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Employees Allege Retaliation Over Public Dissent at Georgian Parliamentary Research Center



By Liza Mchedlidze

On January 21, employees of the Georgian Parliamentary Research Center announced that the institution's director had informed them of a decision to liquidate the center. The announcement, according to Nino Lezhava (Researcher), Salome Natroshvili (Head of the Department of International Practice Studies), and Mariam Chachua

(Head of the Analytical Research Department), was explained as a response to the public activities of five staff members.

These employees had signed a joint statement condemning the government's postponement of EU accession talks until 2028 and the violence against peaceful protesters. They linked the liquidation decision to their public dissent, describing it as a form of repression against conscientious public sector employees.

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In a joint statement, the employees said:

"Today, on January 21, 2025, the director of the Research Center of the Parliament of Georgia informed us that a decision was made to liquidate the center. The decision was explained as being based on the public activity of five employees who signed a petition addressing the postponement of Georgia's EU accession talks and condemning violence against protesters.

ence against protesters.

We view this as another instance of repression against honest public sector workers and an attempt to silence differing opinions within the system. We will use all available legal mechanisms to defend our rights and the rights of our colleagues. We remain loyal to the Constitution of Georgia, serving our country and its people."

The employees further revealed that the working environment

had deteriorated following their public criticism of amendments to the Law on Civil Service. Speaking to *Radio Liberty* on January 20, Natroshvili, Chachua, and Lezhava detailed the challenges and hostile atmosphere they faced after signing the petition. Following the interview, other staff members reportedly confronted them, demanding explanations regarding the mentioned "hostile environment."

TV Imedi Owner Responds to Allegations in Anonymous Letter Sent to U.S. Chief Prosecutor

By Liza Mchedlidze

During a broadcast, Radio Liberty host Nastasia Arabuli asked Irakli Rukhadze, the owner of TV Imedi, whether he was aware of an anonymous letter that was reportedly sent to future US Attorney General Pam Bondi. The letter, dated January 15, 2025, was said to urge Bondi to investigate Rukhadze's business activities, labeling them as fraudulent. The letter also noted Rukhadze's status as a US citizen, implying he held greater responsibility for his dealings with individuals sanctioned by the US Treasury.

Arabuli stated, "We have the second anonymous letter, dated January 15th, to future US Attorney General Pamela, aka Penn Bond. This letter was sent on the day of her congressional hearing. In the letter we have



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8515; Euro - 2.9516; GBP - 3.4928; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8581; Swiss Franc - 3.1308

TV Imedi Owner Responds to Allegations in Anonymous Letter Sent to U.S. Chief Prosecutor

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seen, Pamela Bondi is asked to investigate your business activities, which are referred to as fraudulent, and it states that you are a US citizen and therefore have a much greater responsibility in dealing with persons sanctioned by the US Treasury. Did you know that such a letter existed?"

In response, Rukhadze said he was unaware of the letter, but

he expressed confidence in knowing who might have written it. He explained, "I didn't know [about the letter], but I'm sure I know who wrote it, because they threatened me. I can't name them because I can't say 100%, but they threatened me about 2 days before to write someone. We were arguing about it, and I said I can have my own opinion. They said you are a US citizen, and they are also a citizen of the USA, and said that 'you are going

against your country', 'you are going against the USA.' I told them that what I am talking about is my opinion. They said they would write a letter to the prosecutor. I don't know if they wrote or not, otherwise, I would have told you his name."

Arabuli then asked Rukhadze about the letter's accusation that TV Imedi "regularly broadcasts the propaganda of Ivanishvili's regime with insulting topics of our country" and blames the

United States for the world's problems. She inquired, "Does this reflect the activities of Imedi?"

Rukhadze denied the allegations, responding, "It doesn't." He also made a point of expressing his affinity for the US and Europe, stating, "I love America very much, I love Europe very much, and no one can profit more from Georgia joining the European Union more than me."

According to a source from

Radio Liberty, a letter was sent to the future U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio by Congress, alleging that Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, engaged in "authoritarian rule", "falsification of elections", and shifted towards the "axis of aggression" with China, Russia, and Iran. The letter expresses concerns about Georgia's political alignment and its relationship with Western powers.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Kutaisi Court Rejects Appeal, Keeps Amaglobeli in Custody



On January 21, the Kutaisi Court of Appeals rejected Mzia Amaglobeli's appeal and upheld her pre-trial detention. Her lawyers had challenged a prior decision by the Batumi City Court to remand her in custody.

Amaglobeli, founder and director of Batumelebi and its nationwide sister publication Netgazeti, faces potential imprisonment for allegedly assaulting a police officer. She was arrested on January 12 after slapping Batumi police chief Irakli Dgebuadze, reportedly in response to his abusive and insulting behavior. Watchdog groups argue her case reflects state re-

pression of independent journalists.

Her lawyers have yet to receive the court's reasoning for the decision. "We will consider how to continue the legal fight,"

gian Young Lawyers Association reported that Amaglobeli has been on a hunger strike since her arrest.

For Georgia Alleges Evidence Tampering in Sheraton Batumi Attack Case

The political party For Georgia, led by Giorgi Gakharia, has accused Sheraton Batumi Hotel and law enforcement agencies of tampering with evidence related to the January 15 attack on Gakharia and journalist Zviad Koridze. In a statement the party claimed that Sheraton Batumi has refused to provide access to video footage of the incident.

According to the statement, Sheraton's management initially assured the party that the video records existed and would be preserved, even after being handed over to investigators. However, the hotel has since declined to issue an official response, referring the party's representatives to their legal team for further clarification.

The party also criticized the investigation process, claiming delays and a lack of transparency. "Yesterday, we proposed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to interview Giorgi Gakharia.

Three hours later, we were informed that the case had been transferred to the prosecutor's office. After initial communica-

tion, the prosecutor's office has since become unreachable." The party alleges that the prosecutor's office has now seized all video records and server equipment from Sheraton Batumi, leaving no copies of the footage behind. They argue this



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cerns about user data on the seized servers, claiming it is now at risk.

"These actions point to coordinated efforts to cover up the crime, and we believe Sheraton Batumi was actively involved," the statement read.

EBRD deploys record Euro2.4 billion in Ukraine in 2024

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) deployed a record amount of nearly Euro2.4 billion in Ukraine in 2024, following a Euro2.1 billion total in 2023.

The EBRD, Ukraine's biggest institutional investor, substantially raised investment in Ukraine after the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022,

making a total of nearly Euro6.2 billion available to Ukraine in wartime.

The EBRD prioritises support for energy security, vital infrastructure, food security, trade and the private sector in its work in Ukraine, counting both investments and trade finance in its deployed figure.

In 2024, the EBRD deployed a record Euro833 million of financing via partner financial institutions in Ukraine, including Euro472 million to support trade finance under its Trade Facilitation Programme. Portfolio risk

sharing remained the main instrument for the EBRD to deliver finance to Ukrainian businesses, with the EBRD remaining the leading provider of such guarantee facilities in the country.

"I would like nothing more than for 2025 to be a year of reconstruction. This is where the EBRD can be at its best - using our financing knowledge and experience to build back better," said EBRD President Odile Renaud-Basso.

Among the highlights of EBRD work in Ukraine in 2024 were a highly innovative war

risk insurance guarantee scheme designed to support trade despite the conflict; participation in a US\$435 million telecoms deal that is bringing the country its biggest foreign direct investment in wartime; private-sector finance for postal services to Nova Post, pet food to Kormotech and bionic prosthetics to Esper Bionics; work on reintegrating war veterans into the economy, and major lending to the energy, infrastructure, banking and municipal sectors.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Wednesday, January 22

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 7°C

Night 🌧️ Mostly Cloudy
Low: 0°C

Thursday, January 23

Day 🌧️ Overcast
High: 6°C

Night 🌧️ Overcast
Low: 1°C

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