

Opposition Leader Zurab Japaridze Placed in Pretrial Detention After Refusing Bail

By Liza Mchedlidze

Tbilisi City Court has ordered Zurab Girchi Japaridze, the leader of the Girchi–More Freedom party, into pretrial detention after he refused to pay bail related to a contempt of parliament charge. Japaridze had defied a summons issued by the Georgian Dream-led parliament's temporary investigative committee, which is probing actions of the former United National Movement government.

The hearing was held under heavy security, both inside and outside the courthouse. Anticipation of Japaridze's imprisonment had drawn public and diplomatic attention, though citizens were not allowed into the court's courtyard. At times, tensions rose. Two individuals were reportedly detained during the proceedings. Journalists were also restricted, with TV crews kept out of the court building. A few managed to broadcast using mobile phones.

Inside the small courtroom, which could hold only about 15 people, three diplomats were present—two from the Czech and Swedish embassies, and one representative from Amnesty International. Diplomats from the German and U.S. embassies reportedly arrived at the court but were unable to enter due to space limitations. The hearing lasted over three



hours.

Judge Irakli Shvangiradze granted the prosecution's request for pretrial detention after Japaridze refused to pay the 20,000 GEL bail that had been imposed on April 16. Japaridze, echoing the stance of much of the opposition, said he does not recognize the current parliament, which he views as illegitimate due to the disputed October 26, 2024 elections.

Other opposition figures have faced similar charges. Nika Gvaramia and Nika Melia, leaders of the Ahali party, have announced they will also refuse to pay bail, suggesting they too could soon be detained. Just last week, the court placed former defense minister Irakli Okruashvili in pretrial detention under similar circumstances.

In contrast, some opposition leaders have complied. Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze of the Lelo party have already paid their bail. Giorgi Vashadze of Strategy Aghmashenebeli stated he plans to do the same. Investigations into their failure to appear before the parliamentary commission are ongoing.

Under Georgian law, failing to comply with a temporary investigative committee's summons is a criminal offense that can result in a fine or up to one year in prison.

By Liza Mchedlidze

Salome Zourabichvili, the fifth president of Georgia, sharply criticized the recent arrest of Zurab Girchi Japaridze, leader of the Girchi - More Freedom party, calling it a political case and a clear sign of growing repression against opposition leaders.

In a video statement following the court's decision to place Japaridze in pretrial detention, Zourabichvili said, "The verdict handed down today is a verdict for the Georgian Dream." She accused the ruling party of using the legal system to silence dissent and predicted that regimes which resort to such tactics are ultimately headed toward collapse.

Zourabichvili described these events as deeply troubling. "Today is another very shameful day for the Georgian Dream," she said, pointing to the heavy police presence at Tbilisi City Court, the limited access for the public, and the use of a small courtroom for the hearing. "Everything they tried to do today, to end it with what everyone knew in advance, that Zurab Japaridze would be sent to pretrial detention, is shameful."

She emphasized that the case has no legal basis and is entirely political. According to her, the real purpose of the parliamentary investigative commission is not to examine past government wrongdoing, but to create a tool for targeting political opponents.

Zourabichvili Condemns Japaridze Verdict as Political Repression



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7383; Euro - 3.0924; GBP - 3.6682; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.4391; Swiss Franc - 3.3115

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“This is the beginning of a direct political attack on leaders,” she said. “We already have public activists and public figures in prison for absolutely nothing. Now the next step is going after political leaders.”

Zourabichvili framed the ruling as part of a broader pattern of authoritarian behavior by the Georgian Dream government. “This is another sign of their weakness, that they no longer know how far to take the repression. Every regime that

Zourabichvili Condemns Japaridze Verdict as Political Repression

finds itself in this position and resorts to such measures is doomed to collapse.”

She ended her statement with a call for resolve. “We really need endurance, but we must understand that today’s verdict is a verdict for the Georgian Dream.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

GYLA Challenges Controversial Foreign Agents Law in Constitutional Court

The Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), along with two independent media outlets, has filed a constitutional lawsuit to overturn the recently adopted Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and suspend its enforce-

ment while the court deliberates. Passed by the Georgian Dream controlled Parliament on April 1, FARA is set to come into force by the end of the month. In a public statement, GYLA argued that the law violates Georgia’s Constitution and is intended to silence, discredit, and persecute independent civil society groups and media, partly through the threat of criminal prosecution.

Although the ruling party has claimed that the law is modeled on the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, the lawsuit disputes this comparison. GYLA contends that the U.S. version applies to individuals or entities acting under the direction of foreign powers, not to those merely receiving foreign funding. U.S. court rulings, the statement notes, make clear that funding alone does not place an organization under the donor’s control or trigger registration requirements.

The complaint also highlights concerns about Georgia’s institutional context. It argues that, unlike in the U.S., the law in Georgia grants expansive powers to agencies such as the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Prosecutor’s Office, and the judiciary. GYLA claims these institutions are subject to political influence by the Georgian Dream government.

“We do not expect the Constitutional Court to act swiftly or in accordance with the Constitution. However, we believe that

we should use all legal means to protect the rights granted by the Constitution,” the organization stated.

Chinese Economic Activity in Georgia Reaches Record Levels

Chinese business presence in Georgia surged in 2024, with 291 new companies registered by Chinese nationals, the highest ever recorded in a single year.

times higher than the total between 2003 and 2012.

Trade between the two countries also expanded. In 2024, bilateral trade hit 2 billion dollars, making China Georgia’s fourth largest trading partner.

Chinese tourism increased as well. Around 89,000 Chinese citizens visited Georgia in 2024, up 83 percent from the previous year, following the removal of visa requirements.

Chinese companies are now



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Increasing Chinese Influence in Georgia

22 May, 2025

As Georgia's relations with the United States and the European Union deteriorate, the Georgian Dream is strengthening its alliances with authoritarian regimes hostile to the United States, such as China. The Georgia-China strategic partnership agreement, signed in 2023, appears to be a turning point in the relationship between the two countries, significantly deepening their cooperation. At the narrative level, China offers political support to the ruling Georgian Dream party by characterizing it as enforcing policies of 'peace, stability, and development', while Georgian officials increasingly portray China as a strong partner and an alternative to the West. As an example, in October 2024, Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze praised China as one of the "best examples of state modernization," emphasizing that China sets a positive example for other global powers.

At the practical level, cooperation has accelerated following the visa-free agreement, with both countries expanding direct flights, resulting in a noticeable rise in Chinese tourist arrivals and an increase in Chinese business activity in Georgia; Georgia has also actively adopted Chinese surveillance technology; Furthermore, the central banks of both countries are actively working to strengthen ties, particularly in monetary policy collaboration, and Chinese payment systems may potentially enter the Georgian market. Most recently, the Georgian Dream announced its plans to introduce the Chinese language into the school curriculum.

The data comes from a new report by Transparency International Georgia.

Since the Georgian Dream party came to power in 2013, Chinese business activity has steadily grown. Between 2013 and 2024, Chinese citizens registered nearly 1,900 companies in Georgia, four times more than in the previous decade. Direct investment from China reached 600 million dollars, five

involved in several large infrastructure projects in Georgia. One of the most notable is the Anaklia port development, awarded to China Communications Construction Company, which is under US sanctions.

Transparency International warns that while the economic gains are clear, partnerships with sanctioned Chinese firms raise concerns about long-term security and political risks.

Celebrating Diversity: 100 young people gather at EU4Youth-supported cultural festival in Akhmeta

On 18 May, with the support of the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment’ project, the ‘Illuminator’ Youth Centre hosted a Youth Cultural Festival in Akhmeta, Georgia, to celebrate diversity and promote intercultural integration among local communities.

The event brought together around 100 participants, including young people, community members, and guests from across

Akhmeta Municipality. Youth representatives showcased five



distinct cultures through traditional crafts, national costumes, local cuisine, and customs. Visitors had the opportunity to engage with the rich cultural heritage of the region and experience the unique traditions of the diverse communities living side by side.

The festival created a space for

cultural exchange and dialogue aimed at strengthening mutual understanding, unity and cooperation among young people, helping to build inclusive and sustainable communities.

The Illuminator Youth Centre is a beneficiary of a grant programme under the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment’ project, co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Friday, May 23

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 24°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 15°C

Saturday, May 24

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 27°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 16°C

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