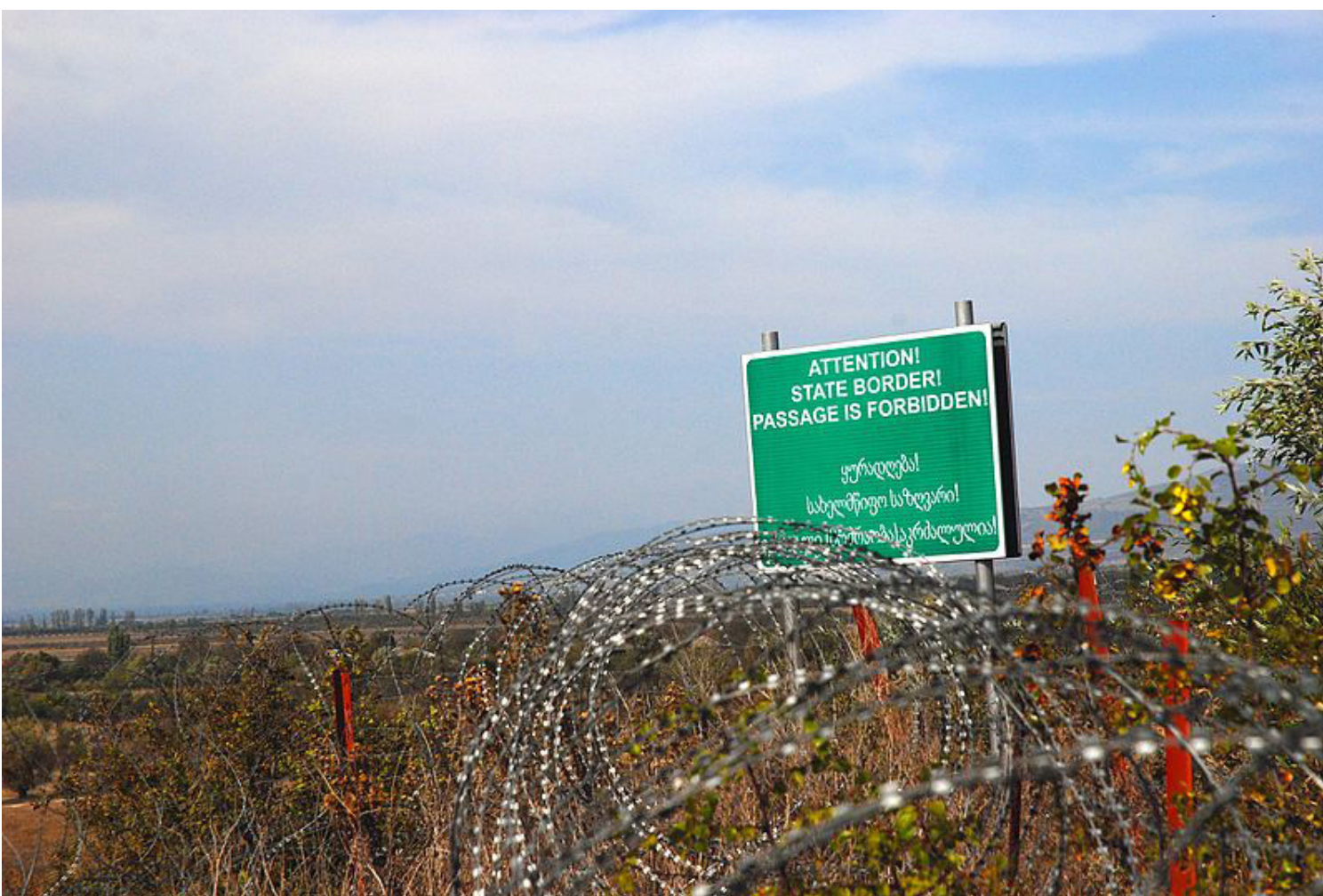
On the same day, a trial of another illegally detained citizen of Georgia Zaza Gakheladze has been carried out after six months of his pre-trial detention. Gakheladze was shot and illegally

detained by Russia-controlled occupation forces in July 2020. The incident occurred near the administrative line dividing the occupied Tskhinvali region.

Gakheladze, who is a resident of Kvemo Tchala village of the Kaspi Municipality in central Georgia, was shot and taken into detention at about 09.30 in the morning for the alleged crossing of the 'state border' and opening fire at the 'border security guards'. According to the official statement released by the de-facto Security Committee of South Ossetia, Gakheladze was injured in a return fire opened by the border security guards. Gakheladze has been taken to Akhgori where he received treatment. According to Gakheladze's family, the 33-year-old went on a mushroom picking trip near the occupation line.

The US Department of State released a statement in July last year, in which it strongly condemned the shooting and the illegal detaining of Zaza Gakheladze and demanded Russia to fulfill its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement.

According to RFE/RL reports, several witnesses and Gakheladze himself were questioned at the hearing on January 18. Should Gakheladze be found guilty of crossing the 'state border' and shooting at the border patrol, he might be sentenced to 11-20 years in prison. Soon after the trial, the State Security Service of Georgia released another statement saying that the central government continues its efforts to achieve Gakheladze's unconditional



# How will Bidzina Ivanishvili's leaving politics influence the political climate in Georgia?

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Unexpectedly to most, Bidzina Ivanishvili stated he is leaving politics. The ruling team praised him for it, whereas the opposition claimed Ivanishvili didn't really leave, saying this is yet another of his tricks, which would secure him and let him avoid his responsibilities to keep his long term control over the country.

Ivanishvili appeared in politics in 2011, letting the public know via a letter. About 10 years later, 11 January 2021, he published a letter announcing his leaving politics. The letter read that Ivanishvili is going back to the life he led before 2011.

In order to develop a clearer idea about the event, we should rewind. After the parliamentary elections of 2012 Ivanishvili was a prime minister for about a year. In November 2013 he quit the post as a PM and as well as the party leader, explaining that he was going to "consult the government from the non-governmental sector." As for returning to politics, he said he was going to do it on "special occasions," when the country was in need for him. After Ivanishvili left, Irakli Gharibashvili, current Defense Minister, took office.

Ivanishvili returned as a party leader in May 2018, when there was no "special occasion" at place. Two possible reasons for



his return were named. The first reason was that he was trying to dodge the accusations of his "backstage leadership". The second reason sounded more significant and referred to the fact that Giorgi Kvirikashvili, PM at the time, was starting to make decisions independently, including those about the Anaklia Port. After Ivanishvili's return to politics, he soon had to leave office.

After Ivanishvili's decision of leaving politics, Georgia sent a special letter to its foreign partners. The letter's title was "Bidzina Ivanishvili- Politician, Philanthropist, Businessman."

The opposition regarded the letter as the government's attempt to save Ivanishvili's reputation.

What caused Ivanishvili's second leaving politics? The opposition parties named various possible reasons, one of them being that Ivanishvili promised the western countries to leave after the 2020 parliament election. That is why the West didn't react so harshly to the election rigging. Now, Ivanishvili has fulfilled his promises, while, of course, receiving a guarantee for his security.

According to the second version, Ivanishvili, an oligarch, is

afraid of USA's new government sanctions. Mikheil Saakashvili believes that Ivanishvili, like a few other Ukrainian oligarchs, was trying to interfere in the US elections and was a Trump supporter. Now that Trump is gone, he is afraid of the possible sanctions and transferred all the money to his charity organization Qartu, leaving only 200 million for his family.

Apart from these potential foreign affair reasons, interior politics could also be a reason. The opposition has stated that Ivanishvili's leaving politics is an attempt to avoid responsibility.

The country is in a deep economic crisis, Lari's value has significantly dropped, the foreign debt has increased, the population is impoverished. On top of this, there is a severe political crisis since the 31 October elections as the opposition refuses to enter Parliament, protesting the government's rigging of the elections. Ivanishvili lays the responsibility on the Georgian Dream party members and leaders, who remain with him to lead the country.

Ivanishvili has praised the Georgian Dream, saying that the current ruling team will have no problems in the coming 4-5 years. He added that it is possible that after his leaving, the ruling team might develop internal conflicts. Ivanishvili stated that the Georgian Dream government will have a hard time staying for the fourth term.

But who does Ivanishvili think will be the next ruling team? This is exactly where the opposition force sees a hidden plan- Ivanishvili will try to remain in control through staying in touch with a few opposition parties. The opposition parties claim there is a possibility a new party will be created to replace the Georgian Dream. All in all, the opposition believes that Ivanishvili's statement about his leaving politics is a well-masked plan that serves his interests.

*(Translated from Georgian by Mariam Mchedlidze)*

## Cultural heritage body fines companies rehabilitating Gelati UNESCO monument

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation, the state body for cultural monuments, has fined and replaced the company working on the ongoing rehabilitation of the Gelati Monastery Complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the country's west, for failing to fix deficiencies in the work.

According to the agency Georgian Arts & Culture Centre and Ikorta 2007, both contractors working on the most recent stage of works on Gelati - will be fined € 12,000 each for 'failure to amend results of work carried out in violation of terms, despite

warnings issued last year'.

Releasing updates on developments around the monument since July when rainwater leaks linked to damage to the complex's newly installed roofing were reported from the site, the state body said a new company would take over the rehabilitation works starting Tuesday. The update revealed that the wind had blown off a section of a temporary structure built by the contractors over the roof of the

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**"The shortcomings in the restoration of Gelati need to be corrected so that the current season in Imereti, characterized by rain and snow, will not be even more damaging to this important monument," Tsulukiani announced on the spot.**



### Weather

Wednesday, January 20

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 3°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: -2°C

Thursday, January 21

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 3°C

Night Clear  
Low: -4°C

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## PM Gakharia meets World Bank Regional Director

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

“It was a wonderful meeting, our views are in line with the successful cooperation between the Georgian government and the World Bank in recent years,” Sebastian Molineus, World Bank (WB) Regional Director for the South Caucasus, said after a meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

According to the press service of the government administration, the main issues discussed at the meeting were effective and successful cooperation between Georgia and the WB, the vaccination action plan, the country's European integration and the structural reform agenda.

Molineus reaffirmed the World Bank's readiness to support the Georgian government's main plan for EU integration - to prepare a formal application for membership by 2024.

The WB stands ready to continue to support the development of infrastructure connecting Georgia and the EU, including through the implementation of strategic projects of regional importance. In addition, the WB is currently seeking to support the Georgian government's efforts to vaccinate.

“We are working very closely with the United Nations and other international



Molineus said that WB would like to support the process of vaccination directly, after the readiness of the system is assessed.



“We greatly appreciate the World Bank's assistance throughout the pandemic. WB is one of our key partners in building a sustainable, inclusive & resilient economy,” the PM tweeted.

financial institutions to assess the readiness of the system before the vaccination process, and then we want to support the vaccination process directly,” Molineus said.

PM Gakharia underlined the fact that the support of the WB in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic has the greatest positive impact on the country's economy and social background. The conversation focused on the next phase of targeted support for citizens and businesses, related to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the meeting, the parties also focused on large-scale regional projects.

It was noted that the latest programs of the World Bank have contributed to important reforms such as pension reform, deposit insurance system reform, capital market development reform, development of public-private partnership systems, etc. The sides expressed readiness to deepen cooperation within the framework of the 2019-2022 Partnership.

According to the press service of the government's administration, at the meeting, the partnership within the framework of Development Policy Operations (DPO) was positively assessed, which contributes to the promotion of inclusive growth and increases the competitiveness of the private sector.

## Cultural heritage body fines companies rehabilitating Gelati UNESCO monument



“I demanded from the Prosecutor's Office to launch an investigation into damaging the monument with improper rehabilitation of the Gelati monastery complex,” Natsvlshvili announced.

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monument to safeguard it from adverse weather, on Monday.

On January 18, a temporary tin roof over the west arm of the temple was damaged by the wind. The restoration works of

the damaged construction have already started.

Water arrived at Gelati Monastery within a month of com-

pleting the roof rehabilitation. The rain significantly damaged the murals.

In spring 2020 it was decided to arrange a temporary roof over the main temple of the monastery, the process was completed in December and the arms of the temple were covered with tin.

Agency director Nika Antidze made social media updates on the ongoing work from the location, saying he was personally directing the efforts and calling reports on collapse of the temporary roofing ‘disinformation’.

Baginetti+ was picked as the new contractor for the rehabilitation by the agency, and a group of experts from the state organization are supposed to continuously monitor the work.

According to Parliament's press service, Tea Tsulukiani, Chairperson of the Committee on Education, Science and Culture and members of the Committee paid a visit to Gelati last week. They got acquainted with the

restoration works started on the monument a few years ago. A committee meeting was held in the Kutaisi National Archives building on the shortcomings revealed during the conservation-restoration process of Gelati Monastery. The deputies listened to Antidze's report and the restorer Kakha Trapaidze regarding the current situation.

Recall that the development follows a request by Ana Natsvlshvili, one of the leaders of the Lelo opposition party, to the prosecutor's office on Monday to launch an investigation into possible ‘wrongful reparation’ process of the Gelati Monastery. She submitted a request for the inquiry about ‘damage to the monument’ caused by alleged mismanagement in the ongoing restoration. Natsvlshvili commented that it is important to create a precedent on specific state organizations being held accountable for alleged damage or destruction of monuments of cultural heritage.