

Zourabichvili: Georgian Dream May Call Elections to Avoid Collapse



need to know exactly how to conduct [new] elections," she said, linking it to restoring public confidence in the electoral process. She also revealed that she has been working with the opposition, lawyers, and civil society groups to define how future elections should be carried out.

Zourabichvili argued that GD lacks international recognition and is growing increasingly isolated. "Even those who recognize it do so for ideological reasons," she said, adding that Western governments should continue their stance of non-recognition and help push for democratic elections.

She also pointed to increasing internal and external pressure on GD, including ongoing protests and the impact of sanctions. According to Zourabichvili, even before full sanctions have been imposed, their effects are already being felt. She claimed to have received messages from business figures seen as key supporters of GD founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, with some saying, "We are not what you think we are." She argued this showed that financial pressure was already working against the ruling party's backers.

Zourabichvili reiterated that GD is at a "complete deadlock" and could attempt to hold new elections as a way out. "We have to be prepared for anything," she warned.

She also called on Georgians to take to the streets in large numbers on February 25, marking the anniversary of the Soviet takeover of Georgia in 1921.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The 5th President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, has not ruled out the possibility that the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party may call early elections itself, as she believes the party is at a dead end and risks collapse.

"Either the regime will collapse if they go all in, or it will call [new] elections itself," Zourabichvili said in an interview with Formula TV. She noted that during her recent visit to the Munich Security Conference, she urged international partners to help Georgia organize

new elections in a way that would prevent possible fraud.

"I do not rule out the possibility that Georgian Dream, having reached a dead end, may itself try to call new elections," she stated.

Zourabichvili claimed that GD has been preparing for this moment by adopting repressive

laws to maintain control, including a new treason law and amendments to election legislation. She accused the ruling party of using these measures to keep society "under pressure and under control."

She stressed the importance of ensuring fair elections: "We

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The 2024 annual report by ILGA-Europe reveals significant setbacks for LGBTI rights in Georgia, highlighting increasing threats to the community's safety, access to services, and freedom of expression.

Based on the report, the Georgian government's controversial foreign agents law has disrupted essential services for the LGBTI community, with none of the country's LGBTI organizations registering under the new law. As a result, these groups face potential fines and bankruptcy, raising concerns about the availability of vital support. The law has created a climate of fear, leading to a drop in individuals seeking help despite the growing need for services.

The report highlights a noticeable rise in LGBTI people fleeing the country, with many seeking asylum abroad to escape the hostile environment. Although no official statistics are available, reports suggest an increase in LGBTI migration, largely driven by the restrictive law. Many are relying on legal assistance to secure documenta-

Georgia's LGBTI Community Faces Growing Challenges, Says ILGA-Europe

GEORGIA
ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES
The foreign agents law endangers provision of services to the LGBTI community in Georgia. At the time of writing, none of the LGBTI community organisations have registered as foreign agents. In protest of the law, therefore, organisations could be fined and might have to file for bankruptcy, which would disrupt the available services. Additionally, the anti-LGBTI law has led to the erosion of trust and safety needed for the LGBTI community to seek out services. Thus, there is a decrease in applications for services, despite the need possibly increasing. (See also under Equality and Non-discrimination and Freedom of Association)

ASYLUM
Georgian LGBTI people continued to flee the country in large numbers. Although there are no official statistics, community organisations report that these numbers have significantly increased. However, there is an ongoing concern that Georgia is classified by some EU countries as a 'safe country'.
Following the adoption of the foreign agents law and the anti-LGBTI law, a vast number of LGBTI people have been requesting

In March, the Charter of Journalistic Ethics investigated anti-LGBTI content aired by a national TV channel. The Charter determined that the network violated multiple ethical principles of journalistic ethics by broadcasting biased and one-sided 'expert' opinions to support the government's stance on LGBTI issues.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE
Just one day after the Parliament of Georgia passed the anti-LGBTI law, a celebrity trans woman, Kesaria Abramidze was found brutally murdered in her apartment. The subsequent investigation pertains to premeditated murder with aggravating circumstances of special cruelty based on gender identity.

In October, a month after Kesaria's murder, renowned trans activist Nata Talikishvili was physically attacked with a brick, resulting in a concussion. Nata Talikishvili is a recipient of Kato Mikeladze's Prize, which is given for defending women's rights.

In the spring of 2024, Tbilisi Pride office was vandalised twice by unidentified persons likely having ties with the Georgian Dream. The attackers threw eggs and left homophobic slurs written in red paint.

tion needed for asylum applications in safer countries.

The report also draws attention to the rise in hate speech and misinformation targeting LGBTI people. One of the most alarming examples is a speech by Irakli Kobakhidze, a senior Georgian official, who compared liberal values to Bolshevism and accused them of threatening

national survival by promoting "LGBT propaganda."

Violence against the LGBTI community has also intensified, with the report citing the tragic murder of trans activist Kesaria Abramidze and the physical assault of Nata Talikishvili. These attacks, which followed the introduction of anti-LGBTI laws, reflect the growing danger faced

by activists and LGBTI individuals in the country.

Additionally, the report highlights the negative impact of the anti-LGBTI law on education. It severely restricts discussions of gender and sexuality in schools, leaving students in an unsafe and discriminatory learning environment. The Venice Commission, a key European body, condemned this provision, labeling it harmful to both LGBTI and non-LGBTI students.

In terms of legal recognition, the anti-LGBTI law further isolates the community by blocking access to adoption and gender marker changes. Unmarried couples, including same-sex couples, are prohibited from adopting or fostering children, while the law also limits the ability of LGBTI individuals to legally alter their gender markers.

Public health efforts, particularly in combatting HIV/AIDS, have been undermined by the law, which stigmatizes LGBTI people and restricts their access

to healthcare services. Furthermore, freedom of expression and assembly have been severely curtailed, with the government cracking down on public protests and censoring media outlets that advocate for LGBTI rights.

The report also draws attention to the erosion of trust in Georgia's law enforcement, particularly following mass protests against alleged election fraud. Accounts of police brutality, including homophobic language used during arrests, have raised serious concerns about the safety and fairness of the justice system.

Overall, the 2024 ILGA-Europe report signals a growing crisis for the LGBTI community in Georgia, as new laws and increasing violence create an increasingly hostile environment. The report urges international bodies to hold the Georgian government accountable for these violations and work towards a safer, more inclusive future for all citizens.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Imprisoned Batumi Protester Temur Katamadze Refuses to End Hunger Strike on 35th Day



Temur Katamadze, the imprisoned flag-bearer of the Batumi protests, has been on a hunger strike for 35 days and has no intention of stopping.

His lawyer, Mariam Gabroshvili, told Formula that

they only have medical documentation on his condition up to February 9 and have requested updated records from the Migration Department.

tion center shortly afterward, despite his request to remain under medical supervision.

“Despite his request to remain in the clinic for constant monitoring, this was refused, which is why he is now protesting and refusing to undergo medical examinations in the detention cen-

ter,” Gabroshvili said.

Katamadze has also raised allegations of mistreatment in custody. His other lawyer, Ketu Tsitsuashvili, said that she met with him on February 19 when he was questioned by the Special Investigation Service about violence inflicted on him while detained.

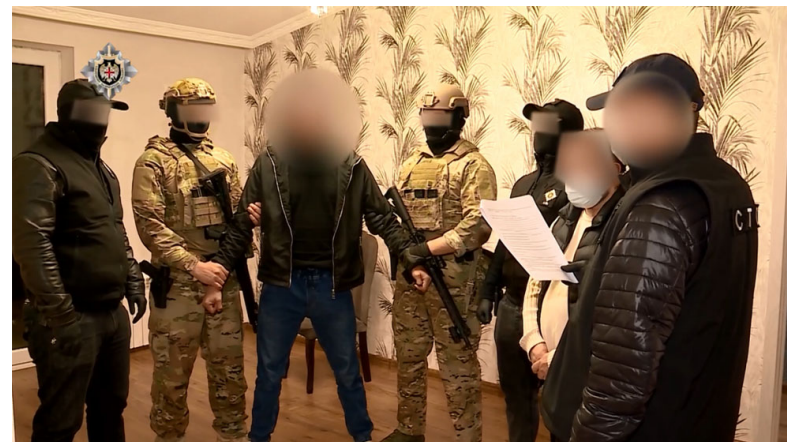
“During this questioning, Temur Katamadze identified another police officer who had committed violence against him. He requested a photo identification process to recognize the officers responsible for physically assaulting and verbally abusing him at the Batumi Police Department,” Tsitsuashvili stated.

Two Georgian Citizens Arrested in Counter-Terrorism Operation

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) has announced the detention of two Georgian citizens as part of a coordinated counter-terrorism operation. The operation led to the seizure of significant evidence, including ammunition, various electronic devices, cash, and other materials crucial for the ongoing inves-

tigation.

According to SSG’s statement, the operation involved simultaneous raids across the country. In addition to the aforementioned items, the authorities also confiscated evidence suggesting potential links between the detain-



ees and an international terrorist organization.

“As a result of the operational activities and investigative actions conducted by the State Security Service within the framework of counter-terrorism operations, several special operations were carried out across the country. These measures led to the detention of two Georgian citi-

zens and the seizure of important evidence, including ammunition, electronic devices, cash, and other significant items,” the statement noted.

The security service also confirmed that evidence seized during the raids points to possible

connections with international terrorist networks, though further details regarding the suspects and the nature of the alleged links remain under investigation.

The operation is ongoing as authorities continue to analyze the seized materials. Further information will be disclosed as the investigation progresses.

On 18 February 2025, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in partnership with local CSOs, within the European Union supported “Gender Equality for Georgia” programme, launched a knowledge sharing and coordination platform to counter technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, similar to other forms of gender-based violence, is also rooted in gender inequality and disproportionately affects women and girls. It is an emerging concern in Georgia, targeting especially those involved in the public sphere who use technology, including but not limited to women politicians, journalists, female business owners, content creators, and youth and people with disabilities.

Evidence shows that, 38% of women globally have personally experienced online violence, while 85% of women have witnessed online violence being committed against another woman. Across Europe and Central Asian countries, the probability

UNFPA launches knowledge sharing and coordination platform to counter technology-facilitated gender-based violence

of experiencing technology-facilitated gender-based violence is 4 times higher for women aged 18-24 than for those over age 65. Given that a young person in Georgia spends on average 3,7 hours a day on the internet, and 86 percent of young people use social media networks as a tool for social interaction, it puts them under the high risk of exposure to technology facilitated gender-based violence.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence can be an obstacle to women’s equal participation in public life, silencing women’s voices and limiting their democratic right to representation and participation, reinforcing gender inequality, patriarchal power structures, and gender norms.

To ensure urgent and coordinated solutions to respond to the existing challenges, UNFPA is initiating creation of a knowledge sharing platform aimed to enhance coordination and support partnerships among national and local actors with a commitment to addressing technology facilitated gender-based violence. More specifically, through periodic meetings, the platform will enhance flow of information and knowledge ex-

change, foster partnerships, identify gaps in data collection, legislative and programmatic frameworks, and share best practices in response and prevention of technology facilitated gender-based violence.

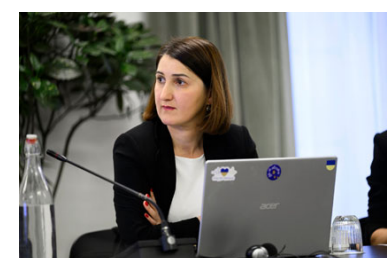
“At UNFPA, we believe technology is essential to advancing gender equality. When women and girls can safely access and use technology across all spaces, they can amplify their voices, exercise their agency and autonomy – giving them a platform to transform their future. For that mission to be a reality we need strong partnerships and coordination within and across sectors,” says UNFPA Programme Manager Marika Kurdadze.

The platform brings together representatives from relevant UN agencies, international development organizations, civil society organizations, gender-based violence related service providers and advocates, feminist and women-led organizations, digital rights and women’s rights advocates, and academic institutions with a commitment to addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

The platform is launched within

the framework of the “Gender Equality for Georgia” programme, funded by the European Union and implemented jointly by UN Women and UNFPA.

Photo credit: Gela Bedianashvili/UNFPA



Weather

Friday, February 21

Day Overcast High: 2°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: -4°C

Saturday, February 22

Day Partly Cloudy High: 2°C

Night Overcast Low: -4°C

published by The Messenger

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

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia’s English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.