

## Friends of Georgia Demand Release of Mzia Amaglobeli and Other Political Prisoners

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Friends of Georgia, a group consisting of multiple Western politicians and researchers, is calling for the immediate release of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli and 52 other journalists, along with many political prisoners currently jailed in Georgia, amid what they describe as an ongoing crackdown on democracy, human rights, and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic future, which has been ongoing for 69 days and has recently worsened.

Mzia Amaglobeli, who has been on a hunger strike for over three weeks, is at risk of severe and life-threatening health consequences. *Friends of Georgia* expressed grave concern over reports from the Georgian Young Lawyers Association and other organizations, indicating that Amaglobeli has not received necessary medical attention and is experiencing degrading treatment in detention. The group emphasized that the Georgian authorities bear full responsibility for any harm to her health.

The coalition strongly criticized the Georgian Dream leadership's attempts to discredit Amaglobeli and others, labeling them as "foreign-funded" in an effort to tarnish their professional credibility. *Friends of Georgia* view this as a tactic to deflect attention from the growing mobilization of the Georgian

Friends of Georgia demand Mzia Amaglobeli's release and call for decisive international action to that end

Tuesday 4 February 2025

We, Friends of Georgia, demand the immediate release of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, of the 52 fellow journalists as well as all of the many political prisoners who are currently jailed in the context of the terror crackdown against democracy, human rights and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic future that has been ongoing for 69 days, with a noticeable recent escalation.

As Mzia Amaglobeli's hunger strike and unjust detainment have entered into their fourth week with the risk of critical and irreversible life-threatening consequences, we are extremely concerned by statements by the Georgian Young Lawyers Association and others reporting that she has not received all necessary medical attention and is experiencing degrading treatment in captivity. We stress that any and all consequences on her health of are the full responsibility of the current Georgian authorities.

We are not fooled by the Georgian Dream leadership's attempts to distort the circumstances that led to Mzia Amaglobeli's arrest and tarnish her professional credibility by qualifying her as "foreign-funded". This is yet another manoeuvre intended to deflect attention from the massive mobilisation of the Georgian population around the Euro-Atlantic path enshrined not only in its constitution but in the will of its people, both of which were betrayed by the Russian-backed oligarchic Georgian Dream party's illegal power grab.

The Georgian people will not be silenced, nor will its only remaining legitimate institution President Salomé Zourabishvili, its independent media and vibrant civil society organisations which so dearly need our support. We stand in solidarity with them.

We reiterate our pressing call that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path and democracy be urgently restored through the necessary steps, starting with the immediate release of all political prisoners, the abrogation of recent illegitimate laws restraining freedom of assembly and the organisation of new and independently monitored elections. We once again call on our countries and the European Union to respond appropriately by introducing or maintaining their sanctions on those responsible, among which Bidzina Ivanishvili, Irakli Kobakhidze, Vakhtang Gomelauri and Sul Khan Tamazashvili.

population advocating for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path, enshrined in its constitution and supported by the will of the people. The coalition pointed out that this movement has been betrayed by the Russian-backed, oligarchic Georgian Dream party's illegal power grab.

In their statement, *Friends of Georgia* expressed unwavering solidarity with the Georgian people, President Salomé Zourabishvili, and independent media and civil society organizations. They are calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners, the repeal of recent laws restricting freedom of assembly, and the organization of new, independently monitored elections in Georgia.

The group further called on the international community to take decisive action, urging the European Union and other countries to either introduce or maintain sanctions on those responsible for the situation in Georgia, including Bidzina Ivanishvili, Irakli Kobakhidze, Vakhtang Gomelauri, and Sul Khan Tamazashvili.

Friends of Georgia concluded their statement with an urgent call for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path and democratic values to be restored. The coalition stressed that international support is crucial in addressing the ongoing crisis and ensuring the country's democratic future.

## Mamuka Diasamidze Recalls Alleged Assault by Zviad Kharazishvili Amidst Protest Arrest

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Mamuka Diasamidze, who was allegedly assaulted by Zviad Kharazishvili, the Chief of the Special Task Department, during a pro-EU protest outside Tbilisi Mall, has shared a detailed account of the incident. Kharazishvili, who has been sanctioned by multiple countries for his involvement in activities violating individuals' rights, including the use of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, is accused of personally directing the assault on Diasamidze.

Diasamidze recounts that he was standing on a hill when he overheard people above him cursing at "Khareba" - a nickname for Kharazishvili. He recalls hearing a command over the radio from Kharazishvili: "Bring him here!" Moments later, four masked individuals approached him, dragged him down the hill by his legs, and subjected him to further physical abuse.

"They threw me into the crowd, kicked and punched me," Diasamidze said. "When they brought me to him, they threw me to the ground, made me lift my head, and shouted: 'Well, swear now!'" Kharazishvili reportedly verbally assaulted him before kicking him in the face.

Despite the alleged abuse, Diasamidze was fined 2,000 GEL by the court for "disobeying a lawful request of the police." He contends that the evidence presented against him by the prosecutor's office, a video footage, was taken after he had already been detained, meaning he does not appear in the footage, and it cannot be considered valid evidence.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Public Defender Criticizes GD's Push for Restrictive Laws



Public Defender Levan Ioseliani has criticized the Georgian Dream (GD)

party's latest push for restrictive laws, warning that the proposed amendments could harm basic freedoms like assembly, expression, and the right to a fair trial.

"These amendments concern the realization of the fundamental rights of as-

sembly, expression, and fair trial and create threats of disproportionate restriction of these rights," said the Public Defender's office in a statement. They pointed out that while amendments might be needed, fast-tracking the review process leaves out key stakeholders and fails to give the public a chance to weigh in.

Ioseliani is calling on the GD-controlled parliament to abandon the expedited review and instead follow the usual procedures, which allow for thorough discussion and consideration. "Adopting amendments on important public issues without appropriate analysis and thorough discussions harms both the legislative process itself and creates risks of restricting constitutional rights," the office added.

The Public Defender's office stressed that rushing through important changes without proper analysis could weaken democratic rights and the rule of law in Georgia.

Kosachev Supports Georgian Dream's Withdrawal from PACE, Criticizes Europe's Relations with Russia



Konstantin Kosachev, Deputy Speaker of the Federal Council of Russian Federation has expressed support for the Georgian Dream (GD) party's decision to recall its delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), saying it "deserves understanding and respect." Kosachev argued that Georgia, like Russia, may eventually leave the Council of Europe to follow a path that prioritizes its own national interests.

Kosachev also endorsed GD's stance against the conditions for full PACE ratification, such as holding new elections and repealing the Foreign Agents' law, calling these demands "offensive." He criticized Europe for its handling of Ukraine and Moldova, accusing them of abandoning ties with Russia for benefits like visa-free travel.

He further defended the use of foreign agent laws, pointing out that they exist in countries like the US, UK, France, and Australia. Kosachev claimed that these nations not only decide such matters independently but also try to set agendas for other countries.

European Commission Directorate-General to focus on Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood

From 1 February, the European Commission has a Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST) responsible for enlargement and accession negotiations with candidate and potential candidate countries to join the European Union. This also includes communication on the benefits of enlargement in EU Member States and in enlarge-

ment partners.

Regional cooperation and regional initiatives including gradual integration of candidate countries as they work to join

the Union is another important task of DG ENEST. This DG will also manage most of the EU's financial and technical assistance to enlargement partners

and to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. In addition, the DG will deliver continued and sustained support for Ukraine and continue the work on Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction and host the Ukraine Donor Platform.

Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos said peace, freedom and prosperity on the European continent depended on the strength, unity and size of the European Union.

"This is the essence of our Enlargement policy. For the first time in 10 years, there is a realistic prospect that during this mandate, we can

bring one or more countries to the finish line of negotiations," Marta Kos said. "The road ahead will be challenging, but I am pleased that with the new Directorate-General for Enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood I will have a dedicated team, driven by knowledge and commitment, to support me in helping future Member States implement the necessary reforms to prepare their place inside our Union."

The creation of this Directorate-General was announced by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, at the presentation of the College of Commissioners in September 2024, with a formal Commission decision taken at the start of the mandate in December 2024.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Wednesday, February 5

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 8°C

Night Cloudy Low: 2°C

Thursday, February 6

Day Rain and Snow High: 3°C

Night Rain and Snow Low: 1°C

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