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# Review of Civil Space in Georgia

November 2024 – January 2025

Volume 5

ძლიერი სამოქალაქო საზოგადოება  
დემოკრატიის განვითარებისთვის საქართველოში

Strong and resilient civil society  
serving to democratic development in Georgia

# Review of Civil Space in Georgia

November 2024 – January 2025

Volume 5

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## Executive Summary

The political crisis in the country intensified during the reporting period. In response to the controversial parliamentary election results and the ruling party's decision to remove EU accession negotiations from the agenda, large-scale protests erupted nationwide. These demonstrations, which persisted throughout the reporting period and continue to this day, were met with excessive force by the state, often involving deliberate violence and reprisals.

It is noteworthy that citizens detained during protests speak of violence, verbal abuse, and in some cases threats of death and rape by the police.

Alongside the ongoing protests, the operational environment for the media has worsened, with instances of violence against independent journalists by law enforcement officers and informal groups. The arrest of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli in Batumi, who faces several years in prison for slapping a police officer, is also viewed as an attempt to suppress free media.

The legislative changes adopted by the ruling power alongside the protests have also had a significant impact. These amendments have further restricted freedom of assembly, peaceful protest, and expression, worsening the overall situation in the country.

It is also worth noting the amendments to the Civil Service Law, which simplified the reorganization procedure. Some civil servants and civil society organizations view this as another step toward political persecution.

In addition, the decision by the new US administration to temporarily suspend the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has negatively impacted the environment for civil society. This situation has further emphasized the need for civil society organizations to diversify their funding sources and explore new options.

Finally, during the reporting period, amid Western isolation and a crisis of legitimacy, the ruling power has increasingly sought to restrict the enabling environment for civil society. This has been manifested in the adoption of draconian laws and the use of force against peaceful demonstrators. It is expected that this trend will persist.

## Methodology

The "Civic Space Review" is a tool for ongoing monitoring and analysis of the current situation. It not only examines the de jure reality in the country but also focuses on current trends, official rhetoric, and anticipated future challenges. The review is prepared by the Civil Society Institute (CSI) with support from the German Foundation "Bread for the World" as part of the project "Strong and Resilient Civil Society Serving to Democratic Development in Georgia".

The reporting period of the review typically spans three months and analyzes the facts and trends that occurred during this time in the following main areas:

- Disrupting the work of civil space or individual actors within it and interfering with their activities;
- Hostile rhetoric and discredit campaigns;
- Financial stability and access to funding;
- Space for cooperation between the state and civil society organizations;
- Opportunities for advocacy and service delivery by civil society organizations.

In addition to the mentioned areas, the review may also address other relevant issues that do not fit into the predetermined themes at the time.

The review involves monitoring and in-depth qualitative analysis of each significant issue and event. As such, it possesses both a descriptive and explanatory character. When preparing the review, the subject of observation is the state of civil society.

This involves analyzing variables and indicators such as empirical practices established by the state that affect the living environment of civil society, legislative initiatives and other legal documents, the actions of central and local legislative and executive authorities, public statements and assessments by representatives of the ruling party(ies), and information disseminated in the media.

During the monitoring process, the project team also examines secondary sources, including studies, reports, and evaluations prepared by local and international organizations.

When collecting data, depending on the importance and sensitivity of a specific issue, additional research may be conducted using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with targeted samples and several focus groups.

The review is published in both Georgian and English to reach local and international audiences. It is distributed through all of the Civil Society Institute's communication channels, including CSOGorgia.org, and is accessible to all interested parties.

## One-party parliament

The outcomes of the October 26, 2024 parliamentary elections were not recognized by any of the major opposition groups or parties that participated. These groups contended that both the electoral manipulations on the day of the vote and the systemic violations observed in the lead-up to the elections—such as voter bribery, intimidation, potential tampering with citizens' personal data, and other similar incidents—undermined the legitimacy of the election results.

The legitimacy of the election results was not recognized by the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili. In addition to a significant portion of society, opposition parties, and the president rejecting the election results, the issue of legitimacy was also raised internationally. As a result, the ruling power received limited support from foreign countries following its electoral victory, primarily in the form of congratulations from the leaders of Georgia's neighboring countries and other states with strained relations with the European Union, such as Hungary.

After the Central Election Commission of Georgia officially approved the summary protocol of the parliamentary election results on November 16<sup>12</sup> President Salome Zourabichvili filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court, seeking the annulment of the election results. The President's lawsuit cited violations of the principles of secrecy, universal suffrage, and free participation.<sup>3</sup> The opposition also submitted a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court, demanding the annulment of the election results.

Constitutional lawsuits have challenged not only the election results but also the distribution of parliamentary mandates based on these results. Notably, according to Article 86 of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia,<sup>4</sup> an individual whose election as a member of Parliament has been legally contested in the Constitutional Court should not be included in the parliamentary resolution recognizing the powers of MPs. Nevertheless, on November 25, the Georgian Dream-led Parliament approved the mandates of all 150 members, including opposition MPs, despite the ongoing legal challenges. Nevertheless, on November 25, the Georgian Dream-led Parliament approved the mandates of all 150 members, including opposition MPs, despite the ongoing legal challenges<sup>5</sup>. The president, opposition parties, and a significant portion of civil society deemed the decision illegal. Subsequently, on December 3, the Constitutional Court ruled on the lawsuits filed by the president and opposition politicians, refusing to consider them on the merits.<sup>6</sup> This decision further fueled concerns among opposition groups regarding the court's impartiality.<sup>7</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that no foreign ambassadors attended the Georgian Dream parliament's session recognizing its credentials. Representatives of the Georgian opposition had urged diplomats to abstain from participating<sup>8</sup>, and later, Georgian Dream officials themselves announced that foreign diplomats would not be invited. The parliament's chairman, Shalva Papuashvili, justified this decision by citing "the unfortunate experience of the instrumentalization of foreign participation in Georgian politics".<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, 49 individuals requested the Georgian Dream parliament to terminate the Georgian Dream's mandate, including representatives from the Coalition for Change, United National Movement, and Strong Georgia. The aforementioned political groups and parties also appealed to the

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<sup>1</sup> Netgazeti. 2024. "CEC approves summary protocol of parliamentary elections". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/751871/>

<sup>2</sup> CEC. Summary protocol of the results of the October 26, 2024 elections to the Parliament of Georgia. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/document/view/6309474?publication=0>

<sup>3</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "The President has appealed to the Constitutional Court to annul the election results". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33207809.html>

<sup>4</sup> Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4401423?publication=64>

<sup>5</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "Parliament, despite constitutional lawsuits, recognized the authority of all 150 members". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/ui46m>

<sup>6</sup> Constitutional Court decision: Available in Georgian at the link: [https://www.constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17525&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMtAAAR0xE5jsUMZPwOYyqjHAqr6rzh69rL7JIBPKZHJNungUBKDAcEjTQYkd9LU0\\_aem\\_vr6yABhu4NDe0RmKmhV1Zg](https://www.constcourt.ge/ka/judicial-acts?legal=17525&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMtAAAR0xE5jsUMZPwOYyqjHAqr6rzh69rL7JIBPKZHJNungUBKDAcEjTQYkd9LU0_aem_vr6yABhu4NDe0RmKmhV1Zg)

<sup>7</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2024. „Constitutional Court Decision - Assessment Across the Political Spectrum“. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/video/sakonstitucio-sasamartlos-gadawyvetileba-shefaseba-politikur-speqtrshi/>

<sup>8</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "Gakharia calls on diplomats not to attend the first session of parliament and not to give it legitimacy." Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33210704.html>

<sup>9</sup> ImediNews. 2024 "Shalva Papuashvili on not inviting ambassadors: We have a sad experience of instrumentalizing foreign participation in Georgian politics. Our ambassadors are also not invited to the first sessions of parliaments in other countries". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/GM46L>

Central Election Commission of Georgia to annul the voter lists, which the commission approved.<sup>10</sup> The party of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, Gakharia for Georgia, has not submitted a request to revoke its mandate. Nevertheless, the party does not recognize the election results, considers the government illegitimate, and refrains from political participation.

Later, on December 13, the Georgian Dream, having been left without an opposition, reestablished the political group People's Power as an independent political entity, which, according to its members, will play the role of a "healthy opposition"<sup>11</sup>. People's Power has positioned itself as an independent political group in the past, but opposition parties and political analysts believe it is actually an extension of the Georgian Dream. It is worth noting that despite People's Power registering as an independent party for the 2024 elections,<sup>12</sup> its members were still on the Georgian Dream electoral list. Mikheil Kavelashvili, who was later nominated as the Georgian Dream's presidential candidate, was also a member of People's Power<sup>13</sup>.

## The issue of electoral legitimacy - OSCE/ODIHR conclusion on the elections

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights released its final report on the parliamentary elections in Georgia on December 20<sup>14</sup>.

According to the document, the election administration efficiently managed the technical aspects of the elections. The electoral registration process for political parties and candidates was generally inclusive, and candidates were generally able to campaign freely.

In addition, the report states that Election Day was generally procedurally well-organized and administered in an orderly manner but marked by a tense environment, with frequent compromises in vote secrecy and several procedural inconsistencies, as well as reports of intimidation and pressure on voters that negatively impacted public trust in the process.

The text says, ODIHR observers noted numerous indications of pressure on voters, reports of many voters feeling pressured, tracking by ruling party structures and affiliates, and overcrowding at many polling stations.

According to the report:

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<sup>10</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2024. „The CEC satisfied the request of three opposition unions and canceled the electoral lists submitted by them.“. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/cesko-m-sami-opoziciuri-gaertianebis-motkhovna-daakmayofila-da-mat-mier-wardgenili-saarchevno-siebi-gaaquma/>

<sup>11</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. “People’s Power” Stages Move into “Opposition “. Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/644591>

<sup>12</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "What does "People Power" show?" - The splinter of "Georgian Dream" has transformed into a party". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/r1vso>

<sup>13</sup> TV Formula. 2024. "Mikheil Kavelashvili will be the Georgian Dream's presidential candidate". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://formulanews.ge/News/120553>

<sup>14</sup> Georgia, Parliamentary elections, 26 October 2024: Final Report. 2024. Available at the link: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/584029>

- In numerous cases, 24 percent of observations, vote secrecy was potentially compromised due to the manner of ballot insertion into ballot boxes, inadequate polling station layouts, and marks visible on the back of ballots.
- Additionally, ruling party representatives frequently video-recorded the voting process, which may have had an intimidating effect on voters.
- The counting process revealed procedural omissions, including improper handling of unused ballots, failure to announce votes aloud, and inconsistencies in determining ballot validity.
- Handling of results protocols at District Election Commissions (DECs) was inconsistent.
- While preliminary results were promptly published online by the CEC, key data, such as voter turnout per polling station and the number of invalid votes, were not made available in a user-friendly format.

In addition, the report notes that "the handling of post-election day complaints by election commissions and courts undermined the right to due process, failed to provide an effective remedy, and did not comprehensively address widespread concerns about the integrity of election results. In addition to analyzing current processes, the report also includes recommendations."

The priority recommendations include:

- preventing voter intimidation, pressure on public employees, vote buying, and electoral violence;
- undertaking a comprehensive legislative review to align the legal framework with international standards;
- revising the appointment process for election commission members to prevent dominance by any single political party and fully ensure efficiency;
- developing clear regulations for political finance oversight; introducing measures to ensure the independence of the media regulatory body;
- introducing measures to ensure the independence of the media regulatory body;
- ensuring efficiency and transparency in election dispute resolution;
- allowing for citizen observers to operate without pressure or intimidation;
- and guaranteeing vote secrecy through procedural safeguards.

The publication of the final report elicited mixed reactions within the country. Representatives of the Georgian Dream argued that the conclusion reaffirmed their position that the elections were not rigged, contrary to claims made by opposition parties. In contrast, opposition representatives contended that the report highlighted clear violations that undermined the fairness and inclusivity of the electoral process.



## Two Presidents

The electoral college, which includes Georgian Dream parliamentarians, members of the highest representative bodies of the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and Adjara, and certain members of sakrebulo (municipal councils), elected Mikheil Kavelashvili, a former member of the "People's Power", as president on December 14.

It is noteworthy that the electoral college includes all members of parliament, with representatives from local self-government bodies potentially included through quotas. However, representatives from opposition parties chose not to participate in the procedure for electing Kavelashvili as president.

According to Salome Zourabichvili, the fifth President of Georgia, she remains the only legitimate institution in the country<sup>15</sup>. She claims that the results of the presidential elections are illegitimate, and as a result, the election of a new president did not take place in accordance with the constitution.

Although Salome Zourabichvili left the Orbeliani Palace, traditionally regarded as the residence of Georgian presidents, following Mikheil Kavelashvili's inauguration ceremony, she continued to receive support and legitimacy from both local and foreign politicians, as well as a significant portion of the population<sup>16,17</sup>.

Mikheil Kavelashvili received congratulations on his presidency from leaders such as Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev, Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.

As a result, a situation has emerged in the country where various groups within society recognize different figures as the legitimate president.

## Freezing of negotiations with the European Union and escalating protests

At the end of November 2024, alongside the non-recognition of the parliamentary election results by certain segments of society and opposition parties, the Prime Minister of Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, announced at a specially held briefing that the ruling party did not intend to put the issue of opening negotiations with the European Union on the agenda until the end of 2028. He further

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<sup>15</sup> Netgazeti. 2025. "I am the only legitimate president of Georgia — Salome Zourabichvili ". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/759093/>

<sup>16</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2024. "Badri Japaridze - The legitimate president is Salome Zourabichvili ...". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/badri-jafaridze-legitimuri-prezidenti-aris-salome-zurabishvili-da-legitimur-prezidentad-darcheba-akhal-saparlamento-archevnebamde/>

<sup>17</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "The legitimate president of Georgia is Salome Zourabichvili " - European politicians on the election of Kavelashvili". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33240019.html>

stated that Georgian Dream would also refuse any budget grants from the European Union that might be allocated to Georgia until the end of 2028<sup>18</sup>.

Kobakhidze's statement sparked large-scale, continuous protests across the country. The primary demands of the protesters included a return to the path of European integration and the holding of new parliamentary elections. Over time, the demands were expanded to include the release of those detained during the protests.

The day after the start of the protests, Mamuka Mdinardze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, declared that their decision had "disrupted the plans of the spying opposition," which, according to him, was set to incite unrest after the European Commission's refusal to begin negotiations on Georgia's EU accession on December 16<sup>19</sup>.

Shortly after the protests began, representatives of the Georgian Dream issued a new statement, declaring that they were ready to 'unhesitatingly' sign the necessary agreement to start negotiations for EU membership if the EU offered them such an agreement<sup>20</sup>. They stated that the Georgian Dream had not halted the process of European integration and that "the blackmailing" on this issue should have ended<sup>21</sup>.

Student organizations, activists, representatives from the private sector, educators, healthcare professionals, civil servants, and members of various professional and advocacy associations participated in the protests.

Representatives of law enforcement agencies have periodically employed methods and measures against protest participants that, according to human rights organizations, contravene legal standards and manifest as acts of excessive retaliation, violence, and retribution.

## State violence, attacks on the media, and informal groups

According to the Public Defender's Office of Georgia, between November 28 and December 10, 327 people who were detained and injured during the protests were visited. Of these, 225 reported ill-treatment, with 157 displaying visible injuries. This accounts for nearly half of the detainees, or 48.01 percent<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Public Broadcaster. Irakli Kobakhidze's statement on not putting negotiations with the European Union on the agenda. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/irakli-kobakhidze-2028-wlis-bolomde-ar-davayenebt-evrokavshirtan-molaparakebis-gakhsnis-sakitkhs-uars-vambobt-evrokavshiridan-grantze-ganvagrzdobt-svlas-evrokavshiriken-tumca-aravis-mivcemt-mu/>

<sup>19</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2025. Mamuka Mdinardze's statement. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/yg5iT>

<sup>20</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2024. statement of Mamuka Mdinardze. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/mamuka-mdinaradze-dadon-magidaze-dokumenti-romlitac-ikhsneba-molaparakeba-da-arc-ki-davfiqrdebit-imave-wams-movawert-khels/>

<sup>21</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2024. Statement of Irakli Kobakhidze. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/irakli-kobakhidze-molaparakebis-gakhsna-tu-undat-dadon-magidaze-dghesve-movawer-khels-chveni-mkhridan-otkhi-wlis-ganmavlobashi-es-sakitkhi-ar-dadgeba-radgan-aravis-davutovot-shantadjis-instrumen/>

<sup>22</sup> Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia. 2024. Public Defender's Briefing on Recent Developments. Available at the link: <https://ombudsman.ge/eng/akhali-ambebi/sakhalkho-damtsvelis-brifingi-mimdinare-movlenebtan-dakavshirebit>

Local media has reported accounts of individuals who endured both verbal and physical abuse from state officials during and after their arrests.<sup>23</sup>

According to the detainees, they were deliberately beaten, with several special forces or police officers involved at the same time. The beatings occurred on the street and in police cars. Some of the detainees reported that law enforcement officers threatened them with murder and rape.<sup>24</sup>

According to the assessment of some human rights organizations operating in the country, peaceful protesters are being illegally dispersed during the rallies, which they describe as "not a police measure, but, due to its scale, organized crime."

According to the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, "These actions are accompanied by widespread arbitrary arrests and targeted persecution. Numerous evidence and witness statements confirm that the special punitive units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs surround protesters, block their escape routes, and indiscriminately beat them, among whom, women, minors and persons with disabilities have been subjected to severe treatment and deliberate violence" <sup>25</sup>.

The attack on civilians was condemned by UN experts,<sup>26</sup> the OSCE Troika<sup>27</sup>, the Co-Rapporteurs for Georgia of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)<sup>28</sup> and other international bodies. The violence was also denounced by ambassadors from the US, the UK, the EU, and other Western countries.

In addition to direct physical violence by the state, the use of special means to disperse the protests is also problematic. According to human rights organizations, this action severely violated human rights and put the health and lives of demonstrators at significant risk<sup>29</sup>. According to organizations, state officials violently dispersed protesters using pepper spray, tear gas, and water cannons laced with chemicals—actions that, in some cases, amounted to torture<sup>30</sup>. The Public Defender's Office also

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<sup>23</sup> Radio Liberty. "How are those detained at the protest being abused". Available in Georgian at the link:

<https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/p/10403.html>

<sup>24</sup> Radio Liberty. "Rape threats for attending a protest - 26-year-old woman shares her experience". Available in Georgian at the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPTs2wP17Lg>

<sup>25</sup> GYLA. 2024. „The Current Developments in Georgia shall be assessed as the Crime Against Humanity“. Available at the link:

<https://gyla.ge/en/post/GYLA-Haague>

<sup>26</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2024. "Georgia: UN experts concerned by widespread human rights violations amid ongoing protests". Available at the link:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/georgia-un-experts-concerned-widespread-human-rights-violations-amid-ongoing>

<sup>27</sup> OSCE. 2024. "Statement by the OSCE Troika on the Situation in Georgia". Available at the link:

<https://www.osce.org/chairpersonship/583315>

<sup>28</sup> PACE. 2024. "PACE monitors express concern at the arrest of opposition leaders and police brutality against journalists and peaceful protesters in Georgia". Available at the link:

[https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9717/pace-rapporteurs-express-concern-about-arrest-of-opposition-leaders-and-police-brutality-against-journalists-and-peaceful-protesters?fbclid=IwY2xjawHF0mdleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHB0oF-KgXOhxP5E3qce\\_myFEAQKpQKHCJFLGmBnj6KkPjCm33eo-qUdhQ\\_aem\\_C6nq0CJW9d71Cw2zi5-Xsw](https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9717/pace-rapporteurs-express-concern-about-arrest-of-opposition-leaders-and-police-brutality-against-journalists-and-peaceful-protesters?fbclid=IwY2xjawHF0mdleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHB0oF-KgXOhxP5E3qce_myFEAQKpQKHCJFLGmBnj6KkPjCm33eo-qUdhQ_aem_C6nq0CJW9d71Cw2zi5-Xsw)

<sup>29</sup> SJC. 2024. "The use of special means by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to disperse protests resulted in gross violations of human rights and posed a threat to the health and lives of demonstrators." Available at the link: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/shs-is-mier-aktsiebis-dashlis-miznit-spetsialuri-sashualebebis-gamoqenebisas-ukheshad-dairghva-adamianis-uflebebi-da-safrtkhe-sheekmna-demonstrantebis-janmrteobas-da-sitsotskhles>

<sup>30</sup> GYLA. 2024. "Preliminary Findings on the Investigation of Torture and Ill-Treatment Against Protesters in Georgia from 28 November to 20 December 2024". Available at the link: <https://gyla.ge/en/post/tsameba-da-araadamianurimopkroba-saerto-gancxadeba>

highlights the use of special means by police forces, which were applied "indiscriminately against everyone." <sup>31</sup>

There have been instances where law enforcement agencies have attacked protesters in front of the media or citizens with cameras. One example is the case of Zviad Maisashvili, who was assaulted by several special forces officers on Rustaveli Avenue on November 30<sup>32</sup>. A citizen captured the violence on camera from the balcony of a nearby building.

Television cameras also captured the attack on journalist Guram Rogava, who sustained serious injuries, including fractures to his facial bones and neck vertebrae. Footage shows Rogava performing his journalistic duties when a special forces officer approaches him from behind and punches him in the head<sup>33</sup>. Despite the Special Investigation Service recognizing Guram Rogava as the victim, no arrests were made in connection with the incident during the reporting period.

Another important case took place on December 7, when journalists from the TV company "TV Pirveli," Maka Chikhladze and Giorgi Shetsiruli, were attacked. This case is considered "unique" because the perpetrators were not state law enforcement officers, but informal groups affiliated with the ruling power, who were wearing masks to conceal their identities<sup>34</sup>. Although the violence was documented and filmed by journalists and bystanders, no arrests have been made by the investigative agencies, which creates the impression that the attack was planned and/or coordinated in advance by the ruling power. According to human rights organizations, the scale of the deliberate attacks on journalists suggests that the intent was not only to obstruct their work but also to prevent coverage of the illegal and violent dispersal of the rally by the punitive squads<sup>35</sup>.

It is noteworthy that a formal investigation is underway into the crimes committed by representatives of law enforcement agencies. However, the victims themselves point to the cursory nature of these investigations.

Finally, it is worth noting that attacks on demonstrators and journalists during the protests were continuous and not isolated incidents. Observing these attacks suggests that they were premeditated and coordinated, aiming to exert demonstrative violence and retaliation.

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<sup>31</sup> Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia. 2024. "Public Defender's Statement on Dispersal of November 29-30 Protest". Available at the link: <https://ombudsman.ge/eng/akhali-ambebi/sakhalkho-damtsvelis-brifingi-mimdinare-movlenebtan-dakavshirebit>

<sup>32</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "'I am a survivor' - a young man whose beating footage drew more people to the rally." Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33225295.html>

<sup>33</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "18 days have passed, no one has been questioned yet" - Guram Rogava was recognized as a victim". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33241948.html>

<sup>34</sup> Netgazeti. 2024. "TV Pirveli journalists were attacked by 'titushki'". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://netgazeti.ge/life/755341/>

<sup>35</sup> GYLA. 2024. „The Current Developments in Georgia shall be assessed as the Crime Against Humanity“. Available at the link: <https://gyla.ge/post/GYLA-Hague>

## Restrictions on freedom of assembly and demonstration

In the aftermath of the protests, in December, the Georgian Dream swiftly pushed through amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Manifestations and the Code of Administrative Offenses. Notably, the purpose of these amendments was to put an end to the ongoing protests in the country.

More specifically, the amendments adopted by the Georgian Dream parliament in December prohibited participants in gatherings or demonstrations from:

- Possessing any means of laser or strong lighting that could interfere with the activities of state agency representatives or the proper functioning of their technical equipment;
- Possessing and using pyrotechnics;
- Covering their face with a mask or any other means.

The Georgian Young Lawyers Association has described the ban on wearing masks as "another step against human rights," arguing that the initiative is designed to facilitate the use of repressive measures against peaceful protesters. Notably, under the amendments to the law, attending a rally with pyrotechnics, laser devices, or masks will be considered a violation, carrying a fine of 2,000 GEL.

Administrative fines for violations related to protests have been increased, including:

- Increase the fine for obstructing traffic from 1,000 GEL to 2,000 GEL, along with a one-year suspension of driving privileges;
- Raise the fine for damaging the appearance of the city from 50 GEL to 1,000 GEL, and to 2,000 GEL in cases of repeat violations;
- Increase the fine for violating regulations on assemblies and demonstrations—for instance, if police determine that an insufficient number of participants is present but the road is still blocked—from 500 GEL to 5,000 GEL, and impose a fine of 15,000 GEL or administrative detention for the organizers;
- Introduce a 2,000 GEL fine and confiscation of uniform elements for the unlawful wearing of law enforcement attire.

In addition, under the amendments, a fine ranging from 100 to 300 GEL may be imposed on a parent or other legal representative of a minor who, in the opinion of the police, has "failed to ensure the minor complies with a lawful order issued by a law enforcement officer".

The amendments also broaden the grounds for detention and the seizure of items or documents. In practice, this may lead to instances of "preventive detention," whereby a police officer detains an individual based on an assumption—often grounded in prior incidents—that the person may commit another administrative offense. The amended provisions also allow for detention solely for the purpose of ensuring a person's appearance in court, even if the individual has not refused to appear voluntarily.

Additionally, the amendments introduce the possibility of “body check,” (in Georgian "პირობის გსობიჯვის" a type of physical examination or bodily check of an individual) a term that, according to some legal professionals, lacks a clear legal definition. They argue that it remains unclear what specific procedures or actions are implied by this provision<sup>36</sup>.

The decision of the ruling power to tighten protest-related legislation significantly restricts the rights to freedom of assembly, manifestation, and expression. The proposed amendments also open the door to politically motivated persecution of citizens, particularly through the use of so-called "preventive detention."

*Notably, at the end of January 2025, \*Georgian Dream\* initiated a new package of legislative amendments aimed at further restricting freedom of assembly and expression. These changes introduce additional limitations and increase penalties. For example, verbal or other forms of insult directed at a political official or public servant, during or in connection with the performance of their official duties, will now be classified as an administrative offense. This offense will be punishable by a fine, and in the case of a repeated violation, by administrative detention for up to 60 days. Moreover, the amendments extend the maximum term of administrative detention for various offenses—including those related to assemblies—from the current 15 days to 60 days.*

## Law on Civil Service and Political "Purge"

Amid the ongoing protests—some of which also included participation from civil servants—Georgian Dream Executive Secretary Mamuka Mdinardze announced on December 9 that the Law on Public Service would be amended to simplify the procedures for public sector reorganization. According to Mdinardze, this initiative is intended to facilitate the “improvement” of the public sector<sup>37</sup>. Previously, Irakli Kobakhidze also discussed "self-cleansing" within the public service, stating that they were monitoring everyone's actions and would respond to them accordingly.<sup>38</sup>

Mdinardze’s statement followed joint statements from public sector representatives, in which public officials from both central and local levels expressed their support for the country’s Western orientation.

Finally, the Georgian Dream party approved amendments to the Civil Service Law in an expedited manner.<sup>39</sup> According to these amendments:

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<sup>36</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. ""Legalization of disorder" - Police granted the right to preventive detention". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33240616.html>

<sup>37</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. "GD Ostensibly Moves to Simplify Firing Civil Servants". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/643177>

<sup>38</sup> Interpressnews. 2024. "Irakli Kobakhidze - The self-cleaning process in the public service was very interesting - we were monitoring everyone's actions and we will react, which I say with full responsibility!". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/823115-irakli-kobaxize-sajaro-samsaxurshi-tvitcmendis-procesi-zalian-sainteresod-carimarta-qvelas-mokmedebas-vakvirdebidit-da-reagireba-gvekneba-rasac-mteli-pasuxismgeblobit-vambob/>

<sup>39</sup> Parliament of Georgia. 2024. The Draft Law on Public Service adopted for the III reading“. Available at the link: <https://www.parliament.ge/en/media/news/parlamentma-sajaro-samsaxuris-shesakheb-kanonshi-tsvlileba-mesame-mosmenit-miigho-1>

- The heads of primary structural units within public institutions, along with their deputies—those holding middle-level managerial positions—will no longer be classified as civil servants. Instead, they will be employed under administrative contracts. The dismissal or replacement of the head of the institution will also lead to the dismissal of these individuals. Furthermore, the administrative contract may be terminated at the initiative of the institution's head without the need for justification. In such cases, prior notice is required, and the individual will be entitled to one month's official salary as compensation.
- The head of a public institution, such as a minister, may appoint an individual from within the institution or someone already employed under an administrative contract to serve as the chairman of the competition commission. Eligible individuals for this role include the head of the primary structural unit, their deputy, or a civil servant holding a second-rank position within the same institution.
- Additionally, civil servants in every hierarchical position will undergo evaluations every 6 months, instead of once a year. Furthermore, the head of the public institution, if not directly involved in the evaluation process, is granted the authority to change the results of a civil servant's evaluation within one month of its completion.
- If a civil servant receives an unsatisfactory evaluation, 20% of their official salary will be withheld until the next evaluation period.
- The rules on mobility and enlistment in the civil service reserve no longer apply in cases of reorganization. According to the amendment, during a reorganization, civil servants will not be encouraged to move within the organization. They will not be transferred to an equal or lower position, and those dismissed due to reorganization will no longer be eligible for enlistment in the civil service reserve. This means that an official dismissed on the grounds of reorganization will be unable to utilize the mobility mechanism and will no longer be considered for participation in closed or internal competitions within the public service.
- If an employee is dismissed due to reorganization, they will not be entitled to compensation. However, the employee must be notified of the dismissal at least 1 month in advance. If the notice is not provided within this timeframe, the employee will be entitled to compensation equivalent to 1 month's salary.
- If a civil servant is dismissed from service due to reorganization, appealing the decision will not suspend the validity of the dismissal. Furthermore, if the dismissal is later found to be unlawful, He/She will not be reinstated. Instead, they will receive severance pay and compensation amounting to three months of their official salary.
- During the transitional period, the provisions related to reorganization will also apply to LEPLs. Additionally, the provisions outlined in this law will apply to the heads of primary structural units of LEPLs and their deputies, treating them as individuals employed under an administrative contract and regulating the relations with them accordingly.

Human rights groups argue that, following these changes, public officials no longer enjoy the same level of protection, thereby increasing the risks of undue influence being exerted over them<sup>40</sup>.

The Public Defender also criticized the amendments to the Law on Civil Service. According to him, individuals dismissed from the civil service due to reorganization will no longer have the right to request reinstatement, which "places them at a disadvantage compared to civil servants dismissed for other reasons." The amendments streamline the "reorganization" process by shortening deadlines and eliminating most of the compensation mechanisms<sup>41</sup>.

It is significant that the rhetoric from representatives of the ruling power, referring to a "cleansing" of the public service, alongside the expedited amendments to the law, suggest an intention to remove individuals with differing political views from their positions. This has been used as a mechanism for controlling and punishing such individuals. Notably, during the reporting period, several dozen cases have already been reported in which former public servants allege that their dismissals were politically motivated.<sup>42,43</sup> Civil society organizations have also created a hotline to provide legal support to dismissed civil servants<sup>44</sup>.

In summary, the changes undermine the institution of professional civil service and pave the way for increased political influence over it, namely:

- Some managerial positions of professional civil servants are no longer classified as civil service roles, thus diminishing the legal protections that shield them from political influence. Furthermore, with the implementation of this change, individuals currently occupying these positions were automatically reclassified as being employed under administrative contracts, making them subject to dismissal at any time without specific justification.
- The terms for periodic evaluation of civil servants have been altered, and the head of a public institution is now authorized to change the results of an official's evaluation and withhold their official remuneration. This could serve as a tool to exert illegitimate influence over the civil servant.
- The rules for dismissing civil servants during reorganization were simplified, and at this time, civil servants cannot use the mobility mechanism, which has worsened the legal status and guarantees of protection of civil servants.

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<sup>40</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024 "Finally, what has changed in the Law on Public Service? - Lawyer's Analysis". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33240679.html>

<sup>41</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. „Public Defender Says Rump GD Parliament Legislates without Consultation, Limits Human Rights“. Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/644658>

<sup>42</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "A compliant public sector? - Dismissal in one sentence". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/HHaDB>

<sup>43</sup> Radio Liberty. 2024. "It'll probably be your turn tomorrow" - Civil servants say they are being fired for political reasons". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/s439r>

<sup>44</sup> TI Georgia. Hotline. Available in Georgian at the link: [https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=994245849411849&set=a.622651453237959&type=3&ref=embed\\_post](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=994245849411849&set=a.622651453237959&type=3&ref=embed_post)



## Western Sanctions

Alongside the outbreak of protests in the country and the ruling power's use of disproportionate force against demonstrators, scrutiny from Western states has also intensified. This has primarily manifested through visa and financial restrictions imposed on senior officials of the Georgian Dream government.

The Baltic states were the first to impose such sanctions on representatives of the Georgian Dream government. On December 2, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia imposed visa restrictions on Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili and senior Interior Ministry officials, including Vakhtang Gomelauri, Vazha Siradze, and Zviad Kharazishvili.<sup>45</sup> Later, all three countries expanded the list of sanctioned individuals to include politicians and judges. The Czech Republic also imposed visa sanctions on Kharazishvili and Siradze<sup>46</sup>.

Germany has also imposed visa restrictions on nine Georgian citizens. According to the country's Foreign Ministry, these individuals are "responsible for violence against protesters and opposition figures in Georgia"<sup>47</sup>.

Ukraine also imposed sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili and 18 other individuals<sup>48</sup>.

Of particular significance were the sanctions imposed on Bidzina Ivanishvili by the United States. Washington made this decision on December 27. According to Matthew Miller, a spokesman for the US State Department, the sanctions were imposed because Ivanishvili's "actions have contributed to human rights violations and undermined the democratic and European future of the Georgian people for the benefit of the Russian Federation."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken remarked that Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream have undermined democratic institutions, contributed to human rights abuses, and restricted fundamental freedoms in Georgia. Additionally, he noted that Ivanishvili's actions have diverted Georgia from its Euro-Atlantic future, leaving the country vulnerable to Russia, which continues to occupy more than 20 percent of Georgia's territory<sup>49</sup>.

According to the US Treasury Department document, all of Ivanishvili's assets located in the US, or owned or controlled by Americans, will be frozen. Transactions by companies owned by Ivanishvili or his partners are permitted, except where other provisions of the sanctions apply. It is also noteworthy that the sanctions regime extends to transactions related to the 2024 Singapore Court of Appeals case<sup>50</sup>.

During the reporting period, the Georgian office of Radio Liberty, citing its own sources, reported that a letter was sent from Congress to Marco Rubio, who was set to become US Secretary of State, detailing the Georgian Dream's "authoritarian rule, election fraud," and Georgia's "tilt towards the axis of

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<sup>45</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia Sanction Ivanishvili, MIA Officials". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/640599>

<sup>46</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. "Czechia Sanctions Three MIA Officials". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/657459>

<sup>47</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. "Germany Imposes Ban on Nine Georgian Nationals". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/649476>

<sup>48</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. "Ukraine Sanctions Ivanishvili and His Associates". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/641724>

<sup>49</sup> Civil.ge. 2024. "BREAKING: U.S. Sanctions Bidzina Ivanishvili". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/648614>

<sup>50</sup> On July 11, 2024, the Singapore Court of Appeal ruled that Ivanishvili was entitled to compensation in a dispute with the Swiss bank Credit Suisse. Ivanishvili accuses the bank of embezzling his personal funds.

aggression of China, Russia, and Iran.” According to Radio Liberty, the letter also names 25 individuals from Bidzina Ivanishvili’s “network of enablers,” including members of his family, Georgian Dream members, state officials, businessmen, and judges<sup>51</sup>.

It is important that in January, a motion was submitted to the UK Parliament demanding the sanctioning of Bidzina Ivanishvili, and more than 25 parliamentarians joined the motion during the reporting period<sup>52</sup>. The authors of the motion condemn Ivanishvili's role in undermining democracy and promoting Russian influence in Georgia. They also urge the UK government to take actions similar to those of the US government in order to demonstrate a strong stance against the democratic backsliding in Georgia.

In response, the Georgian Dream issued a statement asserting that if the United Kingdom were to impose sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, it would clearly demonstrate that the “Deep State” has reduced the United Kingdom to the level of Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, and the European Parliament. According to the Georgian Dream, the imposition of sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili should be regarded as an exceptionally tragic event, given the historical background of the British state<sup>53</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that members of the Georgian Dream view the sanctions imposed by Western states not as restrictions, but as rewards. Irakli Kobakhidze, for instance, referred to the US sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili as a reward, claiming it was given to him "for saving Georgia (from war)<sup>54</sup>".

At the end of January, Mikheil Kavelashvili awarded high-ranking police officials, including those sanctioned by various states, with orders of honor for their "special contribution to strengthening law and order<sup>55</sup>". Among the recipients were Georgian Dream’s Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri, and his deputies, as well as the Director of the Patrol Police Department, Vazha Siradze, and the Director of the Special Tasks Department, Zviad Kharazishvili.

## The case of Mzia Amaglobeli

Mzia Amaglobeli, the editor of local media outlets "Batumelebi" and "Netgazeti," was arrested in Batumi on the morning of January 12, charged with assaulting a police officer<sup>56</sup>. The reason for the arrest was

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<sup>51</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "Ivanishvili's entourage, Turnava, "Rizha", other businessmen - whose list was sent to Marco Rubio, the future US Secretary of State". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/1cMIH>

<sup>52</sup> UK parliament. 2025. "Possible sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili". Available at the link: <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62974/possible-sanctions-on-bidzina-ivanishvili#tab-supporters>

<sup>53</sup> Statement of the Political Council of the Georgian Dream. 2025. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.facebook.com/GeorgianDreamOfficial/posts/pfbid0217HN6oZUV6B52x7xvGKmZ7nyip1Wq8WMrsSpN6ZNMW3Nza37nNXpiRXMVm7L6LBDI>

<sup>54</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2024. "Irakli Kobakhidze - Today's decision is a reward for Bidzina Ivanishvili and Georgia for saving this country". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/irakli-kobakhidze-dghevandeli-gadawyvetileba-aris-bidzina-ivanishvilis-da-saqartvelos-jildo-am-qveynis-gadarchenistvis/>

<sup>55</sup> Tabula. 2025. "Kavelashvili awarded Gomelauri and other police chiefs with the Order of Honor". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://tabula.ge/news/729304-qavelashvilma-gomelauri-politsiis-skhva>

<sup>56</sup> Interpressnews. 2024. "Mzia Amaglobeli, the director of Batumelebi, who was recently released on bail, has been arrested again". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/827317-batumelebis-direktori-mzia-amaglobeli-romelic-cotaxnis-cin-xelcerilit-gaatavisuples-isev-daakaves/>

the slapping of the Batumi Police Chief, Irakli Dgebuadze.<sup>57</sup> A few hours before the incident, Amaglobeli had been detained for posting a protest poster on a building.

The charges brought against the journalist carry a potential penalty of 4 to 7 years in prison.

A few days after the arrest, on January 14, the court ordered Amaglobeli's pretrial detention. Subsequently, on January 21, the Court of Appeals rejected the defense's motion to modify the detention measure.

According to the Young Lawyers Association, which is representing Mzia Amaglobeli in court, following her arrest, Batumi Police Chief Irakli Dgebuadze made multiple attempts to physically restrain him. The organization also reports that while Amaglobeli was held at the police station, Dgebuadze spat in her face. Additionally, Amaglobeli was reportedly denied access to drinking water and the toilet for a certain period.<sup>58</sup>

Human rights groups and legal experts have described the charges against Amaglobeli as problematic. They argue that slapping a police officer cannot be qualified as an assault, given that the act caused no real harm and was instead a symbolic response to the officer's prior abusive conduct toward Mzia Amaglobeli and other citizens. According to them, the journalist's actions do not amount to a criminal offense warranting four to seven years of imprisonment<sup>59</sup>. They believe that, based on the nature of the act, the case should have been pursued under Article 173 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which concerns insulting actions against a police officer and is punishable by a fine of 2,000–3,000 GEL or administrative detention of up to 15 days.

Amid the allegations of possible degrading treatment, Tbilisi Mayor and Georgian Dream party leader Kakha Kaladze expressed support for Irakli Dgebuadze. The Special Investigation Service publicly disclosed the launch of an investigation into the possible violation of the law only on January 19, stating that the probe had officially begun on January 13.<sup>60</sup> However, it is worth noting that the media outlet Netgazeti had sought clarification from the agency on this issue earlier, but received no response at the time.<sup>61</sup>

Local and international journalistic organizations—including IMS, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the Media Development Investment Fund, the International Press Institute (IPI), the European Center for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics,

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<sup>57</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "Batumelei founder Mzia Amaglobeli arrested on charges of assaulting a police officer". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33272790.html>

<sup>58</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "After the arrest, Batumi Police Chief Irakli Dgebuadze spat in Mzia Amaglobeli's face - GYLA". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33277031.html>

<sup>59</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "The main problem is the charges against Mzia Amaglobeli - lawyer criticizes the Ombudsman". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33280251.html>

<sup>60</sup> Public Broadcaster. 2025. "An investigation is underway at the Adjara Division of the Special Investigation Service into possible facts of abuse of authority." Available in Georgian at the link: <https://1tv.ge/news/samsakhurebrivi-uflebamosilebis-dzaladobit-gadametebis-shesadzlo-faqtebze-specialuri-sagamodziebo-samsakhuris-acharis-sammartveloshi-gamodzieba-mimdinareobs/>

<sup>61</sup> Netgazeti. 2025. "The investigation does not say whether they have launched an investigation into the mistreatment of Mzia Amaglobeli". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/760404/>

among others—protested Amaglobeli’s detention and called for her release. The embassies of the European Union and the United States in Georgia also issued statements in response to the detention.

On January 20, Mzia Amaglobeli began a hunger strike, which ended 38 days later following appeals from her family, colleagues, and members of the public. Notably, according to the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, prior to ending the hunger strike, Amaglobeli—who had been transferred from prison to a clinic due to her worsening health—was served food in her hospital ward. The organization considers this act a form of psychological pressure.<sup>62</sup>

Civil society organizations focused on press freedom and human rights have assessed that Mzia Amaglobeli’s arrest represents an act of political revenge by the ruling party and is intended to suppress independent media. According to them, the authorities are targeting Amaglobeli in retaliation for her past activities and critical stance.

Amaglobeli’s arrest and the developments that followed serve as a clear indication of the worsening media environment in the country and represent a serious threat to press freedom.

## Retaliation against political opponents

During the reporting period, incidents of physical attacks against political opponents and civil society representatives were documented.

On January 14, former Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, was physically assaulted at the Sheraton Hotel in Batumi. Prior to that, journalist and regional office manager of Transparency International Georgia, Zviad Koridze, was also attacked at the same location.

Koridze and Gakharia were both in Batumi—though separately—due to the arrest of Mzia Amaglobeli, founder and director of the media outlets Netgazeti and Batumelebi. According to Zviad Koridze, he was physically and verbally assaulted in the hotel lobby by Georgian Dream representatives Dimitri Samkharadze, Giorgi Manvelidze, and others. Koridze also stated that both he and Gakharia were subjected to the same group’s abuse.

According to the treating doctor, Giorgi Gakharia sustained serious injuries, including a concussion, as a result of the attack.<sup>63</sup> The former prime minister’s party has stated that the assault was "orchestrated by the Ivanishvili regime".<sup>64</sup>

Following the incident, Georgian Dream supporter Imedi TV released a video showing a confrontation between Giorgi Gakharia and MP Dimitri Samkharadze at the hotel entrance.<sup>65</sup> However, according to

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<sup>62</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "The lawyer found food brought to Mzia in the chamber, this is a form of psychological pressure - Kurdovanidze". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33304631.html>

<sup>63</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "According to the doctor, Giorgi Gakharia has a concussion and a fractured nasal bone." Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33276171.html>

<sup>64</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "Violent attack orchestrated by Ivanishvili - Gakharia's party". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://shorturl.at/Kg4FW>

<sup>65</sup> Footage released by Imedi TV: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1YAvEJQnRN/>

his party representatives, Gakharia was attacked not outside near the entrance, but directly in the hotel lobby. The party requested the hotel to provide the full video recording of the incident, but the hotel did not comply. In response, the hotel stated its willingness to provide the video evidence to the relevant investigative agencies<sup>66</sup>. Gakharia's team has stated that they have not yet been given access to the video evidence.<sup>67</sup>.

After the incident, one of the leaders of Georgian Dream, Mamuka Mdinardze, placed the blame on Gakharia, claiming that Samkharadze had been "defending himself." Mdinardze also suggested that if Gakharia's actions were politically motivated, it would constitute a "gravest crime," one that would carry criminal liability<sup>68</sup>.

Although Gakharia and Koridze were recognized as victims in the incident, no arrests were made during the reporting period in connection with the investigation.

## Suspension of USAID programs

The decision made by the new US administration in January to suspend foreign aid for at least 90 days had a significant impact on civil society organizations operating in Georgia, many of which relied on financial support from USAID to carry out their activities.

This change has created challenges for organizations, both financially and in terms of their sectoral activities. For years, USAID has been a key supporter of civil society organizations in Georgia, collaborating with them in areas such as environmental protection, the rule of law, strengthening local self-government, human rights, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups, among others. If USAID programs are terminated, organizations will continue to work in these areas, but their capacity and impact will be diminished due to limited resources.

The suspension of USAID programs and projects has also introduced additional challenges for organizations, including difficulties in staff retention. This has negatively affected organizations that have been working closely with USAID.

If existing projects are not resumed by the predetermined deadline, organizations that previously collaborated with USAID will be forced to scale back their activities or seek new partners and donors.

On the other hand, the potential long-term suspension of USAID programs has once again underscored the necessity for civil society organizations to explore alternative funding sources.

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<sup>66</sup> Tabula. 2025. "A Sheraton representative said they have full video footage of the attack". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/728479-sheratonis-carmomadgenlis-tkmit-tvdaskhmis>

<sup>67</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. "The recognition of Gakharia as a victim turned out to be fictitious, they are not providing us with evidence". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33290683.html>

<sup>68</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. Mdinardze's statement on the attack on Gakharia. Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33276861.html>

*\*Given that the reporting period is not long enough to fully assess the event's impact, the team working on the document will continue fieldwork over the coming months.*

## Case of Afgan Sadigov

Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov remains in a Georgian prison. He was arrested by Georgian authorities on August 3 and was promptly placed in extradition detention.

On November 28, the Tbilisi City Court approved Sadigov's extradition to Azerbaijan. However, on January 14, the Strasbourg Court issued a ruling prohibiting Georgia from extraditing Afgan Sadigov to Azerbaijan<sup>69</sup>.

The following day, on January 15, Judge Davit Akhalbedashvili of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal dismissed Afgan Sadigov's appeal against Georgia's refusal to grant him refugee or humanitarian status. The court was the final instance capable of protecting the rights of the journalist and editor and halting his extradition. This marked the conclusion of the consideration of Afgan Sadigov's case by the national courts of Georgia.

Finally, on January 31, the court decided to extend the extradition detention for another three months<sup>70</sup>.

It is noteworthy that Afgan Sadigov has been on a hunger strike in prison since September 12<sup>71</sup>. According to the Center for Social Justice, his condition is critical<sup>72</sup>. In the case filed in Azerbaijan, Sadigov is accused of threatening to spread defamatory information about individuals in order to extort a large amount of property.

Local human rights activists consider Afgan Sadigov a refugee due to his journalistic work, and they view the charges brought against him as politically motivated. As Sadigov stated in a conversation with the media before his arrest, he did not feel safe in Georgia and wanted to leave the country. However, on July 18, he was not allowed to cross the border and could only fly to Azerbaijan. According to Radio Liberty, Sadigov's wife fears that he could die in Baku. If extradited, Sadigov would become the second journalist in recent years to be sent from Georgia to Azerbaijan. Afgan Mukhtarli, who disappeared from Tbilisi in 2017, was later imprisoned in Azerbaijan on charges of illegally crossing the border and smuggling currency. He was sentenced to six years in prison but was unexpectedly released in 2020.

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<sup>69</sup> Civil.ge. 2025. "ECtHR Rules an Interim Measure Preventing Extradition of Afgan Sadygov to Azerbaijan". Available at the link: <https://civil.ge/archives/652461>

<sup>70</sup> Interpressnews. 2025. "The extradition detention of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov has been extended for an additional 3 months, until May 3". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/829080-azerbajaneli-zhurnalists-apgan-sadigovs-saekstradicio-patimroba-damatebit-3-tvit-3-maisamde-gagrzelda/>

<sup>71</sup> The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg suspended the extradition of Afgan Sadigov on February 28, as a result of which the journalist ended his hunger strike.

<sup>72</sup> Radio Liberty. 2025. „Afgan Sadigov's condition is extremely critical - "Center for Social Justice". Available in Georgian at the link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33309798.html>

Mukhtarli claimed he was abducted from Tbilisi by Georgian authorities and handed over to the Azerbaijani state.

The possible extradition of Sadigov, alongside the enactment of the “Russian law” in Georgia, serves as a significant warning for foreign human rights defenders, civil activists, journalists, and representatives of civil society organizations in the country. These individuals, who are persecuted in their home countries and conduct their activities from Georgia, may view such developments as a threat. The occurrence and frequency of such cases could push these groups or individuals to leave Georgia, seeing it as a country that no longer offers protection.