

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

CEC Claims Allegations of Election Rigging Are Baseless

The Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia has claimed that the October 26 parliamentary elections were conducted fairly and denied accusations of rigging made by President Salome Zourabichvili. In a statement issued today, the CEC described the allegations as baseless and politically motivated, asserting its adherence to transparency and professionalism throughout the electoral process.

The President alleged that the elections were rigged and illegitimate, but the CEC rejected these claims, claiming that no substantial evidence has been presented to support them. "The statements that the elections were rigged are entirely baseless and represent a politically motivated disregard for the facts," the commission stated.

The CEC claimed that international observers, including the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, had assessed the elections positively, highlighting their compliance with legal standards despite minor procedural shortcomings. The commission further claimed that these issues had no significant impact on the results.

In response to the fraud allegations, the CEC initiated a request for an official investigation to ensure transparency. "No concrete evidence has been provided to substantiate these accusations," the commission asserted.

The CEC accused the President of perpetuating narratives aligned with politically inter-



ested groups, warning that such statements risk damaging public trust in Georgia's democratic institutions. "We call on all par-

ties, including the President, to provide evidence if available or to refrain from making unsubstantiated claims," the CEC said.

Reiterating its commitment to accountability, the CEC claimed it would continue to counter disinformation and work toward

strengthening trust in the electoral process, urging all stakeholders to prioritize collaboration over polarization.

Human Rights Watch Condemns Police Violence in Georgia Protests

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December 23, 2024 11:00PM EST

Georgia: Brutal Police Violence Against Protesters

Effective Investigations, Accountability Urgently Needed



Thousands gather outside of Georgia's parliament in the capital, Tbilisi, to protest the ruling party's suspension of European Union accession talks, December 11, 2024. © 2024 Jerome Gilles/NurPhoto via AP

(Berlin, December 24, 2024) – Police and other security forces have used brutal violence against largely peaceful protesters in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, Human Rights Watch said today. In widespread and apparently routine acts, security forces have chased down, violently detained, and beat protesters.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Police and security forces in Tbilisi have unleashed widespread and brutal violence against largely peaceful protesters, Human Rights Watch reported. Based on testimonies and evidence, the report documents a pattern of punitive actions, including the violent detention and beating of protesters, as well as incidents of torture and ill-treatment in police custody.

According to the report, protesters sustained severe injuries, including head trauma, broken bones, and extensive bruising, inflicted by masked officers in riot gear lacking identifiable insignia. The report estimates that since protests began on November 28, over 460 people have been detained, with more than 300 alleging abuse. At least 80 detainees required hospitalization for injuries allegedly sustained during or after their arrests.

The protests erupted following the ruling party's controversial decision to abandon Georgia's EU accession process and allegations of massive vote-rigging in October's parliamentary elections. Demonstrators have been calling for new elections, a return to the EU integration process, and the release of those unjustly detained.

Human Rights Watch highlights what it describes as excessive and disproportionate police force, including the use of tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets to disperse largely peaceful crowds. The report also details over 70 incidents of violence and interference targeting journalists covering the protests.

The organization criticized the lack of accountability, pointing out that the government has not taken meaningful steps to address allegations of police abuse. It also condemned the

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8119; Euro - 2.9221; GBP - 3.5236; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8226; Swiss Franc - 3.1229

Human Rights Watch Condemns Police Violence in Georgia Protests

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Georgian authorities for honoring officials implicated in the crackdown while investigations remain pending.

Human Rights Watch is urging the Georgian government to immediately end the violence, investigate all allegations of abuse, and uphold its commitments under international hu-

man rights treaties. The report calls on international partners, including the EU and OSCE, to push for independent investigations and sanctions against those responsible for the vio-

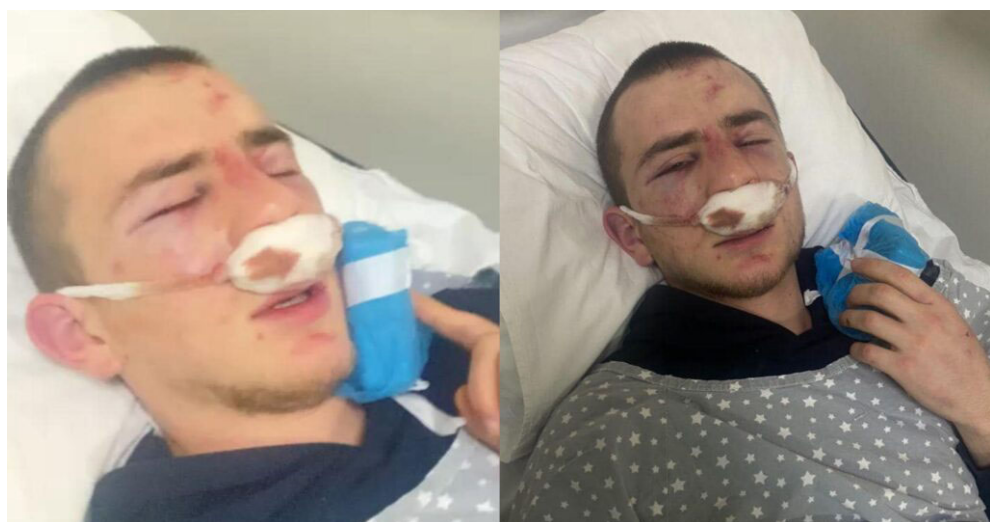
lence. "This level of violence against largely peaceful protesters is shocking and violates both do-

mestic laws and international norms," said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia Director at Human Rights Watch.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

21-Year-Old Severely Beaten by Police at Protest, Now Facing Hooliganism Charges



Bilal Duishvili, a 21-year-old student from Pankisi, was physically assaulted by police on December 4 during a pro-European protest in Tbilisi. According to his lawyer, Mariam Kvelashvili from the Social Justice Centre, Duishvili was arrested and beaten by special forces as the police began to break up the demonstration.

Duishvili, who had been at the rally with a friend, was surrounded by special forces near the Biltmore Hotel. He tried to leave the protest, but was arrested and beaten. Kvelashvili reported that a short video captured the moment Duishvili was taken away by police. He was put into a police van where the officers continued to beat him, taking his phone and wallet. Duishvili could not recall exactly how much time he spent in the van or where

he was taken. Upon arriving at the police station, Duishvili was taken to a bathroom to wash the blood off his face. After being removed from the bathroom, he was in

poor condition. According to Kvelashvili, a report was drawn up at the police station, falsely stating that Duishvili had been swearing at police. He was then transferred to the Central Hospital with a broken nose, a concussion, and multiple bruises.

Duishvili was not held in detention but was hospitalized for treatment. He spent five days in hospital and has now applied to the Special Investigation Service, which has launched an investigation into the incident. Duishvili is recognized as a victim in the case.

Duishvili is facing charges for petty hooliganism (Article 166 of the Administrative Code) and disobedience to police (Article 173 of the Administrative Code). His trial is scheduled for December 27, 2024.

Miners Fired for Political Reasons, Claim Ex-Employees; Company Denies Allegations



Miners Giorgi Abuladze and Khvicha Gabunia have accused the Saknakshiri coal company of firing them for political reasons, following threats and intimidation they claim they faced due to their views ahead of Georgia's elections. Abuladze, who had worked for 18 years at the company, posted on social media that he was dismissed after refusing to align with Russian interests, while Gabunia stated that he and about 100 miners were left unemployed as a form of political retaliation.

According to Abuladze, his dismissal followed a campaign of threats against him and his family. He claims he was warned that his relatives, also employed

at Saknakshiri, would lose their jobs unless he complied. Gabunia added that the layoffs were politically motivated, cit-

ing his pro-European stance and public support for Georgia's movement toward Europe. He further stated that the company was planning to release even more workers in the coming months.

Saknakshiri, however, denies these claims, asserting that the layoffs were part of a broader reorganization to meet European standards. The company claims the reduction in staff was due to an evaluation process in which workers had to meet new qualifications. They offered retraining for affected employees and stressed that the layoffs were not politically motivated. According to a company representative, employees were given the opportunity to retrain and receive full salary, benefits, and insurance during this period.

European Commission proposes to suspend visa-free travel for officials from Georgia

On 20 December, the European Commission proposed to suspend part of the EU-Georgia Agreement on the facilitation of the issuance of visas.

If the Council adopts this proposal, Georgian diplomats, officials and their families holding diplomatic and official passports

would require a visa to travel to the EU for short stays of up to 90 days in any 180-day period. Visa facilitations such as shorter

application times, lower visa fees, and the requirement to submit fewer supporting documents, would also no longer apply to Georgian holders of

diplomatic and official passports.

This Decision would not have a negative impact on people-to-people contacts, as Georgian nationals who are holders of ordinary passports will continue to benefit from the visa exemption when travelling to the EU for short stays.

The proposal is a response to the violent repression by the Georgian authorities against peaceful protesters, politicians and independent media, which started after the authorities announced on 28 November that they would no longer pursue the opening of EU negotiations un-

til 2028. The EU has already taken measures to respond to Georgia's serious democratic backsliding: in June, the European Council noted that the current course of action was leading to a de facto halt of the accession process.

It is now for the Council of the EU to decide on the latest proposal to partially suspend the Visa Facilitation Agreement. If the Council adopts the proposal, and once it enters into force, the Member States will have to take the necessary measures.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Wednesday, December 25

Day ☀ Clear
High: 13°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 1°C

Thursday, December 26

Day ☁ Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night ☁ Cloudy
Low: 0°C

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*On the Occasion of
the New Year 2025,
Ambassador
Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of the
People's Republic of
China in Georgia
H.E. Mr. ZHOU Qian
& Mrs. ZHOU Wenbin
held a
reception on
December 23.*



