

## Zurab Japaridze Refuses Bail, Says Arrest Is Likely: 'This Is a Matter of Principle'

By Liza Mchedlidze

Opposition leader Zurab Girchi Japaridze has announced that he expects to be arrested this week after refusing to pay a 20,000 GEL bail set by the court for his noncompliance with a parliamentary investigation. Speaking on Palitra News' Polit-City, the prominent politician said there is a "99% chance" he will be detained during a scheduled hearing on May 22.

"Today is the deadline for paying the bail. They won't arrest me today, but on Thursday, they probably will," Japaridze said. He made it clear that he has no intention of paying the fine, which was imposed after he refused to appear before a temporary parliamentary investigative commission. "It's not that I want to go to prison," he added, "but this is a matter of principle. I will not participate in this farce."

Japaridze harshly criticized Georgia's judicial and political system, describing it as punitive and unchanged since Soviet times. "This is not a justice system," he said. "It's a system built to punish dissent. From the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the courts and prosecutors, everyone is part of the same falsehood."

The opposition leader also addressed the broader political climate, expressing concern over Georgia's democratic backsliding and the direction of recent political developments. He praised the resilience of protest movements, particularly the



nightly rallies on Rustaveli Avenue, saying they represent a critical show of resistance to what he views as an increasingly authoritarian regime.

"What I like is that the protest hasn't died out. It shows that people are still fighting, still refusing to accept this regime," he said. He dismissed criticism from those who claim the demonstrations are ineffective, arguing that protest is currently the only meaningful form of civic

resistance available.

Turning to upcoming local elections, Japaridze warned that participation under current conditions would be a serious mistake. "Elections in Georgia, as they stand now, are not real elections. Taking part would legitimize the fraud," he argued. "It would also damage the protest movement and send the wrong signal to our international partners."

He also weighed in on the po-

tential participation of other opposition parties, specifically addressing former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's party Gakharia for Georgia. Japaridze predicted that the party would avoid running, calling any such decision "disastrous" for Gakharia. "He won't even get the numbers the CEC gave him last time. It would be political suicide."

Despite the looming threat of arrest, Japaridze remained firm in his stance and hopeful about

Georgia's future. "Every citizen needs to understand what staying home means, it means accepting life under this regime. You'll wake up in Chechnya if you do that. We cannot afford to switch off our minds."

He ended with a message of defiance and belief in the power of the public. "Georgia will not be Russified. This fight will end in victory, because the people of this country still care and they are not backing down."

## Austrian MEP Lena Schilling Denounces Georgian Journalist's Trial as 'Political Persecution'

By Liza Mchedlidze

Lena Schilling, a Member of the European Parliament from Austria (Greens/EFA), has sharply criticized the ongoing trial of Georgian journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli, calling the proceedings "political persecution" and warning that the case poses a serious challenge to Georgia's European aspirations.

Schilling traveled to Batumi on May 16 to attend a court hearing in the case of Amaghlobeli, director of Batumelebi/Netgazeti, who faces criminal charges for allegedly slapping a police official during a protest earlier this year.

"What I witnessed in court today is not the rule of law. Mzia

Amaghlobeli was silenced. Ridiculous claims were presented as evidence — this is political persecution, not a fair trial," Schilling said.

The MEP described the trial as a test of Georgia's commitment to European values and democratic standards. "I sincerely hope that Georgia will return to its European path and become a member of the EU," she said. "To achieve this, we must especially support democratic civil society. Authoritarian regimes know that an active civil society is their greatest enemy. Their fight is therefore our fight."

Amaghlobeli was arrested on January 12 and is charged under Article 353<sup>1</sup> of Georgia's

Criminal Code, which addresses violence against law enforcement officers. If convicted, she faces between four and seven years in prison. At the hearing, medical expert Givi Chkhartishvili testified regarding injuries allegedly sustained by police division head Irakli Dgebuadze.

The trial has drawn widespread attention. Alongside Schilling, German Ambassador to Georgia Peter Fischer was also present in court, highlighting growing international concern.

"Mzia is not an isolated case — her story reflects the global pattern of brave female journalists being silenced," Schilling added. "She is the voice of an



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7415; Euro - 3.0686; GBP - 3.6432; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.3973; Swiss Franc - 3.2750

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entire movement. Her courage inspires all of Georgia — and gives hope to many young women.”

Schilling concluded her remarks by praising Amaghlobeli’s family and sup-

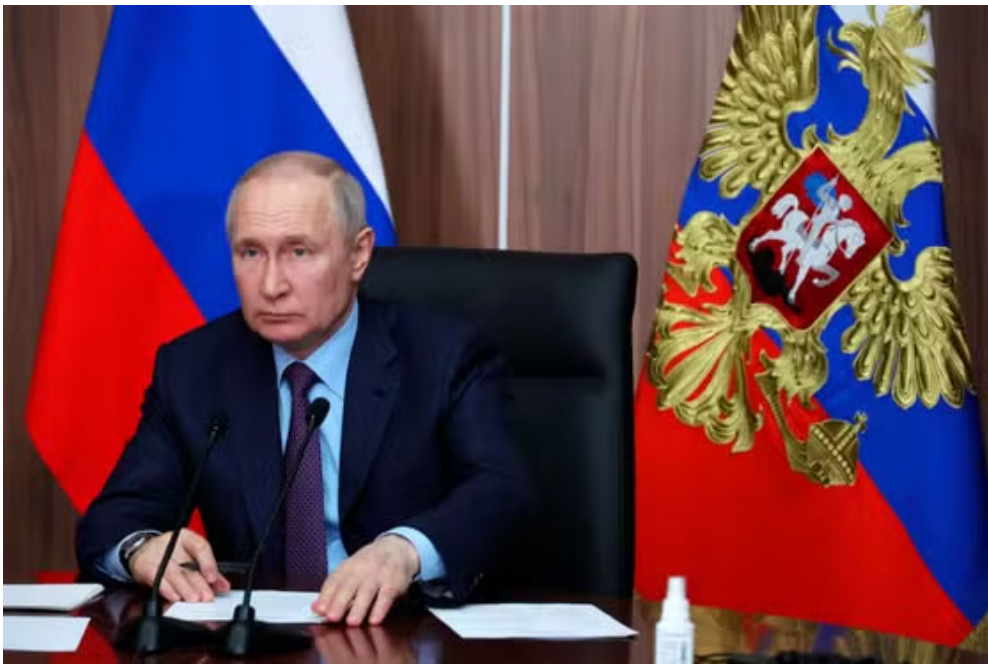
porters for their strength and perseverance. “I was deeply moved by her resilience,” she said.

The trial continues in Batumi City Court as calls for Amaghlobeli’s release intensify among local and international rights groups.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Putin Eases Citizenship Rules for Residents of Occupied Georgian Regions



Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree simplifying the procedure for granting Russian citizenship to residents of Georgia’s Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

The new decree removes several standard requirements typically necessary for naturalization, including permanent residence in Russia, knowledge of the Russian language, and familiarity with Russian history. The move significantly streamlines the process for residents of

these territories to obtain Russian citizenship.

According to the document, residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia may now submit their citizenship applications at

Russian “diplomatic missions” operating in the regional capitals of Sokhumi and Tskhinvali. Those already residing within the Russian Federation may apply at local offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, regardless of whether they are officially registered at their place of stay or residence.

The decree explicitly allows “citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia who are residing in the Russian Federation” to apply at any territorial office of the Ministry, either at their registered place of residence,

place of stay, or, in the absence of registration, their actual place of residence.

### Kobakhidze Calls for Unity, Pledges to Defend Traditional Values



GD Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze called for national unity and reaffirmed the government’s commitment to protecting traditional values during a public address following the Day of the Sanctity of the Family procession at the Holy Trinity Cathedral.

Speaking to the gathered crowd, Kobakhidze emphasized the significance of unity in a time of cultural and ideological division. He extended his message not only to the participants of the procession but also to those who chose not to

attend due to differing views.

“We must address the people who did not join the procession because of their views, we must address them with love,” he said. “We must wish that in the future, tomorrow, they will share the val-

ues around which today’s unity has gathered.”

Kobakhidze expressed hope that in the coming years, more Georgians would unite around the values being celebrated.

“The fight for traditional values continues.. This fight is not easy — there are powerful forces that oppose traditional values, who create false ideologies and false values. It is our duty, our responsibility, to stand side by side with the Mother Church and protect our national values.”

### EU4Youth concludes second cycle of Youth Policy Labs in Georgia

From 9 to 11 May, the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment’ project conducted the second cycle of the Youth Policy Lab (YPL) in Georgia.

The YPLs are being implemented in three municipalities

– Zugdidi, Jvari, and Akhaltsikhe – and bring together a total of 50 participants.

The diverse working groups within the YPLs include representatives from VET institutions, academia, experts, youth

workers, youth organisations, schools, universities, and local businesses. In the second stage of the Labs, these groups focused on designing micro-experiments – small-scale initiatives that serve as models of youth participation and best practices. The experiments aim to explore how various stakeholders, and young people can collaborate to improve systems and programmes while strengthening participatory mecha-

nisms.

As a result of the second cycle, the working groups developed five micro-experiment projects, which will be implemented in the coming months.

Youth Policy Labs provide a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform that empowers young people to take initiative, gain insight into policy development processes, and engage with key actors, including experts, academic institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), and the private sector, who work with or create opportunities for youth.

The Youth Policy Labs in Georgia are structured around four stages and two cycles across

the three municipalities. The initiative will conclude by August 2025 with the development of a final recommendations document, which will outline key policy challenges and propose concrete measures to enhance youth engagement within VET centres.

Youth Policy Labs are organised within the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment’ project, co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and implemented by GIZ.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



## Weather

Monday, May 19

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 20°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 9°C

Tuesday, May 20

Day Clear  
High: 23°C

Night Cloudy  
Low: 12°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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*On the occasion of the National Constitution Day of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Artur Gebal and Ms. Olga Gebal held a reception on May 6.*





