

Parliamentary Commission to Investigate Alleged 'Inhumane Treatment' of Saakashvili, GD Head Not Against it



► "This commission will easily determine the absence of ill-treatment. The session will open in February. Before that we will have a discussion and make a decision," Kobakhidze said.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

United National Movement (UNM) party members have stated this week that they will enter the parliament if an inquiry commission is set up. The former president's lawyer Giorgi Mshvenieradze stated that Saakashvili demands from the parliamentary opposition that a temporary commission of inquiry be arranged to look into the matter.

According to UNM party leader Khatia Dekanoidze, given the abolition of state inspector's office, soon Londa Toloraria will no longer have the authority, which, she assures, was done by the government so that the case of prisoner former president, Mikheil Saakashvili

wouldn't be fully investigated. Dekanoidze announced that the replacement of the State Inspector's Office is possible with a commission of inquiry, such cases have already been observed and in such a setup, UNM will enter parliament.

Another opposition party Lelo for Georgia supports the initiative, while another opposition party, Girchi, has set conditions for their support of the commission.

"We will not take part in the work of the commission of inquiry, but we will not prevent the members of the UNM from creating it if they publicly promise that when we need a commission of inquiry, they will support us and secondly stop saying that we are friends of GD," Girchi MP Iago Khvichia stated.

Former Georgian PM Giorgi Gakharia's party For Georgia states that they will not support the initiative, stating that the 'GD and UNM are two ends of one stick.' According to their representative MP Ana Buchukuri, GD and UNM support each other and under these conditions, it isn't right to set up a commission of inquiry.

"The GD is ready to abolish and destroy an independent state institution for the sake of maintaining power and narrow party interests, and the UNM is ready to exchange a narrow party interest or one person's interest in the state interest," Buchukuri said, emphasizing that when GD decided to abolish the State Inspector's Office, UNM didn't even appear at the plenary session of the parliament and when the committee was discussing this difficult decision, one

of their representatives started reading Mikheil Saakashvili's letter.

Ruling GD party Head Irakli Kobakhidze has stated that he is not against setting up a parliamentary commission of inquiry to investigate the alleged 'inhumane treatment' of former President Saakashvili, who claims prison staff verbally and physically abused him during the transfer to Gldani prison hospital on November 8. Kobakhidze stated that setting up a commission may be wise since it will establish that "there has been no ill-treatment against Saakashvili."

The Georgian State Inspector's Service launched an investigation into the alleged physical assault on Saakashvili on November 18; however, per legislative amendments proposed by the GD at the end of 2021, the state body will be replaced by two new agencies.



► The former president, who currently holds Ukrainian citizenship, is serving a sentence for abuse of power after his clandestine return earlier this year in October from eight years in political exile.

The main events of 2021 in Georgia

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

2021 turned out to be a difficult year for Georgia - the coronavirus pandemic, impoverished population, political polarization, and the rise of authoritarian tendencies within the country, complicating the international situation. All this is inherited by 2022. And yet, what are the main events in the domestic political life of the country in Georgia last year? Perhaps we should first name the agreement reached between the government and the opposition on April 19, mediated by the President of the Council of Europe Charles Michel. This document was criticized by many, but it was a compromise reached with great effort and found a way out of the political crisis created in the country after the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Suffice it to say that concrete steps were taken to carry out electoral reform in order to restore the opposition's confidence in the institution of elections. This was very important before the local self-government elections to be held in the fall of 2021; judicial reform was also envisaged to ensure its independence. The implementation of the April 19 agreement ensured the development of Georgia's political system in the direction of democracy. However, on the 100th day after the agreement, on July 28, the Georgian Dream annulled the agreement.

Subsequent developments in Georgia have shown that the government has embarked on the path of establishing the authoritarian rule. The opposition and non-governmental organizations are talking about this more and more often. Among the main events of the year is the October

2 local self-government elections, which, in their significance, went beyond the usual self-government elections.

The opposition has again accused the Georgian Dream of rigging the election. However, the official results of the elections also showed that the Georgian Dream, despite the widespread use of administrative resources, is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain power, primarily in urban centers.

On October 30, it became necessary to hold the second round of elections in 20 major cities and centers. The self-government elections also showed that the Georgian Dream is not ready to relinquish power even at the level of self-government in any city or municipality. The government did everything possible to ensure that the opposition did not have a majority in the local councils, and a statement was made

that the central government would not cooperate with the self-governing opposition. As a result of these efforts, only one municipal administration in Tsalenjikha remained in the hands of the opposition.

The arrival of the third President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili before the self-government elections in Georgia should be considered an important event in 2021. Saakashvili's statements about his arrival in Georgia were ridiculed by the Georgian Dream, and even after the video posted by Saakashvili on his social network after his arrival in Georgia, they claimed that it was a lie and that Saakashvili was not in Georgia. However, as a result of these videos, the security tracked down Saakashvili and he was arrested in Tbilisi on October 1.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.0883 | EURO - 3.4913 | GBP - 4.1726 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.1209 | SWISS FRANC - 3.3671 |

NGOs Call on President Zourabichvili to Veto Bill on Abolition of State Inspector's Office

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

NGOs are calling on Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili to veto a bill adopted by the parliament on December 30 regarding abolishing the State Inspector's Office in its current form. According to the NGOs, despite the severe criticism by local civil society organizations and Georgia's partner states, the ruling party, without any justification or involvement of the relevant actors and the State Inspector Service itself, made an "unconstitutional decision that is extremely damaging to Georgian democracy".

The NGOs positively assessed the President's statement that it is unacceptable to initiate and expedite a decision on the abolition of an independent state institution without preliminary consultation. President Zourabichvili called on the legislative body on December 27 to refrain from adopting the draft law stating that during a difficult polarization situation in the country, making such decisions is detrimental to the depolarization process.

The signatory organizations call on the President of Georgia



► "It is unacceptable to initiate and expedite a decision on the abolition of an independent state institution, the State Inspector Service, without prior consultation," Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili said.

to exercise her constitutional authority and veto the relevant legislative changes and return the draft legislative amendments to the Parliament with motivated remarks.

The State Inspector's Service, which will be replaced with two new agencies in March 2022,

was mandated to investigate alleged offenses committed by state officials and law enforcement agencies. Many foreign diplomats, NGOs, and the opposition members have called on the ruling party to halt the process, however, Georgian Dream representatives claim that splitting

the State Inspector's Service into two new agencies will strengthen the body and add functions to it, noting that the authority of the State Inspector's Service 'has been broadly expanded.'

The signatory NGOs are Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF); Georgian Young Lawyers'



► The Georgian government adopted the bill replacing the State Inspector's Service with the Special Investigation and Personal Data Protection services on December 30.

Association (GYLA); Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia); Social Justice Centre; Institute for Democracy and Safe Development (IDSD); International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED); Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC); Partnership for Human Rights (PHR); Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI); Rehabilitation Initiative for Vulnerable Groups (RIVG); Democracy Research Institute (DRI); Human Rights Centre (HRC); The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI); Media Development Fund (MDF); Georgian Court Watchman (GCW); and Safari.

The main events of 2021 in Georgia

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If Saakashvili had not uploaded the videos, they probably would not have been able to arrest him, and Saakashvili would have been able to carry out his plan - to appear at a rally in Tbilisi on October 3 to defend the election results. If it happened, it would be a real shock to the government.

Local experts are arguing a lot about who this fact helped more in mobilizing supporters - the government or the opposition. The indisputable fact is that after Saakashvili's return to Georgia, the third president has become one of the main factors in Georgian politics. After a 50-day hunger strike, Saakashvili was taken to a

military hospital in Gori, ending a year of mass hunger strikes by UNM members and supporters demanding Saakashvili's release from prison.

2021 turned out to be difficult for the Georgian Dream as well. To top it all off, the Prime Minister has changed once and the Speaker of Parliament twice. On February 18, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia resigned. The reason for his resignation was the disagreement within the Georgian Dream over the arrest of Nika Melia, the leader of the United National Movement. Irakli Gharibashvili, who has been appointed to his post for the second time in his place, has started pursuing an even tougher policy. The events of July 5-6 were noteworthy when

52 journalists were injured in the anti-Pride rally, during which 52 journalists were injured and one died.

Gakharia, who resigned, formed his own party and came under harsh criticism from the Georgian Dream. Gakharia's party showed the third result in the 2021 self-government elections after the Georgian Dream and United National Movement. However, his political power has not yet found a place between the government and the opposition.

As for the Speaker of the Parliament, on April 27, 2021, Kakha Kuchava took this position and replaced Archil Talakvadze. However, Kakha Kuchava resigned on December 24 and was replaced by Shalva Papuashvili

on December 29. As it is mentioned, the chairman of the new parliament will take a more rigid course compared to Kuchava.

According to Mamuka Khazaradze, the leader of Lelo, 5 prime ministers and 5 parliament speakers have been replaced during the 9 years of Georgian Dream rule. According to him, what stability and consistent course can be talked about in such conditions. However, as some experts point out, frequent staff changes are the style of governing Bidzina Ivanishvili, a figure who has long since announced his departure from politics.

December 22 marks 30 years since the events of December-January 1991-1992, when President Gamsakhurdia was over-

thrown and civil strife broke out in the country. Even today the situation is extremely polarized. That is why there was a great response to the initiative of President Salome Zurabishvili at the December 10 summit organized by US President Biden to reach a national consensus.

According to some, this meant reaching an agreement between the government and the opposition, but President Zurabishvili clarified that such a task is beyond his capabilities and it is a matter of reaching an agreement on the assessment of recent events. It is difficult to say how much this will be achieved.

2021 started in the conditions of internal political crisis, epidemic, social hardship, and the same problems passed in 2022.

THURSDAY JANUARY 6

Day ☀️ Mainly sunny
High: 12°C

Night 🌙 Mainly clear
Low: 2°C

FRIDAY JANUARY 7

Day ☀️ Sunshine
High: 14°C

Night 🌙 Mainly clear
Low: 4°C

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