

GYLA Condemns Amendments to Freedom of Expression Law as Repressive

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has strongly criticized the recent amendments to Georgia's "Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression," calling them repressive and a direct attack on democratic freedoms.

"GYLA notes that the amendments to the Freedom of Expression Act are yet another example of Georgian Dream's repressive policy, aimed at shrinking freedom of expression, political discourse, pluralism, media, and civil space," the organization stated in a public release.

The amendments, initiated by the ruling Georgian Dream party, were rapidly considered by Parliament on June 18 and adopted in the third reading on June 27, 2025. GYLA argues that the changes undermine key protections that safeguard freedom of expression in a democratic society.

"These changes remove significant guarantees of freedom of expression," GYLA said. "Most notably, they abolish the qualified privilege and shift the burden of proof in defamation cases from the plaintiff to the respondent. The wording is also changed to impose 'appropriate liability' for defamation in civil proceedings."

GYLA expressed particular concern about the elimination of qualified privilege, a legal protection that previously shielded individuals and journalists when they spoke on matters of public interest with due diligence and care.

"This change contradicts constitutional and international standards protecting freedom of expression," the statement explained. "Qualified privilege is essential to democratic pluralism — it shields participants in public discourse, particularly concerning public figures. Its removal undermines that foundational



democratic safeguard."

The association also warned about the shift in the burden of proof in defamation cases, stating that it would encourage abusive litigation aimed at silencing critics.

"Journalists must be free to verify their sources and publish responsibly. The prior law met these standards, but the new one severely lowers them in Georgia. This will exacerbate existing abusive SLAPP litigation, where courts often

impose burdensome standards on the defense, treat defamation claims with undue procedural speed, or accept them without thorough justification. The amendments institutionalize these problematic court practices," GYLA stated.

Another key concern involves vague terminology introduced into the law. The new version of Article 13 replaces "civil liability for defamation" with "appropriate liability for defamation," a phrase

GYLA describes as alarmingly undefined.

"Criminal defamation would be a grave incursion into freedom of expression. UN human rights experts consistently advise against criminalizing defamation. The European Court regards criminal penalties as disproportionate. This amendment paves the way for dangerous precedents and equips the ruling party with another tool to silence criticism," the statement read.

The association further criticized the weakening of protections for journalists' confidential sources and professional secrecy, noting the importance of these safeguards for investigative reporting.

"In democratic societies, exposing government or official wrongdoing — even when based on confidential or classified information — is crucial for public oversight. Weakening these standards leaves journalists vulnerable, particularly when reporting on corruption or misconduct, thus undermining transparency and accountability," GYLA said.

One of the most contentious elements of the amendments is their retroactive application. The law will apply to actions taken up to 100 days before its adoption.

"Legal certainty protects individuals' legitimate expectations and is essential to the rule of law. Applying criminal norms retroactively undermines this foundation," the association stated. "This change poses a chilling effect on expression, as people cannot reasonably anticipate what actions might become punishable or how their prior actions may be judged."

GYLA warned that the cumulative effect of the amendments represents a serious step backward for democratic governance in Georgia. The organization called on lawmakers, civil society, and international partners to resist efforts to erode fundamental freedoms.

UK Summons Georgian Diplomat Over Crackdown on Civil Society, Warns of Further Action

By Liza Mchedlidze

The United Kingdom has summoned Georgia's chargé d'affaires to express deep concern over what it describes as the Georgian Dream government's intensifying crackdown on civil society, media freedom, and political opposition. The British Foreign Office confirmed the meeting took place on June 30 and warned of further consequences if Georgia does not return to democratic norms.

George Saganelidze, currently serving as Georgia's chargé d'affaires in the UK, was called to the Foreign Office in response to recent political developments in Tbilisi. According to a statement from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, a senior British official "made clear

the UK's firm position on Georgia's increasingly harmful trajectory and strongly objected to false claims and public attacks launched by Georgian Dream against the UK and international partners."

"The imprisonment of prominent opposition leaders is the latest attempt by the Georgian government to crack down on freedoms and stifle dissent," said a Foreign Office spokesperson. "The detention of election rivals is incompatible with any remaining Euro-Atlantic aspirations held by Georgian Dream as well as their own constitutional commitments."

The spokesperson also issued a warning: "The British government will not hesitate to consider further action should



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7215; Euro - 3.2155; GBP - 3.7502; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.4658; Swiss Franc - 3.4519

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Georgia not return to respecting and upholding democracy, freedoms, and human rights.”

The Foreign Office’s response follows the sentencing of six opposition figures in Georgia, who were jailed for several months after refusing to appear before a parliamentary investigative commission. The opposition has long rejected the Georgian Dream-led parliament’s legitimacy.

Since December 2024, the UK has already imposed sanctions on several high-ranking Georgian officials. These include former Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri, senior judges implicated in corruption, and former Prosecutor General Giorgi Gabitashvili. The measures were introduced in response to violent protest crackdowns and allegations of serious institutional misconduct.

The diplomatic escalation follows a recent meeting between UK Ambassador Gareth Ward and Georgian Foreign Minister Maka Bochorishvili. According to Georgia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bochorishvili raised concerns about the UK’s recent actions, including the sanctions, which she claimed “cast a shadow over the strategic partnership and friendship” between the two countries.

Commenting on the latest developments, United National Movement Chair Tina Bokuchava said the UK’s summoning of the chargé d’affaires confirms that sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili and his allies are actively being considered.

“We had already been discussing the fact that the United Kingdom is actively considering the imposition of financial sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili, corrupt individuals, and propagandists — and now we can clearly see that this is the case,” Bokuchava said.

She emphasized that the UK’s recent actions suggest a clear readiness to target Ivanishvili personally, along with those in his inner circle.

“Just last week, when we were at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and had a bilateral meeting with the UK delegation, we discussed that the United Kingdom is actively considering imposing financial sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili and his entourage — including corrupt figures, propagandists, and in particular, the chief propagandist Irakli Rukhadze. Now, based on the facts, we can see this is indeed the case,” Bokuchava stated.

She said, “The UK has confirmed that it is considering all measures in response to the anti-democratic steps taken by the Ivanishvili regime. Of course, this clearly implies the enforcement of financial sanctions targeting Ivanishvili personally and those around him.”

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Papuashvili Dismisses Elene Khoshtaria’s Hunger Strike, Calls It ‘Unethical Blackmail’



Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Shalva Papuashvili has dismissed the recent hunger strike by opposition leader Elene Khoshtaria as ineffective and politically irrelevant. In remarks to journalists, Papuashvili claimed that the protest, which lasted two days, had no visible impact and did not resonate with the public or the opposition itself.

“I don’t think Elene Khoshtaria’s hunger strike changed anything,” Papuashvili said. “She didn’t show any physical signs of fasting, the country didn’t feel that she had

fasted, and neither did the opposition. They are exactly where they were three days ago.”

Elene Khoshtaria and Gedeon Popkhadze were launched in protest after eight opposition parties announced they would not participate in the

are eight of them who will not participate. They dissolved the coalition again just to inflate the numbers,” he said. “Sometimes they present themselves as a coalition, and when they need to make the number look bigger, they break it up and list them as separate parties. If eight don’t participate, twenty will. This has absolutely nothing to do with the elections. It’s their own decision whether or not to participate.”

He insisted that voters would still have a choice in the October elections: “The Georgian people will come out in October for the local elections, they will have a proper choice, and they will make that choice.”

Papuashvili also condemned the hunger strike on ethical grounds, framing it as a manipulative tactic. “Announcing a hunger strike and trying to coerce others by threatening your own life is unethical,” he said.

Parliament Fast-Tracks Bill Granting State Monopoly Over Narcotic Imports and Opioid Therapy

The Georgian Parliament is reviewing, under an accelerated procedure, a draft law that

would give the state exclusive control over the import and wholesale distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as the provision



of opioid substitution therapy. All three readings and the final adoption of the legislative package are scheduled for this week’s extraordinary sessions.

According to the proposal, only legal entities established or controlled by the state will be allowed to import narcotic and psychotropic substances. The Ministry of Health will have the authority to grant exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

Opioid substitution therapy would also become the sole responsibility of the state.

Wholesale pharmaceutical distributors currently handling substances under special control will be required to transfer their remaining stocks to a state-es-

ablished entity by March 1, 2026, in exchange for compensation.

The Ministry of Health and treatment providers must ensure that all ongoing opioid therapies continue without interruption by the same deadline.

Entities set up by the state to distribute controlled pharmaceuticals will be exempt from standard permitting requirements until January 1, 2029.

The bill was introduced by MPs from Georgian Dream and People’s Power.

Kaja Kallas meets Young European Ambassadors in Armenia

During her two-day visit to Armenia, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas met with Armenian youth, including 20 Young European Ambassadors (YEAs).

The exchange focused on EU-



Armenia relations and highlighted the key role of youth in shaping the future of the partnership.

Following the exchange, Kallas said: “Young Armenians have high hopes for the EU to stand

by them. I was glad to have an open exchange with them.”

The Young European Ambassadors (YEAs) initiative brings together socially engaged youth from the six Eastern Partner countries, the European Union and the United Kingdom to foster dialogue and to raise awareness about the EU and its cooperation with its Eastern partner countries.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Wednesday, July 2

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 27°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 15°C

Thursday, July 3

Day Showers
High: 20°C

Night Showers
Low: 14°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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