

Media Organizations Condemn Arrest of Mzia Amaglobeli, Call for Accountability

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Organizations defending independent media and professional rights have condemned the arrest of Batumelebi and Netgazeti founder Mzia Amaglobeli, describing her detention as a "pre-planned criminal provocation" by Georgian authorities. Their statement, released on January 12, criticizes the government for its alleged targeting of independent media and escalating repression against dissenting voices.

The statement asserts that Amaglobeli's arrest is part of a broader effort to intimidate critical media. It highlights two incidents from January 11, when Amaglobeli was detained twice. The first arrest occurred while she was placing a sticker on the fence of the Adjara Police Department advocating for a nationwide strike planned for January 15. Witnesses report that police failed to inform her of the reason for her detention.

The second arrest took place during a protest outside the police department, where Amaglobeli joined demonstrators calling for the release of detained activists. Eyewitnesses allege that Batumi Police Chief Irakli Dgebuadze verbally abused Amaglobeli before detaining her under what the statement describes as dubious circumstances. The organizations note that Dgebuadze has previously been accused of aggression toward journalists, including threatening Batumelebi editor Eter Turadze in December.

Amaglobeli is currently charged under Article 353 of the Criminal Code for allegedly assaulting a police officer, a crime



punishable by 4 to 7 years in prison. However, her defenders argue that the circumstances surrounding her detention suggest a deliberate effort to silence her and intimidate other independent journalists.

The organizations behind the statement have raised concerns over video footage of the arrest, distributed by pro-government media outlets, which they claim is heavily edited. The footage allegedly omits critical parts of the events leading up to the arrest and fails to provide a full account of the interaction between Amaglobeli and the police. This selective representation, the statement suggests, is intended

to discredit Amaglobeli and justify her detention.

The statement highlights serious procedural violations and instances of mistreatment during Amaglobeli's detention. Despite multiple requests, her lawyers were denied access to her for more than three hours, which the organizations argue is a violation of her constitutional right to legal representation. Additionally, Amaglobeli reportedly endured improper treatment in custody, which the statement describes as part of an effort to punish and intimidate critical voices in the media.

The arrest of Amaglobeli is seen as part of a broader pattern

of escalating repression in Georgia. The organizations behind the statement emphasize that women, minors, disabled persons, and journalists have increasingly become targets of police actions. They further note that the targeting of Amaglobeli, a prominent media figure who has been at the forefront of independent journalism in Georgia since the 1990s, is a particularly alarming development.

The statement also situates Amaglobeli's detention within the context of the Georgian government's alleged shift toward authoritarian practices. The use of police force against media figures, combined with

procedural violations, is cited as evidence of a deliberate effort to stifle dissent and suppress critical reporting.

In their statement, the organizations issue a series of demands aimed at addressing what they see as a growing crisis for media freedom in Georgia:

- Immediate release of Mzia Amaglobeli by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

- A thorough investigation into allegations of mistreatment and procedural violations, to be conducted by the Special Investigation Service.

- Suspension of Batumi Police Chief Irakli Dgebuadze to ensure impartiality during the investigation.

- Increased international attention, urging diplomatic corps and international organizations to monitor the case and advocate for press freedom in Georgia.

Media organizations warned about the consequences of continued repression against independent media and civil society. They argue that the Georgian government's actions undermine democratic principles, erode public trust, and damage the country's international reputation. By targeting prominent journalists like Amaglobeli, the government risks alienating its citizens and further deepening the political crisis.

The organizations urge swift and decisive action to ensure accountability and protect the fundamental rights of journalists and activists, emphasizing the critical role of independent media in a functioning democracy.

Batumelebi Founder Detained on Criminal Charges in Batumi



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Mzia Amaglobeli, founder and director of the Batumelebi newspaper and its online sister publication Netgazeti, was detained during the early hours of January 12. Police informed her family that she is being investigated for allegedly assaulting a police officer, a charge under Article 353 of the Criminal Code, which carries a penalty of 4 to 7 years in prison.

According to Amaglobeli's lawyer, Paata Diasamidze, formal charges have not yet been filed, and the defense team has not received an official notification. Authorities must either bring charges or release

Amaglobeli within 48 hours.

Amaglobeli was detained twice within hours on the night of January 11-12. Initially, she was arrested for posting a sticker calling for a nationwide strike and released two hours later. She then remained outside the Batumi Police Directorate, where a spontaneous protest emerged demanding the release of other detainees. During this second detention, Amaglobeli reportedly made an instinctive gesture while squeezed by the crowd, accidentally hitting Batumi Police Chief Irakli Dgebuadze, who then personally detained her.

Representatives of the Public Defender's Office, who visited

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8310; Euro - 2.9171; GBP - 3.4821; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7833; Swiss Franc - 3.0984

Batumelebi Founder Detained on Criminal Charges in Batumi

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Amaglobeli earlier, relayed her complaints of mistreatment during detention. Police allegedly delayed access for her defense

lawyers until 3 a.m. on January 12.

The Public Defender's Office also reported multiple instances of mistreatment and procedural violations during the arrests of

10 citizens that night. Among the issues identified were lack of information about grounds for arrest, verbal abuse, and physical harm to detainees, with one individual suffering chest and

head injuries. Several detainees have expressed their intention to seek an investigation.

Amaglobeli's detention has drawn attention due to her prominent role in Georgian me-

dia. Batumelebi, founded in Adjara during a politically tumultuous period, has a history of challenging powerful figures, including former Adjara leader Aslan Abashidze.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

8 Arrested During Protests in Batumi



The head of the Adjara police, Irakli Dgebuadze, confirmed that eight individuals were arrested during protests in Batumi on January 12. Speaking with TV Pirveli, Dgebuadze stated that the arrests were made under the Code of Administrative Offenses, citing Articles 166 and 173, which cover minor hooliganism and disobedience to lawful police orders, respectively.

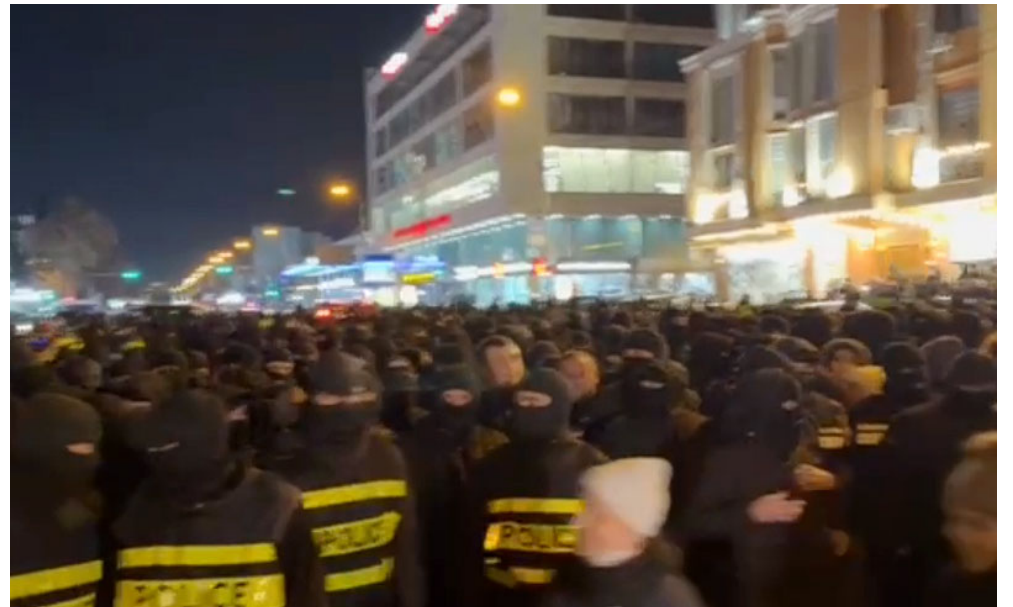
Among those detained are Luka Natsvlishvili, Elizbar Chkhikvadze, Elene Khoshtaria, Giorgi Kirtadze,

Shushana Matsaberidze, Tornike Kakaladze, as well as Batumelebi cameraman Giorgi Murvanidze. According to Droa, Shushana Matsaberidze was trans-

ferred to Poti along with other activists, while the whereabouts of Elene Khoshtaria remain unclear. Giorgi Kirtadze is reportedly being held at the Batumi Division.

The protests mark the second consecutive day of detentions in Batumi. On January 11, police arrested 12 individuals, including Mzia Amaglobeli, founder and director of Batumelebi and Netgazeti. Amaglobeli is accused of assaulting police officers.

Protests Erupt Outside Judges' Event in Tbilisi



Tensions escalated outside the Babilo restaurant in Tbilisi on January 12, where judges gathered for a corporate event amidst public outrage. Protesters, including family members of individuals detained during pro-European demonstrations, confronted the judges as they began arriving around 3 PM.

The protests were triggered by judicial decisions on January 10 and 11, which resulted in 19 protestors being placed in custody. These rulings sparked widespread criticism of the judiciary, which has been accused of being influenced by the ruling Georgian Dream party. Among the attendees was Levan Murusidze, a US-sanctioned

member of the High Council of Justice. Police, including representatives from

the Ministry of Internal Affairs Special Tasks Department, were heavily deployed at the scene. A water cannon was stationed nearby, and as judges began leaving the event in the evening, several demonstrators were arrested. However, the exact number and charges remain undisclosed as of now.

Protesters carried banners reading, "A corrupt judiciary undermines democracy and violates human rights," and chanted slogans such as "Judges everywhere, justice nowhere." Some judges entered the venue through the back door to avoid confrontation, while others faced verbal abuse and were pelted with eggs.

Ukraine: EIB provides Euro4.7 million for waste management improvements at Lviv's Hrybovychi landfill

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has provided a second loan tranche of Euro4.7 million, backed by EU guarantees, to support the reclamation of the Hrybovychi solid waste landfill in Lviv.

The funding will support a set of rehabilitation works at the Hrybovychi landfill, set to begin

in early 2025. These include the installation of a drainage layer to cover all parts of the landfill, along with a layer of soil to stabilise the landfill and surrounding disturbed areas. Perennial grasses will be planted

across these sites to prevent erosion and improve the landscape. A new reservoir will be constructed for the treatment of surface water and as a firefighting resource. Additionally, new wells will be installed,

and existing wells will be upgraded to enhance groundwater monitoring and ensure environmental safety. Once fully reclaimed, the Hrybovychi landfill will be transformed into a continuous green zone and park area, providing residents with a safe and welcoming space for relaxation and recreation.

The funding provided by the Bank is part of its Ukraine Solidarity Urgent Response package, developed with the European Commission, through which over Euro2 billion has already been delivered to restore essential infrastructure and address urgent recovery needs in Ukraine.

European Commissioner for Economy and Productivity, Implementation and Simplification Valdis Dombrovskis said the EU-guaranteed EIB financing

was a tangible demonstration of EU commitment to improve the lives of Ukrainian citizens. "It will be used to transform the Hrybovychi landfill into a park for the residents of Lviv. In doing so, it will address long-standing environmental challenges and create an important new amenity."

"The rehabilitation of the Hrybovychi landfill is a cornerstone project for Lviv, addressing the city's critical environmental challenges. Once completed, it will eliminate environmental risks and also bring the site in line with EU standards," said Oleksii Kuleba, Deputy Prime Minister for Restoration of Ukraine – Minister for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Monday, January 13

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 13°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

Tuesday, January 14

Day 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
High: 12°C

Night 🌧️ Mostly Cloudy
Low: 4°C

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