

Parliament Adopts Amendments to Laws on Courts and Freedom of Speech

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Parliament has adopted amendments to the Law on Common Courts in the third reading. The bill received support from 80 deputies, with none opposing it. The amendments introduce a ban on photographing and video recording, as well as broadcasting media, within court buildings, courtrooms, and courtyards. Decisions on allowing photo or video recording during court sessions will be made solely by the High Council of Justice.

The bill also introduces liability for any individual who shows disrespect to a judge during a court session or in public, whether through words, gestures, or actions. Additionally, the term for transferring judges increases from two to three years, with the possibility of extending it for an additional two years.

Changes to the structure of the High Council of Justice are also included. The Parliament will now elect only two members instead of five, while the number of judges on the Council will increase from nine to twelve. The President will again appoint one member. The amendments also abolish the Independent Inspec-



tor Service and the position of Independent Inspector. Grounds for disciplinary liability of judges are expanded, with failure or improper performance of judicial duties now classified as misconduct.

Parliament also adopted amendments to the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression in the third reading, supported by 83 deputies with no opposition.

The Georgian Dream party considered the bill in an expedited manner.

Several articles are being removed from the current law, with new regulations introduced. Notably, the legal norm placing the burden of proof on the initiator of a restriction on speech is being repealed. In its place, any unproven suspicion must be resolved in favor of protecting free-

dom of speech.

Another repealed article had protected defendants in defamation cases from being penalized solely for refusing to disclose confidential sources. The new law shifts the burden of proof in defamation cases to the defendant. Plaintiffs will no longer be required to prove that statements made against them are false. Instead, defendants must prove

that their statements did not include materially false facts.

The amendments also introduce regulation of both direct and public insults. An existing provision stating that freedom of expression cannot be limited for the sake of private life or personal data if the information is necessary for democratic self-governance is being repealed.

The law also removes the concept of qualified privilege in defamation cases. Previously, a person could avoid liability if they took reasonable steps to verify facts, aimed to protect public interest, made the statement with consent, responded proportionately, or reported fairly. These protections are being eliminated.

The timeframe for resolving defamation disputes is being shortened. The existing one-month period for potential settlement is reduced to ten days. Courts may also require defendants to pay material or non-material damages if a correction or denial is not deemed sufficient.

Finally, the 100-day limitation period for filing defamation lawsuits will continue to apply to statements made before the new law comes into effect, provided the limitation period has not yet expired.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

European Court of Human Rights Begins Review of Journalist Mzia Amaglobeli's Case



The European Court of Human Rights has officially begun reviewing the case of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, founder of Batumelebi. The announcement was made today by Nona Kurdovanidze, Chairperson of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) and Amaglobeli's legal representative.

At a press conference, Kurdovanidze stated that international legal mechanisms will be applied in all ongoing cases involving Amaglobeli if her rights are not upheld within Georgia's national system. She emphasized the significance of the case's progression.

"We would like to share important news received yesterday. The European Court of Human Rights has notified GYLA that it has begun consideration of Mzia Amaglobeli's case. The letter also notes that the case may be classified as high-profile due to its importance. It is worth noting that the Court moved forward with the case very quickly — just two months after we submitted it," said Kurdovanidze.

She explained that the Court will now examine the core issues raised in the complaint, which alleges violations of several key rights protected under the European Convention on Human Rights. These include the right to liberty and security, the right to a fair trial, and freedom of expression.

Communication between the Court and the Government of Georgia has already begun. "Georgia has been given time to respond to the questions posed by the Court at this stage. This is a crucial development," said Kurdovanidze.

She reiterated that Mzia Amaglobeli remains in detention, which her legal team considers unlawful. The case before the European Court primarily concerns these alleged violations.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER
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U.S. Senators Warn
Against Georgian
Dream’s Power
Consolidation and Back
MEGOBARI Act

government is aggressively moving toward power consolidation, silencing independent voices through anti-democratic actions, resembling Lukashenko’s regime in Belarus.” They added, “The scale of information demanded from civil society organizations is likely illegal, but

of Georgian citizens and sources from government overreach, we will use our voices and legislation to stand with them. In this regard, we support advancing the bipartisan ‘MEGOBARI Act’ as soon as the Senate schedule allows.”

influencing public perception. According to her, the current wave of arrests serves the exact purpose of instilling fear and submission.

Khoshtaria described the ruling party as losing legitimacy

victory, she argued it creates a real chance, which depends on how the opposition chooses to act.

She stressed that the majority of the population supports change, but that unity is critical. She called for unity around

COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

Ranking Member Shaheen, Senator Wicker Condemn Georgian Dream Government’s Anti-Democratic Actions against Georgian Civil Society

The Georgian Dream government is aggressively moving to consolidate power, according to a joint statement by U.S. Helsinki Commission Chair Senator Roger Wicker and Senator Jeanne Shaheen, a leading member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. They expressed strong support for advancing the bipartisan MEGOBARI Act as soon as the Senate schedule allows.

The senators emphasized that democratic governments should not see organizations as threats. They criticized Georgian Dream for intensifying repression of the political opposition this week by arresting and sentencing several pro-democracy leaders on politically motivated charges.

Senators Wicker and Shaheen stated, “The Georgian Dream

also so extensive that it will inevitably lead to noncompliance. The actions of Georgian Dream, which we understand to be directed by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, aim to paralyze the important work of groups such as the Open Society Foundation, the Economic Policy Research Center, Transparency International Georgia, Sapari, the Academy of the Future, the Media Development Foundation, and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy.”

The statement continued, “Simply put, democratic governments should not view organizations that support independent media, fight Kremlin propaganda, combat corruption, and empower women or youth as threats. Just as these groups protect the private information

Elene Khoshtaria Says Arrests Are Intended to Break the Public’s Spirit

Elene Khoshtaria, one of the leaders of the Coalition for Change, says that the recent arrests are intended to psychologically break the opposition and convince the public that resistance is futile. Khoshtaria emphasized the need for unity around a clear strategy that includes rejecting the legitimacy of local elections, calling for sanctions, and organizing a large rally to present the movement’s plan of action.

She stated that the primary weapon of modern autocracies is psychological pressure, while propaganda media play a key role in shaping false realities and



both domestically and internationally, noting that when a regime is not recognized, its existence becomes fragile. She added that internal divisions within the government reflect weakness, though not necessarily imminent defeat. At the same time, she believes Georgia has shown resilience with an unbroken civil society and political opposition. While this does not guarantee

a clear strategy that includes complete refusal to cooperate with the ruling party, rejection of the legitimacy of upcoming elections, public mobilization, international recognition of the opposition, and the imposition of sanctions.

Khoshtaria added that a large rally to announce the strategy and mobilize support is urgently needed.

EU Enlargement Commissioner: arrest of opposition voices is ‘an attack on Georgia’s democratic foundations’



“The arrest of opposition voices is an attack on Georgia’s democratic foundations,” EU Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos said on X on 24 June, reacting to the latest repression in Georgia.

This week, opposition leaders Badri Japaridze, and Manuka Khazaradze were jailed for eight months, while Zurab Japaridze and Giorgi Vashadze received seven months.

The opposition voices in Georgia “are being eroded by the day”, Marta Kos wrote on X.

“I stand with those fighting for a free and pluralistic Georgian society and call on the Georgian authorities to release all journalists, activists and those detained,” she said.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Friday, June 27

Day Clear
High: 31°C

Night Clear
Low: 17°C

Saturday, June 28

Day Clear
High: 31°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 19°C

published by

The Messenger

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The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Hungary H.E. Ms. Anna Maria Siko and Mr. Robert Christopher Summerfield held an informal friendly gathering – *Gulyas in the Garden* to say good-bye after four years in Georgia.
***The Messenger* wishes H.E. Ms. Anna Maria Siko and Mr. Robert Christopher Summerfield good health, prosperity and all the best in their careers.**





