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Mikheil Saakashvili Attends His Trial, Says Politicised Judiciary is His Biggest Mistake

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgia's third president Mikheil Saakashvili, who was taken to Gori Military Hospital after a 50-day hunger strike, attended his trial held at Tbilisi city court on November 29.

Saakashvili is charged with the infamous November 7 case on exceeding official authority in a series of events, including disbanding the 2007 anti-government protests and a raid on and the seizing of Imedi TV station, then a government-critical channel. The third president of Georgia is accused in this case under Article 333, Part 3, subparagraphs B and C of the Criminal Code. Same Article 333 envisions sentences of 5 to 8 years of imprisonment.

At the trial, which was the first one attended by Saakashvili since his arrest in Tbilisi on October 1, the judge granted the Public Broadcaster's motion to broadcast the trial live, making it the only TV station allowed into the courtyard and at the trial.

The former president addressed the court with an extensive speech. Before the hearing, he said that he distrusts the Georgian court, noting that he 'would have used the opportunity' to address the public.

"I would like to tell you, my lovely Georgian people, I would like to ask you: Do you not miss feeling proud of your country? Do you not miss the pace and drive of the development? Do you not miss novelty and development? Do not miss love and warmth? Do you not miss celebrating victory? If you miss all of these, then



"I apologize, but mistakes and misdeeds are one thing, crime is another."

we must together end everything that is happening now."

Regarding the November 7 case, in response to the accusations, Saakashvili said that "the country avoided the Russian scenario", which was led by the billionaire Badri Patarkatsishvili.

"Georgia went to NATO. In 2006, Putin told me that he would do everything to stop this process. During the same year,

President of Belarus Lukashenko asked me who Arkady Patarkatsishvili was, who invited him for a meeting. I told him that he could meet with him if he wanted to, but nothing would come of such a meeting. Patarkatsishvili nevertheless arrived in Minsk, and then he was received by Lukashenko. He told me that Putin called him and said that he needed to meet with Patarkatsishvili,"

Saakashvili said, adding that 3 FSB agents met with Patarkatsishvili, after which Putin announced Lukashenko as the next president of Georgia in September 2007.

Saakashvili said a "historic conference" was held in Tbilisi in October 2007, attended by NATO Sec-Gen Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, as well as several foreign ministers. It was practically decided to grant Georgia the MAP, and immediately after that, on November 2, talks began in Tbilisi.

Saakashvili says he is far from the opinion that all the people who took to the streets danced to the Russian tune or knew about Patarkatsishvili's plans. According to him, the dispersal of the rally takes place in many countries and no one thinks about initiating cases, except for special maniacs. Saakashvili noted that the process was led by the MIA and he watched it on TV, so he did not give any directives to anyone.

"After that, I resigned, reduced my presidential term by 1.5 years and called new presidential elections, which was difficult, but I won. I did this to get a new mandate from the Georgian people. We did this to thwart Russia's plans," he added.

According to Saakashvili, the Girgvliani case does not exist, it

was named like that for the sake of PR. According to him, the officers who committed this crime were arrested, and after the 2008 war, an amnesty was announced for 280 people with military ranks.

Among other topics, he addressed the errors during the UNM reign saying: "Did I make mistakes? More than enough. Many mistakes that I bitterly regret. First and foremost, my mistake is this court. That we failed to create an independent judiciary harmed our many. Now it is harming me and I apologize to everyone who suffered."

Meanwhile, during a trial 15 opposition activists, including opposition leader Gigi Ugulava, were arrested at a rally near Tbilisi City Court for disobeying police orders after the situation got tense as supporters climbed up on a nearby fence and security cabin. His supporters decided to block the road near the city court, paralyzing the transport in that district. Before the hearing took place, the former president called on supporters to hold a rally at the court.

Saakashvili left the court session after announcing the break. As his lawyer stated at the hearing, the doctors recommend the postponement of the due to his health condition. The next trial is scheduled for December 23.



15 people were arrested at an opposition rally during a trial attended by Saakashvili.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

SSS-system should be destroyed' -Rally Planned on November 30 in Front of the SSS Building

A rally under the name 'SSS-system Should Be Destroyed' was announced on November 30, at 15:00 in front of the SSS building. "The Georgian Dream retains power at the expense of the State Security Service.

The state institution governed by the ruling party, to which we have paid the total of 800 million in 6 years, is monitoring our every move through total surveillance. The 2021 elections were conducted not by the CEC but by the State Security Service. Everything that until now we thought was an integral part of the Soviet past, the government has revived in real life.

"We're meeting at the State Security Service building, protesting against the illegal, immoral and degrading activities of the SSS," said the organizers of the rally: Shame, Droa, Lelo for Georgia, Foxes, and Change parties.

Georgian-Austrian business forum held in Georgia

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

On November 22, the Austrian Foreign Trade Representation Advantage Austria and the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry organized a business forum, bringing Austrian business companies to Georgia for B2B meetings. The forum included a symposium organized by Advantage Austria and the Austrian embassy to Georgia on the topic - What Does Sustainability Mean in Practice? Austrian and Georgian Experiences.

"The best way [to overcome the economic consequence of Covid-19] is connecting businesses and at the same time address the even bigger challenge for all of us: climate change. It is time to reconnect, re-engage and re-focus our efforts! Austria and Georgia can do a lot together!" reads the statement published by the Austrian embassy to Georgia.

The symposium was opened by the Austrian Ambassador to Georgia, Thomas Muehlmann, the Austrian Consul for Trade in Georgia, Azerbajek, and Vice President of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Nino Suknidze.

Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, Natia Turnava also participated in the event and delivered a speech on Sustainability and Greening the Economy as well as Georgia's Strategies in the Context of Post-COVID Economic Recovery. According to the minister, the forum was a good example of business and government working on new projects that aim at the development of environmental principles and the introduction of more eco-friendly

technologies in Georgia. As Turnava stressed at the forum, despite the COVID pandemic, several new legislative acts have been adopted in Georgia, including the Law on Energy Efficiency, the Law on Energy Efficiency of Buildings, the Law on Energy Labeling, the Law on Renewable Energy, the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan. According to her, such laws create the basic legal ground for sustainable development and a greener economy. In this context, the minister highlighted that Georgia will become the first country in the region to carry out green hydrogen projects. She also focused on implementing greener projects in the transport system and tourism field.

According to the Austrian

Embassy, the Minister's speech was followed by a high-level panel discussion with Nino Tandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia; Nino Zambakhidze of the Georgian Farmers' Association; Dietmar Preinstorfer of e-control Austria; and Alexander Karner of the Austrian Development Agency.

The highlight of the event was the Energy Globe Award received by Nodar Kevkhisvili for his project - Zero Emission Fluidized Bed Combustion Device. According to the embassy, the award is intended for successful sustainable projects and demonstrates that practical solutions are already available for most of our environmental problems.

The Austrian companies that participated in the business Fo-

rum are - ACESS AG, Ennsfellner Consulting E.U, Eppendorf Austria GmbH, fabco GmbH, and PANOMAX.



Weather

Tuesday, November 30

Day Partly Cloudy High: 18°C

Night Clear Low: 8°C

Wednesday, December 1

Day Partly Cloudy High: 10°C

Night Light Rain Low: 3°C

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