

By LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

21 Year Old Protester Sentenced to Over Four Years in Prison

21-year-old Mate Devidze was sentenced to four years and six months in prison on charges of attacking police officers during a protest crackdown in November. The ruling was handed down by Judge Nino Galustashvili in a courtroom filled with tension and heavy security.

The verdict followed months of legal proceedings surrounding Devidze, who was arrested in the early hours of November 19, 2024, during a forceful police operation that broke up an all-night opposition demonstration on Melikishvili Avenue. The rally had called for fresh elections following contested results from the October 26 vote, which opposition parties claimed was marred by fraud.

Initially held on administrative charges, Devidze was not released after the mandatory two-day period. Instead, authorities reclassified his case as a criminal matter. He was later charged under Article 353¹ of Georgia's Criminal Code, which deals with violence against police during the performance of their duties.

At the center of the prosecution's case was footage showing Devidze running from police and swinging an object resembling a stick during the dispersal. The Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed he used the object to strike officers and cause injury. Three policemen testified to having been struck by him during the incident: Giorgi



Estatishvili, Bidzina Zhamerashvili, and Levan Kodelashvili.

Zhamerashvili said he was hit with a stick while responding to a commotion involving opposition figure Nika Melia. Estatishvili claimed he was struck in the face and shoulder by what he believed to be a flagpole. Kodelashvili testified that a man with curly hair hit his wrist, leaving redness but not requiring medical care. Despite these claims, none of the officers sought hospital treatment.

The defense raised doubts about the reliability of these accounts. Devidze's lawyers pointed to inconsistencies in the testimonies and questioned how officers identified him in the video. They argued that Estatishvili, for example, failed to clearly place himself in the footage and that Zhamerashvili described being hit in the back despite claiming the blow came from the front.

Devidze maintained throughout the trial that he acted out of fear and exhaustion. During the final hearing, he told the court he had not slept in two days and insisted there was no intention to cause harm. His legal team argued the act was instinctive, not aggressive.

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Tusk Pushes to End Georgia's Visa-Free Access, Botchorishvili Condemns Move

By LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has announced efforts to rally support within the European Union to suspend or restrict Georgia's visa-free travel, citing concerns over democratic decline and growing migration. His remarks have triggered a strong backlash from Georgian officials, who accuse both Poland and the domestic opposition of working against the interests of Georgian citizens.

"I have already spoken out, intervened, and we are now working to build the necessary majority to limit or suspend visa-free travel for Georgia, along with other countries," Tusk said during a June 11 parliamentary session in Warsaw. "Yes, this is my intention while being fully aware that one-third of Georgians genuinely wish to share our values. But we know where the real problem lies."

Framing the issue within a broader debate on migration and democratic governance, Tusk added: "I strongly support restricting visa-free travel from countries, like Georgia, that no longer uphold basic democratic standards and from which

migration presents a direct threat to legal and public order in our country and in Europe." He also claimed that 50 Georgian nationals were recently deported from Poland for committing various crimes.

In response, Georgian Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili condemned Tusk's comments as "regrettable" and "insulting," emphasizing that the vast majority of EU member states do not support ending visa-free access for Georgians.

"The issue does not have many supporters in Brussels, but work is still ongoing to use this issue against the interests of the Georgian people," Botchorishvili told reporters, in remarks later released by the Foreign Ministry. "Georgia has done everything to ensure that our citizens can travel freely to the European Union."

Botchorishvili also accused Georgia's opposition of lobbying European institutions to target visa-free travel, claiming these efforts are politically motivated and coordinated with foreign allies.

"This is more like coordinated actions on the part of Poland," she said. "The

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7301; Euro - 3.1625; GBP - 3.7058; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.4069; Swiss Franc - 3.3585

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The sentencing triggered emotional scenes in Tbilisi City Court. Supporters and family members cried openly after the ruling was read. Several individuals collapsed in the corridors and had to be removed by bailiffs.

Former President Salome Zurbishvili was present and criticized the decision, calling it “shameful” and warning of political consequences in the days ahead. “He will remain a symbol of dignity for us,” she told reporters outside the court. In his closing words, Devidze

told the courtroom, “You sacrifice us to follow your commander’s orders,” before stepping out, refusing to remain for the announcement of the sentence. Earlier, he had turned to his supporters and said, “I won’t be seeing you in a while.” Devidze, a musician from the

eastern town of Telavi, had been traveling to the capital to participate in demonstrations in the weeks following the disputed election. He turned 21 while in custody, having already spent seven months in pre-trial detention. The ruling comes at a time of continued political unrest in

Georgia. June 12 marked the 197th consecutive day of demonstrations, and more verdicts are expected soon in the cases of other protesters arrested during the same period. Activists and opposition figures say the crack-down on demonstrators is part of a broader campaign to silence dissent. In his last words before leaving the courtroom, Devidze quoted a line that has since spread across social media: “To look for light in endless darkness.”

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opposition’s visit to Brussels and attempts to use visa-free travel as a tool against Georgian citizens... These are the issues being used against Georgia’s interests,

especially when the opposition no longer has any resources inside the country.” The dispute adds to already strained relations between Tbilisi and Brussels. Georgia, an EU candidate country, has faced mounting criticism from European

officials over its shift away from democratic norms. The ruling Georgian Dream party has come under fire for legislation targeting civil society and its use of force against pro-EU demonstrators. Despite the friction, EU Ambassador

to Georgia Pawel Herczynski recently reiterated that most member states oppose revoking visa-free access, saying, “We don’t want to make ordinary people pay for the decisions made by their government.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Zourabichvili Fined for Joining Mothers of Detained Protesters on Rally



Georgia’s fifth president, Salome Zurbishvili, revealed that she has been fined GEL 5,000 for her participation in a March 3 demonstration held on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi. The protest, organized by mothers of detained activists, took place on

where all mothers should have been – alongside the mothers of prisoners of conscience.”

Zourabichvili was fined under Article 174 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which penalizes “blocking the road.” The same charge has been used against hundreds of demonstrators and journalists during months of protests in Georgia. Human rights groups have repeatedly criticized the provision, arguing that it serves as a tool to intimidate citizens and stifle dissent.

The ongoing demonstrations, which intensified following a series of arrests, have seen a heavy police presence and frequent reports of fines, detentions, and surveillance. Many protesters have begun wearing face coverings to avoid identification by authorities.

Mamuka Mdinardze Sues Journalist Nanuka Zhorzholiani Over Facebook Post

During a court hearing on June 12, journalist Nanuka Zhorzholiani revealed that it was Mamuka Mdinardze, rather than Georgian Dream MPs Thea Tsulukiani or Mariam Lashkhi, who filed a lawsuit against her for a Facebook status she posted. Zhorzholiani explained that Mdinardze claimed the post — featuring a goose emoji — was

offensive. She added that while Tsulukiani and Lashkhi were not plaintiffs, the defense requested they be questioned, suggesting they might not feel in-

Dimitri Samkharadze, during their time in parliament. This was intended to highlight the plaintiffs’ understanding of freedom of speech.



sulted or could be under Mdinardze’s influence. However, no judge has yet agreed to summon them.

The journalist also noted that evidence was presented in court, including offensive remarks made by former MPs of the Georgian Dream party, such as Mikheil Kavelashvili and

Additionally, Zhorzholiani referenced a 2019 interview with Tsulukiani, then Minister of Justice, where she stated that insults and foul language should not be punishable offenses, or “we would all have to go to prison.”

The court hearing is scheduled to continue on June 13.

Weather

Friday, June 13

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 33°C

Night 🌧️ Mostly Cloudy
Low: 19°C

Saturday, June 14

Day ☁️ Partly Cloudy
High: 30°C

Night 🌧️ T-storm
Low: 17°C

Georgia’s Mother’s Day and called for the release of those arrested during recent political unrest.

In a Facebook post published on June 12, Zourabichvili shared an image of the fine and wrote, “I have been baptized as an activist today. But I stood

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