

President Zourabichvili Pressures Ivanishvili for Election Talks Amid Growing Protests

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

President Salome Zourabichvili addressed thousands of protesters gathered on Rustaveli Avenue, calling for negotiations with Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili to set a new election date before December 29. The speech, delivered in front of the historic First Georgian Gymnasium, was marked by repeated technical disruptions that some suspected were deliberate jamming.

Standing beneath statues of Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, figures central to Georgia's 19th-century national awakening, Zourabichvili emphasized her determination to stay in office and her commitment to Georgia's democratic future.

"This location is symbolic," she said, referencing the school where her father once studied. "Behind me, Ilia and Akaki are looking down on the new Georgia that has already been born through you. Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, it will be a strong, very European Georgia, and no one can stop it."

She referenced Georgian Dream chairman Irakli Kobakhidze's claims that only a few hundred protesters attended recent demonstrations. "True, there are about 300 of you here," she said with sarcasm, adding, "but we are not afraid."

Zourabichvili invoked the memory of Georgian military hero Giorgi Antsukhelidze, who was tortured and killed by Russian forces in 2008 for refusing to spit on the Georgian flag. "We all have a duty towards him," she said. "Alongside him, many heroes from our past have contributed to us standing



here, for Georgia to be alive. But Georgia never yields when it is right."

Zourabichvili urged Ivanishvili to meet her at the Presidential Palace to negotiate the terms for new elections. "Whoever wants for things to end well in this country, let them come to the palace," she said. "I call on [Bidzina] Ivanishvili to come tomorrow because he governs everything. I am ready to sit down and to negotiate how the elections should take

place. But the date for the new elections has to be decided before the 29th of December."

The President presented herself as a defender of the Constitution, a leader for all Georgians regardless of political allegiance, and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. "I am the President of all Georgians, and so I will remain," she declared firmly.

Zourabichvili's speech was interrupted

several times by audio and live feed problems. Some attendees suggested the disruptions were caused by deliberate interference, an accusation yet to be confirmed. Referring to these incidents, Zourabichvili said, "They seem to be stealing not only our stage but also my voice."

She promised to deliver a full recorded address from the Presidential Palace the following evening.

Kobakhidze Threatens Zourabichvili with Imprisonment Over Election Dispute

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze issued a warning to President Salome Zourabichvili during a December 22 briefing, suggesting she could face imprisonment if she continues to challenge the legitimacy of the government and upcoming presidential inauguration.

Kobakhidze criticized Zourabichvili's refusal to recognize Mikheil Kavelashvili, elected by a one-party electoral college, as the incoming president. Zourabichvili maintains her position as the legitimate President until a new Parliament is established through free and fair elections. She views the planned December 29 inauguration as unconstitutional.

"Salome Zourabichvili will have to leave office on December 29. Let us see where she continues to live – beyond the bars or behind the bars," Kobakhidze stated, alleging that her actions could

violate the Criminal Code.

Kobakhidze warned that any attempt by Zourabichvili to barricade herself in the presidential residence would be a criminal act. "Nobody may want to send a 72-year-old woman to prison, but if she chooses this path, she sacrifices those who may join her inside the residence, risking sentences of several years in prison."

He added that any public call for repeat or snap elections by the President could also constitute a criminal offense, as "such measures lack legal grounds."

Zourabichvili and the opposition have called for repeat elections, citing legitimacy concerns. However, Kobakhidze argued that the Central Election Commission and the Constitutional Court have validated the results, and snap elections can only occur if the government loses a vote of confidence, which has not happened.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8082; Euro - 2.9174; GBP - 3.5133; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7198; Swiss Franc - 3.1394

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“Her statement calling for repeat or snap elections is not only comical but also a criminal offense,” Kobakhidze said, referencing provisions in the Criminal Code that could result in multi-year

imprisonment. Kobakhidze concluded his remarks with an ultimatum: “She has until 21:00 today to think. I hope someone smart advises her. Let us see who wins – someone smart, or Zourabichvili.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Public Broadcaster Employees Demand Political Discussions on Daytime TV

Employees of Georgia’s Public Broadcasting Company are continuing to call for the channel to dedicate daytime programming to public and political discussions, following widespread protests

not to films that have nothing to do with today’s reality.” They argue that this is a critical time for the country and that the broadcaster has the capacity to offer such programming if there is a willingness from management.

Despite multiple appeals, the employees expressed frustration at the lack of response, with one statement noting, “Unfortunately, many of our public ap-

peals and official letters were not followed by a business and reasoned response from the management.” They added, “We know that if there is a will, the public broadcaster has the means to provide it technically.”

A press conference will be held on Monday, December 23, at 1 p.m. in front of the Public Broadcaster building. In their state-

Georgia’s Education Quality Center to Appeal EQAR Suspension

At a press conference, Margishvili stated, “A large part of the recommendations they had have been corrected, there are still some issues that we continue to work on, and we will definitely ensure that the EQAR registration center is established as soon as possible.”

The suspension came after concerns were raised that Georgia’s higher educa-

Lasha Margishvili, Acting Director of the National Center for Education Quality Development, announced that the institution will appeal the decision to suspend its registration with the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

tion system had violated European quality assurance standards. On December 6, it was reported that Georgia’s membership in both the EQAR and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) had been at risk due to these violations.



sparked by the November 28 announcement from Georgian Dream’s Irakli Kobakhidze that EU membership negotiations were postponed until 2028.

The employees emphasized that the current socio-political climate requires urgent dialogue, stating, “The current events oblige us to dedicate the television air to dialogue on socio-political issues and

peals and official letters were not followed by a business and reasoned response from the management.” They added, “We know that if there is a will, the public broadcaster has the means to provide it technically.”

On 13 December, the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) to Ukraine and the Austrian Government announced the extension of a joint project aimed at strengthening the capacity of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies in the liberated territories. Austria will support the project with Euro 170,000 in additional support.

This funding will further enhance the capabilities of key agencies, including the National Police of Ukraine (NPU), State Bureau of Investigation (SBI),

EUAM: Austria extends support for Ukraine’s fight against organised crime



Economic Security Bureau (ESBU), State Financial Monitoring Service (SMFSU), Asset Recovery and Management

Agency (ARMA), National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), and the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU), enabling them to investigate and prosecute financial and corruption-related crimes more efficiently, using EU best practices.

“This initiative equips our Ukrainian partners with the skills and tools they need to tackle complex organised crime cases,” said Rolf Holmboe, EUAM’s Head of Mission. “Through capacity building and advice, we are helping Ukrainian authorities adopt globally recognised tools for investigating financial crimes and misuse of

funds.”

The project employs a ‘train & equip’ approach, which combines tailored expert advice, hands-on training and the provision of modern equipment and specialised software. This approach ensures that Ukrainian law enforcement agencies can carry out their tasks efficiently. Earlier this year, training sessions in Austria gave participants practical experience in advanced investigative techniques while fostering professional links with EU counterparts.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Monday, December 23

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 11°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 2°C

Tuesday, December 24

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 13°C

Night Clear
Low: 2°C

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