

HRW Calls on EU to Investigate Georgia's Protest Crackdown and Impose Sanctions

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Georgia's Human Rights Crisis Deepens Amid Mass Protests

EU Leaders Should Impose Consequences on Georgia's Authorities

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

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Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on the European Union to take decisive action against the Georgian government over its handling of ongoing anti-government protests. In a statement, HRW urged EU foreign affairs ministers, who will meet on December 16 to discuss Georgia, to demand an independent investigation into the government's response and to impose sanctions on officials responsible for violence against protesters.

The protests erupted nationwide after the government abandoned its pursuit of EU accession, a move HRW says violates Georgia's constitution and disregards the will of approximately 80% of the population. The unrest also follows the disputed October 26 parliamentary elections, criticized for alleged vote-rigging and a series of repressive measures targeting civil society and media.

According to HRW, security forces have responded to the largely peaceful

demonstrations with excessive force, deploying teargas, water cannons, and rubber bullets. Protesters have reportedly faced beatings, mass detentions, and ill-treatment in custody, with dozens hospitalized. Independent journalists have also been targeted by riot police and alleged pro-government mobs, further stifling media coverage.

HRW representatives warned that the Georgian government's actions risk plunging the country deeper into a human rights crisis. They called on EU ministers to advocate for investigations led by international bodies, including the Council of Europe and the United Nations, into allegations of unlawful force, arbitrary detentions, and torture.

The organization also urged the EU to activate its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, targeting Georgian officials responsible for the violence. Proposed measures include travel bans, asset freezes, and imposing Schengen visa requirements on government officials and diplomats. Simultaneously, HRW recommended increased EU support for Georgian civil society and independent media.

"As the Georgian people look to the EU in their aspirations, EU leaders should show them more than moral support," the HRW statement concluded. "Concrete and decisive steps are needed to prevent Georgia's human rights crisis from further escalating."

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Mtavari Arkhi on the Brink of Closure Amid Allegations of Political Collusion

The future of Georgia's independent television channel Mtavari Arkhi is in jeopardy, as founder Zaza Okuashvili has reportedly decided to shut it down, according to the channel's General Director, Giorgi Gabunia. The announcement comes with sharp allegations of political maneuvering and financial sabotage, with Gabunia claiming the move aligns with the interests of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Gabunia accused Okuashvili of acting deliberately to incapacitate Mtavari Arkhi. Central to these claims is Gogi Kurdadze, who was appointed as the channel's director by Okuashvili several months ago. Gabunia described Kurdadze as an "obedient executor" of Okuashvili's tasks, with no expertise in media management or engagement with the channel's operations.

"The sole purpose of his appointment was to give Okuashvili effective leverage over the channel to achieve personal goals," Gabunia said, accusing Kurdadze of neglecting the staff and refusing to approve essential financial transactions. Among the alleged disruptions, Kurdadze reportedly stopped health insurance for employees, a critical resource in a climate



CONTINUED ON Page 2

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8323; Euro - 2.9742; GBP - 3.6052; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7300; Swiss Franc - 3.2036

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where journalists and cameramen face systematic violence and harassment.

Gabunia alleged that these actions are part of a deliberate effort to block the channel's operations, leading to terminated contracts and an inevitable shutdown. "This is exactly what Bidzina Ivanishvili needs today," he asserted.

The controversy extends beyond financial mismanagement. Gabunia hinted at potential political collusion between Okuashvili and Ivanishvili's Georgian

Mtavari Arkhi on the Brink of Closure Amid Allegations of Political Collusion

Dream party. He suggested that Okuashvili might be using the channel as leverage in his ongoing legal disputes with Ivanishvili.

"There is reasonable suspicion that Okuashvili is doing this by negotiating or trading with the illegitimate government," Gabunia said, recalling past in-

stances where Okuashvili's family members supported Georgian Dream initiatives. Specifically, he referenced votes cast by Nato and Rostom Chkheidze, relatives of Okuashvili, in favor of Georgian Dream's judicial council nominees at a critical parliamentary juncture.

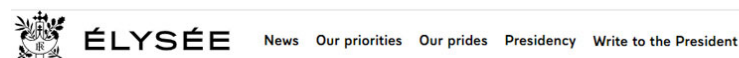
Gabunia vowed to continue broadcast-

ing for as long as possible, emphasizing the channel's commitment to its viewers and its role as a counterweight to government narratives. "We did not fight so hard to see the channel handed over to Bidzina Ivanishvili, even indirectly. As far as we can, we will fight and remain on the air for the Georgian people," he said.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Macron Condemns Violence in Georgia and Calls for Dialogue in Conversation with Ivanishvili



ers and journalists and demanded the release of those arbitrarily detained.

In a statement, the Elysée Palace emphasized that Macron initiated the call to address Georgia's political crisis. The French President expressed regret over Georgia's deviation from its European

trajectory, warning that this shift could harm its relationship with the European Union. He called for an inclusive dialogue among all political parties and civil society to honor the democratic and European aspirations of the Georgian people.

that Ivanishvili and Macron agreed to stay in contact to evaluate progress in the coming days. However, after Macron's statement, Georgian Dream issued an additional response acknowledging the President's demand for the release of detainees.

According to Georgian Dream, Ivanishvili assured Macron that most detainees under administrative detention would be released soon. He maintained that those facing criminal charges were being prosecuted under Georgian law. Ivanishvili also defended law enforcement's actions during the protests, claiming they adhered to standards higher than those in Europe, while noting ongoing investigations into police misconduct.

The conversation comes amid widespread protests in Georgia following the government's controversial decision to abandon its bid for European Union accession.

Public Defender Raises Alarm Over Labor Rights Violations of Tbilisi Municipality Employees

The Public Defender of Georgia has addressed growing concerns about potential violations of labor rights among employees of Tbilisi Municipality City Hall and other public institutions. The statement emphasized that freedom of expression, a constitutional right, must extend to the workplace for civil servants.

The Public Defender reiterated that it is illegal for public institutions to dismiss employees due to their civic positions or



საქართველოს
სახალხო დამცველი
PUBLIC DEFENDER
(OMBUDSMAN) OF GEORGIA

opinions. Any pressure to force resignations is equally inadmissible. The office has pledged to investigate reported violations of labor rights and will inform the public of its findings.

Giga Sopromadze, executive secretary of the council addressing issues of disabled persons within Tbilisi City Hall, formally requested the Public Defender to intervene. He cited reports of threats and intimidation targeting public employees, alleging that these acts are becoming increasingly actionable.

This issue follows public statements by some civil servants who claim they have faced explicit attempts by officials to suppress their freedom of expression.

Interview with Bidzina Ivanishvili, Honorary President of Georgian Dream.

Published on December 11, 2024

The President of the Republic held a meeting at his own initiative with Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili, Honorary President of the Georgian Dream.

He condemned the intimidation of representatives of civil society and the opposition, as well as the violence of the security forces against peaceful demonstrators and journalists. He demanded the release of all those who were arbitrarily arrested and called for respect for freedoms of expression and assembly.

He once again regretted that Georgia had deviated from its European trajectory and reiterated his conviction that the relationship between the

French President Emmanuel Macron has voiced strong concerns about the situation in Georgia during a phone call with Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Honorary Chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party. Macron condemned the use of violence by law enforcement against peaceful protest-

trajectory, warning that this shift could harm its relationship with the European Union. He called for an inclusive dialogue among all political parties and civil society to honor the democratic and European aspirations of the Georgian people.

Georgian Dream initially reported the conversation lasted an hour and noted

Ukraine to receive Euro52 million for transport infrastructure development

According to the Recovery Window network, a media partner of the EU NEIGHBOURS east programme, the European Union will allocate more than Euro52 million for four Ukrainian transport infrastructure projects, related to railways, border crossing points, river infor-

mation services, and air navigation.

The grant agreements were handed over by Magda Kopczynska, Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Transport and Mobility, during the High Level Dialogue for Ukraine, which took place at the end of

November, in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Four Ukrainian projects related to the development of transport infrastructure will receive funding under the European Union's Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

The 'Integration of the Ukrainian railway system into the EU transport system. Stage 1' project will receive almost Euro43 million. This initiative is aimed at modernising the railway infrastructure and introducing a 1,435 mm gauge, which will ensure technological compatibility and increase the capacity of the railway network.

The 'Ukrainian River

Information Service on the Danube River' will receive more than Euro4.8 million for the creation and implementation of a river information service on the Ukrainian section of the Danube River, and its integration with European platforms. It also aims to increase the level of navigation safety and provide unified information services for ships on inland waterways.

Another project, aiming to increase the infrastructure capacity, safety and efficiency of border crossing services on the common road Romania-Moldova-Ukraine, will get Euro2.9 million.

Yet another project envisages the restoration of Ukraine's air navigation industry and the modernisation of the communi-

cation, navigation, surveillance and aeronautical information infrastructure. More than Euro2,1 million will be spent on its implementation.

Last year, Ukraine joined the Connecting Europe Facility. Its total budget until 2027 is about Euro21 billion.

The Ukraine Recovery Window media network brings together 80 independent regional and national media and analytical platforms to monitor and report on all aspects of reconstruction in Ukraine, highlighting EU and international donor support for recovery. The Recovery Window network is a partner of the EU NEIGHBOURS east programme.

(eunighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Thursday, December 12

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 11°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 2°C

Friday, December 13

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 8°C

Night Snow Showers
Low: -3°C

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