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Melashvili and Ilychova released on bail



► Prosecutor argues that the presence of certain people outside will no longer prevent the investigation and gathering of evidence, since this process has finished.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Natalia Ilychova and Iveri Melashvili, 2 detainees in the Georgia-Azerbaijan 'land forfeit' high-profile case have been released on €20 000 bail each. A rally was held in the Tbilisi City Court in parallel with the hearing. Civil activists and opposition politicians said the detainees were political prisoners and should be released. Minutes before the hearing, the prosecutor in the case said they were requesting a change in the restraining order and were seeking bail instead of detention, stating that there was no further need for pretrial detention.

This does not mean that they are no longer threatened with imprisonment, the criminal case is still ongoing in this case. They were also banned from leaving the country before the court decision. Melashvili, accused in the "Cartographers' Case", thanked his supporters and lawyers after his release. He said his arrest was linked to political issues.

According to the civil movement "Shame", 40 000 has been fully collected in 2 hours by citizens of Georgia to pay the bail.

The court dismissed Melashvili from the post at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs upon the motion of the Prosecutor's Office as well. The prosecutor stated that there was a danger of continuing criminal activities 'due to previous actions'.

Aleko Elisashvili, the leader of the Citizens party, says this release is the result of negotiations with the ruling party. Elisashvili responded to the release of the detainees on bail on Facebook, saying 'the negotiations have yielded results



► Elisashvili on Melashvili-Ilychova: This dismissal is the result of negotiations.

and this is a good thing; This is a step to continue the negotiations and to restore trust between the parties!"

Melashvili thanked all parties that stood by him, including Citizens, but announced that he doesn't support anyone using the fact that they discussed this issue at the meeting and he was released, as a justification to enter parliament. "I do not want to be a part of this trade," he said.

Mamuka Mdinardze, the chairman of the Georgian Dream faction, spoke about the expected speculations due to the change of the measure of restraint for the accused in the cartographers' case before the trial.

"Aleko Elisashvili specifically returned to the topic of so-called political prisoners 3 or 4 times and we refused to talk about this issue at all four times," Mdinardze said.

Elisashvili together with Levan Ioseliani, met with the Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze and Mdinardze on 22nd of January.

Recall that the prosecutor's office detained Melashvili and Ilychova, former members of the state commission on the Georgian-Azerbaijani border demarcation, on 7th of October. None of the detainees pleaded guilty and so far they have been remanded in custody, as a measure of restraint.

Protests against the COVID-19 induced regulations

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On January 28, protesters gathered outside of the Georgian Parliament in order to demand the lifting of the existing COVID-19 induced regulations. Representatives of the local NGOs and the “For the people” movement took to the streets with banners that read “You cannot see the people outside of your jeeps, the country needs to be opened up”. The protesters demand public transport to be reopened since it has recently been announced that the municipal transport will not be functioning until March 1, or until the number of COVID-19 cases decreases to 4%. Protesters claim that the government officials who are responsible for introducing the new regulations travel on expensive cars and do not understand the needs of the regular citizens. Meanwhile, the latter are forced to use taxis which



is quite unfeasible given the current state of the national economy and widespread unemployment.

“People who introduce new regulations are sitting in the black [expensive] SUVs and do not understand the problems that we are faced with. They do not understand the socio-economic needs that we have. We are calling for the existing regulations to be lifted”, said one of the activists. The protests are likely to continue on January 29, as the people are invited to keep their horns in defiance to the existing regulations as part of the “Beep – the country needs to be reopened” action. The Georgian government is planning to restore the work of public transport in all major cities across Georgia, apart from Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Rustavi. The residents of the latter three are unhappy with the government’s decision and demand for

municipal transportation to be resumed immediately.

Prime Minister Gakharia announced that in the case of the number of infected persons decreasing to 4%, the process of gradual lifting of the existing regulations will begin earlier than previously planned.

Earlier this week, a number of opposition politicians, representatives of the business sector, as well as ordinary citizens have also gathered in front of the administrative building of the Georgian government to demand the lifting of the existing restrictions. Protesters claimed that the existing regulations affected the social welfare of the country and violated the human rights of the Georgian citizens. One of the members of the Lelo for Georgia party claimed that the current government is failing to manage the ongoing crisis and called for a “wise lifting” of the existing restrictions.

TI Georgia names high-level corruption as unresolved problem



TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL GEORGIA

TI report stated that Denmark and New Zealand share the first place with 88-88 points. Somalia and South Sudan are in the last place with 12-12 points. The worst score since 2012, the US has 67 points. The report addresses the impact of corruption on government response to COVID-19, investment in health care, and the weakening of democratic norms and institutions

during the pandemic. According to TI Director Delia Ferreira Rubio, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health and economic crisis, but also a corruption crisis and has yet to be tackled. Research shows that pandemic problems have been dealt with worse in countries with higher levels of corruption. According to the report, sustained corruption is undermining the healthcare system, contributing to the decline of democracy and posing a serious threat to the lives and livelihoods of its citizens.

The NGO report also includes recommendations aimed at reducing corruption and responding better to crises. Recommendations include strengthening controlling institutions, equipping them with sufficient resources and independence to carry out their duties, ensuring transparency of government contracts and exposing conflicts of interest, ensuring accountability of governments to civil society and the media, and providing realistic information on costs and resources.

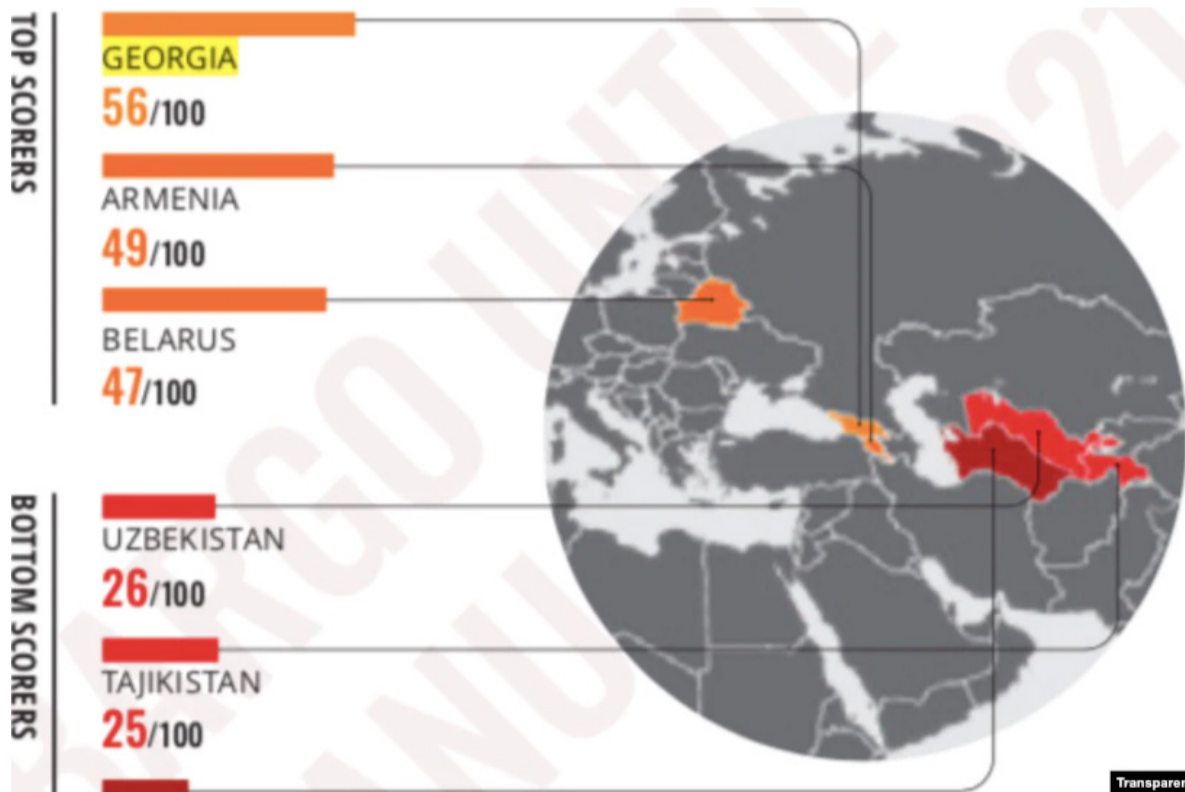
According to TI Georgia, the problem of high-level corruption in the country remains unresolved. The fact that Georgia has a mediocre result that has not changed significantly over the years indicates that the country has made some progress in fighting corruption, in particular petty corruption, but that high-level corruption issues remain unresolved.

► According to TI, 2020 has revealed problems even in the most successful countries and has shown that no country is free from corruption.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Transparency International (TI) has published the Corruption Perceptions Index 2020. The NGO report estimates the level of corruption in the public sector in 180 countries and territories around the world. A scale from 0 (very corrupt) to 100 (very clean) is used for evaluation.

According to the 2020 index, Georgia is in the 45th place with 56 points. In 2019, Georgia had 56 points, but was in 44th place, and in 2018, with 58 points out of 41, which was an improved position by 5 steps compared to 2017. It was also revealed that Georgia is ahead of 9 EU countries.



► According to Transparency International, more than two-thirds of countries have less than 50 points, as in previous years.

FRIDAY JANUARY 29

Day ☁ Mostly cloudy
High: 11°C

Night ☁ Cloudy
Low: 0°C

SATURDAY JANUARY 30

Day ☁ Mostly cloudy
High: 10°C

Night ☁ Cloudy
Low: -1°C

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GWP workers go on strike, demand better salaries and work conditions

THE COMPANY FIRES 13 WORKERS WHO WERE “ACTIVE AT THE PROTESTS”

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Several workers from the water supply company Georgian Water and Power went on strike on January 25. The workers demand better salaries, healthcare and access to paid leave, which they're entitled to according to the Labor Code.

The workers refused to carry out their duties if the company didn't meet their demands. They gathered in front of their office building to voice said demands.

The company addressed the strike and said that the workers were violating their contracts by refusing to work.

“Some of the company's contractors have been refusing to do their job for two days now. Their duties are laid down in a particular contract, the terms of which they breach by their actions. On the one hand, they do not perform their duties without any prior notice, and on the other hand, they prevent others from doing their job,” the company said in a statement.

Representatives of the company met with the workers on January 28 and came to an agreement. However, the company refused to continue contracts of 13 workers who were “active at the protests and with the media”. The rest of the workers on strike are refusing to go back to work without their peers who were fired.

The workers are also demanding equalizing their salaries. According to one of the employees



► The company refused to continue contracts of 13 workers who were “active at the protests and with the media”.

currently on strike, some people receive GEL 4.2, while others get GEL 5.5 per hour for the same work. Furthermore, they demand raising their hourly wages by GEL 1 for everyone.

After consultations between the company and the workers on January 26-27, the agreement was reached to equalize the salaries, but not increase them. While these terms were good enough for some of the employees, they still refused to go back to work since 13 of their peers lost their positions.

An independent labor union Solidarity Network met with the workers and listened to their demands on January 27. The Solidarity Network lawyer Davit Osmarashvili notes that the Labor Inspection should get involved in the case.

“In the middle of the pandemic, these people are staying without pay, it's important for the State to assume the role of a



► The company addressed the strike and said that the workers were violating their contracts by refusing to work

mediator [between the workers and the company],” said Osmarashvili.

“The drivers, the operators... We are the people who answer the calls whenever something goes wrong in the city. In other words, we are the ones who get the work done, we work day and night,” the workers state.

Despite the initial agreement, the GWP employees are refusing to go back to work until the fired workers are reinstated at their positions.

Opening Ceremony of the Project for Provision of Mobile Intensive Care Unit in Telavi, Ambrolauri, Zugdidi and Ozurgeti Municipalities within the Grassroots Human Security Grant Program (GGP) Of the Embassy of Japan

On January 28, 2021, the Opening Ceremony of The Project for Provision of Mobile Intensive Care Unit in Telavi, Ambrolauri, Zugdidi and Ozurgeti Municipalities was held within the Grassroots Human Security Grant Program (GGP), funded by the Government of Japan, based on the goodwill of the Japanese people. Mobile Intensive Care Units (so-called Reanobiles) are designed to save lives of patients with severe medical conditions and enable to significantly decrease the waiting time for emergency patients, especially in the Covid-19 context, when the rising cases of hospitalization placed emergency healthcare system under immense pressure.

The Ceremony was attended by H.E. Mr. Imamura Akira, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Georgia, Deputy of Ambassador



of Japan Mr. Masataka Obata, Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, Mr. Giorgi Tsotskolauri, Director of the Legal Entity Under Public Law Emergency Situations Coordination and Urgent Assistance Center – Mr.

Aleksandre Kalandia together with the Deputy Directors.

Apart from the reanobiles to assist the Government of Georgia to fight Covid-19 pandemic, the Government of Japan also decided to provide 3 million USD worth medical support as well as 2.5 million USD support using fund contributed by Japan through



ADB. The Government of Japan is also helping Georgia's vaccination efforts through COVAX facility established with WHO.

The grant amount for this project amounts to 290,500 USD. This project was a part of the Grassroots and Human Security Program (GGP) that provides assistance to relatively small

projects implemented by municipalities, medical/educational institutions, as well as NGOs and aims at improving the living standards of Georgian people. Within 22 years of its work in Georgia - from 1998 to 2020, the GGP funded 180 projects, in total amounting to more than 19 million USD (19,055,657 USD).