

CEC Appeals Georgian Court Ruling, Citing Judge's Wife's Social Media Posts as Grounds for Bias

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Central Election Commission (CEC) has filed an appeal seeking to overturn a recent decision by the Tetrtskaro District Court that annulled electronic voting results in the Tsalka and Tetrtskaro districts. The ruling, issued by Judge Vladimir Khuchua, found in favor of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), which argued that voting secrecy had been compromised.

In its appeal, the CEC raised concerns about the impartiality of Judge Khuchua, pointing specifically to social media posts by his wife, Elza Gurgenzidze. According to the CEC's complaint, Gurgenzidze is a known supporter of the opposition party European Georgia-Movement for Freedom and has made public statements critical of the ruling party, Georgian Dream. The CEC claims that her open disapproval of Georgian Dream and her support for the annulment decision could influence the judge's objectivity.

The appeal, as shared by GYLA, reads, "Elza Gurgenzidze, the wife of Judge Vladimir Khuchua, is a donor to the opposition party and has made statements against Georgian Dream on social media. In one of her



საქართველოს ცენტრალური საარჩევნო კომისია / CEC of Georgia

posts, she praised her husband's ruling to annul the election results, raising further doubts about Judge Khuchua's impartiality."

The CEC contends that these circumstances created a conflict of interest and that Judge Khuchua should have recused himself. "All of the above indicates that Mr. Vladimir

Khuchua should have recused himself in this case, as there are significant grounds to question his impartiality," the CEC's appeal states. It further argues that this alleged conflict amounts to an "illegal composition of the court," which could invalidate the original ruling.

Nona Kurdovanidze, the director of GYLA, defended

Judge Khuchua's role and criticized the CEC's argument, stating that Gurgenzidze's social media activity falls within her right to free expression and does not influence the judge's independence. Speaking at the appellate court on November 6, Kurdovanidze said, "This fits within the judge's wife's freedom of ex-

pression and is not grounds for removing the judge."

The CEC's appeal will now proceed through the appellate court, which will determine whether Judge Khuchua's ruling will stand or be overturned based on the presented arguments regarding judicial integrity and election fairness.

Friends of Georgia Call for International Inquiry into Election Irregularities



Joint Statement,

Friends of Georgia, 6 November 2024

ON INTERNATIONAL INQUIRY COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE IRREGULARITIES OF ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA

Standing strongly in solidarity with nations that adhere to the values of democracy, fundamental freedoms and rule of law,

Standing strongly with the Georgian people and their European choice,

Noting with deep regret Georgia's recent democratic backsliding, including the enactment of anti-European legislation limiting the space for independent civil society organizations and human rights,

Reiterating our deepest concern about the fact that Parliamentary elections in Georgia of October 26 were marked with the unprecedented number of incidents and systemic violations which were reported by international observers,

Noting that integrity of elections and upholding the rule of law are an integral part and fundamentals of the European values to which Georgia as an EU candidate country has to demonstrate its commitment,

By Liza Mchedlidze

In an urgent statement released on November 6, the *Friends of Georgia*, a coalition of European parliamentarians and international allies, have called for an independent international inquiry into alleged irregularities in Georgia's October 26 parliamentary elections. They expressed grave concerns over Georgia's democratic "backsliding" and emphasized the need for accountability and transparency in the electoral process.

The group noted that the recent election was marred by numerous incidents, with international observers reporting systemic violations, including claims of voter intimidation and vote-buying. The coalition also expressed regret over recent anti-European legislation passed in Georgia, which they argue undermines the role of civil society and restricts human rights. Ac-

cording to the statement, these legislative actions are incompatible with the values Georgia committed to as an EU candidate country.

The *Friends of Georgia* issued several demands to the Georgian government:

- **Transparent Investigation:** They called for a full and open investigation into all allegations of electoral manipulation, especially around voter intimidation and vote-buying.

- **International Inquiry:** Given the severity of the allegations, they demanded that only an independent international commission should investigate both pre-election and election-day violations.

- **Voting Protocols and Transparency:** The group urged the Georgian government to make voting records publicly accessible, allowing each voter to verify the accuracy of their voting details, including time and location.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7247; Euro - 2.9288; GBP - 3.5135; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7747; Swiss Franc - 3.1132

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Repeal of Anti-European Legislation: They also called for the repeal of recent laws that restrict freedoms and harm civil society organizations, which they argue counter EU principles and values.

The coalition also urged the European Union and transatlan-

tic allies to consider sanctions on Georgian officials and political leaders allegedly involved in these electoral violations, specifically naming Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili. They also called for the EU to freeze funds allocated to Georgia for state and public institutions, with exceptions for projects supporting civil society and the rule of law.

In parallel, they advocated for increased financial support to Georgia's independent media and civil society organizations, stressing the importance of these sectors in upholding democratic norms and the rule of law.

Highlighting the significance of visa freedom, particularly for Georgia's youth, the coalition called on the European Commis-

sion and Council to reassess Georgia's visa liberalization status. They suggested that full suspension of the visa agreement should be considered if Georgia does not meet the outlined demands.

The statement reaffirmed support for the Georgian people's pro-European aspirations, as well as Georgia's independence,

sovereignty, and territorial integrity. It was signed by prominent members of various European foreign affairs committees, including Christine Schwartz-Fuchs of Austria, Els Van Hoof of Belgium, and Michael Roth of Germany, as well as members of the European Parliament and representatives from other allied nations.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Opposition Leaders Meet with Georgian President to Discuss Election Violations and International Inquiry

for an international investigation into the October 26 parliamentary elections. Representatives from all four opposition parties that passed the electoral threshold attended the meeting.

Following the discussion, opposition leaders addressed the media, stating that their main

Coalition for Change, emphasized that the opposition's plans had not changed. "We are still fighting for the annulment of the election results," Gvaramia said, adding that the conversation centered on the current political situation and the opposition's stance.

Tina Bokuchava, leader of the Unity - National Movement, shared that President Zurabishvili had made it clear she would not cooperate with Ivanishvili's prosecutor's office. "The president openly stated that she does not intend to cooperate with them," Bokuchava explained, referring to the ongoing controversy surrounding the prosecutor's office.

Ana Dolidze, leader of Strong Georgia, stressed the importance of the international investigation and its diplomatic implications. "The EU is very interested in what is happening here," she said. Dolidze also noted that the current parliament remains largely unrecognized, with only a handful of countries acknowledging its legitimacy, further intensifying the opposition's calls for international intervention.

Dimitri Tskitishvili of Gakharia for Georgia stated that the president plays a unique role

in conveying public sentiment to international partners and aligning local and global perspectives.

Giorgi Rurua Says He Was Not Questioned About Terrorism During Interrogation

Speaking to journalists afterward, Rurua described the interrogation as a "circus staged by the authorities" with no meaningful content. "It was an interrogation without content. I cannot comment further," he said, explaining that he had been made to sign a non-disclosure



Giorgi Rurua, the co-founder of the Mtavari Arkhi channel who was interrogated by a magistrate judge as part of the ongoing investigation into charges of terrorism and conspiracy, told the journalists that he was not asked any questions about terrorism.

agreement. When asked about inquiries into a potential plot to murder Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of Georgian Dream, Rurua denied any such questions had been raised. "There was no question at all about that name," he stated.



On November 6, 2024, leaders of Georgia's opposition parties met with President Salome Zourabichvili to discuss ongoing electoral violations and the need

focus was on the annulment of the election results and the necessity of an international inquiry into the alleged violations. Nika Gvaramia, leader of the

EU4Digital conducts cross-border ePrescription testing in Georgia

Healthcare providers and patients in Georgia could benefit from an improved flow of healthcare data, following new EU4Digital testing of a cross-border ePrescription service.

This is the first pilot of EU4Digital eHealth services for Eastern partner countries, with Moldova also expected to test cross-border ePrescription in the coming months.



The ePrescription service allows prescriptions issued in a patient's home country to be electronically accessible and valid at pharmacies in foreign countries. For anyone travelling or temporarily residing in another country, this reduces the effort of consulting an unknown physician, helps overcome language barriers, and reduces the risks of time wasting, inaccuracies and impacts on people's health.

For care providers, cross-border eHealth services such as ePrescription also increase efficiency and patient safety.

EU4Digital has been working with the Information Technology Agency (ITA), a subsidiary of the Ministry of IDPs from Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, to connect the national ePrescription system with an 'OpenNCP' server - a gateway for interoperable cross-border eHealth services. This is the first technical step in the new EU4Digital ePrescription pilot, which is part of EU4Digital's eHealth thematic area of activi-

ties. Once the server is connected, the ITA team will test cross-border exchange of ePrescription data with an EU Member State's eHealth services.

EU4Digital will follow up on the Georgian ePrescription cross-border pilot testing with a report. Potential next steps involve scaling up successful eHealth pilots and expanding collaboration among other Eastern partners and EU countries. Ukraine and Moldova are expected to take part in ePrescription pilots in the near future.

(eunighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Thursday, November 7

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 14°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 1°C

Friday, November 8

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 13°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 2°C

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