

Gakharia Urges Diplomats to Boycott Parliamentary Session Over 'Fraudulent Elections'

By Liza Mchedlidze

Former Georgian Prime Minister and leader of the Gakharia – For Georgia party, Giorgi Gakharia, urged the diplomatic corps in Georgia to boycott the opening session of the newly elected Parliament. Speaking at a briefing, Gakharia called on ambassadors, including those representing the United States and European Union member states, to refrain from attending the session as a sign of disapproval of what he described as illegitimate election results.

Gakharia accused the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party of orchestrating systematic election fraud during the October 26 parliamentary elections. He claimed violations included voter intimidation, manipulation of voter privacy, and the misuse of citizens' personal data. He further alleged that state institutions, such as the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, were complicit in the scheme.

Gakharia emphasized the need for a full, independent investigation into the alleged election fraud, asserting that the crisis could have been mitigated if the GD had disclosed the list of participating voters. Instead,



he claimed, the ruling party obstructed transparency by initiating what he called a "fake investigation" to secure control over evidence.

He also appealed to Georgian citizens to join protests on the first day of Parliament's session, urging them to visibly deny the legislature's legitimacy.

Discussing his party's coordination with other opposition groups, Gakharia said the focus remained on addressing "stolen elections" and returning the country to a pro-European trajectory. However, he highlighted differences in protest strategies, distancing his party from the United National Movement's (UNM) approach.

Responding to questions about relinquishing parliamentary mandates, Gakharia maintained that such decisions were solely his party's prerogative. He clarified that Georgia would refuse state funding but declined to specify the format of the refusal.

Addressing potential EU sanctions, Gakharia opposed measures that would restrict visa liberalization for Georgian citizens, calling them unfair and counterproductive. Instead, he advocated for targeted sanctions against GD officials, whom he accused of undermining the country's European aspirations.

Social Justice Center Criticizes Protracted Trial of Two Political Activists in Georgia

By Liza Mchedlidze

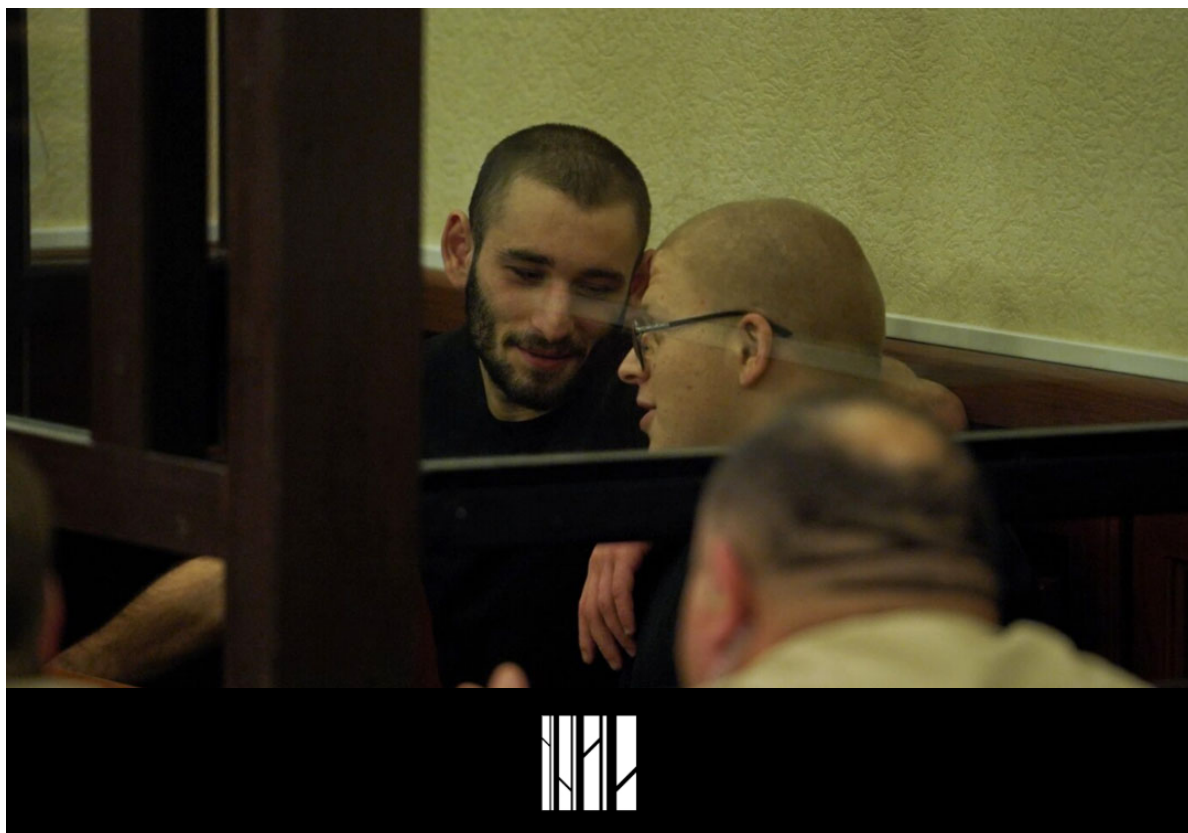
On November 21, the Social Justice Center (SJC) issued a statement condemning the prolonged trial of political activists Saba Meparishvili and Omar Okribelashvili, who have been detained since May 14, 2024. Both individuals face 3 to 6 years in prison for allegedly damaging a GEL 400 (USD 146) iron barrier during protests against Georgia's controversial Foreign Agents Law. The SJC argues that their continued detention and the charges against them represent the political manipulation of Georgia's judicial system and an attempt to punish political activism unjustly.

The activists are charged under Article 187, Part Two, Subsection "c" of the Georgian Criminal Code, which pertains to the destruction of property as part of a group. This provision was introduced in 2023, following the initial attempts by the Georgian government to pass the Foreign Agents Law, a highly contentious piece of legislation that sparked protests across the country. The SJC points out that the amendment has been used against political activists in a problematic manner and argues

that the law's justification remains unclear, as the explanatory note for the amendment was never made public.

The organization further criticizes the use of imprisonment in these cases, arguing that European Court of Human Rights rulings highlight that imprisonment should only be used when there is a clear risk of the defendant influencing evidence or posing a danger to the administration of justice. The SJC maintains that neither Meparishvili nor Okribelashvili can interfere with potential evidence in the case, and therefore their continued detention is disproportionate and unjustified.

The trial has experienced significant delays, with court sessions scheduled two months apart, and the last session held on September 23. The SJC claims that the postponements are part of an effort to delay the process until President Salome Zourabichvili's term ends in December 2024, potentially paving the way for a presidential pardon. The two-month period for reviewing pre-trial detention ends on November 23, but the SJC believes that these delays



CONTINUED ON Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7433; Euro - 2.8862; GBP - 3.4640; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7214; Swiss Franc - 3.1050

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CONTINUED FROM Page 1
 are designed to ensure that the case will not reach a conclusion before the president's term expires. Highlighting the broader im-

plications of the trial, the SJC argues that these cases exemplify Georgia's "unfair criminal justice policies" and reveal the increasing politicization of the country's judiciary and prosecutor general's office. The SJC asserts that the government is attempting to maintain its legitimacy and resolve the political

crisis through disproportionate legal measures. The organization concluded its statement by urging the Tbilisi City Court to issue a final decision on the cases of Meparishvili and Okribelashvili in a timely manner, based solely on credible and objective evidence.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Transparency International and Civil Society Foundation Submit Amicus Curiae Brief in Georgia's Election Lawsuit

international human rights law. Filed on November 20, President Zourabichvili's lawsuit argues that the election results are unconstitutional due to these violations. The Constitutional Court has yet to decide whether the ap-

peal will be accepted for further review. seven years. According to the Ministry, Devidze "attacked policemen and inflicted bodily injuries by beating them with a stick" during the protest on Melikishvili Avenue, which followed the violent dispersal of

However, it is unclear from the footage how the officer was affected. The November 19 protests stemmed from public discontent over alleged fraud in the October 26 parliamentary elections. Authorities faced criticism for their



21-11-2024 THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS ARRESTED ONE PERSON FOR ATTACKING POLICEMEN

The employees of Tbilisi Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as a result of operational measures and investigative actions, arrested M.D. (born in 2003) for assaulting policemen. The crime envisions up to 7 years of imprisonment. The investigation established that on November 19 of the current year, during the protest held on Melikishvili Avenue in Tbilisi, M.D. physically assaulted law enforcement officers mobilized to protect public order. In particular, during the rally, he attacked the policemen and injured them with a stick. On the basis of the investigative activities conducted in the case and the obtained evidence, the law enforcement officers M.D. arrested. The investigation is being conducted under the Article 353 part I of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

Transparency International Georgia and the Civil Society Foundation have jointly filed a friend of the court brief in the Constitutional Court of Georgia. The brief supports President Salome Zourabichvili's lawsuit, which challenges the official results of the October 26 parliamentary elections. The brief, based on evidence from My Vote observers, highlights violations of fundamental electoral principles, including breaches of ballot secrecy, universal suffrage, and the free expression of voters' will. These violations are said to contravene both Georgia's Constitution and

21-Year-Old Protester Faces 7 Years for Alleged Police Assault
 The Georgian Interior Ministry announced on November 21 the arrest of 21-year-old Mate Devidze, who is accused of attacking police officers during a protest on November 19 in central Tbilisi. The charges, filed under Article 353¹ of Georgia's Criminal Code, relate to the alleged physical assault of officers and carry a potential prison sentence of up to

demonstrators near Tbilisi State University. Footage aired by Rustavi 2 TV shows Devidze swinging a stick in the direction of a police officer amid a chaotic chase. heavy-handed response to peaceful demonstrations, including reports of violence against protesters and journalists.

Azerbaijan's first renewables auction concludes at COP29 with EBRD support

On November 21, Azerbaijan concluded its first ever renewable energy auction with technical

assistance from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The outcome of the competitive auction was



announced at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Baku (COP29). Parviz Shahbazov, Minister of Energy of Azerbaijan, ran the auction, where Universal International Holding Limited submitted the lowest bid, with a competitive tariff of US\$ 3.540 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). The company will now start working towards commissioning a 100 megawatt (MW) solar power plant in Azerbaijan's Garadagh region. Alkis Vryenios Drakinos, the EBRD's Regional Head for the Caucasus, said: "This is a great way to wrap up the

EBRD's work at COP29 in Baku. Having surpassed one gigawatt mark in financed green energy and following our consistent policy engagement with the authorities, our assistance with renewables auctions in Azerbaijan has today produced game changing success." The EBRD has been supporting the country's decarbonisation agenda for a number of years through financing, technical assistance and policy dialogue. The Bank has advised Azerbaijan on several reform initiatives, including implementation of the enabling framework for competitive bidding. (euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Friday, November 22
 Day ☀️ Clear High: 19°C
 Night ☁️ Mostly Cloudy Low: 7°C
 Saturday, November 23
 Day ☁️ Mostly Cloudy High: 17°C
 Night 🌙 Clear Low: 5°C

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