

NGO, Ombudsman and EU Ambassador Say the Process of Selecting Supreme Court Judge Candidates Should be Suspended

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary considers it unjustified for Parliament to start interviewing candidates for the Supreme Court. The statement said that the current rule of selection/ appointment of judges does not ensure that the competition is free from party influence and previous cases of selection show that candidates are not evaluated based on their qualifications and professional good faith.

The next process of electing judges of the Supreme Court has started in the Parliament of Georgia. On November 22, 2021, it became known that the 4 candidates nominated by the High Council of Justice for Parliament will be interviewed on November 25-26.

There are currently 5 vacancies in the Supreme Court and 3 independent competitions are underway, which are yet to be announced in the autumn of 2020. It should be noted that 3 of the candidates nominated by the Council for the Parliament (Nino Sandodze, Tamar Okropiridze, Tea Dzimistarashvili) had already participated in the previous competition (announced by the decree of October 7, 2020), during which they could not advance to the next stage.

The legislation allows that if the Parliament does not appoint all the candidates nominated by the Council as judges, the Council will appoint other persons from the same competition (without re-conducting the interviews, Based on existing evaluations) to select the candidates with the best results within 2 weeks. However, this deadline was explicitly violated by the council, as the decision to transfer these candidates to the next stage was made on November 4 this year, while the 2-week term began on July 12, 2021 (when the parliament did not fully nominate all candidates nominated by the council).

The Coalition notes that in addition to the above-mentioned formal reason, the ongoing interview and evaluation process of the Supreme Court members within the framework of this competition was characterized by an unequivocal crisis of legitimacy and, as in previous years, was flawed. In particular, the assessments of the board members left the impression of inconsistency, unequal attitude towards the candidates and stereotyping.

"Beyond the fundamental criticism of the current composition of the council and the public distrust towards it, it is also problematic that the parliament makes decisions on this issue by a simple majority, at which time a political consensus on the candidates is not mandatory. Therefore, before the emergence of substantial reform of the judiciary and the commitment to make this decision in parliament by political consensus, the Supreme Court will be fully staffed, will not serve the interests of justice and



► The Committee on Legal Affairs has set up relevant working groups and intends to hear all 4 candidates nominated by the Council of Justice this week, after which the candidates will be presented to a plenary session for selection.



► EU refuses to attend hearings of candidates for Georgian Supreme Court in parliament.

will provide an opportunity to further strengthen political influence in the judiciary."

Besides Coalition, the Public Defender Nino Lomjari also calls on the Parliament of Georgia to suspend the process of appointing Supreme Court judges until a systematic reform of the judiciary has taken place and a political consensus

decision is required.

According to the Ombudsman's statement, the High Council of Justice nominated 4 candidates to the Parliament within the framework of 2 selection competitions launched in October last year and November. The serious shortcomings identified in them, including the fairness of the process and equality

between candidates, are described in detail in the third OSCE/ODIHR report.

Statement emphasizes that unfortunately, the number of applicants expressing interest in a vacant Supreme Court judge is declining from year to year, indicating distrust of the selection procedure.

Note that in the 2nd competition, only 10 members of the High Council of Justice - 9 judges and 1 member appointed by the President participated in interviewing and evaluating the candidates, as the terms of all 5 non-judges elected by the parliament had expired and new members have not been elected by the parliament so far.

EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell Also commented, saying that they were invited to observe the interview process on November 25-27, but the embassy refused 'for several simple reasons, this is part of the process we have been talking about since April'.

"We have urged the country's leadership to carry out a large-scale judiciary reform first and only afterward select and appoint judges". According to Hartzell this is not in line with the April 19 agreement. The process is not being carried out in full accordance with the Venice Commission and the advice of ODIHR. "We think the process should be stopped," Hartzell said.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1153 | EURO - 3.4935 | GBP - 4.1627 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.1752 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3287 |

Rallies in Tbilisi and Batumi After the Death of a UNM Member

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

The United National Movement claims that the ruling Georgian Dream party is responsible for the death of the Batumi City Council member, Nugzar Putkaradze.

The member of the opposition political party, Giorgi Kirtadze, recently accused the father of Davit Rizhivadze of pressuring Putkaradze, which has led to his death. Rizhivadze is the head of the Adjara government.

The member of the United National Movement held a press conference recently, where he talked about the negotiations led by Rizhivadze through two former law enforcers. Kirtadze said that they were forcing Putkaradze to leave the United National Movement. He also added that the pressure on Putkaradze started much earlier, and it is the reason for his passing. The sister of Putkaradze also talked about the situation of his brother over the past few weeks, saying that he was feeling worried about his children. On the other hand, the representatives of the ruling party are denying the accusations. The

UNM SAID THE GD IS BEHIND THE DEATH OF PUTKARADZE



Putkaradze's sister said that he was worried about his children

head of the Adjara government, Rizhivadze, even said that he is waiting for apologies. UNM also released recordings that allegedly showed the pressure that was put on Putkaradze, but GD member Tite Aorshidze denied any connections of the ruling party with the recordings.

Rallies were held in Tbilisi and Batumi to protest the death of Putkaradze.

The protestants demanded the

resignation of Rizhivadze. The sister of Nugzar Putkaradze also attended the rally in Batumi, saying that it is not acceptable for such people to rule the country, "who have killed numerous people who loved their country so much, the system kills" noted Puktaradze.

The people gathered at the rally also demand to start investigating the case of possible pressure on Putkaradze and to punish all the perpetrators.



UNM claims the ruling party is responsible for the death of Putkaradze

Nugzar Putkaradze died a few days ago. According to Giorgi Kirtadze, the chairman of the Batumi branch of the United National Movement, the cause of death was an increase in blood sugar levels.

According to Kirtadze, Nugzar Putkaradze from the UNM was one of the first to be pressured and bribed to leave UNM. According to Kirtadze, negotiations with Putkaradze were initiated by "high-ranking law enforcers,"

who served during the rule of Aslan Abashidze and were tasked by the father of Adjara's government head. The investigation into the death of Nugzar Putkaradze was launched on November 18. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the investigation is underway under Article 116, Part 1 of the Criminal Code. According to the agency, the family members of the deceased were questioned already.

The Rose Revolution as an Ideological Watershed

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

In the politically polarized Georgian society, the 18th anniversary of the Rose Revolution turned out to be an excuse for a great deal of discussion between politicians and the media.

The positions taken towards the Rose Revolution once again showed that polarization has its ideological basis and it is a matter of orienting the Georgian state with values and vision of the future.

On November 23, part of the opposition, who took part in the Rose Revolution 18 years ago, or for whom its ideals are acceptable, took to the streets, and demonstrators stretched a long chain from Freedom Square to Republic Square in the center of Tbilisi. It was renamed Republic Square.

Even the renaming of this name shows the attitude of the Georgian Dream towards the Rose Revolution, and this is understandable because they can

not positively assess the event, the main character of which is their 'main enemy' Mikheil Saakashvili. Statements by opposition figures regarding the Rose Revolution, while emphasizing its importance in Georgia's recent history, noted that the main protagonist of the Rose Revolution, the Georgian Dream, was imprisoned and taken to a military hospital in Gori after a 50-day hunger strike.

The Rose Revolution is considered to be the most important and turning point in the post-Soviet history of Georgia, which spans three decades. According to the leaders of the National Movement, Georgia started the path of development right after the Rose Revolution and implemented the reforms that turned the country into a modern state. The reforms implemented in Georgia after the Rose Revolution became attractive for other post-Soviet countries as well, because if 'Georgia did it', so could they. That is why the example of Georgia was unac-

ceptable for Russia's neo-imperial plans, looking to entrap European countries into its Soviet ideology.

Mikheil Saakashvili himself released an open letter from the hospital, in which he stressed the importance of the Rose Revolution, the achievements of his 9 years of rule, and expressed hope that the Georgian people would be able to return to the ideals of the Rose Revolution.

According to Giga Bokeria, the achievements of the Rose Revolution are in great danger today 'thanks' to the Ivanishvili regime, and it is necessary to mobilize the part of the society that "believes in the freedom and future of this country to complete the work started by the Rose Revolution."

The attitude of the leaders of the Georgian Dream towards the Rose Revolution is negative but heterogeneous. Some say that the Rose Revolution was planned and carried out by Russia, and therefore the leaders of this revolution are also pro-Russian forces.

However, this version does not sound very convincing because of Russia's hostile attitude not only to roses but to "color" revolutions in general. Some, including the current prime minister, say the Rose Revolution "destroyed Georgia's economy." However, against this version, specific figures are given, according to which the economic growth of Georgia in the period following the Rose Revolution is significantly higher than the periods of "Shevardnadze" and "Georgian Dream".

On the 18th anniversary of the Rose Revolution, another version was voiced by Georgian Dream leaders - the ideals of the revolution were high and nothing could be said against it, but its creators "soon became the founders of a radical and violent regime" and did not lead the country to democratic development.

Unfortunately, the government that came after the Rose Revolution really made mistakes and this led to the removal of the "National

Movement" from power, although the fact itself can be considered a democratic achievement of changing the government through elections. If there is a real judgment on the mistakes made after the Rose Revolution and a desire to overcome them arises, this may lead to opposing forces in Georgian politics agreeing on what needs to be done to establish a democratic, human rights-based government.

An agreement on this seemed to have been reached. Recall after a long negotiation between the government and the opposition, a document created through the mediation of Charles Michel, which 100 days after the signing was canceled by the Georgian Dream. The document called for steps to be taken to establish an independent judiciary, electoral reform that would build confidence in elections, this key democratic institution. It is in this direction that a solution can be found to the long-running crisis in Georgian politics.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 26

Day Rain High: 6°C

Night A few Clouds Low: 1°C

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 27

Day Sunshine High: 13°C

Night Clouds Low: 4°C

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UN Women Joins the Global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign Together with Partners and Donors

“Orange the world: End violence against women now!” With this message, UN Women joins the 16-day global campaign against gender-based violence in Georgia, supported by the European Union and the Government of Sweden. This year, the activism is mainly focused on sexual violence and solidarity with and support for the people who have experienced this form of violence.

According to the national survey on violence against women carried out by UN Women and Geostat (2017), 9 per cent of women in Georgia have experienced sexual violence as children; however, it

remains one of the most hidden crimes. Women often choose silence because society blames them for what happened. For example, 36 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women believe that victims' negligence is the reason for their rape. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence reminds us once again that supporting women who have experienced violence is crucial to breaking this silence.

This year, traditionally on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and in cooperation with Tbilisi City Hall, the

TV Tower will be lit in orange. With this symbolic gesture, Tbilisi will join the message against gender-based violence like other capitals of the world. Georgian rugby players will also demonstrate solidarity with the campaign by dedicating the Autumn Nations Series to the fight against the violence against women, and they will go out to the pitch wearing kits with the UN Women logo. With this gesture, the Lelos once again will remind the world that ending violence against women and girls is more important than any game.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gen-

der-Based Violence in Georgia is implemented by UN Women with the support of the European Union and the Government of Sweden. The 16-day international campaign has been marked since the early 1990s. It aims at raising public awareness and showing solidarity with the victims of gender-based violence. This year, sexual violence is the main focus of the global campaign, which will be launched on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and end on 10 December, Human Rights Day.

Time to end violence against women and girls in Georgia

This joint statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is issued by the United Nations system in Georgia, the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, the Council of Europe Office in Georgia, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and the Embassies to Georgia of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we express our support for and solidarity with women and girls who have experienced violence. We call for further resolute action to prevent and eventually eliminate violence against women and girls once and for all.

Violence against women and girls is a global scourge and, unfortunately, still one of the most serious human rights violations in Georgia and worldwide.

Georgia can rightfully claim notable progress achieved in recent years, including the adoption of comprehensive legislative framework and gender quotas, and strengthening institutions to enforce these laws, tackling some of the discriminatory social stereotypes, providing specialized services for victims/survivors and raising public awareness on the need to combat gender-based violence.

Despite these efforts, Georgian women and girls still face violence in their private and public lives due to pervasive social and economic inequality, limited political participation of women, entrenched discriminatory social norms, stigma and deeply rooted harmful stereotypes.

Sexual violence in Georgia persists, not least due to slow shifts in public

attitudes. Almost one third of the Georgian population still blame women rape victims for inviting the attacks by their behavior. This is preventing many women from seeking help. Reporting of sexual violence crimes remain extremely low.

Women and girls from vulnerable social groups, including communities affected by conflict and people with disabilities, are facing an increased risk of violence, deepened by the economic and social crisis brought on by the pandemic.

Women's political participation and their influence on critical decision-making remain low. The latest parliamentary and local elections showed improvements in increasing women's political representation but still left Georgia with a men-dominated political landscape.

Government authorities at all levels in Georgia need to work to uphold the rights of women and girls in all areas of their lives, and to promote women's economic and political participation and empowerment that are key factors to preventing gender-based violence against women. Georgia needs to take concrete action to fully implement the Istanbul Convention - including the legal definition of rape - given its commitment to the Gender-Based Violence Action Coalition of Generation Equality global movement in 2021. Effectively investigating and prosecuting incidents of violence against women and girls must be given high priority by the police and judicial institutions. Prevention strategies, which address the root causes of violence against women and girls need to be stepped up, including actions that engage men and boys to challenge harmful stereotypes. We all have crucial roles to play in ending gender-based violence against women and building a future in which everyone has a real and fair chance at success, safety and well-being.

We stand ready to support the Government of Georgia, civil society and other partners in this vital work.

On the occasion of the International Day to eliminate violence against women, HRVP Josep Borrell and Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner for International Partnerships, issued an OpEd to mark this day as well as the first anniversary of the EU Gender Action Plan III



Jutta Urpilainen



Josep Borrell

Putting gender equality first

Rarely in the world have women's and girls' rights been challenged as they have been in Afghanistan. The latest developments give cause for great concern. The EU has made it clear that future EU development assistance to Afghanistan will depend on the respect for the international legal framework and for norms on human rights, including women's and girls' rights. The EU is determined and committed to continue to support the women and girls of Afghanistan and worldwide, sticking to our values and beliefs.

Together with human rights, freedom and democracy, equality represents one of the core values that make the European Union what it is. It enriches our societies and strengthens their resilience. Gender equality is a core part of peace, security, economic prosperity and sustainable development. Moreover, defending and promoting gender equality is required by the EU Treaties.

That is why working politically, operationally and financially to promote and safeguard progress on gender equality is a political priority and a key objective for the EU. The EU Gender Action Plan III and the new EU external action budget provide a roadmap for global action towards a gender-equal world. We work closely together with multilateral, regional and bilateral partners, including civil society organizations, to achieve those objectives. We still have a long way to go; there is no room for complacency. However, we are stronger together while many challenges remain.

In many countries, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing gender inequalities across different areas: education, vocational training, health, security and safety, sexual and reproductive health and rights, decision-making, and economic opportunities.

The COVID-19 lockdowns have often seen an increase in gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence, while women and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services has been reduced. At the same time, a significant part of the care burden has fallen on women and girls. Workers in the informal economy and in low-skilled jobs (most of whom are women), migrants, and those belonging to minorities, have been more at risk and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Moreover, school closures have exposed girls to an increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy, child labour, and forced marriage. The Malala Fund estimates that 20 million more girls risk dropping out of school, adding up to a total of 150 million girls – equivalent to a third of the EU population – without educational prospects.

According to a recent UN report, military spending in 2020 still outpaced the worldwide expenses on health, even in a year that was dominated by the corona pandemic. For a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to redouble our efforts to promote gender equality.

Now is the time to do more

This challenge requires a global response and needs to be tackled now, when we are building the future we wish for our children and grandchild-

dren to grow up in a post-pandemic world that is more equal, more diverse, and where equal opportunities are a reality. We need to address the root causes of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination in order to achieve sustainable change.

The European Union and its Members States, as well as the European financial institutions have stood with the women and girls of the world throughout the pandemic. As Team Europe, we have already mobilised €46 billion in support of over 130 partner countries, with a particular focus on women and youth.

Three examples as an illustration: In Nepal, we helped one million girls and boys continue their education through radio-based learning. In Togo, we supported the creation of a universal income scheme and the appointment of women to head new municipalities. Worldwide, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative has helped 650,000 women and girls prevent or address violence against them, and educated 880,000 men and boys on positive masculinity, non-violent conflict resolution and parenting.

Still, to meet the growing challenges, we need to do more and better. That is the purpose of the Gender Action Plan III. It promotes leadership and meaningful participation of women, girls and young people in political, economic, social and cultural life, as well as in all matters related to peace and security, worldwide.

We work to get human development back on track

We are now making this plan a reality with the help of the new €79.5 billion NDICI-Global Europe instrument that will support the EU's external action for the next seven years.

Support for education and particularly girls' education will have a central role. Just as we support education in emergencies, the EU has worked with partner countries throughout the pandemic to minimise its impact on learning and the well-being of children, and to facilitate a safe return to school.

We already provide more than half of all global aid to education as Team Europe. But we will increase funding further, to promote gender equality through quality education at all levels. Our joint €1.7 billion pledge to the Global Partnership for Education in July – to transform education for girls and boys in up to 90 countries and territories – is part of this new beginning.

We are multiplying our efforts across the board, from supporting women and girls' education and economic opportunities to improving their access to sexual and reproductive health services. By 2025, 85% of all the EU's new external actions – across all sectors – will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

This is now being finalised with our partner countries based on close consultation with civil society organisations, women's rights activists, and youth.

We need to put human development back on track and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, leaving no woman or girl behind.

It is crucial we get it right.

Concluding concert of Night Serenades held at Tbilisi State Conservatoire Grand Hall.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 21, within the framework of the Batumi-Tbilisi International Festival Night Serenades, the concluding concert of the festival was held at Tbilisi State Conservatoire Grand Hall. The participants of the concert were the festival's basic orchestra Georgian Virtuosa, Maestro Vakhtang Matchavariani, and soloists - Sabine Grofmeier and Sandro Nebieridze. The event was attended by the representatives of state institutions, the diplomatic corps, and music lovers.

According to the artistic director of the festival Giorgi Issakadze, this year's festival hosted two of the greatest instrumentalists of modern times – Italian bandoneon artist Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi and German clarinetist Sabine Grofmeier. Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi, together with the Principal Conductor of the Georgia National Symphony Orchestra Nikoloz Rachveliani and Georgian musician Sopho Khalvashi, fascinated the public at the opening concert in Batumi.

Issakadze pointed out that for the last few years the festival has been paying special attention to the works of classical

music created by Georgian composers. He also stressed that the educational program held within the framework of the festival lasted for two months this year. The sectoral masterclasses and workshops delivered to students were led by renowned musicians, including Sabine Grofmeier, Vakhtang Matchavariani, Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi, and Giorgi Shaverzashvili.

According to Nina Tsagareli, the Director of the Festival Night's Serenades, the opening concert of the 13th International Festival was held in Batumi and after two months of conducting various field masterclasses, the concluding concert of the festival was held at Tbilisi State Conservatoire Grand Hall. Tsagareli thanked the partners, supporters, all the listeners, and the team of the festival.

"I am very glad that despite the pandemic, music lovers were given the opportunity to share the celebration of art" she noted.

Traditionally, the festival had several premieres, including the composition of Maestro Vakhtang Matchavariani dedicated to Ludwig van Beethoven, Nikoloz Rachveli's 'Piece to Italian People' and Sandro Nebieridze's fantasia on the themes of Paliashvili's opera.

Renowned clarinetist Sabine Grofmeier performed the masterpieces of Mozart at the final concert in Tbilisi. She stressed that the festival associated with the name of Liana Issakadze is very important and thanked the team of the Night Serenades for the invitation. Grofmeier also expressed her admiration for the basic festival orchestra "Georgian Virtuosa".

"I would especially like to thank the outstanding Georgian listeners," the German clarinetist noted.

Young pianist and composer Sandro Nebieridze also took part in the concluding concert and performed a fantasia, created especially at the request of Giorgi Issakadze on the themes of Paliashvili's opera. According to Nebieridze, he has been working with the festival for four years and every year the Night Serenades become more and more important. "This year the festival was fantastic, it was special," he noted.

The international festival Night Serenades was founded in 1982 in Georgia's north-western region of Abkhazia by renowned Georgian violinist and conductor Liana Issakadze. The festival was taking place annually in Bichvinta and was visited by renowned musicians from the Soviet Union as well as from abroad,

including Alfred Schnittke, Kurt Masur, Gidon Kremer, and others.

In 1991, following the armed conflict, the festival stopped existing, however, 18 years later, in 2009, Night Serenades was brought back to the Georgian seaside town of Batumi, continuing the traditions of Bichvinta's Festival. Due to the wide popularity of the festival throughout the years, Tbilisi City Council decided in 2015 to change its name to Batumi-Tbilisi International Festival.

The basic team of the Festival is the chamber orchestra "Virtuosi", founded by Liana Issakadze in 2011. The orchestra is staffed with talented young Georgian musicians working abroad and in Georgia.

The artistic director of the festival is Giorgi Issakadze, the director of the festival is Nina Tsagareli, and the chief conductor is Maestro Vakhtang Matchavariani.

The event is organized by the company 'Art Alliance.'

The festival Night Serenades is supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia, Tbilisi and Batumi city halls, Ministry of Culture, Education and Sports of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, and embassies of Italy and Germany. The official insurer of the festival is the company 'Ardi.'



Giorgi Issakadze



Nina Tsagareli



Sandro Nebieridze



Maestro Vakhtang Matchavariani



Sabine Grofmeier



H.E. Carl Hartzell and Mrs. Mette Hartzell



H.E. Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Knirsch



H.E. Diego Colas (in the middle)

