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Georgian PM Vows to 'Eradicate' Opposition Amid Pro-EU Protests

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People stage a protest outside the Parliament Building after Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said the country would suspend talks on its bid to join the European Union until 2028. **Alexander Patrin / TASS**

Georgia's prime minister vowed Thursday to "eradicate" the country's "liberal-fascist" opposition, escalating the government's bitter campaign against its rivals as mass pro-EU protests enter their second week.

Tbilisi has been rocked by turmoil since the governing Georgian Dream party, which critics accuse of creeping authoritarianism and of leading the country back into Russia's orbit, claimed victory in a disputed election in October.

The government said last Thursday that it would suspend EU membership talks until 2028, sparking uproar and a fresh wave of demonstrations that have been met with a heavy-handed response from authorities.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has refused to back down in the face of international condemnation, instead escalating a feud with pro-EU opposition groups that are demanding a

rerun of the elections.

“We will do everything necessary to completely eradicate liberal fascism in Georgia,” he told reporters Thursday.

“This process has already begun. These recent developments mark the start of the end of liberal fascism in Georgia,” he said, using language reminiscent of that used by the Kremlin in Russia to target its political opponents.

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He also called on “parents to protect their children from the influence of liberal fascist hubs” — a reference to the young protestors that have taken to the streets of Tbilisi in nightly rallies.

The comments come a day after masked police officers raided several opposition party headquarters and arrested opposition leaders.

‘Unjustified violence’

Around 300 people have been detained and dozens injured, including protestors and police, in clashes outside the parliament building in central Tbilisi over the last week.

Several demonstrators, including journalists, have needed hospital treatment after being detained and, they allege, beaten by the security forces.

Rights ombudsman Levan Ioseliani has accused the police of using “torture” against those detained at rallies.

On Wednesday, Georgian police arrested seven people for “organizing and leading group violence” and seized crates of fireworks, which have been launched by protestors at riot police.

Opposition leader Nika Gvaramia of the Akhali party was beaten and detained during a police raid, with television footage showing him, apparently unconscious, being carried away by masked security forces.

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The United States is among those that have denounced Georgia's forceful crackdown, threatening additional sanctions against the country's leaders.

“The United States strongly condemns the Georgian Dream party's brutal and unjustified violence against Georgian citizens, protesters, members of the media, and opposition figures,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

Kobakhidze on Thursday rejected Blinken's statements and said Tbilisi was hoping for better

relations with Washington after Donald Trump comes to power in January.

Russian turn

Critics of the government are enraged by what they call its betrayal of Georgia's bid for EU membership, which is enshrined in its constitution and supported by around 80 percent of the population.

Several ambassadors and a deputy foreign minister resigned over the decision to suspend EU accession talks for four years.

Galvanizing the protest movement, a senior interior ministry official tasked with responding to the protests also quit on Wednesday, posting his resignation letter on social media accompanied by Georgian and European flag emojis.

The protests have drawn comparisons with the 2014 pro-EU "Revolution of Dignity" in Ukraine that ousted a Moscow-backed president, and come amid criticism of the Georgian Dream party for allegedly moving closer to the Kremlin.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday sanctioned Kobakhidze and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, widely seen as the country's de facto leader, for "handing Georgia over to Putin," he said in a video message.

Since 2022, Georgia has advanced legislation targeting civil society and independent media outlets, as well as curbing LGBTQ+ rights, measures critics say are based on repressive Russian laws.

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