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Georgia: Human rights defender and lawyer Eduard Marikashvili arbitrarily detained and facing hooliganism and disobedience charges

On 6 June 2023, the Tbilisi City Court started to review the case of the human rights defender and lawyer **Eduard Marikashvili**. The human rights defender is accused of hooliganism and disobedience of a legal order from the police. Eduard Marikashvili is on trial for participating in a peaceful public protest on 2 June 2023, where he was arbitrarily arrested and detained for 48 hours. The human rights defender intends to file a complaint concerning the violation of his right to freedom of assembly, his unlawful detention and the extension of this detention.

[Eduard Marikashvili](#) is a Georgian human rights defender and lawyer. In his human rights litigation, he focuses on juvenile justice, criminal law and accountability. He has been Chairperson of the human rights organisation “Georgian Democracy Initiative” (GDI) since 2021. GDI is committed to defending human rights, expanding inclusivity in society and promoting tolerance, as well as strengthening democratic reforms, advancing the rule of law and enhancing transparency and accountability of public institutions. GDI carried out monitoring, open debate, fact-based research and analysis of policy options to address the challenges facing Georgia. Eduard Marikashvili has been working as a human rights lawyer since 2014, and has headed the Legal Aid Centre within the GDI since 2017. He has also been a lecturer in the Free University of Tbilisi since 2019.

On 2 June 2023, at 10:30 pm, human rights defender and lawyer Eduard Marikashvili arrived to a peaceful protest in front of the Georgian Parliament in Tbilisi. The protesters had gathered to express their discontent with the Georgian government's foreign policy and Georgia's growing alliance with the Russian authorities. The human rights defender joined the protest to monitor the violation of the peaceful protesters' rights, as law enforcement officers started to violently arrest and detain them while confiscating and destroying their signs. Eduard Marikashvili joined the protest and held a blank piece of paper in his hands.

At approximately 11:45 pm, [law enforcement officers approached Eduard Marikashvili and a group of other protesters, ripped the white paper from the hands of the human rights defender, destroyed it and arbitrarily arrested him and some other protesters](#). The law enforcement officers brought the human rights defender to the Georgian Ministry of Interior's premises in Tbilisi, where he spent several hours. He was then transferred to a pre-trial detention facility in Telavi, where he spent 48 hours. He was repeatedly denied access to his lawyers, Giorgi Tabatadze, Ivane Chitashvili and Merab Mamuladze, who arrived at the Ministry of Interior's premises. The human rights defender faces charges of hooliganism and disobedience of a legal order from the police, offences envisioned under Article 166 and Article 173 of the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia. He was released after 48 hours in detention.

During the hearing on 6 June 2023 at the Tbilisi City Court, Ana Vazagashvili, the representative of the Ministry of Interior, stated that law enforcement officials did not request the body camera footage from the police officers who detained Eduard Marikashvili, despite previously citing the need to request body camera recordings as the reason for extending his detention. In addition to this, on 3 June 2023, law enforcement officers extended the detention time of the human rights defender from 24 to 48 hours at the written request of the Head of Infantry Police Officers and Non-Contact Patrol Division, Zviad Khurtsilava. This request cited the need to receive and review the

evidence from the police body cameras. The Court postponed the hearing on merits until 28 June 2023. Eduard Marikashvili intends to file a complaint concerning the violation of his right to freedom of assembly, his unlawful detention and the extension of this detention.

Front Line Defenders expresses grave concerns about the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender and lawyer Eduard Marikashvili during a peaceful protest, as well as the unfounded charges of hooliganism and disobedience against him. Arrests and trumped-up charges against peaceful protesters, who express their discontent with Georgian foreign policy and growing political closeness with the Russian Federation, violate citizens' rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Such targeting, along with the recent unsuccessful attempt to pass the so-called "[foreign agents" bill](#), contribute to a negative trend that significantly impacts the ability of human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists to carry out their legitimate and non-violent work. Front Line Defenders urges the Georgian authorities to ensure a safe and productive environment for human rights defenders and groups in the country.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the authorities of Georgia to:

1. Immediately cease persecution and drop all charges against human rights defender and lawyer Eduard Marikashvili as he is being targeted as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure the physical and psychological integrity of Eduard Marikashvili;
3. Ensure that Eduard Merikashvili is fully reinstated in his rights;
4. Ensure that Eduard Merikashvili, as well as other human rights defenders, can exercise his right to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly;
5. Cease targeting peaceful protesters in Georgia with arbitrary arrests, detentions and trumped-up charges;
6. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Georgia are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Georgia's international human rights obligations and commitments.