



GEORGIA ALERT

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JOINT WEEKLY NEWSLETTER BY POLITICAL PARTIES DROA, STRATEGY AGHMASHENEBELI, UNITED NATIONAL MOVEMENT, LELO – FOR GEORGIA, GIRCHI – MORE FREEDOM, AND CIVIL MOVEMENT DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS.

HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK:

A new phase in the Georgian Dream’s war against liberalism

The July 5, 2021 violence against the media representatives as well as the LGBTQ+ community, the inaction of the law enforcement agencies, the death of TV Pirveli operator Lekso Lashkarava, and the callousness of the Georgian Dream government shook Georgia’s strategic partners and international organizations. 6 people associated with the pro-Russian violent mob “Alt-Info” were [sentenced](#) to 5 years each for violence and organizing the violence. On January 16, however, the Tbilisi Court of Appeals [declared](#) them innocent of organizing the violence aspect, shortening their sentences to 4 years each. Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA) [stated](#) that this decision deepens the pervasive impunity of the hate groups that organized the July 5, 2021 events, and the responsibility for the impunity lays within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Prosecutor’s Office as the investigating and prosecuting entities. On January 15, famous Georgian politician and academic Levan Berdzenishvili was physically [barred](#) by the same pro-Russian “Alt-Info” mobs from holding a lecture for children at EuroClub Kvareli. The police did [not](#) intervene against “Alt-Info.” The lecture “Ilia – Our European Father” was supposed to be about the European nature of the modern Georgian statehood through the foundational ideas of its founding father Ilia Chavchavadze. Months ago, the GD unofficially declared Berdzenishvili a traitor for criticizing King Erekle II. DRI has already [called](#) the incident government-organized.

On January 9, another strong piece of the GD’s anti-liberal ideological basis was [aired](#) by the government propaganda media TV Imedi. In his televised letter, pro-GD philosopher Zaza Shatirishvili repeated the traditional Russian propaganda that the United States is run by wealthy families in the shadow who have invented liberalism to dominate the world – the reason why the United States also constantly wages wars; that liberalism degrades national, religious, and cultural identity, that it is no less evil than any other aggressive ideology; that Georgia needs to stand up to the liberal dictatorship and expansionism to survive, and that the UNM [and the entire opposition by extension] derives its support and power precisely from the liberals in Georgia.

The liberal-democratic camp in Georgia is more than confident that the Patriarchate of Georgia, the pro-Russian mobs, and the Georgian Dream government are inherently tied. Bishop Iakob of Bodbe has recently stated that although Russia took 20% of Georgia, the European Parliament and MEPs take away Georgia’s future.

In our previous issue (46) we discussed that the GD’s Parliamentary partner “the People’s Power” plans to register all foreign-funded organizations as foreign agents. GYLA [commented](#) that since the “agent” is perceived as a “traitor,” the aim is to discredit the entire NGO sector.

Events surrounding Mikheil Saakashvili

The Sejm of Poland [adopted](#) a resolution appealing to the government of Georgia to provide Saakashvili with the necessary treatment of global standards. The Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Urmas Reinsalu [tweeted](#) that he had talked to his Georgian counterpart Ilia Darchiashvili to allow Saakashvili to be treated abroad. The German Ambassador Peter Fischer [stated](#) that protecting Saakashvili's rights, like that of any inmate, is the government's responsibility. The EU Ambassador to Georgia Pawel Herczynski also [called](#) on the government once again to ensure the protection of Saakashvili's rights. The United States pays close attention to the situation of Mikheil Saakashvili especially his state of health, [said](#) Vedant Patel, Principal Deputy Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State. [According](#) to Giuli Alasania, Saakashvili's mother, the Ukrainian judicial system began "actively researching" Saakashvili's poisoning. The initiator of the Magnitsky Act Bill Browder [stated](#): "It's obvious that Mikheil Saakashvili is being tortured - I think Vladimir Putin is behind all this, trying to take revenge, and this is also a message from Putin to Zelensky: 'Here's what I plan for you in the future.'" As discussed in our previous issue (46) Saakashvili's case and those responsible for his condition are being prepared for the Magnitsky Act. MP Dimitri Khundadze, a member of GD's Parliamentary majority and ideological partner "the People's Power," [believes](#) that the list should be headed by Saakashvili himself as he is the key responsible one for his own health condition. GD MPs Gia [Tsagareishvili](#) and Nikoloz [Samkharadze](#) (also the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee) repeated each other's words by saying that Magnitsky was "drained of his soul" (a Georgian expression) in inhuman circumstances, whereas Saakashvili resides in a lux apartment at the hospital. GD MP Gia Volski [claimed](#) that Saakashvili's simulation of illness is the fuel resource for the opposition.

On January 11, gastroenterologist Stuart I. Finkel, MD stated at Saakashvili's sentence deferral court hearing that he was at an increased risk of developing stomach [cancer](#) and even [dying](#). He also [underlined](#) that Saakashvili was treated with non-FDA-approved medication, and [denied](#) the GD's allegations that Saakashvili had had gastric surgery just prior to his apprehension. It used to be the propaganda argument to support the claims that he was simply on a post-surgery diet instead of a hunger strike. "The People's Power" with which the Georgian Dream sees [no](#) ideological difference [issued](#) a statement insisting that Saakashvili's "patrons" now have a plan B: Saakashvili has to die so that the government is blamed, a revolution is staged, and the country descends into chaos. The Party MP Guram Macharashvili [specified](#) that the "patrons" implied are MEPs, former American officials, and "certain powers." Georgian Dream MP Giorgi Kakhiani [backed](#) the statement of "People's Power" and supported the claim that "certain powers" want Saakashvili dead to cause unrest against the government. Strategy Aghmashenebeli MP Paata Manjgaladze [noted](#) that killing off a person and then blaming someone else for the crime is a classic Russian playbook.

Now pro-government TV Rustavi 2 [aired](#) an audiotape of Giuli Alasania, Saakashvili's mother, recorded before Saakashvili's return to Georgia. In it, Alasania worries about her son's return and says that what Russia would do about it was the key part of the story and that she thought "Russia would not do this." Rustavi 2 actively presented it as evidence that Saakashvili's pro-Westernness is a fraud and that he is actually tied to Russia. Alasania [denies](#) the authenticity of the tape.

The Georgian Dream argues further with the Ukrainian officials

In our previous issue (46) we discussed that Ukraine had asked to transfer BUK air defense systems which Ukraine originally gave to Georgia in 2008, and the outrage this has caused among the GD members. The story continued with GD MP Aluda Gudushauri rebuking the opposition's remarks that Georgia should have helped Ukraine militarily. "Stop being enemies of your own country and start using your minds!" – Gudushauri [exclaimed](#). The "People's Party" MP Guram Macharashvili referred to the statement from the Ukrainian Charge d'Affaires that the United States was ready to replace military equipment for Georgia if it helped Ukraine, and [stated](#) that Andrei Kasyanov's words were the testimony that the US wanted to drag Georgia into war with Russia and demanded explanations from the US Ambassador. Strategy Aghmashenebeli MP Paata Manjgaladze [noted](#) that we should not be distracted by the "People's Power" and should instead concentrate on the real origin of such narratives, the Georgian Dream. GD MP Nikoloz Samkharadze [insisted](#) that Georgia had stated from the very beginning that it would help Ukraine in every way but militarily. At the same time, though, the New York Times published

an [article](#) exposing Russian sanctions evasion routes through Georgia. The GD [criticized](#) the NYT in its special statement and rejected all accusations as groundless and mere gossip. Advisor to President Zelenskyy Mykhailo Podolyak [stated](#): *“I have a very simple attitude towards Georgia. There are Georgian people, but unfortunately, they made a huge mistake when he chose such a government at the time. Mr. Ivanishvili’s government looks at the Russian Federation with wide-open or wide-closed eyes and expects from Russia solutions on some energy issues, [and expects Russia] not to continue the war of 2008, i.e. [not] to continue the occupation of Georgian territories. **It is impossible to reach an agreement with such authorities of Georgia because they are in a different reality.**”*

GD MP Gia Volski [called](#) Podolyak’s statement “shameless” and assumed that either he “shamelessly continues with the UNM agenda,” or he cannot see anything happening around Ukraine and in the region. President Salome Zurbishvili tweeted condolences regarding Russia’s bombing of Dnipro, to which MEP Rasa Jukneviene [responded](#): “And what? You are on the wrong side of the history!” She quoted Tea Tsulukiani, Vice Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture who had stated that Georgia would not help Ukraine militarily because it did not want to be a party in the war.

Luke Coffey [noted](#) that there are already cracks in the US-Georgia relations as some of the statements of the leaders of Georgia are shocking, while expert Zaza Bibilashvili [warned](#) that we should not be fooled by the fact that we still consider Georgia some form of democracy by inertia because the state has fundamentally changed and full-scale pro-Russian activities have been unleashed.

Tina Khidasheli, former Minister of Defense of the Georgian Dream government, [stated](#): **“the government of Georgia is mentally tied with Moscow and assesses national security from the prism of the Kremlin.”**

Other developments

On January 16, GD MP Irakli Zarkua almost literally broke into the news studio where Strategy Aghmashenebeli leader Giorgi Vashadze was being interviewed, and asked Vashadze to stay and enter debates with him; later, after being accused of pro-Russian policies, Zarkua [swore](#) at Vashadze and made threats of physical violence against him multiple times, while Vashadze remained calm.

Political prisoner and media manager Nika Gvaramia [stated](#) that he had no hopes he would be deemed innocent by Georgian courts, he just wishes the process to be concluded quickly so he can appeal in Strasbourg and fight for his rights for real.

Human Rights Watch’s 2023 [report](#) on Georgia indicates a lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies, deteriorating media freedom, minority rights, etc.

Shota Tkeshelashvili was [elected](#) unanimously as the Chairman of the Prosecutorial Council, for which he was the sole candidate.

Azerbaijani opposition journalist Seymur Hazi was [barred](#) from entering Georgia.

GD MP Davit Matikashvili [sees](#) no problem in Russians purchasing real estate in tens of thousands as “most of them are ethnic Georgians anyway.”