

Georgia : Open letter to the Council of Europe and European Union officials

- [english] - Region - Europe & Central Asia - Georgia -

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To: The President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly,
Mr. Mevlüt Çavusoglu
The Secretary General of the Council of Europe,
Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland
The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
Mr. Thomas Hammarberg
The President of the European Commission
Mr. José Manuel Barroso
The President of the European Parliament
Mr. Jerzy Buzek

30.06.2010

Your Excellencies,

Since November 2007, Georgia has attracted major international attention. The brutal crackdown on opposition on 7th of November and subsequent special operation against Imedi TV somewhat reshaped the perception of the Georgian government by European authorities.

The problem of politically motivated persecutions in Georgia was the subject of continuous discussions for years by active representatives of civil society as well as NGOs working in the field. However none have been able to effectively advocate the issue on the European level so far. Human Rights Center (HRIDC) and The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) have been warning on deteriorating human rights record in the country in past years as well.(1)

In 2009, FIDH together with HRIDC has carried out the research concerning the matter. The aim of the study was to confirm or disprove the existence of politically motivated imprisonments in the country. Studying 8 pilot cases in their 50 page report FIDH and HRIDC concluded that political prisoners do exist in Georgia.(2)

The actual number of such prisoners is still the matter of international research. Local NGOs and political parties have been studying the phenomenon with varying results but according to our average estimates, the numbers vary from 50 to 60 prisoners by May 2010.

In April 2010 the representative of Human Rights Center visited the Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Strasbourg. One of the main goals was to advocate the extension of the mandate of the reporter on political prisoners in the region to Georgia as well. On this matter, the representative of Human Rights Center held meetings at the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. During discussions, representatives of the committee expressed the desire to study the issue and consider the initiative if sufficient evidences are provided by HRIDC or other interested parties.

Taking the above mentioned into consideration

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Human Rights House Foundation and the Human Rights Centre (HRIDC) call upon

The Council of Europe to:

" Mandate a group of independent experts to examine cases of alleged political prisoners in Georgia and to render

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opinions on the said cases as to whether the persons in question may be defined as political prisoners on the basis of the criteria adopted in previous Council of Europe documents.

" Ensure that this group has the capacity and mandate to meet with a number of alleged political prisoners, their lawyers, their relatives, State officials, and representatives of intergovernmental organizations and human rights NGO

" Ensure that the appointed PACE Reporter on Political Prisoners visit all three countries in the South Caucasus within the end of 2010.

The EU to:

" Support the establishment of the CoE group of independent experts in charge of examining the cases of alleged political prisoners in Georgia.

" Carry out judicial observation for all cases of alleged political prisoners and in all politically sensitive trials. Pay special attention to information provided by Georgia's human rights NGOs, lawyers and detainees' families regarding the cases of alleged political prisoners.

" Share all relevant information and expertise regarding alleged political prisoners in Georgia with Council of Europe experts.

(1) FIDH and HRIDC joint statement available at <http://www.fidh.org/Human-Rights-violations-in-Georgia>

(2) Full FIDH and HRIDC report available at <http://www.fidh.org/After-the-rose-the-thorns-Political-prisoners-in>

(3) Establishment of the actual number of political prisoners was not among the aims of the above mentioned research. It was focused purely on confirming or disproving the existence of the phenomenon itself.