

## Zourabichvili Calls on European Leaders to Address Georgia's Crisis at EU Summit

By Liza Mchedlidze

Georgia's fifth president, Salome Zourabichvili, has sent a joint letter to European leaders, urging them not to overlook Georgia during the March 20-21 European Council meeting. The letter, prepared in coordination with opposition parties and civil society, describes the Georgian Dream (GD) government as a "Russian-inspired regime" that is dismantling democratic institutions, threatening the country's sovereignty, and jeopardizing its European future. It calls for new elections and urges European and U.S. high-level mediation between the pro-European opposition and the ruling authorities.

In a televised address on March 19, Zourabichvili explained her decision to send the letter, emphasizing the urgency of Georgia's situation. While acknowledging that Ukraine and European security remain key priorities for the European Council, she insisted that Georgia must not be ignored.

"The daily strengthening, or at least expansion, of the repressive regime in Georgia acts in the direction of canceling Georgia's freedom, independence, and Europeanness," Zourabichvili said. "The Georgian issue cannot be ignored and should be on the agenda of the EU leaders' meeting."

She argued that Georgia's political crisis is not an isolated issue but part of a broader challenge facing Europe, warning that the country is "an object of hybrid aggression." She also stressed that Georgia's security is directly linked to the stability of the Black Sea region.

"The European leaders must understand that Georgia's issue can't be left out when discussing the Black Sea re-



gion since the country has a direct interest in strengthening security and cooperation in the Black Sea," she said.

The letter warns that GD authorities are dismantling institutions and violating fundamental rights that were built over the past two decades with European support. Zourabichvili writes that a "Russia-supported dictator" should not be allowed

to "defy European and American partners" or turn a "determined pro-European population into a Russian satellite."

It describes recent developments — alleged election fraud and GD's decision to stall EU accession efforts — as "nothing else but the attempt by Russia to test an alternative hybrid instrument to re-establish domination over a sovereign in-

dependent pro-European country." The letter suggests that Russia, having failed to achieve its goals in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, has now shifted to a "less costly hybrid approach" aimed at eroding Georgia's independence without direct military intervention.

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## GYLA Files Complaint with European Court Alleging Mass Violations of Voting Secrecy in 2024 Elections

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), alleging "mass violation of the secrecy of the vote" during the 2024 parliamentary elections.

According to GYLA, the complaint argues that the Georgian government violated Article 3 of the First Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, which, they state, "requires state parties to hold free elections in conditions that ensure the free expression of the people's will when electing their legislative body."

"The complaint has already been registered by the European Court," said Nona Kurdovanidze, Chair of GYLA. "The electoral administration's failure to prop-

erly fulfill its duties led to a mass violation of the fundamental principle of secrecy in voting, and the right to an effective remedy for electoral disputes was also violated."

The organization further argues that Georgian law unfairly restricts the ability of citizens to file complaints about electoral disputes. "The blanket provision in Georgian law, which restricts citizens' ability to file complaints about electoral disputes, does not comply with the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights," the complaint states.

According to GYLA, they had already warned about potential risks to voting secrecy before the elections. The organization states that during training and informational meetings held by the Central Election Commission (CEC), they

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7743; Euro - 3.0096; GBP - 3.5922; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2766; Swiss Franc - 3.1469

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"Such a new pattern should concern each and every one, not only those of you that are closest to Russian borders," the letter warns.

Zourabichvili also argues that Georgia's fate is directly tied to that of Ukraine. "The fate of Georgia cannot be delinked from that of Ukraine, nor the discussions about peace in Ukraine ignore Georgia," she writes. The letter

raises concerns about GD's plans to involve China in the Anaklia port project and Russia's reported intentions to establish a military base in Ochamchire, stating: "Losing Georgia is equal to handing this region to Russia's dominance, which doesn't define neither a stronger Europe nor a stronger America."

Describing Georgia as being "in deep crisis", Zourabichvili says the country has seen "four months of relentless protest", yet GD authorities refuse to engage

in dialogue with pro-European forces and instead "add repressions to repressions." She asserts that "the only peaceful way out of such a dead end is new elections."

The letter calls for "European (and eventually American) high-level mediation" to resolve the crisis and warns that Europe must take responsibility as the U.S. shifts its foreign policy priorities.

"We firmly support the call for a 'Voice of Europe' to take the succession in the fight for freedom and promote European

values," the letter states, referencing the Trump administration's decision to cut funding for U.S. foreign broadcasters Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Zourabichvili concludes the letter by urging European leaders to include Georgia on the agenda for the next European Council meeting in June and offers to testify before the European Parliament on the country's ongoing political crisis.

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"identified risks to the secrecy of the vote" and urged election officials to take action.

GYLA claims that the CEC dismissed these concerns, assuring them that the ballots used in these meetings were only test versions. According to the organiza-

tion, the CEC stated that "the ballots used on election day would be of a different quality to ensure secrecy."

However, GYLA argues that "during the 2024 elections, the CEC failed to prevent the appearance of colored circle marks on the back of the ballots," which they claim compromised the secrecy of

the vote.

Following the election, GYLA states that it used internal legal mechanisms to challenge the results, requesting the "annulment of the results from 2,263 polling stations in 73 districts where the elections were conducted using technology."

The organization claims that "the principle of voter secrecy was violated on a large scale during the voting process, which undermines the constitutional electoral rights of Georgian citizens."

GYLA notes that at the national level, "only the Tetrtskaro District Court accepted GYLA's complaint." According to the organization, the court conducted an investigation that supported their claims.

GYLA highlights that "the court randomly checked several ballots from the villages of Tsalka and Tetrtskaro and

found visible marker traces on the back of the ballots."

Furthermore, GYLA states that "Judge Vladimir Khuchua also conducted a voting secrecy experiment during the hearing, which confirmed a clear violation of secrecy when the ballots were inserted into the vote-counting machine."

Despite this ruling, GYLA reports that the "Tbilisi Court of Appeals annulled the decision of the Tetrtskaro court."

Kurdovanidze emphasized the significance of the complaint, stating that it presents the European Court with "the opportunity to assess both the systematic violation of voting secrecy during the October 26, 2024 elections and the fairness of the system for addressing election-related complaints."

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Georgian Courts Defy ECtHR Ruling on Afgan Sadygov's Extradition Detention



Georgian courts have upheld the extradition detention of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadygov, despite the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) prohibiting his transfer to

Azerbaijan, the Social Justice Center (SJC) said on March 20.

The ECtHR issued an interim measure on February 27, instructing Georgia not to extradite Sadygov until it issues a final ruling. However, Georgian courts have maintained that his detention remains legal, rejecting appeals for his release.

On March 11, the SJC filed a motion with the Tbilisi City Court, requesting that Sadygov's extradition detention be canceled and replaced with bail. The organization pointed out that his final detention deadline expires on May 3, meaning he could remain in custody well before the ECtHR issues a final decision.

The Tbilisi City Court dismissed the motion without an oral hearing, declaring it inadmissible. The judge ruled that the ECtHR's interim measure only suspends extradition and does not constitute a new legal circumstance that would justify modifying Sadygov's detention

status.

On March 17, the Investigative Panel of the Tbilisi Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling, arguing that the defense failed to prove why the ECtHR's decision warranted Sadygov's release. The court further cited concerns that he "may evade justice" if released.

The Social Justice Center strongly condemned both rulings, stating:

"The reasoning of both the Tbilisi City Court and the Tbilisi Court of Appeals is completely unfounded and contradicts the requirements of both national legislation and international law."

The organization also announced that it will continue to challenge the "illegal decisions" and has already submitted a full application to the ECtHR.

### Georgian Government Ready to Rebuild Relations with U.S., Says Kakha Kaladze

The Georgian government is prepared to regulate its relations with the United States, but first, the "Deep State" must be defeated, according to Kakha Kaladze, General Secretary of

Georgian Dream party and Mayor of Tbilisi.

Speaking to journalists, Kaladze emphasized that the Georgian government remains open to cooperation with the U.S.



but believes that the internal political struggle in Washington will have a direct impact on Georgia. He expressed hope that U.S. President Donald Trump would succeed in his declared fight against the "Deep State."

"The Georgian government is ready to regulate relations. We are closely following the processes that are happening," Kaladze said. "The newly elected president of the United States has directly declared war on the

'Deep State,' and his main task is to defeat the 'Deep State.'"

Kaladze further claimed that the influence of global political forces has extended into Georgia and suggested that their removal would lead to immediate positive changes for the country.

"We spoke about the 'Global War Party' a long time ago, their interests, and the fact that they had deep roots in Georgia and other countries, and they have interests there," he stated. "Therefore, the first thing that must happen is the defeat of the 'Deep State.' We will see this immediately. Of course, this will reflect on our country and our relationship with our country."

Reiterating Georgia's willingness to maintain strong ties with the U.S., Kaladze expressed support for Trump's political goals.

"The Georgian government and authorities are ready for friendship," he affirmed. "We wish the President of the United States success in this fight and hope that he will fully fulfill the promise he made regarding the defeat of the 'Deep State.'"

## Weather

Friday, March 21

Day Rain  
High: 7°C

Night Rain  
Low: 3°C

Saturday, March 22

Day Rain  
High: 7°C

Night Rain  
Low: 4°C

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