

Social Justice Center Accuses Police of Systemic Brutality, Demands Accountability

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Social Justice Center (SJC), a local human rights watchdog, has condemned what it calls the "excessive use of force by police officers" and "brutal retaliation" against demonstrators. The SJC describes these actions as a "normalized practice" in recent protests and is calling for investigations by the Special Investigation Service (SIS) and the Prosecutor's Office, particularly into the accountability of senior officers like Zviad Kharazishvili. The organization has also urged the Ministry of Interior to explain the arrests of demonstrators and release those still in detention.

Following a protest near Tbilisi Mall on February 2, the SJC stated that the police actions were not about law enforcement but rather about punishing and retaliating against citizens. The watchdog highlighted "particularly alarming" cases where police officers allegedly targeted individuals based on political affiliation or other factors, warning that such behavior creates a "dangerous environment for hate crime" and violates police neutrality.

During the protest, large numbers of masked police officers were deployed, cordoning off both sides of the highway. The SJC stressed that the use of masked officers, whose identities were unconfirmable, violates human rights standards and contributes to "total impunity."

The SJC referred to multiple videos circulating on social media that allegedly show police brutality against peaceful demonstrators. These include footage of detainees being beaten during arrests, inside police vans, and a particularly disturbing video showing Zviad Kharazishvili, head of the Special Tasks Department, assaulting a protester.

The SJC also criticized the government's decision to criminalize roadblocks, arguing that it undermines fundamental legal principles. The organization claims that a blanket prohibition on roadblocks, without considering the size of a rally or the specific circumstances, violates both the Georgian Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Despite several instances of police violence since November 28, the SJC notes that no officer has been punished or investigated. The organization continues to demand accountability and safeguards to protect citizens' rights to peaceful assembly and free expression.



საკოლეტიზმის რეპრესიის იზრდება:

პოლიციის უსუსტესი მკაცრების მიხედვით

გაუმჯობესების დაწყებას



Georgian Dream Announces Harsher Penalties for Administrative and Criminal Offenses



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Georgian Dream (GD) party has announced legislative changes aimed at increasing penalties for various administrative and criminal offenses, including "insulting officials" and "assaulting police." The amendments will also criminalize threats or violence against civil servants. Public calls for violence, previously considered an administrative offense, will now be punishable by imprisonment for up to three years instead of financial penalties.

GD parliamentary majority leader Mamuka Mdivaradze revealed the proposed changes on February 3 following a party political council meeting. He framed the reforms as a response to ongoing political instability, stating that "the attempt to overthrow the government by the agents of the 'Deep State' continues" and that the ruling party requires "appropriate levers and means to govern the country" and "serve the citizens."

Mdivaradze emphasized that these changes are only the ini-

tial phase of broader legislative reforms, promising further measures "until the imposed norms are completely replaced by the adoption of norms necessary for the proper functioning and independence of the state." He confirmed that the relevant amendments had already been drafted.

The amendments introduce harsher penalties for both administrative and criminal violations. Indoor rallies without prior consent from the building owner will be prohibited. Penalties, including fines and detention periods, will be increased for offenses such as petty hooliganism, disobeying lawful police orders, vandalism, insulting the police, and blocking court entrances. The maximum period of administrative detention will be extended from 15 to 60 days. Insulting a public official in connection with their work will become a new administrative offense.

Public calls for violence will now carry a prison sentence of up to three years instead of a fine. Resisting, threatening, or using

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.8403; Euro - 2.9090; GBP - 3.4964; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8368; Swiss Franc - 3.0964

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violence against the police will be classified as a serious crime, punishable by five to ten years in prison. Crimes committed against police, state authorities, and their family members will have new aggravating circumstances, particularly if carried out in groups, under specific conditions, or using dangerous means. The punish-

ment for harming the health of police officers will be increased. In addition, a new criminal code will criminalize threats of attack or violence against political authorities, state officials, or public servants.

The new measures are expected to impact activists and protesters, many of whom have already faced legal action under existing laws.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

US Embassy Responds to Georgian Dream Official's Claims of Interference



The United States Embassy in Georgia has sharply rebuked Mamuka Mdinardze, the Executive Secretary of the Georgian Dream party, following his accusations of US interference in ongoing protests in Georgia. Mdinardze had criticized the US Embassy for its actions, claiming that they were inconsistent with the policies of President Trump and Secretary of State Rubio.

In response, the Embassy stated: "Mr. Mdinardze's statements today are categorically false and demonstrate a lack of understanding of what the United States Embassy does to support President Trump and Secretary of State Rubio's top priorities of making America safer, stronger and more prosperous."

Mdinardze had previously called the US Embassy in Georgia the "lower ech-

elon" of the new US government and claimed that its actions did not align with the statements of the US leadership. He expressed concerns about the "Deep State" in US foreign policy, implying that the Embassy was acting contrary to the in-

terests of the American people.

"It is unfortunate that the statements and narratives of the newly elected government of the United States of America are one and the actions of its lower echelons, including the American Embassy in Georgia, are completely out of step with the statements that we hear," Mdinardze said, claiming that the Embassy's involvement in organizing recent pro-EU protests was an example of this perceived inconsistency.

GD Government to Abolish Civil Service Bureau Amid Criticism

The Georgian Dream (GD) government announced on February 3 that the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) will be abolished



on April 1, 2025, as part of efforts to "rationalize governance and optimize expenses." The government argued that the Bureau's responsibilities, such as monitoring officials' declarations, have already been taken over by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, making the CSB's continued existence unnecessary.

Established in 2004, the CSB was key in aligning Georgia's public service with European Union standards. However, many employees have criticized the decision, believing it is aimed at silencing dissent within the civil service. Nino Tsukhishvili, a CSB employee, accused the government of undermining efforts to maintain a professional and politically neutral public service. She linked the Bureau's closure to recent amendments

to the "Public Service" law, which, she claimed, were used to dismiss staff who opposed government policies.

In December 2024, 15 CSB employees spoke out against the law's amendments, arguing they would reduce legal protections for public servants and undermine efforts to create a merit-based, accountable civil service. Civil society organizations, including GYLA and JSC, also condemned the changes, calling them repressive and harmful to democracy.

Despite the criticism, GD officials, including Irakli Kobakhidze, defended the amendments, framing the dissent as part of a "self-cleansing" process within the civil service, accusing critics of being manipulated by "foreign agents."

Armenia: EIB Global and Ameriabank join forces to provide Euro105 million loan to support small businesses

The European Investment Bank (EIB Global) today granted a Euro105 million loan to Ameriabank (Armenia) – its

largest direct loan to a bank in the South Caucasus region. The operation aims to finance investments in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and mid-caps in Armenia, with

the aim of supporting their growth, competitiveness and adoption of greener and more sustainable practices.

The financing will enable Ameriabank to offer affordable loans to local businesses. The operation is expected to benefit approximately 400 MSMEs and sustain over 15,000 jobs in the Armenian economy. At least 20% of the loan will be directed towards green invest-

ments, contributing to Armenia's transition to a more sustainable and resilient economy.

Part of the financing will be provided in local currency to protect MSMEs against currency risk. The European Union is supporting the operation with grant funding, which will help ensure the loan's interest rate remains affordable.

"This assistance is part of the European Investment Plan (EIP) for Armenia which is a comprehensive initiative aimed at fostering economic growth, sustainable development, and prosperity in the country," said the Head

of the EU Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Vassilis Maragos. "We will further build on these efforts by delivering in total Euro270 million under the Resilience and Growth Plan in the period 2024-2027. A large part of it will be dedicated to business development, targeted at tech, start-ups and new export opportunities, which will support Armenia's economic diversification."

Under its Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership, the EU aims to support 30,000 Armenian MSMEs.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Tuesday, February 4

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 12°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

Wednesday, February 5

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 3°C

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

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