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BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Police Raids Target Opposition Leaders and Activists Amid Ongoing Protests

On December 4, Georgian police carried out a series of raids on the homes and offices of opposition leaders, activists, and youth organizations, escalating tensions amid ongoing protests against the government. The searches, arrests, and reported procedural violations have drawn widespread criticism, with many viewing the actions as part of a broader crackdown on dissent.

According to reports, police officers failed to present court-mandated search warrants to property owners or party representatives, despite claiming to possess them. In some cases, entry was allegedly obtained through deceit. Police justified these actions under the "urgent investigative requirement" exception, but the absence of independent witnesses during the searches has raised concerns about their legality.

The raids, which included opposition party offices, saw police loading trucks with confiscated office equipment and other materials. Opposition leaders have criticized these actions as an attempt to disrupt their operations and intimidate their members.

The crackdown led to the detention of several high-profile opposition figures and activists:

- **Nika Gvaramia**, leader of the Coalition for Change, was arrested during a confrontation with police while attempting to enter his party's office during a search. Live footage showed him being tackled to the ground, rendered unconscious, and dragged into a police vehicle.

- **Gela Khasaia**, another member of the Coalition, was arrested while filming



Gvaramia's detention, despite offering no resistance.

- **Zviad Tsetskhladze**, founder of the activist group Dafioni, was detained on charges related to his role in organizing protests against government policies, including the controversial Foreign Agents' law.

- **Ilia Ghlonti**, a leader of the online activist group Daitove, faced a raid on his home during which police confiscated electronic devices. Ghlonti was charged with organizing violent activities, despite the search beginning before his lawyer's ar-

rival.

The police also raided the offices of youth organizations affiliated with the opposition party Unity-UNM and blocked access to journalists and party leaders, including Tinatin Bokuchava and Levan Khabeishvili. Following the searches, members of the youth organization, including Davit Gedenidze, Vakhtang Gagnidze, and others, were arrested.

In addition, the offices of member parties of the Coalition for Change, such as Girchi – More Freedom, Ahali, and Droa,

were searched. During one such raid, Gvaramia's attempt to enter the premises resulted in his arrest.

Activists associated with Daitove and Nabiji were similarly targeted, with homes searched and electronic devices seized. In some cases, the police acted without presenting proper documentation, further intensifying allegations of procedural misconduct.

PM Irakli Kobakhidze defended the raids, describing them as "preventative measures" aimed at maintaining

public order. He alleged that opposition groups were stockpiling fireworks to incite unrest and referred to an ongoing investigation into an alleged coup attempt. However, these claims remain unsubstantiated, and opposition leaders have dismissed them as baseless propaganda.

The raids and arrests have drawn criticism from opposition groups, civil society organizations, and human rights defenders. Many view the actions as a deliberate attempt to stifle political dissent and dismantle the growing protest movement.



Georgian Watchdog Alleges Crimes Against Humanity Amid Protests

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has issued a damning statement accusing state authorities of committing crimes against humanity during recent protests sparked by Georgia's U-turn on EU accession. The statement, released on December 4, highlights widespread and systemic violence against civilians, including protesters, journalists, and marginalized groups, since November 28.

According to GYLA, the pro-

tests began after Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the government's retreat from its EU integration path. The watchdog alleges that coordinated repressive actions, including the unlawful dispersal of peaceful demonstrators, have taken place daily. These measures, they claim, exceed the scope of standard police enforcement and constitute organized crime.

GYLA described patterns of violence where Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) units

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8468; Euro - 2.9894; GBP - 3.6077; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7102; Swiss Franc - 3.2102

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surrounded protesters, blocked escape routes, and indiscriminately attacked individuals.

Among the victims are women, minors, and persons with disabilities, who have reportedly faced severe physical abuse and deliberate violence.

Members of the media, including international journalists, have been subjected to violence, the statement alleges. GYLA also highlighted arbitrary arrests and targeted persecution of individuals involved in the protests. "Special punitive units" were accused of systematically intimidating civilians, while investigative authorities allegedly failed to act against these abuses.

The watchdog asserts that state institutions are directly complicit in these actions. They cite the following:

- The MIA's refusal to

identify police officers involved in violence, despite video evidence.

- The Special Investigation Service's failure to identify or prosecute perpetrators.

- Court rulings imposing administrative sanctions on protesters without examining individual circumstances, effectively punishing victims.

GYLA further accused government officials of encouraging punitive actions by security forces, fostering anti-Western propaganda, and demonizing protesters.

The organization argues that

the scale and systematic nature of these violations meet the threshold for crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Statute. They cited acts of torture, persecution on political and discriminatory grounds, and other inhumane acts causing significant suffering.

GYLA calls for international attention to address these allegations. They warned that the current trajectory not only undermines human rights but could deepen Georgia's international isolation.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Kobakhidze Defends Raids on Opposition Offices



Irakli Kobakhidze has defended the recent police raids on opposition party offices, describing the actions as "preventions" rather than repressions. Speaking

to journalists on December 4, Kobakhidze accused opposition parties of systematically supplying protest participants with pyrotechnics and other materials, contributing to what he described as "systemic gross violence."

Kobakhidze claimed that the raids by the Ministry of Internal Affairs uncovered evidence of these supplies within the party offices. According to Kobakhidze, such actions demonstrate that opposition parties are using their resources to incite unrest.

"The fact is, one thing is confirmed: people were systematically supplied with pyrotechnics and other means by the relevant political forces. This is absolutely clear, and it lies in the palm of your hand," he said.

He further accused these parties of attempting to "change the government through violence."

Kobakhidze also targeted the online activist group Daitove, which has been active in mobilizing support for the protests. He characterized the group's leadership as politically motivated, claiming that its administrator has ties to the opposition party United National Movement (UNM) and former president Mikheil Saakashvili.

Georgian Authorities Arrest Seven in Investigation of Protest Violence



MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs announced on December 4 the arrest of seven individuals as part of an investigation into group violence and public incitement to violence. The operation, based on a judge's ruling, involved searches in Tbilisi and various regions of the country.

According to the Ministry, the investigation is being conducted under Articles 225 and 239 of Georgia's Criminal Code. These articles pertain to organizing or participating in group violence and inciting public violence, with penalties of up to nine years of imprisonment.

Law enforcement officials stated that searches were conducted in the personal residences and houses of six individuals as part of the operation.

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum calls for new elections in Georgia and immediate resumption of EU accession talks

Weather

Thursday, December 5

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 10°C

Night Clear

Low: 0°C

Friday, December 6

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 9°C

Night Clear

Low: -1°C

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) released a statement on December 4 saying that it fears that the accelerating erosion of democratic governance and European values in Georgia "brings the country dangerously and, potentially, irreversibly close to Kremlin's orbit".

Earlier, the EaP Index found that 2024 brought upon Georgia "an unprecedented series of alarming setbacks that contradict the aspirations of the Georgian people and the constitutional commitment to European integration enshrined in Article 78 of the Georgian Constitution".

The decision of the Georgian Dream-led government on 28 November to suspend the EU accession process and reject EU

budgetary support until the end of 2028 has sparked another wave of nationwide protests, lasting for several consecutive nights already.

"This decision, allegedly influenced by Russian interests, undermines the promise to pursue full integration by 2030 and betrays the will of the majority of Georgian citizens who continue to demand a European future," the statement says. "The protests have swiftly transformed into a full-blown crackdown on fundamental freedoms, with enforcement authorities forcibly dispersing protestors, beating and detaining hundreds of them."

To reverse Georgia's democratic backsliding, the EaP CSF Steering Committee urged the Georgian authorities to cooperate with the EU and international partners to reorganise the

parliamentary elections under international supervision with the support of an independent election administration.

Following the re-run of the parliamentary elections, the Georgian government should immediately resume EU accession talks, uphold democratic freedoms, and unconditionally withdraw the laws on "Transparency of Foreign Influence" and "Family Values and Protection of Minors", the Committee recommends.

It also urges the Georgian authorities to immediately and effectively investigate all reported cases of harassment, threats and violence against civil society, media and political opposition that occurred throughout 2024, including at the November-December 2024 protests.

The Committee also recom-

mended that the European Union and its Member States intensify political and financial support for Georgian civil society, rights defenders and media workers, and impose sanctions on individuals and entities involved in electoral fraud, vote manipulation, and intimidation of voters and observers, as well as state violence against protestors.

The EaP CSF Steering Committee also calls on the donor community to cease all financial support and development assistance programmes directed toward Georgian ministries and government agencies and strengthen their support to local civil society in Georgia in a flexible manner as the needs emerge.

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