

By Liza Mchedlidze

The United Kingdom has imposed sanctions on four senior Georgian officials in response to serious human rights violations linked to violent crackdowns on protests in the country. The designations, announced by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), target Shalva Bedoidze, Mirza Kezevadze, Karlo Katsitadze, and Giorgi Gabitashvili under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulation 2020.

The sanctions include asset freezes, meaning any funds or economic resources held by the individuals in the UK will be frozen.

"Our sanctions show the UK will not accept such a blatant lack of accountability by those in charge, and will continue to consider all options available to us until Georgia reverses its current trajectory," said UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy. "We stand with the people of Georgia and their constitutional right to fundamental freedoms and to pursue a European path."

Who was sanctioned and why: Shalva Bedoidze, First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, was cited for being responsible for "a serious violation of the rights of individuals not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." The FCDO noted that the ministry oversaw disproportionate police violence during the protests that erupted after Georgian Dream halted the EU ac-

## UK Sanctions Four Georgian Officials Over Human Rights Abuses



cession process in November 2024. Bedoidze had already been sanctioned by the Baltic states in December 2024.

Giorgi Gabitashvili, Georgia's Prosecutor General, was found to have "intentionally or recklessly" failed to investigate and prosecute serious human rights violations committed by the Special Task Department and Tbilisi police. The sanctions cite his failure to act on the abuse of protesters, journalists, and opposition figures since November. Gabitashvili is also under sanctions from Estonia.

Karlo Katsitadze, Head of the Special Investigative Service, was accused of failing to hold law enforcement accountable for police violence during the protests against the controversial Foreign Agents Law. He was previously sanctioned by Estonia in December 2024.

Mirza Kezevadze, Deputy Head of the Special Task Department at the Interior Ministry, was sanctioned for overseeing acts of

cruel and inhuman treatment during protests following the Foreign Agents Law's passage. The UK noted his role in brutal crackdowns on opposition members, journalists, and demonstrators. Kezevadze had already been sanctioned by the U.S., Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Czechia in late 2024.

## Council of Europe Slams Democratic Backsliding in Georgia, Adopts Critical Resolution

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution on Georgia, criticizing the country's deepening democratic crisis and failure to address prior recommendations. The resolution passed with 89 votes in favor, three against, and five abstentions.

The resolution expresses regret over the resignation of all members of Georgia's delega-

tion, despite its credentials being ratified by the Assembly. PACE emphasized that participation is not optional but a responsibility, warning that Georgia currently has no representation in the Assembly.

The Assembly underlined its deep concern over the ongoing deterioration of democratic standards in Georgia, pointing to several areas of regression:

Elections and Electoral Law: The resolution criticizes recent changes to the Electoral Code, which, according to the Venice Commission, risk entrenching the ruling party's power and undermining political pluralism. PACE called for the repeal of these amendments and urged impartial redistricting based on clear legal standards.

Erosion of Institutional Checks: It voiced concern over changes to Parliament's rules of procedure that reduce oversight in appointing members of the Central Election Commission and exclude civil society from the process. PACE stressed these changes undermine electoral independence.

Crackdowns on Protest and Dissent: PACE condemned the continued use of arrests, pre-trial detention, and retaliatory legal measures against protesters, journalists, and civic activists. It highlighted reports of torture, including the degrading treatment of opposition leader Elene Khoshtaria, who was forcibly stripped in detention.

Freedom of Expression and

Media: The Assembly criticized amendments to Georgia's Law on Administrative Offences and media laws, warning of their chilling effect on free speech. Georgia's drop in the World Press Freedom Index, from 77th to 103rd, was cited as evidence of deteriorating media freedoms.

Civil Society Restrictions: The resolution also raised alarms over recent laws restricting NGOs' access to funding, curtailing their participation in policymaking, and criminalizing non-compliance under the newly adopted Foreign Agent Registration Act. PACE said this law would devastate civil society.

Intimidation of Civil Servants: The Assembly noted widespread reports of retaliation and job dismissals targeting civil servants critical of the government, and criticized the refusal to register the Independent Trade Union of Civil Servants.

Resolution

Res. 2600 10/04/2025

The situation in Georgia and follow up to Resolution 2585 (2025) "Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Georgia"

Other author

Parliamentary Assembly

Session

2025 - Second part-session

VOTING RESULTS

+ 89 in favor

- 3 against

○ 5 abstentions



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7573; Euro - 3.0518; GBP - 3.5594; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.2415; Swiss Franc - 3.2798

# Council of Europe Slams Democratic Backsliding in Georgia, Adopts Critical Resolution

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LGBTQ+ Rights: PACE welcomed the Committee of Ministers' call to repeal the controversial Law on Protecting Family

Values and Minors, saying it violates the European Convention on Human Rights.

The resolution also condemned the ruling party's push to investigate and potentially ban the

opposition party United National Movement (UNM), calling it a "gross violation" of Georgia's Council of Europe membership obligations. It warned that even the threat of banning democratic

opposition fuels further political polarization.

Finally, PACE noted that without tangible progress in addressing these issues, it would not support ratifying credentials

of any future Georgian delegation. The Assembly called on the Georgian government to fulfill its commitments under previous resolutions and fully re-engage with the Council of Europe.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Gia Volski Dismisses PACE Resolution, Denies Georgia's Shift from European Course



First Vice-Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Gia Volski, rejected the critical resolution adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), saying the accusations it contains, particularly claims of a shift in Georgia's foreign policy, are unfounded and politically motivated.

"There is no sign that the elections in Georgia were rigged, especially since there is an absolutely shameless accusation regarding the change of foreign policy, which has no basis," Volski said.

According to Volski, the resolution's

narrative serves a political agenda aimed at destabilizing Georgia. "This 'speculation' carries a certain political content, which is called promoting the development of the destabilization process in Georgia," he said.

Volski argued that any objective observer would recognize the resolution's criticisms as baseless. "There are several interesting passages in this resolution, and objective observers, without any party bias, will easily notice that the accusation that Georgia has deviated from the European course is unfounded."

He also compared Georgia's stance on Russia with that of other European nations, stating: "The only thing that can be said is that we have not really declared an economic war on Russia, but all three Baltic countries export more to Russia than we do, and other European countries do not shy away from quite intensive trade rela-

tions."

Refuting claims that Georgia halted its European integration process, Volski emphasized the country's readiness to proceed with accession talks. "We have not suspended it, and moreover, we are ready to start the negotiation process tomorrow. There are about 40 different issues and we are already ready to start negotiations on a significant part."

Looking ahead, he reaffirmed the government's commitment to EU membership. "And in 2028, we will be fully prepared to achieve the final goal of this

process in 2030, and we will have absolutely all the data for accession to the European Union," Volski said.

### Public Defender Meets Chiatura Miners Amid Ongoing Crisis



Public Defender Levan Ioseliani met with Chiatura miners on April 10 to hear their concerns over mass dismissals, poor working conditions, and unpaid compensation. According to a statement from the Public Defender's Office, miners requested Ioseliani's mediation with relevant agencies to help resolve the crisis.

At the meeting, Ioseliani noted the worsening social and economic conditions

in Chiatura, where many residents were employed in manganese mining. "Leaving thousands of people unemployed and without a source of livelihood... violates the human right to work and a dignified life," he said. He also highlighted the severe environmental damage caused by open-pit mining in the area.

The mining company Georgian Manganese halted operations in January, citing "radical" protests in the village of Shukruti. While the company had promised to pay 60% of workers' salaries and maintain insurance coverage, miners say they never received the promised payments, prompting the ongoing protests. Ioseliani assured workers he would push to raise their issues with decision-makers.

## National Unity Day in Georgia: EU joins commemoration of those who died for independence

### Weather

Friday, April 11

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 15°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 6°C

Saturday, April 12

Day Rain

High: 8°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 3°C



Yesterday, the European Union Delegation to Georgia joined the country in honouring the legacy of 9 April 1989, calling this day "the symbolic end of Soviet rule".

On 9 April 1989, the Soviet army brutally suppressed an anti-Soviet independence demonstration, killing 21 people and injuring hundreds. This day is now remembered as National Unity Day.

"Today, we commemorate those who gave their lives for Georgia's independence. Generations of Georgian citizens continue to protect that independence resolutely," the EU Delegation to Georgia said in a statement on Facebook.

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# Vazha Azarashvili Tribute Concert 2025

On April 8, 2025, Vazha Azarashvili Tribute Concert 2025, a memorial concert marking the first anniversary of his demise, was held at the Grand Hall of Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire. The event took place in the scope of Japan Weeks 2025 in Georgia and was co-organized by the Embassy of Japan and the Tbilisi State Conservatoire in corporation with the Vazha Azarashvili Project in Japan, supervised by Maestro Usui.

The concert featured exceptional musicians from Japan and Georgia, including Vazha Azarashvili's friend, pianist, maestro Mr. Usui Toshiki, along with cellist Ms. Niikura Hitomi and members of the Georgian State Chamber Orchestra, Georgian Sinfonietta.

In his opening remarks, the Ambassador of Japan, Mr. Ishizuka Hideki, spoke about the significance of music as a cultural bridge and Vazha Azarashvili's contribution to strengthening that ties between Japan and Georgia, and expressed his gratitude to pianist Mr. Usui Toshiki, to whom he entrusted full authority over Mr. Azarashvili's copyrights management, for his contributions to promoting cultural exchange between the two nations through music.

In their speech, Vice Rector of Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Ms. Nino Kasradze thanked the Ambassador and Japanese musicians. During the concert, melodies from a world-renowned Studio Ghibli animation film "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" were played. The program also featured Vazha Azarashvili's beloved compositions and one of posthumous works, among which is never-heard-before in Georgia "Piano Concerto No.3", which was composed specifically for Maestro Usui by Mr. Azarashvili himself. The concert ended with a thunderous applause following an encore song - one of the most famous Azarashvili's works - Song without Words.

