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# Free, Fair and Equal Electoral-Political 2022-2025 Cycle in Georgia

**NEWSLETTER №45**  
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# INTRODUCTION

Since August 2019, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has been implementing the project “Free, Fair and Equal Election” throughout Georgia, covering the electoral political cycle from 2019 to 2022. One of the project's goals is to promote the improvement of the election environment through monitoring and evidence-based advocacy. To achieve this, the organization will monitor ongoing policy processes and develop recommendations that will be communicated to the public and presented to decision-makers. Currently, we are presenting Newsletter #45, which describes the events of June that have had an impact on the political environment.

## 1. DEPUTIES WHO LEFT THE “UNITED NATIONAL MOVEMENT” (UNM) CREATED A PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Two MPs, Roman Gotsiridze and Khatia Dekanoidze, who left the “United National Movement” party, created a parliamentary group - “Eurooptimists”.<sup>1</sup> on June 8, the Committee on Procedural Issues and Rules of the Parliament supported the creation of the group.<sup>2</sup> The formation of the group became feasible due to the changes introduced by Roman Gotsiridze and Khatia Dekanoidze in the parliamentary regulations. These alterations were adopted by the Parliament on May 30 with 91 votes, following an expedited procedure.<sup>3</sup> As per the amendment, prior to the official notification of the authority of the parliament chosen in the 2024 elections, parliament members who were nominated by a single political party or electoral bloc possess the right to establish a political group, provided that fellow parliament members from the same nominating political party or electoral bloc have already formed a faction. This right can be exercised if said parliament members have withdrawn from their respective political party or from membership in the party aligned with the electoral bloc.<sup>4</sup> According to Roman Gotsiridze, the structure of the political group will afford them greater chances to utilize parliamentary influence.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AND AN ATTACK ON THE LEADER OF “GIRCHI - MORE FREEDOM”

On the morning of June 17, at approximately 9 o'clock, an assault occurred involving Zurab Girchi Japaridze, the leader of “Girchi - More Freedom”. He was en route to deliver a lecture at the “Institute of Individual Freedom” camp in Borjomi when the incident transpired. At around 9:00, an unidentified individual struck him in the face.<sup>6</sup>

On that very day, law enforcement apprehended an individual in relation to the assault on Zurab Japaridze, the head of “Girchi - More Freedom”. The incident prompted the initiation of a case under Article 126 of the Criminal Code, which pertains to acts of violence.<sup>7</sup> The substantial examination of the case is scheduled to commence on August 4th.

On the same day, at approximately 11 o'clock in the morning, a group of numerous individuals launched an attack on the “Academy of Liberal Education,” a camp organized by the “Institute of Individual Freedom”. This camp is

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<sup>1</sup> “The Committee on Procedural Issues and Rules Supported the Registration of the Parliamentary Political Group “Eurooptimists”, Official Website of the Parliament of Georgia, June 8, 2023, available at: <https://cutt.ly/kwh5iGhc>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Parliament supported the amendment to the regulations with 91 votes”, official website of the Parliament of Georgia, May 30, 2023, available at: <https://cutt.ly/Gwh5oUT5>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Gotsiridze: Dekanoidze and I have created a political group in the parliament, we are choosing a name”, information portal “Tabula”, available at: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/700857-gotsiridze-me-dekanoidzem-parlamentshi-politikuri>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>6</sup> “A group of thugs attacked an opposition politician and a youth camp”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 17, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/548639>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>7</sup> The attacker of the leader of “Girchi - More Freedom” was sentenced to pre-trial detention, information portal “Civil.ge” June 20, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/548977>, updated: 22.08.2023.

attended by students aged 15 to 16.<sup>8</sup> The incident took place in Borjomi municipality.<sup>9</sup>

One of the individuals involved in the attack was Vato Shakarishvili, who was previously an active member of the youth wing of “Georgian Dream”. Last year, he established the “Conservative Movement - Georgia First”.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. THE PRESIDENT HAS EXERCISED A VETO ON THE AMENDMENTS TO THE ELECTION CODE

On June 13, the Georgian Parliament passed the amendments to the Election Code and the Parliament’s Regulations in their third reading. This legislative package was introduced in the Georgian Parliament on June 8. Under the revised provisions, the Parliament of Georgia will now be responsible for electing the Chairman and seven members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), replacing the previous role of the President. This election will take place based on nominations made by the Chairman of the Parliament. Additionally, the number of votes necessary for election will be lowered to a simple majority, departing from the current requirement of a two-thirds majority.<sup>11</sup>

On June 26, President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed the mentioned changes.<sup>12</sup> According to the position of the president, the alteration in the voting requirement from 100 votes to 76 votes for the election of the chairman and members diminishes the necessity for consensus-driven choices and heightens the potential for polarization.<sup>13</sup> As per the president’s recommendation, the chairman and members of the CEC should be elected with a minimum of 90 votes, aligning with the precedent set in the appointment of the public defender.<sup>14</sup>

On May 8, GYLA responded to the initiated package of changes.<sup>15</sup> As per the organization’s statement: “Through its disregard of the staffing rule established in 2021 for the Central Committee, Georgian Dream is declining to enhance democratic institutions, thereby acting in opposition to the aspirations of the Georgian populace, the progression towards European integration, and the fundamental principles and values that underpin the existing rapport between Georgia and its strategic allies”.<sup>16</sup>

**GYLA appealed to the ruling party, urging them to refrain from endorsing the proposed draft law, which seemed to primarily cater to the specific party agenda of “Georgian Dream”. They further implored the party to consider the suggestions put forth by strategic allies in order to implement effective measures for ensuring the autonomy of the election administration.**<sup>17</sup>

It is worth noting that the existing model of CEC staffing before the changes was a part of the Charles Michel agreement.

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<sup>8</sup> “A group of thugs attacked an opposition politician and a youth camp”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 17, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/548639>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Legislative initiative “On Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia “Election Code of Georgia”, website of the Parliament of Georgia, available at: <https://info.parliament.ge/#law-drafting/26338>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>12</sup> “The President exercised a veto the amendments adopted in the “Election Code”, official website of the President of Georgia, June 26, 2023, available at: <https://cutt.ly/Awh0wsAD>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “With the changes in the procedure for staffing the CEC, “Georgian Dream” continues to adapt the legislation to party interests and reduces the independence of the CEC”, website of the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, May 8, 2023, available at: <https://bit.ly/3Xk8QuH>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## 4. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili presented his annual report to the Parliament on June 30.<sup>18</sup> During his speech, in addition to discussing other focal points outlined in the government program, he also addressed the matter of Georgia’s European integration. He emphasized that European partners had treated Georgia unjustly by withholding candidate status. Gharibashvili asserted that Georgia outperformed Moldova and Ukraine in all relevant metrics, positioning it in a more favorable position.<sup>19</sup>

Gharibashvili emphasized the significance of the association agreement and visa-free travel. He also highlighted the acknowledgment of the European perspective and the pivotal role of the ruling party in this context. He concentrated on how the opposition deliberately impeded the progression of European integration. As per the Prime Minister, attaining this status would contribute to diminishing polarization within the country.<sup>20</sup>

## 5. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GEORGIA

### 5.1. Visits of international partners to Tbilisi

On June 5, Michael Roth, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the German Bundestag, conducted a working visit to Tbilisi.<sup>21</sup> During his visit, he held meetings with various Georgian dignitaries, including President Salome Zourabichvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilia Darchiashvili, and Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili. Additionally, he engaged with representatives from civil society and opposition parties.<sup>22</sup> At the press conference convened for journalists, Mihael Roth highlighted the significance of addressing the 12 priorities outlined by the European Commission.<sup>23</sup>

On June 5, Robin Wagener, a member of the German Bundestag and the coordinator of the German federal government for inter-community cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Republic of Moldova, paid a visit to Georgia.<sup>24</sup> Robin Wagener met with Nikoloz Samkharadze, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament.<sup>25</sup> The press release issued by the Parliament of Georgia cites Wagener as expressing that “Germany not only supports Georgia’s pursuit of candidate status but envisions Georgia’s future within the European Union as well”. Wagener views the country as one of the European Union’s most dependable partners.<sup>26</sup>

### 5.2. Germany’s Renewed Security Strategy

On June 14, Germany approved a revised national security strategy, marking the first instance in which Georgia is referenced within the framework of European Union enlargement.<sup>27</sup> In the section titled “Protection of Peace and Freedom,” the strategy document states: “The German federal government endorses the continued integra-

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<sup>18</sup> “Annual report of the Prime Minister of Georgia” official YouTube page of the Parliament of Georgia, June 30, 2023, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SX3GKYLvYW8&t=1289s>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Chairman of the Bundestag’s Foreign Relations Committee: ‘The European Union is not complete without Georgia’”, information portal Civil.ge, 7 June 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/546876>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> “Robin Wagner visits Georgia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 6, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/546874>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “The prospect of Georgia joining the European Union was reflected in Germany’s national security strategy” information portal “Civil.ge”, June 14, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/548125>, updated: 22.28.2023.

tion, cohesion, and expansion of the European Union through the inclusion of Western Balkan nations, Ukraine, Moldova, and in due course, Georgia”.<sup>28</sup>

### **5.3. The 12th session of the European Union-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee**

The 12th session of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee took place on June 8 at the European Parliament in Brussels.<sup>29</sup> The session was attended by the permanent delegations of the Parliament of Georgia and the European Parliament, as well as representatives of the executive structures of Georgia.<sup>30</sup>

In her opening address, MEP Marina Kaljurand, the chairperson of the Parliamentary Association Committee of Georgia, discussed several topics, including two resolutions from the European Parliament concerning media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia. She also addressed the situation involving former President Mikheil Saakashvili.<sup>31</sup> According to her: “There’s no point in concealing the fact that the interactions between the Georgian government and Western allies, particularly the European Parliament, were considerably turbulent and one might even characterize them as chaotic last year”.<sup>32</sup> Kaljurand highlighted that a significant 89% of Georgia’s population is in favor of the nation’s integration into the European Union. She stressed that the Georgian government should uphold its commitments and capitalize on the current “exceptional window of opportunity” that exists.<sup>33</sup>

### **5.4. Prime Minister’s visits to Chisinau, Berlin and Brussels**

On June 1, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili attended the European Political Union summit in Moldova.<sup>34</sup> Gharibashvili shared his assessment of his visit to Moldova with the media. He assured his European counterparts that the Georgian government would wrap up the execution of the objectives laid out in the 12 recommendations by the conclusion of June. Subsequent to this, he indicated that the final decision would rest with Europe.<sup>35</sup>

On June 14, the Prime Minister visited Belgium, engaging in meetings with Prime Minister Alexander de Kroos, President of the European Council Charles Michel, and European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi.<sup>36</sup> During these meetings, particular emphasis was placed on the “historic decision” to acknowledge Georgia’s European perspective. The discussions also revolved around the advancements made by Georgia in meeting the 12 priorities delineated by the European Commission.

Opposition MP Paata Manjgaladze responded to the Prime Minister’s visit to Brussels.<sup>37</sup> According to him, only a visit is not enough and it is important to show our partners the progress achieved in different directions.

According to MP Mikheil Daushvili, the positive messages coming from the partners are not sufficient and the main challenge is related to the implementation of reforms by the Georgian side.<sup>38</sup>

Beka Odisharia, a deputy from the majority, interprets this visit as a demonstration of “Georgian Dream’s” com-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “The European Union-Georgia Association Committee held its 12th session”, information portal “Civil.ge”, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/547393>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “The European Union-Georgia Association Committee held its 12th session”, information portal “Civil.ge”, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/547393>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Prime Minister: It is important to maintain high-level dialogue to achieve the goal of EU candidacy”, information portal Radio Liberty, June 1, 2023, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32438737.html>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili visits Brussels”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 14, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/547954>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>37</sup> “Prime Minister’s visit to Brussels - assessments across the political spectrum”, the official YouTube page of the Public Broadcaster, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7T-nGJTe64>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>38</sup> “Prime Minister’s Visit to Brussels - Assessments”, the official YouTube page of the Public Broadcaster, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzDhp0UQgRI>, updated: 22.08.2023.

mitment to fulfilling the 12 recommendations and collaborating with senior European Union officials to secure candidate status for Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

### 5.5. Oral report of the European Commission on the implementation of 12 recommendations

On June 21, the European Commission delivered an oral report to the European Union ambassadors in Brussels, detailing the progress made in addressing the 12 priorities outlined by Georgia to attain the status of a candidate country within the European Union.<sup>40</sup> According to the report, Georgia has achieved partial advancement in the second recommendation, pertaining to ensuring the complete and autonomous operation of state institutions and enhancing the electoral legal framework. This includes rectifying the deficiencies highlighted by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe/Venice Commission.<sup>41</sup> Georgia has made limited progress in the section of de-oligarchization.<sup>42</sup>

Irakli Gharibashvili responded to the report.<sup>43</sup> In his view, the separation of Georgia from the trio would constitute a strategic error on the part of the West, and awarding candidate status would play a role in diminishing polarization within the nation.<sup>44</sup>

According to Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of “Georgian Dream,” the governing party commits to passing all pertinent legislations by the conclusion of June. He also indicated that as long as the opposition persists in carrying out radical actions, achieving depolarization would remain unattainable.<sup>45</sup>

As stated by Tina Bokuchava, a deputy from the “United National Movement” (UNM) party, the Georgian government has yet to enact the essential reforms required to secure candidate status. According to the MP, “Georgian Dream” is deliberately hindering the European integration process.<sup>46</sup>

According to MP Teona Akubardia, the ruling party should stop anti-Western rhetoric and actually implement democratic reforms.<sup>47</sup>

On June 27, 2023, the “Open Society Foundation” Georgia released the fourth assessment document titled “Statusmeter”.<sup>48</sup> This document provides an overview of the progress made in meeting the 12 criteria outlined by the European Commission for the country to be granted candidate status.<sup>49</sup> According to the “statusmeter”, the second priority, which implies electoral and institutional reforms, has been partially achieved, whereas the de-oligarchization priority is still pending completion.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> 12 recommendations: what and how Georgia (didn't) did it”, information portal “Netgazeti”, June 22, 2023, available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/life/676214/>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Three of Georgia's recommendations have been deemed fulfilled, including: 1) Reinforcement of gender equality and combatting crimes targeting women; 2) Active consideration of decisions from the European Court of Human Rights (“Strasbourg”) during deliberations by Georgian courts; 3) Appointing a new public defender transparently. There is partial progress on 7 recommendations: 1) Mitigating political polarization; 2) Incorporating civil society into the decision-making process; 3) Full functioning of state institutions and improvement of the electoral legislative framework, elimination of deficiencies identified by the OSCE/ODIR and the Council of Europe/Venice Commission; 4) strengthening of anti-corruption agency; 5) strengthening protection of vulnerable groups and human rights; 6) adoption of the judicial reform strategy; 7) Strengthening the fight against organized crime. There is limited progress in the point of de-oligarchization, while Georgia has no progress in terms of the following recommendation: free, professional and independent functioning of pluralistic media.

<sup>43</sup> “Politicians react to the European Commission's report on Georgia's progress”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 22, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/549350>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Statusmeter 4.0 - How Georgia is moving towards fulfilling the 12 conditions of the European Commission”, the official website of “Open Society Foundation”, available at: <https://osgf.ge/statusmetri-rogor-midis-saqartvelo-evrokomisiis-12-pirobis-shestrulebisen-3/>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Chairman of “Georgian Dream” Irakli Kobakhidze responded to the presentation of “Statusmeter”.<sup>51</sup> He referred to the non-governmental organizations present at the presentation as a “collective Sergo Orjonikidze” and remarked that the desire of “well-off NGOs” is for Georgia not to attain candidate status in December. He suggested that these NGOs would then push for the government’s resignation.<sup>52</sup>

Badri Japaridze, the leader of the “Lelo” party, believes that the contradiction between Georgian Dream’s assertion of fulfilling the priorities and the opposing stance of the recommending party implies that the ruling party may not genuinely intend to carry out the recommendations.<sup>53</sup>

## 5.6. Interview of Salome Zourabichvili on CNN

In a CNN interview on June 28, Salome Zourabichvili discussed and assessed the process of Georgia’s accession to NATO and the European Union.<sup>54</sup> During the interview, she addressed the ongoing Russian aggression in the region and Russia’s influence in Georgia through soft power tactics. The President emphasized that “The European Union cannot afford to let Georgia slip away,”<sup>55</sup> even if the ongoing reforms may not completely align with the European Union’s standards and requirements.<sup>56</sup>

## 6. THE EUROPEAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PES) TERMINATED THE MEMBERSHIP OF “GEORGIAN DREAM”

On April 28 of this year, members of the European Socialist Party (PES) conveyed their apprehensions regarding the actions and statements made by Prime Minister Gharibashvili.<sup>57</sup> One of the causes for concern was Prime Minister Gharibashvili’s involvement in the conservative political action conference held in Budapest on May 4-5. The matter concerning the observer membership status of “Georgian Dream” had previously been raised by PES President Stefan Löfven during a meeting in March.<sup>58</sup> On May 11, Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of Georgian Dream, issued a statement regarding his departure from the party due to ideological disparities.<sup>59</sup> On June 29, the chairmanship of PES made a decision to expel “Georgian Dream” from its membership.<sup>60</sup> The proposal was unanimously supported by the members of the PES presidency.<sup>61</sup>

## 7. THE CASE OF NIKA GVARAMIA

On June 19, the Supreme Court dismissed the lawsuit filed by Nika Gvaramia, the founder and general director of the “Mtavari Channel,” deeming it inadmissible. This decision upheld the ruling of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal issued on November 2, 2022.<sup>62</sup> As per the aforementioned verdict, Nika Gvaramia was convicted and sentenced

<sup>51</sup> “Irakli Kobakhidze - the collective Sergo Orjonikidze, Vano Chkhikvadze gathered in the “Soros Foundation”, their only goal is that Georgia does not get the candidate status”, the official website of the Public Broadcaster, June 28, 2023, available: <https://cutt.ly/Fwh7FJCP>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “Statusmeter: How are the 12 conditions of the European Commission fulfilled?”, information portal Business Media Georgia, June 28, 2023, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7qQCrAcLpQ>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>54</sup> “Salome Zourabishvili: “The European Union cannot allow the loss of Georgia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 30, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/550149>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> “Party of European Socialists worried about ‘dream’ coming closer to conservative conference”, information portal civil.ge, 29 April 2023, available at: information portal civil.ge, 1 May 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/539749>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “Georgian Dream leaves the Socialist Party of Europe due to ideological incompatibility”, information portal “civil.ge”, May 11, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/541808>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>60</sup> “The Socialist Party of Europe terminated the membership of Georgian Dream due to political differences”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 30, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/550092>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “The Supreme Court kept Nika Gvaramia in custody”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 19, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/548874>, updated: 22.08.2023.



to 3 years and 6 months in prison for the charge of abuse of power during his tenure as the director of the “Rustavi 2” TV company.<sup>63</sup>

In a statement released on June 20, the US Embassy expressed “deep concern” regarding the Supreme Court’s ruling to maintain the detention of Nika Gvaramia, the director of Mtavari Channel.<sup>64</sup>

On June 20, the international media freedom organization “Reporters Without Borders” once again urged the President of Georgia to grant a pardon to Nika Gvaramia.<sup>65</sup> US and EU ambassadors made similar statements before.<sup>66</sup>

On June 22, the President of Georgia pardoned Nika Gvaramia.<sup>67</sup> The president did not provide an explanation and emphasized that granting clemency to the prisoner falls within his discretionary authority, remaining unaffected by any pressure, recommendations, or potential threats from others.<sup>68</sup> s per MP Levan Bezhashvili’s evaluation, the president has taken a significant step with a state decision, though this action represents only “half the task”. To safeguard the interests of Georgia’s European integration, it is also imperative to grant a pardon to Mikheil Saakashvili.<sup>69</sup>

Vakhtang Megrelishvili, a representative of the “Girchi” party, expressed a favorable assessment of Nika Gvaramia’s pardon. However, the MP did not anticipate a reduction in countrywide polarization due to this decision.<sup>70</sup>

Public Defender of Georgia Levan Ioseliani responded to the pardon of Nika Gvaramia on his personal Facebook page.<sup>71</sup> According to him, the president’s decision brought Georgia even closer to Europe.<sup>72</sup>

The fact of pardoning Gvaramia was also welcomed by the President of the Council of Europe, Charles Michel.<sup>73</sup> In his opinion, the said decision would contribute to depolarization in Georgia.<sup>74</sup>

Givi Mikanadze, a deputy from the “Georgian Dream” party, has asserted that Salome Zourabichvili’s decision has led to an affront to the dignity of the presidency.<sup>75</sup> According to the assessment of the deputy, the president’s emphasis appears to be more on “fulfilling the task” rather than considering public opinion.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> “The Court of Appeals kept Nika Gvaramia in custody” information portal “Civil.ge”, November 2, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/513436>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>64</sup> “US Embassy Expresses Concern Over Detention of Nika Gvaramia,” information portal Civil.ge, June 20, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/549100>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>65</sup> “The Supreme Court kept Nika Gvaramia in custody”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 19, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/548874>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>66</sup> “US and EU Ambassadors: It is up to the President of Georgia to pardon Nika Gvaramia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, April 24, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/538699>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>67</sup> “President of Georgia Nika Gvaramia was pardoned”, official website of the President of Georgia, June 22, 2023, available at: [https://president.ge/index.php?m=209&news\\_id=1929&lng=geo](https://president.ge/index.php?m=209&news_id=1929&lng=geo), updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “Yoseliani on the pardon of Gvaramia: today we are closer to Europe”, information portal “Radio Freedom”, June 22, 2023, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32471270.html>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “Charles Michel welcomed the President’s decision to pardon Nika Gvaramia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, June 23, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/549444>, updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> “Nika Gvaramia’s Pardon - Evaluations”, official YouTube page of Georgian Public Broadcasting, June 23, 2023, available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_zRTVBpL3I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_zRTVBpL3I), updated: 22.08.2023.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.