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Georgia

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Religious and sexual minorities continued to face discrimination and violence and in several instances were unable to exercise their right to freedom of assembly. Opposition politicians were subject to violent attacks. Allegations of ill-treatment by police and penitentiary officials continued to be reported and were often inadequately investigated. Domestic violence against women remained widespread.

Background

On 27 June, the European Union signed the Association Agreement with Georgia.

Allegations of the selective prosecution of figures associated with the opposition party United National Movement (UNM) persisted. On 13 August, the Chief Prosecutor's Office charged former President Mikheil Saakashvili in his absence with embezzlement and abuse of office. On 9 December, the OSCE trial monitoring, which focused on criminal cases against senior officials in President Saakashvili's government, identified concerns related to a number of fair trial rights, including equality of arms between parties and the presumption of innocence.

Defence minister Irakli Alasania was sacked on 4 November following the arrests of five senior defence officials on 28 October, which he had dismissed as politically motivated. The officials were accused of mispending GEL 4.1 million (US\$2.1 million) in what the prosecution claimed was a sham tender. Several ministerial resignations followed resulting in the breakdown of the parliamentary coalition.

In November, three detainees from the US detention facility at Guantánamo Bay were transferred to Georgia for resettlement.

On 24 November, the de facto authorities in Georgia's Abkhazia region signed the Agreement on Alliance and Strategic Partnership with the Russian Federation making the breakaway territory even more dependent on Russia in defence, external relations and economic matters.

Discrimination

On 2 May, an anti-discrimination law was adopted but without provisions which had been included in an earlier draft. These would have introduced an independent oversight mechanism and financial penalties for violations.

Reported incidents of violent religious intolerance increased. The authorities failed to protect the rights of religious minorities, address recurring violence and effectively investigate attacks.

On 1 June, local Orthodox Christians in the town of Terjola, western Georgia, gathered to protest against the construction of a place of worship for Jehovah's Witnesses. They threatened to use physical violence and destroy property. Several Jehovah's Witnesses reported being harassed and intimidated by local residents, including receiving death threats and having stones thrown at their houses. Police issued written warnings to the alleged offenders but did not conduct any formal investigation.

In September, residents of the town of Kobuleti, western Georgia, repeatedly blocked an entry to the local Muslim boarding school and physically prevented staff and schoolchildren from entering the building. On the first day of the new school year, a pig was slaughtered at the building entrance and its head was nailed to the door. A criminal investigation was opened.

Freedom of assembly

On 22 October, clashes between the police and the local Muslim community broke out in the village of Mokhe, western Georgia, after the local authorities began to construct a library on the site of a derelict building which, the Muslim community claimed, was once a mosque. Police reportedly insulted and used disproportionate force against protesters, arresting 14. Several detainees were reportedly beaten, among them a woman who received serious injuries to her face. Three detainees were released the next day without charges while the others were fined 250 lari (US\$140) each by the court in the town of Akhaltsikhe.

In May, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex activists abandoned plans to organize a public action to mark the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) due to the lack of security guarantees by the authorities. In 2013, the IDAHO street event was thwarted by a violent attack by thousands of counter-demonstrators while the police failed to ensure people's safety.

Police and security forces

A number of violent attacks against opposition politicians were reported in which the police failed to prevent violence.

On 9 June, Gigi Ugulava and Giga Bokeria, leaders of the opposition party United National Movement (UNM), were assaulted by members of the Georgian Dream Coalition (GDC) during a

pre-election meeting with voters in the town of Tsageri. According to eyewitnesses, police officers standing nearby did not intervene to stop the violence.

On 30 September, the office of the NGO Free Zone, which was associated with the UNM, was attacked by about 50 people. Several staff members were injured as the police failed to arrive promptly despite the warnings of possible violence.

Torture and other ill-treatment

There were several reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in prison and in police custody. Official investigations were often slow and ineffective. Of the 18 cases of alleged ill-treatment in prison documented by the Public Defender (Ombudsman), in just one case an investigation was opened for charges of ill-treatment. No prosecutions were reported at the end of the year.

On 15 March, Irakli Kelbakiani reported being forced into a police car, beaten with hands and iron bats on his head, face and body, and asphyxiated by police officers. According to the initial incident report, bruises and other injuries were evident on his arrival at the police station.

Amiran Dzebisashvili reported that on 31 October he was forced inside a police car and threatened after he had testified in court that Vasil Lomsadze was beaten by police officers during his arrest on 27 October 2013. Vasil Lomsadze was standing trial for resisting arrest and allegedly attacking police officers during this incident. There had been no effective investigation into Vasil Lomsadze's allegations of being beaten by police at the end of the year, despite several eyewitness accounts and his recorded injuries.

Violence against women and girls

At least 25 women and girls were reported to have been killed as a result of domestic violence. In several cases the victims had previously asked police for protection but had not received adequate support.

Right to privacy

The legislative amendments of 28 November allowed security agencies to retain direct access to communications surveillance amidst concerns that such an access can be misused by the agencies to bypass the judicial oversight for surveillance.

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