

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian President Highlights Domestic Crisis During Paris Visit

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili is in Paris for the re-opening of the restored Notre Dame Cathedral, a high-profile event attended by world leaders, including U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

While in Paris, President Zourabichvili met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss regional security and Georgia's political turmoil. Zelenskyy expressed strong support for the Georgian people, stating, "I expressed Ukraine's full support and solidarity with the Georgian people, who are fighting for their dignified future. Respecting the will of the Georgian people and preventing Ivanishvili's government from surrendering the country to Putin is essential for the stability and future of the region."

Zelenskyy underscored the broader implications of Georgia's situation, describing it as a strategic concern for Russia. "It is about control of the Black Sea region – a strategic Russian goal that poses a threat to the national security of everyone in the region and across Europe," he said. He assured Zourabichvili that Ukraine would work with international partners to support the Georgian people in their fight for freedom.

Zourabichvili also met with President-elect Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss Georgia's domestic unrest. In a statement, she said, "I exposed the stolen elections and the extremely alarming repression against the Georgian people. I emphasized the need for a strong United States. The Georgian people have a friend in Donald Trump. God bless the United States of America."

During a briefing at the Government Administration building, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze addressed questions from journalists about the December 7



meeting in Paris between Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

Kobakhidze expressed optimism about Trump's upcoming inauguration on January 20, which he believes will bring significant changes globally and regionally. "I think that everything in the world will change significantly from January 20, in-

cluding our region, which will calm down. Of course, we are waiting for the inauguration of the president in the USA. We have high hopes that from January 20, this region will be significantly calmed down, which should have a positive impact

He also noted that Zourabichvili's term ends on December 29, meaning the U.S. presidential inauguration is not relevant

for her. "The Georgian society as a whole is waiting with great optimism for the inauguration of the new president, which Salome Zourabichvili will not be able to attend as her term of office expires on December 29. Accordingly, the inauguration of the American president is not relevant for her at all. I think everything will be fine," he concluded.

Legal Aid Network Reports Alleged Abuses Amid December 7 Arrests

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Legal Aid Network of Non-Governmental Organizations has issued a statement condemning alleged abuses during and after arrests made on December 7, 2024. The network reported receiving hundreds of calls on its hotline, highlighting injuries among detainees and claims of inhumane treatment by law enforcement.

The statement detailed the challenges faced by lawyers attempting to meet detainees due to overcrowded isolation cells and limited meeting facilities, leading to significant delays. According to the network, most of those arrested showed signs of injuries of varying severity.

"On December 7, 2024, the hotline of the legal aid network of non-governmental organizations received hundreds of calls. Lawyers for the network have so far sought out and met with the peaceful demonstrators arrested last night," the statement read.

The organization raised concerns about individuals being forcibly taken from their homes by people claiming to be law enforcement officials, often without uni-

forms or proper identification. "In the afternoon, the hotline received information about a number of people who were approached at their homes by persons unknown to them. According to their family members and friends, these persons were taken out of their homes by persons who identified themselves as representatives of the law enforcement agency, but were not wearing police uniforms," the statement said.

One particularly alarming account detailed alleged coercion during detention. "Masked people, during the arrest, forced the person who was in the police car with him to hold a knife, at the same time repeating to him that it was his cold weapon," the statement alleged.

The network accused authorities of conducting warrantless searches, inflicting violence on peaceful demonstrators, and subjecting detainees to inhumane treatment and torture. "Until now, people are being taken from their homes and various spaces to law enforcement agencies without justification... peaceful demonstrators are being beaten, inhumanely treated, and tortured," the statement added.

As of now, lawyers from the network are representing over 500 individuals in courts and investigative bodies. "The lawyers of the network continue to work non-stop to help the detainees," the statement reads.

**არასამთავრობო
ორგანიზაციების
სამართლებრივი დახმარების
ქსელის განცხადება 7 დეკემბერს
განვითარებულ მოვლენებთან
დაკავშირებით**

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7753; Euro - 2.9365; GBP - 3.5418; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7835; Swiss Franc - 3.1595

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The Oligarch's Next President

The presidential candidate for Georgia's ruling party "Georgian Dream" will be former footballer Mikheil Kavelashvili. He will be elected by the Electoral College on December 14 and inaugurated on December 29. This decision was, of course, made by Bidzina Ivanishvili. Kavelashvili has been a member of parliament since 2016 and is best known for his sharply anti-Western stance.

For the first time this year, the president will not be elected by direct public vote but by the Electoral College. The Electoral College consists of 300 members, including 150 members of the Georgian Parliament, 20 members from Abkhazia's and 21 from Adjara's legislative bodies. The remaining 109 members are chosen proportionally by political parties based on local election results.

A presidential candidate can be nominated by at least 30 members of the Electoral College. In theory, the opposition could propose a candidate, but they have no chance of winning and are not planning to participate, as they consider the elec-

tion illegitimate.

The ruling Georgian Dream party will have 156 members in the Electoral College (89 from parliament, 54 from local councils, and 13 from Adjara's legislative body), plus 20 members from Abkhazia's legislative body. Although Georgian Dream is unlikely to secure the required two-thirds majority of 200 votes in the first round, they are expected to win the second round, where a simple majority of 151 votes will suffice.

This marks the third time Bidzina Ivanishvili is hand-picking Georgia's president. His first choice was Giorgi Margvelashvili in 2013, but Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream were dissatisfied with his presidency. In 2018, they chose Salome Zourabichvili, requiring a second-round vote. Despite fierce opposition, she remained loyal to Georgia's pro-European constitutional course. Georgian Dream even attempted to impeach her but lacked the necessary votes.

By the end of 2024, Ivanishvili

will be choosing the presidential candidate for the third time. This election is easier since the public no longer votes directly; the 300-member Electoral College, dominated by Georgian Dream, now decides.

As the election approached, speculation about Georgian Dream's candidate intensified. Some suggested Ivanishvili himself might run, arguing it would end rumors of shadow rule and grant him immunity. However, holding even a ceremonial position like the presidency would require public appearances, which Ivanishvili avoids. His current status—without any formal role or official responsibility—suits him better.

Other names were considered, including Georgia's first president's son, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, former ministers Tea Tsulukiani and Irakli Gharibashvili, and former parliamentary speaker Archil Talakvadze. The main criterion was loyalty to Ivanishvili, though even Margvelashvili and Zourabichvili were initially seen

as loyal.

In the end, Ivanishvili's choice of Mikheil Kavelashvili surprised the public. In 2015, Kavelashvili was barred from running for president of the Georgian Football Federation due to lacking a higher education diploma—a requirement he still does not meet. Responding to media questions, Georgian Dream's Mamuka Mdinardze dismissed the issue, saying, "Loving your country doesn't require a diploma."

Kavelashvili, a three-term MP, is remembered for his offensive language, fights, and anti-Western statements. In 2022, he and two other MPs left Georgian Dream but remained in the parliamentary majority, forming the "People's Power" movement, claiming it would better inform the public. People's Power became Georgian Dream's primary vehicle for anti-Western propaganda, suggesting that Georgia was punished for not opening a second front against Russia, thus being denied EU candidate status in 2022.

In 2022, Kavelashvili published an open letter to then-U.S. Ambassador Kelly Dignan, accusing U.S.-funded actors of pushing Georgia into war, not Russia. This raised doubts about the letter's authenticity, prompting Kavelashvili to insist he wrote it himself. Ambassador Dignan dismissed the letter as full of lies, admitting she "couldn't even finish reading it."

The first draft of Georgia's controversial "foreign agent" law, targeting media and NGOs, also originated from People's Power. Though protests blocked the law initially, it was reintroduced and passed by parliament under Georgian Dream's sponsorship.

Opposition leaders see Kavelashvili's nomination as a complete discrediting of the presidency, reducing an already ceremonial role to an openly anti-Western figure. They argue that Ivanishvili's decision symbolically underscores Georgia's continued drift away from the West.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Public Defender Calls for Action Amid Titushky Attacks on Protesters and Journalists

On December 7, Georgian Public Defender Levan Ioseliani condemned violent attacks carried out by groups of alleged Titushky – unofficial enforcers often associated with suppressing protests – against demonstrators and journalists near

"For the last hour, according to the information spread in the media and social networks, in Tbilisi, near Rustaveli Avenue, people dressed in black are attacking and physically assaulting citizens and TV Pirveli journalists," Ioseliani stated. He urged police forces mobilized in the area to "respond immediately and ensure the safety of citizens on the spot," and demanded that law enforcement authorities launch an investigation and prosecute those responsible.

Journalists from TV Pirveli, including Maka Chikhladze and cameraman Giorgi Shetsiruli, were among those targeted on Besiki Street. Chikhladze reported that Titushky physically assaulted them, confiscated their broadcasting equipment, and subjected them to verbal abuse.

In a separate incident, members of the Coalition for Change were attacked in their office. Two individuals were assaulted, including coalition member Koba Khabazi, who was reportedly beaten by the group.

Mindia Gabadze of Publika was reportedly attacked by a group of individuals believed to be Titushky, while at least two police officers were present at the scene. Despite requests from citizens, the police did not arrest the attackers.

In response to the incident, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandre Darakhvelidze addressed the situation, stating that when a group is involved in an assault, a single police officer cannot effectively intervene. "We react to each fact and do everything that is within our mandate and defined by the law. Accordingly, when the patrol police are called, of course, they record the

fact and react," Darakhvelidze said.

He stated that police officers may not have the same capabilities as specially trained units. "We cannot ask a policeman or a patrolman to have the same skills as a special forces officer or someone else who has undergone special training. When a group is violent, in this case, one person cannot do anything there," he added.

Darakhvelidze assured that the situation was being addressed, stating that the relevant units had been called, an investigation had been launched, and all necessary investigative actions were being carried out.



საქართველოს
სახალხო დამცველი
PUBLIC DEFENDER
(OMBUDSMAN) OF GEORGIA

Weather

Monday, December 9

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 12°C

Night Clear

Low: 2°C

Tuesday, December 10

Day Cloudy

High: 7°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 1°C

Titushky Attack on Journalist Raises Concerns Over Police Response

On December 6, journalist



Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi. Ioseliani called for immediate intervention by law enforcement to protect citizens and ensure accountability.

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Turkish Coffee: A Journey of Culture, Flavor, and Conversation

Turkish Coffee: A Cultural Heritage

The Embassy of the Republic of Turkiye to Georgia in cooperation with Tbilisi Yunus Emre Institute held promotional event titled "Turkish Coffee: A Journey of Culture, Flavor and Conversation", on the occasion of December 5th, the World Turkish Coffee Day, with the participation of guests from the diplomatic corps, including the sector of leading baristas from Tbilisi, at the Embassy residence on December 6.

H.E. Ali Kaan Orbay, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye to Georgia delivered opening speech and introduced participants internationally renowned gastronomy writer and Turkish coffee ambassador Mr. Osman Serim, who shared insights into the history and cultural heritage of Turkish coffee, as well as its recognition by UNESCO.

Participants were enjoyed freshly brewed Turkish coffee, with opportunities to ask questions about its preparation and cultural significance during and after the presentation.



