

By LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

**N**ika Melia, a leading figure in Georgia's opposition Coalition for Change, was detained in Tbilisi on May 29, 2025. His arrest occurred one day before he was scheduled to appear in court regarding charges connected to his refusal to testify before a parliamentary commission controlled by the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Melia's lawyer, Giorgi Kondakhashvili, voiced concerns over the legality of the arrest, pointing out that the bail deadline had not yet expired and that no court order had changed his client's pretrial conditions. According to the lawyer, police officers intercepted Melia's vehicle and detained him by force.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs confirmed the arrest and stated that Melia was charged under Article 173 of the Administrative Offenses Code, which refers to disobeying or insulting law enforcement officials. This administrative offense comes on top of an existing criminal charge under Article 349 of the Criminal Code for his failure to testify before the parliamentary commission investigating past government actions.

The court had previously ordered Melia to pay bail of 50,000 GEL by May 30. Non-compliance could have led to imprisonment for up to one year. His sudden arrest before that deadline raised suspicions among political allies and international observers.

U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson condemned the move, claiming it was part of a broader crackdown on political opposition in Georgia. He warned that such actions could bring international consequences, including sanctions, and criti-

cized the government's perceived alignment with authoritarian interests abroad. Melia is not the only opposition leader

under pressure. Politicians like Nika Gvaramia and Zurab Girchi Japaridze have also faced similar legal challenges.

Japaridze was arrested earlier in May after refusing to comply with a court-ordered bail payment.



## Opposition Leader Nika Melia Detained Ahead of Court Hearing



## Georgian Airways Under Scrutiny Over Alleged Abduction of Former Ivanishvili Aide

By LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

**G**eorgian Airways is facing intense scrutiny following allegations that one of its VIP aircraft was used in the covert transfer of Giorgi Bachaishvili, a former aide to ex-Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, from Abu Dhabi to Tbilisi. Bachaishvili's legal team claims this operation amounted to an unlawful cross-border abduction.

According to Business Media Georgia (BM.Ge), a Bombardier CRJ jet operated by Georgian Airways landed in Abu Dhabi on May 26. The aircraft allegedly flew with its transponder disabled for most of the journey, only activating it shortly before entering Persian Gulf airspace, thereby obscuring its origin. The plane allegedly departed later that day, again disabling its transponder mid-flight, making its subsequent destination untraceable via public aviation databases.

On May 27, Georgia's State Security Service (SSSG) announced Bachaishvili's arrest, stating they had received an anonymous tip placing him near the "green border zone" between Red Bridge and Sadakhlo, areas connecting Georgia with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The agency claimed he was apprehended during joint operations with the Interior Ministry.

Contradicting the official account, Bachaishvili testified in a Tbilisi court on May 29 that he was kidnapped abroad on May 24. He alleged that he was blindfolded, detained for two days without access to legal counsel or contact with family, and then transported to Georgia aboard a Georgian Airways Bombardier jet. His lawyer, Davit Jandieri, confirmed the use of the aircraft and described the flight as a "special charter." While withholding the exact location of the alleged abduction, Jandieri asserted it occurred

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outside the Caucasus region and without any formal extradition process.

In response to inquiries, Georgian Airways declined to confirm or deny the aircraft's involvement, citing privacy concerns. The airline stated that the government plane had been abroad for technical inspection and was not in service. They emphasized that all flights in and out of international airports are subject to oversight, making illegal departures or ar-

rivals implausible.

Bachaishvili fled Georgia on March 9, 2025, citing fears of imminent arrest. The following day, he was sentenced in absentia to 11 years in prison on charges of embezzling cryptocurrency and laundering funds linked to Ivanishvili's Co-Investment Fund. Prosecutors allege he misappropriated significant sums in digital assets and cash during his tenure. He was ordered to post bail and was banned from leaving the country, a restriction he violated by fleeing.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Polish and French Embassies Warn Citizens of Entry Risks to Georgia



The Polish and French embassies in Tbilisi issued advisories cautioning their citizens about potential entry risks into Georgia. The Polish Embassy highlighted that participation in or presence at ongoing protests, as well as social media activity, could lead to denial of entry. They emphasized that Georgian authorities have the sovereign right to assess risk factors for entry, which may apply even to holders of valid Georgian residence permits. The embassy also noted that foreigners participating in demonstrations could face hefty fines and that re-entry might require immediate payment.

Later that day, the French Embassy issued a similar statement, advising travelers to check for any factors that could put them at risk of being refused entry, including involvement in demonstrations and online activity.

These advisories follow a series of incidents over the past year where foreign nationals, including journalists, activists, and politicians, have been denied entry

into Georgia. The situation has intensified amid ongoing protests since November 2024. Notably, on May 21, Simon Vanderbroucke, a member of the EU Delegation to Georgia, was denied entry



at Tbilisi International Airport, marking the first reported case of an EU diplomat being refused entry. Georgian Dream authorities attributed the incident to a "technical problem."

The advisories also come in the context of proposed legislative amendments aimed at tightening immigration controls. Under these amendments, foreigners could be expelled from Georgia and barred from re-entering for administrative offenses such as petty hooliganism and disobedience to police. The Interior Ministry has indicated that foreign participants in protests will be particular targets of these changes.

### Georgian Prime Minister Kobakhidze Meets with Orbán at CPAC

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze met with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Budapest, marking their sixth meeting since

Georgia's October 2024 parliamentary elections. The following day, Kobakhidze addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), where he ech-

faith. He criticized what he termed "liberal fascism," accusing foreign-funded NGOs and media of undermining traditional values and promoting divisive ide-



oed Orbán's rhetoric and criticized Western liberalism.

During their meeting, Kobakhidze expressed gratitude for Hungary's support of Georgia's European integration and emphasized the growing partnership between the two nations. He praised Orbán for his unwavering defense of Hungary's sovereignty and national interests.

In his CPAC speech, Kobakhidze portrayed Georgia as a nation with a rich Christian heritage, asserting its commitment to preserving national identity and

ologies. He also alleged that a "deep state," which he referred to as the "Global War Party," orchestrates global unrest and seeks to erode national sovereignty.

Kobakhidze reiterated Georgia's commitment to European integration but insisted that this path should not compromise the country's dignity or sovereignty. He condemned perceived double standards and emphasized the importance of national identity in the face of external pressures.

## Eurobarometer: vast majority of Europeans support Ukraine and sanctions against Russia

### Weather

**Friday, May 30**

Day ☁ Overcast  
High: 25°C

Night ☁ Partly Cloudy  
Low: 14°C

**Saturday, May 31**

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 28°C

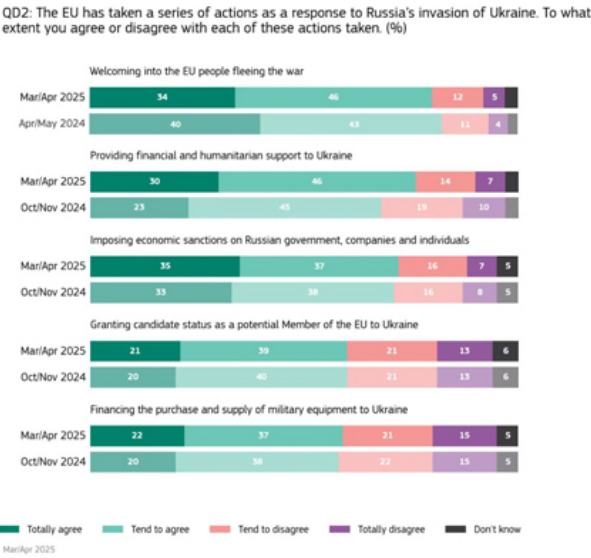
Night ☁ Partly Cloudy  
Low: 15°C

In the face of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, 80% of European respondents agree with the policy of welcoming Ukrainian refugees into the EU, according to the latest Eurobarometer survey, released on 28 May.

Seventy-six per cent of Europeans agree with providing financial and humanitarian support to Ukraine.

Seventy-two per cent of EU citizens support economic sanctions on the Russian government, companies, and individuals.

Six out of ten approve of the EU granting candidate status to Ukraine



and 59% agree with the EU financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to be considered as the most important issue at EU level (27%), followed by the international situation (24%), and security and defence (20%). Seventy-seven per cent of respondents agree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the security of the EU.

The survey was conducted by the European Commission from March to April 2025, through face-to-face interviews.

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