

Georgia Seeking to Reassure U.S. on Prosecutions

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — Georgia's justice minister is seeking to reassure U.S. officials that recent arrests of former government officials are not politically motivated.

Tea Tsulukiani is meeting U.S. officials in Washington this week amid concern by President Barack Obama's administration that the new government of Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili is using the justice system to settle political scores. Ivanishvili led a coalition that defeated the party of President Mikheil Saakashvili in parliamentary elections in October. U.S. officials fear that political infighting could set back the path toward Western integration for a country that has been a bright spot of emerging democracy in the former Soviet sphere.

In an interview Wednesday, Tsulukiani said that her ministry had received several thousand complaints about members of Saakashvili's party, including allegations of torture, wrongful seizure of property and corruption by senior officials. But she said she believed that the majority of the complaints were legitimate. As evidence of the government's caution, she

noted that it had only opened about 30 prosecutions so far. "We have been gathering evidence," she said. "Judges will decide if these people are guilty or not."

The swiftness of government prosecutions following the elections, including a former interior minister and an army chief of staff, has prompted concern in the United States and Europe. Ivanishvili campaigned on a pledge to prosecute Saakashvili allies and is under pressure from constituents to follow through. Ivanishvili has been grappling over constitutional reforms with Saakashvili in an uncomfortable power sharing arrangement. Saakashvili's term ends in October.

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