

GEORGIA ALERT

JOINT WEEKLY NEWSLETTER BY POLITICAL MOVEMENT “DROA” & CIVIL MOVEMENT “DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS”

HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK:

US EMBASSY: “STEPS TO WEAKEN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS DAMAGE GEORGIA’S ASPIRATIONS FOR NATO AND EU MEMBERSHIP”

In a strong statement criticizing the abolishment of the State Inspector’s Service, the US Embassy in Georgia [warned](#) the government that attempts to “weaken democratic institutions damage Georgia’s EU and NATO aspirations.” In addition to criticizing the abolishment of the State Inspector’s Service, the statement also expressed its disappointment on the recent amendments made to the Law on Common Courts and on the appointment of another Supreme Court judge with the flawed selection process. “Whether intended or not, the ruling party sent the message that independent oversight of the government or dissenting voices, even when prescribed by law, will be answered with retaliation, discipline, and dismissal,” the statement reads.

- The US Embassy in Tbilisi already expressed its [concern](#) on the rushed appointment of Supreme Court judges on November 26th and Ambassador Degnan [requested](#) the Georgian Parliament to pause the passing of the legislation on the abolishment of the State Inspector’s Service on December 27th, adding it needs to be made into a more “inclusive” and “transparent” process.

1. POLITICALLY MOTIVATED JUSTICE

- ⇒ The highly controversial legislation that abolished the State Inspector’s Service and transformed it into two separate institutions came after the institution played an active and meaningful role in the latest developments in Georgia concerning the treatment of jailed third President Mikheil Saakashvili. After the release of former President Saakashvili’s footages of his violent and forced transfer to the Gldani prison, the State Inspector’s Service [fined](#) the Ministry of Justice and the Special Penitentiary Service of Georgia for collecting and making public President Saakashvili’s personal data and information. The institution also [launched](#) an investigation on the “inhumane treatment” of the former President and [called](#) on his “health, honor, dignity, and safety” to be protected. The pressure mounting from the public, as well as the State Inspector’s Service and the Public Defender, led to the transfer of President Saakashvili to the Gori Military Hospital, where he began his post-hunger strike treatment on November 19th.
- ⇒ **Saakashvili’s case:**
 - Around one month after being treated in the Gori Military Hospital, Saakashvili was transferred back to the Rustavi Penitentiary Facility on morning of December 30th- a process

the Public Defender and his lawyers claim was an “untransparent” and not followed with credible justification.

- As the Public Defender [wrote](#) in a statement following Saakashvili’s transfer to Rustavi on December 30th, the independent medical group of experts designated to monitor and assess Saakashvili’s health by the Public Defender were not allowed to see the President on December 27th - the day the Public Defender writes the decision was made to transfer Saakashvili back to the Rustavi Penitentiary Facility.
- An initial attempt to transfer Saakashvili back to the Rustavi prison on the night of December 27th ended in failure. Saakashvili himself [claims](#) the attempt was “forceful,” and he “resisted” it until passing out. Two days after, Saakashvili’s doctor in Gori - who claimed in a report released by Saakashvili’s lawyers that the former President was not yet in the condition to be moved back to prison - [quit](#) her job.
- To this day, independent medical group of experts and Saakashvili’s personal doctor are not allowed inside the Rustavi prison to assess the former President’s health. On December 30th, the Public Defender’s representatives [attempted](#) to see Saakashvili twice but could not see him due to the state of Saakashvili’s health.

⇒ **Japaridze-Khazaradze-Tsereteli’s case:**

- The final hearing of Khazaradze-Japaridze-Tsereteli case, during which the verdict will be given, will be held on January 11th. The hearing, initially scheduled on December 16th, was postponed due to the request from the Prosecutor’s Office.
- The Khazaradze-Japaridze-Tsereteli case, which has been going on for more than two years, accuses the leaders of “Lelo” party and founders of “TBC Bank” for money laundering. Prominent [civil society organizations](#) and the [Public Defender](#) continue to assess the case as “politically motivated,” with Public Defender Nino Lomjaria [stating](#) that the “charges should be dropped as the presented action does not have signs of money laundering.”

2. CASES OF STATE CAPTURE

- ⇒ Following the abolishment of the State Inspector’ Service, over a dozen civil society organizations in Georgia released a joint [letter](#) and called on President Zurabishvili to veto the bill. Some of the country’s most prominent CSO’s – including Transparency International Georgia and Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association – called the abolishment of the State Inspector’s Service “unconstitutional and overly detrimental to Georgian democracy.” The same appeal came from the Public Defender Nino Lomjaria on December 29th, who [stressed](#) that the bill “breaches human right standards” and called on the President to veto it.
- A few months ago, a dozen CSO’s released a similar letter of concern about the government’s “assault” on Georgia’s public defender (See [here](#)).
- ⇒ On her part, President of Georgia - Salome Zurabishvili - [criticized](#) the bill abolishing the State Inspector’s Service on December 28th, stating that it is “unacceptable to initiate and expediate a decision on the abolishment of an independent state institution without prior consultation.” President Zurabishvili has [called](#) for “national reconciliation” in the Georgian society and has been meeting different sectors of the society to “achieve a shared understanding of recent history, help heal divisions and move forward.”

3. ANTI-WESTERN STATEMENTS

- ⇒ The Chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Irakli Kobakhidze, [commented](#) on the US Embassy's criticism on the abolishment of the State Inspector's Service and said that the statement "undermines the Georgian public's trust in western partners" as it contains "factual" errors" and "false information." The Chair of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee, Mikheil Sarjveladze, also [criticized](#) the US Embassy's statement, saying it was "harsh," "not well argued," and "not synchronized" with the positions of the Georgian society.
- Similar comments were made by the ruling party in response to international partners' criticism of the government's handling of the July 5th violence against Tbilisi Pride. According to Kobakhidze's [statement](#) at that time, international partners make "hasty statements sometimes."

4. OPPOSITION'S ACTIVITIES

- ⇒ Political parties "[Girchi – More – Freedom](#)," "[United National Movement](#)" and "[Droa](#)" responded to Kobakhidze's discreditation of the US Embassy in Georgia and emphasized that the opposition will continue working with Georgia's Western partners to further Georgian public's clear and unwavering choice in the West. Political party "Droa" also [criticized](#) the Georgian government for taking the backseat in the recent international developments in the world and stressed that Georgia has "no luxury" to distance itself from events that play a significant role in determining Georgia's place in the free world.
- ⇒ Starting from Zugdidi, Chairman of the United National Movement, Nika Melia, has begun [meeting](#) with local in Georgia's different regions. Melia most recently [met](#) with families of political prisoners in Zugdidi.
- ⇒ The United National Movement [announced](#) it is preparing to create a parliamentary commission that investigates the "inhumane" treatment of former President Saakashvili. Saakashvili [called](#) on his party to create such a commission in the beginning of last week. For the commission to be formed, support from at least 50 members of the Parliament is necessary.
- When asked about this commission, Kobakhidze [said](#) that he personally would not be against it since the commission "will only establish that there was no place for improper treatment." Meanwhile, Gakharia's "For Georgia" party [announced](#) that they will not support the creation of such a commission in the Parliament.

5. PERSECUTION OF THE MEDIA

- ⇒ UNESCO [added](#) Lekso Lashkarava - TV1 cameraman who was beaten by far-right groups when covering July 5th pogrom in Tbilisi– to its list of killed journalists of 2021.