



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

09 February 2005

### GGA43343.E

Georgia: Information on the treatment of members of the democratic movement by state authorities and the population in general (November 2003-January 2005)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Information on the treatment of members of the democratic movement was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the following information on democratic conditions and events is relevant.

According to Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitors, the November 2003 elections "fell short of a number of international standards for democratic elections" (Freedom House 23 Aug. 2004). Mass demonstrations provoked the resignation of then-president Eduard Shevardnadze on 23 November 2003 (BBC News 3 Feb. 2005a; Agence France Presse 2 Dec. 2003). "[S]ecurity forces refrained from violently dispersing demonstrations" and no violence erupted during the protests (*Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004). The elections were cancelled and new ones were scheduled for 4 January 2004 (Freedom House 23 Aug. 2004; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004; Colisée 28 July 2004).

Although the demonstrations led by opponents to President Shevardnadze were not met with violence, Freedom House indicates that "progovernmental supporters" violently suppressed peaceful demonstrations both on 19 November 2003 and at other times before the 2003 elections; "[o]ther instances of violence occurred during earlier opposition demonstrations in September in Bolnisi and in October in the republic of Ajaria" (23 Aug. 2004).

However, *Country Reports 2003* states that there were "[n]o reports of political killings nor politically motivated disappearances" in 2003 and that the rights to freedom of association and assembly were generally respected (25 Feb. 2004). Freedom House indicates that "[n]on-governmental organizations, including human rights groups," did not face "arbitrary restrictions" (Freedom House 23 Aug. 2004).

Amnesty International (AI) reports on attacks on individuals, political parties offices and media occurring during the two weeks following the change in government of November 2003 (9 Dec. 2003). Some political parties saw their offices attacked: "[o]n November 22, supporters of the National Movement destroyed the parliamentary offices of the Revival and New Rights parties. Unknown persons also placed explosive devices in the offices of the Labor Party and Revival" (*Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004).

The Liberty Institute, a human rights NGO based in Tbilisi, mentions that the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression, drafted by the organization, "was adopted by the Parliament of Georgia June 24, 2004" to bring Georgian law "into line with modern western democratic standards" (Liberty Institute n.d.).

Nonetheless, sources state that authorities harassed independent newspapers and television stations (Freedom House 23 Aug. 2004; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004). *Country Reports 2003* identifies specific events during which authorities had harassed independent media or in which political motivations were identified :

[f]or example, authorities closed Caucasus TV for minor tax arrears and began investigating the *Georgian Times* media group because they considered the group to be politically motivated. In December, both State Television and Rustavi-2 were attacked with explosive devices. Unknown persons fired gunshots at the apartment of an Iberia Television journalist, critical of the new government, in an apparently politically motivated attack. (*Country Reports* 25 Feb. 2004).

AI mentioned this later attack, as well as others; according to a public statement released on 9 December 2003, the head of the news department of Iberia TV, Lyuba Eliashvili, had her apartment shot at on 25 November 2003. AI states that her station broadcasted "programs critical of the so-called 'Rose Revolution'" (AI 9 Dec. 2003). On 2 December 2003, the same thing reportedly happened to a spokesperson of the former governmental bloc, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia (ibid.; Agence France Presse 2 Dec. 2003).

Furthermore, according to the United Nations Association of Georgia (Civil.ge), "[g]overnmental control over media outlets and televisions has become one of the major concerns since the Rose Revolution" (29 Nov. 2004).

Tina Khidasheli, chairwoman of the NGO Georgian Young Lawyers Association criticized the government of President Saakashvili "for its role in human rights abuse and for mounting pressure on media" (UN Association in Georgia 14 Dec. 2004). Former PM Zurab Zhnania - who died on 3 February 2005 "apparently poisoned by gas from a faulty heater" (BBC News 3 Feb. 2005b) - responded, in a short article published on

11 December 2004, that "some of the claims" from Tina Khidasheli's article "[were] misleading and at times flatly inaccurate" (UN Association in Georgia 14 Dec. 2004).

AI also mentions that authorities detained members of the youth organization Kmara and members of their families "for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression" (25 Jan. 2004).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 2 December 2003. "Opposition Leader Escapes Apparent Assassination Attempt." (Dialog)

Amnesty International (AI). 25 January 2004. "Georgia: President Saakashvili Should Put Human Rights at the Heart of his Policies." (EUR 56/001/2004) <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR560012004?open&of=ENG-GEO>> [Accessed 2 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 9 December 2003. "Georgia: Treatment of Opponents is Litmus Test for Commitment to Human Rights." (EUR 56/004/2003). <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR560042003?open&of=ENG-GEO>> [Accessed 2 Feb. 2005]

BBC News. 3 February 2005a. "Timeline: Georgia A Chronology of Key Events." <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country\\_profiles/1102575.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1102575.stm)> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 3 February 2005b. "Saakashvili Steps in as PM Dies." <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4231653.stm>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

Comité de liaison pour la solidarité avec l'Europe de l'Est (COLISEE). 28 July 2004. Mirian Méloua. "Biographie de Mikhaïl Saakachvili, président de la Géorgie." <[http://www.colisee.org/article.php?id\\_article=1362](http://www.colisee.org/article.php?id_article=1362)> [Accessed 28 Jan. 2005]

*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003*. 25 February 2004. "Georgia." Department of State of the United States. Washington, D.C. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27838.htm>> [Accessed 2 Feb. 2005]

Freedom House. 23 August 2004. "Georgia." *Freedom in the World 2004*. <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/georgia.htm>> [Accessed 2 Feb. 2005]

Liberty Institute [Tbilisi]. n.d. "Freedom of Speech." <[http://www.liberty.ge/eng/categories.php?genre\\_id=79&section\\_id=2&from=categories](http://www.liberty.ge/eng/categories.php?genre_id=79&section_id=2&from=categories)> [Accessed 2 Feb. 2005]

United Nations Association of Georgia (Civil.ge). 14 Dec. 2004. Giorgi Sepashvili. "Georgian PM Responds to Civil Society Leader's Criticism." <<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8570>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 29 November 2004. Nino Kutsidze. "Rose Revolution - A Year After; Q & A With RFE/RL Journalist Tamar Chikovani." <<http://www.civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=64>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sources, including:** Amnesty International, Comité de liaison pour la solidarité avec l'Europe de l'Est (COLISEE), *Country Reports 2003*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Internews Georgia, Liberty Institute [Tbilisi], Open Society - Georgia Foundation, United Nations Country Team in Georgia

**The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.**