

## Zourabichvili: Georgian Dream in 'Paranoid State,' Signs of Regime's Final Stage

By Liza Mchedlidze

Georgia's fifth president, Salome Zourabichvili, says the ruling Georgian Dream party is acting out of fear and showing signs of collapse.

Speaking at the Strategy Aghmashenebeli office on June 24, Zourabichvili told journalists the government's behavior reflects internal panic. "This state that they themselves are in today, which is a paranoid state, is classically an indicator of the final stage of such a regime," she said. "No one can say whether this final stage will end quickly or drag on."

She said recent crackdowns show that the system is beginning to turn on itself. "Some people are already being punished inside. We can imagine how this feels for those who've followed everything without question until now. Suddenly they realize: I could be next."

Zourabichvili also addressed the possibility that she herself could be summoned by the parliamentary investigative commission. "Would you rule it out?" she replied when asked.

"This regime is not well internally," she continued. "Persistent repression for no reason shows something deeper is wrong. These are moments of fluctuation and we have to endure. It's not easy, especially for young people. Politicians may be more prepared, but for ordinary protesters, it's harder."

She warned that the government is trying to provoke a violent



response. "The government wants to turn this into an uprising. That's one of their goals. We have to keep the protest peaceful."

Zourabichvili said unity across the opposition is essential. "There are only two ways out: one, to continue protesting peacefully. And two, full unity

of the opposition around one strategy."

She confirmed that an opposition strategy meeting would take place soon. "We'll meet to-

day and figure it out. But one thing is clear — what's happening now is a sign of their weakening."

## Parliament Bans Court Filming as Judge Salaries Doubled in Fast-Track Bill

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Georgian Dream parliament is advancing a draft law that prohibits photo, video, and audio recording at court premises, alongside a nearly twofold pay raise for judges. Critics warn that the sweeping reforms will block public oversight of judicial proceedings.

The proposed amendments ban all recording or broadcasting in courthouses, courtrooms and courtyards unless conducted by the court or an approved official. The bill stipulates that independent media may only record after submitting a formal request and receiving a judge's reasoned approval.

The Media Advocacy Coalition cautioned that the changes "will severely restrict media work and

effectively eliminate public oversight of the judiciary". Mindia Gabadze, a photographer for Publika, said court coverage is now essentially banned for media professionals, particularly photographers.

Under current rules, Georgia's Public Broadcaster can freely record court sessions in open courtrooms and share content with other outlets. Additionally, private individuals are allowed to bring phones, laptops, and other devices into courts. These provisions are removed entirely in the new bill.

Meanwhile, judges' pay will change from fixed salaries to a formula based on the state budget. City court judges' pay will increase from roughly GEL4,000



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7252; Euro - 3.1599; GBP - 3.7079; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.4691; Swiss Franc - 3.3615

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to GEL10,512, and the Supreme Court chair's salary will rise from GEL7,000 to GEL14,600.

In defence of the legislation, Georgian Dream Secretary-General and Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze compared current court proceedings to a "circus," assert-

ing that reforms will professionalise the judiciary and bring Georgian standards in line with those in Europe and the United States.

International reaction has been critical. The EU's High Representative Kaja Kallas labelled Georgia's justice system as "part of this repression ma-

chine," saying sanctions against judges may now be considered after the EU Foreign Affairs Council met on June 23.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Giorgi Vashadze Sentenced to Seven Months in Prison for Defying Parliamentary Commission



Tbilisi City Court has sentenced Giorgi Vashadze, leader of the opposition party Strategy Aghmashenebeli, to seven months in prison for refusing to appear before a parliamentary investigative commission led by the Georgian Dream party. The June 24 decision by Judge Nino Galustashvili adds Vashadze to a growing list of jailed opposition leaders. One day earlier, Zurab Japaridze of Girchi More Freedom and Lelo leaders Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze were handed similar sentences. All four have also been banned from holding public office for two years.

Vashadze previously served as Deputy Justice Minister under President Mikheil Saakashvili and was a United National Movement MP from 2012 to 2016. He founded Strategy Aghmashenebeli in 2016 and ran in coalition with the UNM

Kobakhidze announced today that Economy Minister Levan Davitashvili has been removed from his post and replaced by his deputy, Mariam Kvrivishvili.

The announcement came during a

and managing strategic projects. The Prime Minister introduced Kvrivishvili as the new minister and wished her success in her new responsibilities.

In response, Davitashvili thanked Kobakhidze for their collaboration and



in the October 2024 parliamentary elections.

Vashadze did not attend the court session, as with the other opposition leaders, viewing the case as politically driven. He was arrested at the Strategy Aghmashenebeli party office, where other opposition figures and Georgia's fifth President, Salome Zourabichvili, were gathered in a show of support.

### Mariam Kvrivishvili Replaces Levan Davitashvili as Economy Minister

Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli

briefing on June 24. Davitashvili, who had served as Economy Minister since 2022, will now take on a new role as the Prime Minister's chief adviser on economic affairs and as Secretary of the Economic Council, a body that coordinates key economic policy and is chaired by the Prime Minister.

"Leading the ministry is associated with a demanding routine," Kobakhidze said, explaining that relieving Davitashvili of the position would allow him to focus more effectively on driving economic growth, attracting investment,

expressed optimism about continuing to contribute in a different capacity. "In a new format, we will be able to further accelerate and coordinate the important strategic projects that are crucial for the country's continued development," he said.

Davitashvili also extended his gratitude to Georgian Dream founder and Honorary Chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili, calling his appointment to senior positions a "unique chance." He concluded by wishing Kvrivishvili success in her new role.

### EBRD boost for Ukrainian agribusiness

To strengthen food security and resilience in wartime Ukraine, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is arranging a financing package of up to Euro100 million for a leading Ukrainian agribusiness producer's investment programme.

The EBRD will lend Euro40 million to agribusiness products

producer MHP on its own account, while parallel lenders and B-lenders will provide the remaining Euro60 million.

Food security is one of the five investment priorities of the EBRD in Ukraine, along with energy security, vital infrastruc-



ture, trade and the private sector. The EBRD, Ukraine's largest institutional investor, has made more than Euro7 billion available to Ukraine in wartime.

The company will use the finance to invest in energy security, improve production and operational efficiency and diversify geographically to mitigate the impact of the war, including by constructing a pet food plant in Croatia.

The financing will also support human capital improvements, giving young people new training opportunities, improving internal human resources practices for women, and strengthening support for veterans being reintegrated into the

30,889-strong workforce with new psychological training. MHP has already reintegrated 373 veterans into the workforce and 2,483 more are still serving in the army.

MHP is a leading international food and agrotech group and Ukraine's largest producer of poultry, culinary, and processed meat products. After disruptions in 2022, it has re-established supply and export routes to continue to export to more than 70 countries. MHP also supports thousands of smaller businesses, including more than 2,000 small retail stores and 2,500 local farmers in Ukraine. (euneighbourseast.eu)

## Weather

Wednesday, June 25

Day Clear  
High: 28°C  
Night Clear  
Low: 16°C

Thursday, June 26

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

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