

## Kavelashvili Offers to Pardon Convicted Politicians Who Agree to Join

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

**M**ikheil Kavelashvili has announced that he is willing to pardon imprisoned opposition leaders if they apply for clemency and confirm their intention to participate in the October 4 local self-government elections. The offer was made in a Facebook post on July 5, just three months ahead of the elections in which mayors and municipal councils will be elected across 64 municipalities in Georgia.

Kavelashvili emphasized the importance of full participation by all political parties, noting that an inclusive and competitive election campaign would serve the interests of democracy. "It is important that all political parties registered in accordance with Georgian law and expressing a desire to participate be given the opportunity to do so fully," he wrote.

Addressing the issue of several opposition leaders currently serving prison sentences, Kavelashvili added: "Given these circumstances, I suggest that all relevant convicted politicians apply to me for pardon and confirm their desire to participate in the elections with the same application. In the event of such an application, I will immediately issue an act on pardoning the relevant convicts."

The statement comes amid heightened political tensions following the July 4 announcement



by the Lelo – Strong Georgia coalition that it will take part in the elections, a move that has caused internal party splits and criticism from other opposition groups. Responding to criticism of the

president's pardon offer, Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua questioned the logic of opposition leaders who dismiss the proposal as illegitimate. "If they reject Kavelashvili's statement on the basis of legitimacy, then excuse me, do they even know who calls the local elections? It's the President," Zarkua said.

He further argued that questioning the legitimacy of the president while accepting the legitimacy of the Central Election Commission and the elections it administers is contradictory. "They're confused. It's not just that they're lost in translation — the radicals are lost in their actions," he said.

The offer of pardons has been widely interpreted as a political maneuver aimed at drawing opposition parties into the electoral process, which many have pledged to boycott amid allegations of political repression and authoritarianism by the ruling Georgian Dream government.

Several leaders from the Lelo – Strong Georgia coalition remain imprisoned after refusing to comply with summonses from the Tsulukiani Commission, a controversial parliamentary body investigating alleged misconduct by former officials. Despite their incarceration, the coalition declared its intention to run in the October elections, framing participation as a form of resistance against the ruling party's hold on power.

## Lelo – Strong Georgia Confirms Participation in Local Elections Amid Internal Division and Opposition Backlash

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE



**T**he opposition coalition Lelo – Strong Georgia has officially announced its decision to take part in the October 4 local self-government elections. The announcement was made by the party's Secretary General Irakli Kupradze during a briefing held at the coalition's headquarters.

According to Kupradze, the coalition is entering the elections as part of broader fight against the "Russian regime" and the "de facto authorities" currently in power. He called on the public and the pro-Western opposition to join in "total resistance" against what he called dictatorship and repression.

"This is not just a local election. October 4 is a battle in de facto elections against a de facto government," Kupradze said. "We are ready for full engagement, for resistance, for repression and even for

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imprisonment. We propose coalition cooperation with the pro-Western opposition. This is not a time for retreat but for unity.”

The decision has triggered a wave of criticism and resignations from within the party and across the opposition spectrum.

Three senior members of Lelo – Strong Georgia : Saba Buadze, Dea Metreveli, and Ana Natsvlishvili have resigned from the party’s Political Council in protest. Buadze, who also led the party’s Tbilisi branch, and Metreveli, who served as Executive Secretary, announced their decisions, expressing concern that participating in the elections under current conditions contradicts the opposition’s earlier commitment to boycott. Natsvlishvili

stated that while she does not support the party’s choice, she rejects claims that any members were “bought.”

The backlash extended beyond the party itself. Chairwoman of United National Movement, Tina Bokuchava, issued a strongly worded statement accusing Lelo of betraying the opposition’s common struggle. She described the decision as Lelo’s “moral death” and predicted their “electoral death” in October.

“This is not a fight to save the country, but a deal with the regime for an honorable second place,” Bokuchava wrote. “I would not be surprised if Mikheil Kavelashvili personally pardons Lelo’s leaders, just to wrap them in the cloak of collusion.”

The party Freedom Square also criticized the decision, calling it a political

risk for the broader opposition. In a written statement, they reaffirmed their commitment to an active boycott and said they would focus on building an alternative democratic movement instead of turning the opposition into a battlefield.

Coalition for Change leader Elene Khoshtaria said a 4-percent party like Lelo does not determine Georgia’s fate,” she said. “Whether they are weak or traitors, let history judge that. Let us focus on our work.”

The internal dissent continued with detailed statements from departing members. Buadze emphasized his disagreement with the decision and described it as a serious mistake. Metreveli called the move inconsistent with the principled stance taken by imprisoned party leaders Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri

Japaridze. Natsvlishvili cited the opposition’s failure to form a unified strategy for the elections and warned that the absence of consensus weakened the pro-Western front.

Despite the criticism, Kupradze reiterated the coalition’s commitment to joining forces with other pro-European parties. He maintained that the elections represent a crucial front in the fight against the regime, not a routine political event.

The October 4 elections come amid a deepening political crisis and mounting allegations of authoritarianism against the ruling Georgian Dream party. The Strong Georgia coalition was formed prior to the contested 2024 parliamentary elections and had previously refused to take seats in the current parliament.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Zourabichvili Slams Kavelashvili’s Pardon Proposal



The 5th President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili has sharply criticized the Georgian Dream party’s offer to pardon

jailed opposition leaders in exchange for their participation in upcoming local elections, comparing the move to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s tactics.

Responding on social media to

you have — your dignity, reputation, and conscience — and I will set you free... into slavery!” Zurabichvili wrote.

She drew a direct comparison to Putin’s stance toward Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky: “This is the same logic Putin applies toward Zelensky: ‘Surrender,’ and at the same time, ‘I will take Crimea from you forever, also Donetsk and Luhansk — and know this: I haven’t changed my original military goal — your destruction!’”

Zourabichvili urged Georgian Dream to “step out of the Russian KGB-style scenarios” and try independent thinking. “It wouldn’t hurt to step out of the Russian KGB-style scenarios a bit, think for yourselves, and take the Georgian character into account,” she wrote. “You might even do something better for a change — but that requires the ability for free thinking and reasoning.”

### Opposition Criticizes Georgian Dream for Withholding Support from OSCE Resolution on Territorial Integrity

Paata Manjgaladze, a leader of the opposition party Strategy Aghmashenebeli, has sharply criticized the ruling Georgian Dream party for refusing to sup-



port a resolution by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly that reaffirmed support for Georgia’s territorial integrity.

The resolution, adopted at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, called on Syria to recognize the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) as integral parts of Georgia. It also emphasized the need for democracy and free elections within the country.

“This was yet another open and direct support for our country’s territorial integrity, but Georgian Dream did not support it. Why? Because the same resolution stated that democracy and free elections are necessary in Georgia,” Manjgaladze said.

He accused the ruling party

of prioritizing power over national interest. “This is how they traded the homeland for power and once again betrayed Georgia. Georgian Dream’s stance on the OSCE resolution shows what kind of patriots they are and how they actually understand patriotism.”

Manjgaladze also criticized what he called “lame and primitive” government propaganda, noting the contradiction in celebrating international support while failing to back a resolution that directly affirms Georgia’s sovereignty.

The government has not yet issued a detailed explanation for its decision to withhold support from the OSCE resolution.

## Weather

### Monday, July 7

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 30°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 20°C

### Tuesday, July 8

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 30°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 21°C

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