

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## Judge Issues Second Fine Against Jailed Journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli

On June 18, Judge Mariana Pomaeva of Batumi City Court fined Mzia Amaghlobeli, the imprisoned director of Batumelebi and Netgazeti media outlets, GEL 1,000 for placing a protest sticker on a police department outbuilding. Her legal team claims this is the second penalty for the same act.

Amaghlobeli, who is currently on trial for allegedly assaulting a police officer, had previously been fined in March for disobeying police. Her defence argues that the earlier charge was fabricated to cover up what they describe as an unlawful arrest in January.

The incident traces back to the night of January 11-12, when protests and arrests erupted in Batumi. Amaghlobeli was detained twice that night. She was first arrested after putting up a sticker in support of detainees. Following a brief release, she was arrested again on criminal charges for slapping police chief Irakli Dgebuadze during a confrontation.

In March, Judge Salikh Shainidze found her guilty of police disobedience under Article 173 of the Administrative Code and fined her GEL 2,000. The defence accused law enforcement of falsifying reports and submitting misleading video footage recorded long after the incident.

Later, in April, a separate administrative case was launched over the sticker under Article 150, which penalizes defacing municipal property. Un-



like Article 173, this charge does not allow for detention, prompting claims that police escalated the situation by using a charge that permitted arrest.

Footage from the initial arrest features a voice believed to be Dgebuadze's, acknowledging that the arrest was under Article

150, raising further questions about the legitimacy of the earlier disobedience charge.

During a court hearing on June 9, journalist Jaba Ananidze testified that video used as evidence in the police disobedience case included him, despite the fact that he only arrived at the

protest after Amaghlobeli had already been released. He stated he was in Turkey earlier that day and arrived in Batumi late that evening.

The defence also submitted a forensic analysis suggesting that the video evidence had been manipulated.

As criminal proceedings continue, the journalist faces a prison sentence of 4 to 7 years. Rights groups and press freedom advocates have criticized the case as an example of retaliatory action against independent media in Georgia.

## UK Rejects Georgian Dream Accusations of Funding 'Extremism,' Urges Election Monitoring

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The British Embassy in Georgia has firmly denied accusations from the ruling Georgian Dream party that it is financing "propaganda and extremism" through civil society grants, in-

cluding those related to the upcoming local elections. In a statement released on June 18, the Embassy also called on the Georgian government to invite the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission.

The accusations began on

June 11 when Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili claimed on broadcaster Rustavi 2 that the British Embassy was "planning to fund pre-election propaganda" and had "exposed itself in funding extremism" through can-

celed grants. He specifically criticized support for media outlet Tabula, founded by opposition figure Tamar Chergoleishvili, calling it a "party propaganda newspaper."

Other Georgian Dream officials echoed Papuashvili's claims, following the British Embassy's earlier announcement on June 12 that several civil society and media-related grants had been withdrawn. The Embassy explained the cancellations were linked to Georgia's recently adopted "foreign influence" law, which requires government approval before distributing grants to local organizations, creating legal uncertainty.

The grants were intended to support election transparency and competitiveness ahead of the October 4 local elections. Intended recipients included Tabula, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), and Georgia's Future Academy,

a youth group involved in election observation.

In its latest statement, the Embassy rejected the ruling party's characterization. "We reject its current description of funding 'propaganda and extremism.' Nothing could be further from the truth," it said. The Embassy emphasized that UK-Georgia cooperation is based on a shared commitment to democracy and civil society, referencing the 2019 Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

"The Georgian government itself previously supported this activity," the embassy noted, adding that election-related assistance had long been part of UK efforts in Georgia.

The statement also urged the government to issue an invitation to OSCE/ODIHR to monitor the municipal vote and to implement recommendations

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from the organization’s final report on the 2024 parliamentary elections. “The hopes and aspirations of the Georgian people are for de-

mocracy and freedom,” the Embassy said, expressing hope that both UK and European partnerships with Georgia would support those goals. In response, PM Irakli Kobakhidze repeated claims that

the canceled grants were aimed at groups “directly affiliated with the radical opposition,” again naming Tabula and Georgia’s Future Academy. When asked about ODIHR participation in the upcoming

elections, Kobakhidze stated that such missions are typically not invited for local contests. He acknowledged past exceptions but said observation would now be “unnecessary.” However, ODIHR has moni-

tored Georgia’s municipal elections in 2021 and 2017, and received invitations in 2014. Although the 2014 mission was not deployed due to funding issues, Georgia’s authorities did issue a formal request at the time.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Zourabichvili Warns Georgia Is Facing ‘Triple Crisis’



The 5<sup>th</sup> President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili warned on June 17 that Georgia is facing a serious political and geopolitical crisis. In a post on X following her speech in the French Senate, she said democracy is weakening, the country’s sovereignty is being lost to Russia, and Georgia is moving away from Europe toward Russia and China. Zourabichvili said the shift began with the introduction, withdrawal, and reintroduction of the so-called “Russian law,” which targets foreign-funded organizations. She said this led to attacks on Western ambassadors and growing tensions with Georgia’s international partners. “Despite the government’s turn away from the EU path, 80% of Georgians still strongly support European integration,” Zourabichvili wrote. She said the ruling party is violating the constitution and using anti-Euro-

pean rhetoric, sparking protests across the country. She accused the government of copying Russian methods to suppress civil society and political opposition. New laws now

affect not just political groups, but also organizations that support people with disabilities and other vulnerable communities. Zourabichvili said the courts are no longer independent and that legal cases are used to control political opponents. She noted that around 60 young activists are currently in pre-trial detention, with more verdicts expected this summer. “This crisis isn’t just internal,” she said. “It’s part of a Russian strategy to block Georgia’s path to the EU and NATO through propaganda and politi-

cal influence.” She also warned that the ruling party is building closer ties with Russia, Iran, and China, increasing Georgia’s dependence on these countries and raising concerns about Black Sea security. “Georgia faces a triple crisis: democracy is weakening, sovereignty is slipping into Russia’s hands, and we are drifting from Europe toward Russia and China,” she said.

### NGOs Accuse Georgian Authorities of Enforcing ‘Russian Laws,’ Refuse to Share Personal Data

Representatives of several non-governmental organizations accused Georgian authorities on June 17 of enforcing what they called “anti-constitutional Russian laws” through politically influenced courts. Speaking at a briefing hosted by the Civil Society Foundation, they said the Anti-Corruption Bureau had unlawfully demanded sensitive personal data about individuals under their protection. According to the NGOs, the demands include names, personal ID numbers, photographs, financial details, health records, and other private information of vulnerable groups such as victims of torture, women facing domestic abuse, teachers, students, pensioners, disabled individuals, journalists,

whistleblowers, and former public servants who were allegedly dismissed unlawfully. “They are demanding this in-



formation from us, human rights defenders, without any legal basis,” the groups stated. “We will not betray the trust of citizens under our protection, even if it results in our persecution or arrest.” The NGOs warned that complying with such orders would violate both ethical obligations and the constitutional rights of those they assist. They pledged to use all legal channels to resist what they see as politically motivated pressure from the government.

“For us, their goal is clear – Ivanishvili is trying to destroy free civil society in Georgia, just as the Bolsheviks did in the

1920s, and as the Putin and Lukashenko regimes have done in recent years,” they said in a joint statement, referring to ruling party founder Bidzina Ivanishvili and alleging coordinated efforts to suppress dissent. The organizations emphasized their refusal to follow what they described as “Russian laws” or to accept the government’s turn away from Georgia’s European path. “We will continue to fight to protect the rights of the Georgian people,” they said.

### G7: Ukraine committed to ceasefire, Russia must do the same

The G7 Leaders, gathered in Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada, on 16–17 June, recognised that Ukraine has committed to an unconditional ceasefire, and agreed that Russia must do the same. The EU was represented at this year’s G7 summit, hosted by the Canadian G7 presidency, by the President of the European Council António Costa, and the President of the European Com-

mission Ursula von der Leyen. G7 leaders also expressed sup-



port for President Trump’s efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine and said they were resolute in exploring all options to maximise pressure on Russia, including financial sanctions. “We must

stay the course in our collective resolve to support Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, supporting the United States-led peace efforts, and ensuring they have the best chance of success,” António Costa said. The G7 met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and with the Secretary General of NATO Mark Rutte to discuss their support for a strong and sovereign Ukraine, including budgetary defence and recovery and reconstruction support. (euneighbourseast.eu)

## Weather

Thursday, June 19

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 28°C  
Night 🌙 Clear  
Low: 14°C

Friday, June 20

Day ☀ Clear  
High: 30°C  
Night 🌙 Clear  
Low: 17°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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