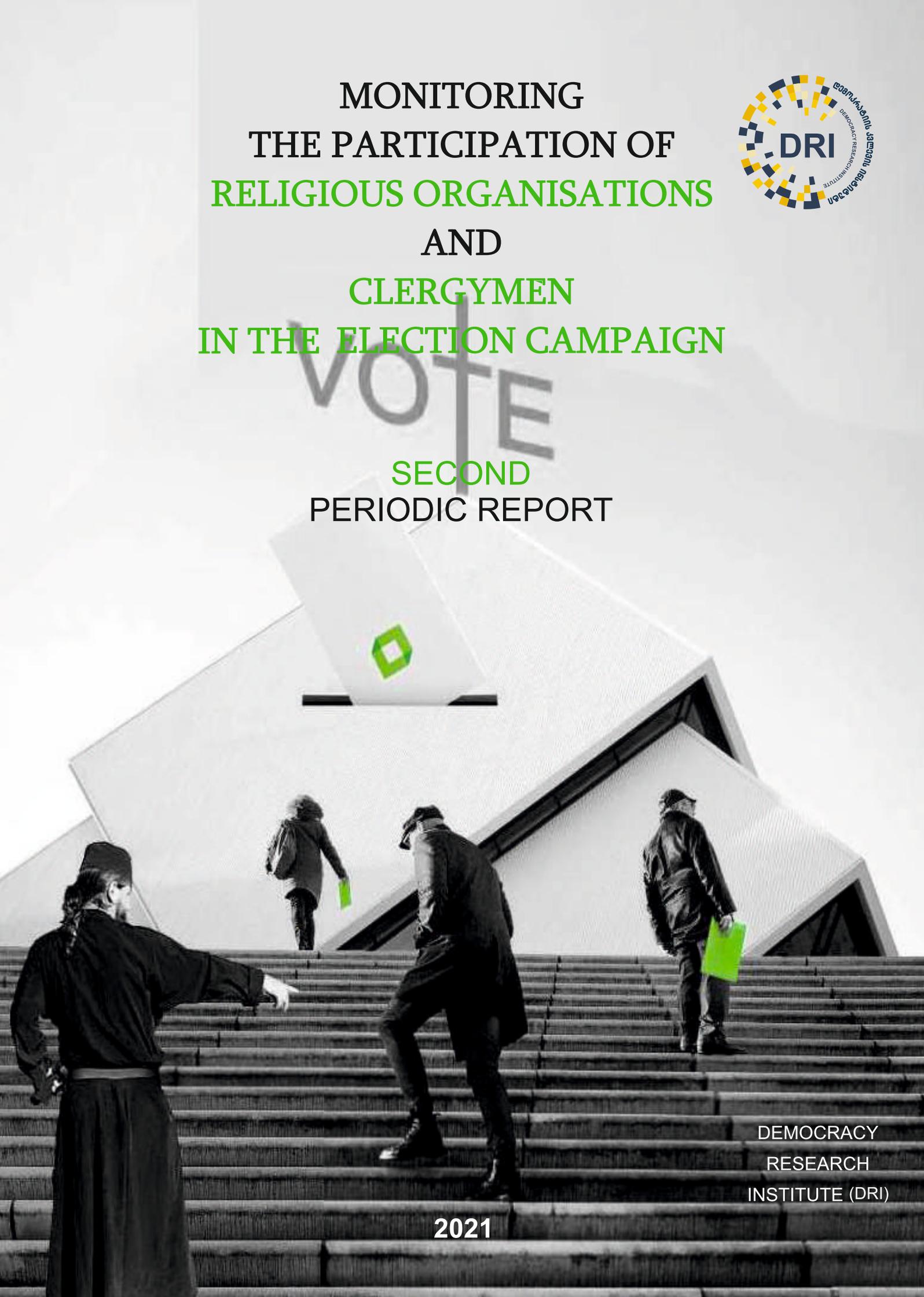


MONITORING
THE PARTICIPATION OF
RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS
AND
CLERGYMEN
IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN



SECOND
PERIODIC REPORT



DEMOCRACY
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 
- 1 INTRODUCTION
 - 1 THE STATE AND THE CHURCH –
IS THE DIVIDING LINE BEING ERASED?
 - 5 RELEASING MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI –
THE REASON FOR CONTRASTING VIEWS OF THE CLERGYMEN
 - 11 CLERGYMEN IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES
 - 13 WHO IS (NOT) CALLING FOR RECONCILIATION?

INTRODUCTION

The return of Mikheil Saakashvili to Georgia prior to the local self-government elections has resulted in his detention, and further agitated clergy to engage in election campaigning more intensely. Besides the political statements voiced by clergymen, the leaders of the GD and UNM parties spared no effort to prove their loyalty to the Patriarch and the Orthodox Church. Intensity, with which the political leaders attempt to prove their loyalty to the Church, is a sign that distinguishes the 2021 pre-election campaign from other recently held elections. Portraying the Church, as the foundation of the State, and the exceptional focus the authorities place on the unity of the State and the Church, has never been this relevant in any pre-election campaign in the past. Georgia is a multi-ethnic country with diverse religious demography. The Constitution of Georgia recognizes the Church and the State as mutual independent institutions. The statements the public officials make blur this distinction, and weaken the principle of secular statehood of Georgia.

The runoffs were also particularly characterized by the fluidity of positions the politicians displayed whenever it came to pleasing the Church. To prove their loyalty and their religiosity, Mikheil Saakashvili and many other opposition leaders did not hold back either.

The present report covers the period from 2 October to 28 October. It lists the facts of participation of clergymen in political processes. During the monitoring period, the importance Mikheil Saakashvili holds in public has also emerged clearly, both in the electoral processes and in the clergy. Therefore, two key findings appear: First, M. Saakashvili's return to Georgia, and his detention-liberation has split opinions among clergy, further strengthening previous assumptions that spiritual leaders are engaged in negotiations with political actors to solidify their own influence. Second, it has explained the practice of manipulating ethical and moral issues by political candidates to take advantage of the Church and religion.

For the present report, we have adopted a conditional approach, that political participation of clergymen to mean social media related psychological and behavioral factors, their political participation in online space, which may have an influence on the attitudes of the electorate, election of public officials and on policy matters. The report evaluates both the political statements of the clergy and the politicians' attempts to manipulate the public via the Church.

THE STATE AND THE CHURCH – IS THE DIVIDING LINE BEING ERASED?

Article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia regulates the relationship between the State and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia. Along with freedom of belief and religion, the State recognizes the outstanding role of the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia, and its independence from the State. The prohibition of religious organizations to interfere in political processes is emphasized in the Election Code of Georgia, which prohibits the participation of religious organizations in the pre-election campaigns. However, Georgian legislation has not specifically told politicians not to manipulate public opinion by using religious organizations and the Church to their advantage. This is a

harmful practice, as it endangers the principle of mutual independence of the state and the church.

Georgian Dream

October 27 demonstration held by the Georgian Dream

On October 27, 2021, the governing party Georgian Dream held a massive demonstration to showcase their support and public officials addressed it. Almost all speakers were stressing how special the bond is between the Church and the State and how closely aligned these two are.

Irakli Gharibashvili, Prime Minister: “we will forgive no one for scolding and insulting clergy and the foundation of Georgian statehood—the Orthodox Church.”

Irakli Kobakhidze, Member of the parliament, Chair of GD-for Democratic Georgia political party: “In 2012, here, on this square, people gathered and with their unity, they founded a new constitutional order, which, until today, is guided by the principles of dignity, statehood, the Church, humanity and freedom.”

Thea Tsulukiani, Vice prime-Minister, Minister of Culture, Sport and Youth: “It is the duty of our government and it is our destiny, that we shall pass the power not to those corpse-eaters, Georgian-haters, not to those apostles of the past and those peeping from the prison cells, not to those who fight Ilia the II, not to those who target icons and the Cross.”

Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, Secretary General of GD party: “We have been tasked by the Georgian people, once again, my friends, to defend the strength of our statehood and the Church, defend human dignity and freedom.”

Irakli Gharibashvili, Prime Minister

In his response to Nika Gvaramia¹. The PM stressed the unity of the Church and the State, and argued that any criticism of the incumbent bishop Shio Mujiri was an anti-state position.

“We are witnessing non-stop attacks against the Church, the bishops, the metropolitans—the representatives of the Church. I would like to respond to the statement of Nika Gvaramia, who is the author of one of the most despicable and anti-state campaigns, and would like to speak about his attack against Locum Tenens Shio Mujiri, against the entire Church. This is a classical example, who they are fighting the state, the Church – the core foundation. Today, our population faces a simple choice. One the one hand, this is GD, who is serving its people, who has already, three times received popular mandate, and on the other hand, this is anti-state, people’s abuser,

¹ 17 October, Show “Key Accents” (available at <https://www.facebook.com/TvMtavari/videos/1681646005533615>) Nika Gvaramia responded to Locum Tenens Shio Mujiri with threatening statement. Shio Mujiri words, that some people often interpret the Holy Books improperly about forgiveness, Gvaramia responded – “I promise you, rather sooner than later, that your moral will come before you are able ascend to the Patriarch’s throne.” primetime.ge, “Gvaramia responded to Mujiri with threatening statement”, 18.10.2021, available at <https://primetime.ge/nika-gvaramia-meufe-shios-gpirdebit-umal-tqveni-moraluri-sikvdili-dadgeba-vidre-tqven-katolikos-patriarqi-gakhdebit/>

torturer and an enemy of the Church, a criminal band of Gvaramia-Saakashvili-Melia, who will be ended on October 30 and the Country will proceed peaceful development.”– said Gharibashvili.²

Shalva Papuashvili, Member of the Parliament, GD Secretary of PR

On October 16, Shalva Papuashvili reshared TV Imedi coverage on his own page, in which a philologist Levan Gigineishvili talks about the violent regime of UNM in their 9 years of tenure. Papuashvili titled the video with the words of the Metropolitan Dimitri Shiolashvili, saying it was the most accurate explanation of the reasons polarization persists.³



United National Movement

Mikheil Saakashvili

Mikheil Saakashvili has distributed information via his official FB page, in which he speaks highly of Ilia the II and pays his personal respect to him. He also declares that he was and is the follower of the dominant positions of the St. Synod. “Since the time of the Communists, 1979, after I have attended with my teacher, Mara Chavchavadze, still as a child, the sermon served by his Holiness, I remain his spiritual son and support all of his positions taken regarding major ecclesiastical issues.”⁴

The statement of the Third President of Georgia received a reply from the former Metropolitan of Tchkondidi, Petre Tsaava. Petre Tsaava said, that the statement, was “a diplomatic and dirty political game” and added that “it is extremely regrettable, that for such a huge patriot and strong politician that you are, this is a terrible mistake, when you are trying to engage in diplomatic and dirty political game rules to build relations with them. Let me briefly tell you, that supporting the spiritual course of the KGB’s Red, Soviet Patriarch and praising him today is no more, or no less, supporting fake Christians and Soviet legacy.”⁵

In the given political reality, showing one’s religious beliefs and attitudes toward the Church is one of the methods of manipulation, which is used to gain the goodwill of

² RFRL “PM calls Gvaramia’s show on Locum Tenens Shio Mujiri as an anti-state policy.” 19.10.2021, available at <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31519225.html>

³ Shalva Papuashvili, FB page, available at <https://fb.watch/8Tpr6US8x2/>

⁴ Mikheil Saakashvili, FB page, 20.10.2021, available at <https://www.facebook.com/SaakashviliMikheil/posts/413811506781119>

⁵ Tabula.ge, “Metropolitan Petre to Saakashvili – the Lord, who awards victory, resides in truth, not in the Soviet Patriarch.” 20.10.2021, available at https://tabula.ge/ge/news/674822-meupe-petre-saakashvilis-gamarjvebis-momnichebeli?fbclid=IwAR2qNd4ALxMwYJ2kTuXi5Yv5QLCkhyv7zoAIdGU-Gct49TA9K3J7Sit_t0

the voters. This is illustrated by Mikheil Saakashvili’s attempts to present himself as the “pious” victim, who is unable to carry a small cross on chest⁶.

Levan Khabeishvili

Levan Khabeishvili is an MP and one of the leaders of UNM. He stated that during M. Saakashvili's presidency, under the UNM rule, most churches in Georgia were built. He declared: “Tell me, can you recall any other epoch since Georgia has gained independence, other than Saakashvili’s period, that would see this many Churches erected? Tell me another example, when the trust and rating of the Patriarchate was as high as during Saakashvili time, when it reached 99%.”⁷

Gigi Ugulava, UNM’s mayoral candidate in Poti

During the pre-election campaign period, Gigi Ugulava noticeably adjusted his rhetoric regarding the Patriarch. It was only a few months back he was laying the blame for the 5th July violence at the Government’s and the Patriarch, Iliia the II’s feet.

“Ivanishvili and Iliia the II are responsible... What we saw yesterday, it was an Apocalyptic Beast, released, with the blessing given by Gharibashvili, from the dungeons of the Patriarchate, to cover up their own problems... It’s a shame, when anyone working at the Patriarchate’s office, starting from the doorman and continued with the highest of clergymen, are busy investigating who sleeps with whom, and then they drive people crazy and hoicks humans against other humans.”– said Ugulava in his interview with TV Pirveli.⁸



Today, Gigi Ugulava’s rhetoric has been changed. He claims the Church is one of the most important institutions in the country. While talking about the health of the Patriarch, he fears the Church would become subjected to the Russian Orthodox Churches’ influence should Iliia the II be no more.

⁶ ipress.ge, “Mikheil Saakashvili: I am unable to carry a small cross on chest, the person who ensured that the Cross was featured on the State Flag.” 20.10.2021, available at <https://ipress.ge/new/mikheil-saakashvili-sakheltsipho-droshaze-jvrjs-gamomsakhvels-ar-medzleva-uphleba-tsikheshi-mkerdze-chemi-patara-jvari-vataro/> ;

⁷ Tabula.ge, “Khabeishvili: point me to a period, when the Church and a priest were more appreciated than in Misha’s time in power.” 24.10.2021, available at https://tabula.ge/ge/news/674999-khabeishvili-mitkharit-periodi-rotsa-eklesias?fbclid=IwAR0Dyla5EunAe7hCJfCKmJZ4jHmwWObjAVo8wNqKV57_uLXas0SSBibaZNE

⁸ TV Pirveli, “Ivanishvili and Iliia the II are responsible – Gigi Ugulava” (video). 06.07.2021, available at https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebi/politika/6449-pasukhismgebeli-aris-ivanishvili-da-ilia-meore-ugulava-video?fbclid=IwAR1xb3V_K8PI5cr8lQ2sJtCuOHqI8YoC_EPcgxJPfm5el4pYhPhbOcy2lkl

“Now, in this scenario, I honestly wish him health, since it is his health, that determines the freedom of the Church today, that Russia cannot take it under their wraps, so that they are not able to do so, since our Autocephalous Church is one of the most important institutions in this country, which is looking towards the West, freedom, democracy, Western security systems and welfare, and it is in this architecture that our Church always finds itself inscribed into, but not Shio Mujiri, who is the Locum Tenens of the Kremlin.” – a quote disseminated by an Internet - portal Tabula.⁹

RELEASING MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI –

THE REASON FOR CONTRASTING VIEWS OF THE CLERGYMEN

Saakashvili's imprisonment and related views of clergy can't necessarily be viewed or perceived as a clerical attempt to interfere in politics, given the general nature of the Orthodox views and the universal love for humanity. Despite this, the issue is polyhedral. Mikheil Saakashvili is not only a former president of Georgia. He is also the face and the center of attraction of the largest opposition party in the country. Therefore, the statements made by high-ranking clergymen about him, in the period leading to local municipal elections, can in no way be viewed as isolated from ongoing political developments. Given the social weight individual clergymen hold among the public, every statement they make regarding Saakashvili might affect the way votes swing.

We could say that Saakashvili's detention has crystallized the general political inclinations of Georgian clergymen. Some leaders of the Church joined the “Free Misha” petition, while the others spared no effort to radically distance themselves from it. According to the IPN agency, this is the order, in which the high-ranking priests signed the petition: Margveti and Ubisa Bishop, Melkisedek, The Metropolitan of Akhalkalaki, Kumurdo and Kars, Nikoloz Pachuashvili, Metropolitan of Shemokmedi, Joseph, Poti and Khobi Metropolitan, Grigol. Metropolitans John Gamrekeli, Stephen, Archimandrite Ioane Mtchedlishvili, and Marneuli and Hujabi Bishop Giorgi Jamdeliani stated they would not join the petition. The Patriarch's nephew, Dimitri Shiolashvili went even further and condemned those who signed the said petition.

Support received by the Third President from the clergymen is their subjective view and cannot be portrayed as the position of the Patriarchate, said Andria Jaghmaidze, the head of PR of this institution.¹⁰

Metropolitans Nikoloz Pachuashvili and Malkhaz Songhulashvili called on the public on October 14, 2021 to reconcile. However, the Patriarch's Locum Tenens came out unequivocally against the idea of reconciliation.

⁹ Tabula.ge, ‘Gigi Ugulava – On Patriarch's health’, 19.10.2021, available at https://tabula.ge/ge/news/674737-ugulava-patriarkis-janmrtelobazea-damokidebuli?fbclid=IwAR0tIX6DMPglFz2yOOtBg_3PuMVHdvNQ_4r5gIcEd09e-JHkKdopsOWVApA

¹⁰ RFRL, “RFRL disseminates Andria Jaghmaidze's statement,” 07.10.2021, available at <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.radiotavisupleba.ge%2Fa%2F31508759.html%3Ffbclid%3DlWAr1rrXYcVmmf1L-zwgii1dZaziBpgd11Gb-D6WuxWI33iNjfCHfRCXMOumo&h=AT2B-1O7zm1T9ov52kKI7xHUdyuh5okJZTWelJVVuSu2qmdN3AQTHrYDSy5H2dDy9UD1YWbvHkNaxvaUdgcyyKnhSoOs3Qi6HCbVfDiztFBB6yq45vfhlrZfjtzbjAA0OroeoyYcE8Q3aIY>

The Metropolitan of Akhalkalaki, Kumurdo and Kars, Nikoloz Pachuashvili

Nikoloz Pachuashvili is the head of the Patriarchate's Missions and Evangelization Department and a member of the Synod. started talking about reconciliation first. According to media reports, the Metropolitan of Akhalkalaki, Kumurdo and Kars was one of the first to pay a visit to jailed Mikheil Saakashvili at the Penitentiary #12 in Rustavi.

According to his statements, he doesn't wish that the Third President be imprisoned. "I wish that the current leader did not imprison the previous leader. I wish they could communicate without this – When the government will be replaced again, I want that these changes did not result in someone's imprisonment...Saakashvili set a precedent for this, by not having his predecessor arrested,"¹¹ He told RFRL journalist.

"I think we all, the whole country, are facing a big challenge today. The solution is to stop hateful rhetoric and to stop bad-mouthing each other. I have pleaded with Mr. Mikheil to call on his supporters and to every TV station he could, to ask as firmly as possible, to let us think jointly about reconciliation and forgiveness, Christian forgiveness. We have to forgive a lot to each other... if we were to start calculating who has committed what crimes, our country will not be able to move forward...I have high hopes, that Mr. Mikheil will be released from the prison and a new age will commence in the history of our Country, via the fact, that all of us, existing, past or future governments, will find mutual language to communicate and we will all, find a common language to speak to each other "¹²

Pachuashvili's statement regarding the imprisonment of Saakashvili has intensified the media frenzy on the issue. This stimulated other clergymen to make statements about releasing Saakashvili and to argue for reconciliation, and, on the other hand, to argue that the UNM should never be allowed back to power.

Bishop Melkisedek

The Bishop of Margveti and Ubisa, and the member of the Synod, Melkisedek has visited Saakashvili in the Penitentiary Establishment #12 on October 14.¹³

Metropolitan Joseph

Metropolitan Joseph is a member of the Synod. He supported the petition to free Saakashvili.

"I do not want us to fall into yet another sin and to make punishing our presidents a national tradition. What you do to others, the same, or worse, may happen to you. And

¹¹ RFRL, "Metropolitan Pachuashvili joins Free Misha petition," 11.10.2021, available https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31503553.html?fbclid=IwAR2QaYmxH2Se2inkIVQ2t2R8HsJuyoGcq2u34ci9KjyYDQ4DpWxZC0_sdao

¹² RFRL, "Metropolitan Pachuashvili: I have high hopes to see Mr. Mikheil released from prison," 13.10.2021, available <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31507423.html?fbclid=IwAR3zHNR-TJi5A-zM6bSS1ji-LS0TDQgRMGvnpnDww83Dlpg29L3flrxyT2k>

¹³ RFRL, "Bishop Melkisedek visit Mikheil Saakashvili in priso, 15.10.2021, available at <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31511996.html?fbclid=IwAR2BGp6QCLotr2J2OTQJTAMivvyudrmHPwhbuLw6zJc1OG46I2Tbpe7sCco>

if we are discussing punishing the Third President of Georgia, first, let's ask: why are the murderers of Zviad Gamsakhurdia still unpunished? Why is this crime still not investigated? Why are those who committed vice against our country, without punishment? Nevertheless, together with the majority, I am not demanding anyone's punishment, the Lord is merciful and we should, for once and for all, reconcile and establish peaceful elections and country. I would like to once again, ask our authorities, our people, to show Christian mercifulness, love. If not, the same, and maybe even worse, will happen to them.”¹⁴

Metropolitan Grigol

The Metropolitan of Poti and Khobi is also a member of the Synod. He stated that for every day the Third President spends in jail, Georgia's interests suffer.

“We believe that the Third President of Georgia should be allowed to enjoy a peaceful life in his own homeland; and this is not what he needs, but what our country and society's future needs. I hope that the Georgian authorities will take every measure that overcomes the danger zone, without damaging consequences to your country, and the peril, in which our homeland has found itself, and considering our heavy past, we will be able to sustainably move forward! “¹⁵

Metropolitan Anania

Metropolitan Anania is a member of the Synod. RFRL publishes his commentary, made in Mtskheta, prior to Svetitskhoveli Day sermon: “let's forgive, let's pardon, this is most important – forgiveness.” He confirmed to the media that he would “definitely” sign the petition.¹⁶

Bishop Michael

The Bishop of Tianeti and Pshav-Khevsureti, Michael, is a member of the Synod. He holds a neutral view regarding Saakashvili. According to him, he is in favor of releasing everyone and returning to their beloved families. “Signing the petition does not mean much. What matters is that I only wish kindness and goodness for every human. This is not only about M. Saakashvili. Here we mean all of those individuals, who are missed in their homes by their parents and siblings. “¹⁷

¹⁴ newsreport.ge, “I would like to clarify why I signed Free Misha petition – Metropolitan Joseph,” 12.10.2021, available at მსურს, განმარტო, რატომ მოვაწერე ხელი სააკაშვილის გათავისუფლებას – მეუფე იოსებო | newsreport.ge

¹⁵ interpressnews.ge, “For every day the Third President spends in jail, Georgia's interests suffer” – Poti and Khobi Metropolitan, 13.10.2021, available at <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/678558-potisa-da-xobis-mitropoliti-mesame-prezidentis-sapqrobileshi-qopnis-qoveli-dge-mxolod-da-mxolod-kveqnis-interesebis-sazianod-mokmedebs>

¹⁶ RFRL, “Metropolitan Anania to sign Free Misha petition,” 14.10.2021, available at https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31508407.html?fbclid=IwAR2gPvLk_Yp8Q5n7TYWEmXCB1W8d8rR6VzSCM DB9W0W7IJlX47LawFeqQ0

¹⁷ interpressnews.ge, “Signing the petition does not mean much. Everyone wants to be free. I support this. Let everyone return to beloved family,” 14.10.2021 available at <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/678752-meupe-mikaeli-xelis-mocera-bevrs-arapers-nishnavs-tavisupleba-unda-qvelas-momxre-var-rom-qvela-adamiani-gatavisupldes-da-saqvarel-ojaks-daubrundebs>

His Grace, Grigol Katsia

Grigol Katsia is the Bishop of Agaraki-Tsalka and a member of the Synod of the Orthodox Church. According to his statement, he will sign the “Free Misha” petition, if he receives the Patriarch’s blessing to do so - “if the Patriarch gives me the blessing, I will.”¹⁸

Metropolitan Dimitri (Shiolashvili)

Batumi and Lazeti Metropolitan Dimitri is a member of Synod and the nephew of the Patriarch Ilia the II. He aired his negative views regarding President Saakashvili on his own FB page. He also scolded those priests who signed the “Free Misha” petition. “Reconciliation is a holy business, the core of our belief and the kernel of all kernels. It should be the tortured who desire reconciliation and not the torturer who should experience regret. I call on those clergy who signed the petitions. Have you at least once met the families of those tortured? Have you heard of their troubles and woes?”¹⁹

Later on, the member of the ruling party, and the member of its political council, Shalva Papuashvili, quoted the Metropolitan to strengthen his own argument.

Metropolitan John Gamrekeli

The Metropolitan of Kutaisi and Gaenati diocese is the chair of the St. King David Education Center and the member of the Synod. The metropolitan expressed his position regarding the release of Saakashvili, responding to a question asked by a journalist; He said the position of other bishops was their own subjective opinion. “What is their motive? Why do they sign it? It is their business. The national interest is subject to subjective position. If there is no justice in the country, we shall speak of the country any more. In 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, were you not questioning the fairness of the Justice system in Georgia? Don’t you remember they were raiding hundreds of thousands of manifestants? Nobody protested this then. When the businesses were robbed, when the murders were being committed... now you question these? When the criminal is not willing to confess, is not repenting and continues to behave like a hooligan, there is not reconciliation for them.” – the Metropolitan John told the media.²⁰

¹⁸ Tabula.ge, “if the Patriarch gives me the blessing, I will sign the Free Misha petition,” 14.10.2021, available at <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/674549-meupe-grigol-katsia-patriarkis-kurtkheva-tu?fbclid=IwAR3Z2KT8YHDfrKzREsb07LafCIUpAhzX0hCqdqYVK8hdYJiMoHSV9MhYF-c>

¹⁹ interpressnews.ge, “Metropolitan Dimitri – It should be the tortured, who desire reconciliation and not the torturer, who should be experiencing regret. I call on those clergy, who signed the petitions, have you at least once met the families of those tortured? Have you heard their troubles and woes?” 15.10.2021, available at <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/679028-meupe-dimitri-sherigebis-survili-unda-modiodes-tanjulsgan-dara-mtanjvelisgan-peticiaze-xelmomcer-mgvdelmtavrebs-mivmartav-ertxel-mainc-tu-shexvedrixart-am-tanjva-cameba-gamovlil-ojaxebs>

²⁰ interpressnews.ge, “When the criminal is not willing to confess, is not repenting and continues to behave like a hooligan, there is no reconciliation for them.” – the Metropolitan John on Saakashvili, 14.10.2021, available at <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/678741-meupe-ioane-saakashvilze-roca-damnashave-ar-agiarebs-danashauls-ar-nanobs-da-kidev-aket-xulignobs-sherigeba-ar-xdeba>

Metropolitan Stephen

The Metropolitan of Tchkondidi and the members of Synod did not join others in demanding the release of Saakashvili. He told the media that he was not going to sign the petition either.

“If the Lord will not be fair, then the hell will be abolished in effect and the Heavens will resemble a stinky pig farm. If there is no justice, that which is goodness, is not only a mercy. As for Saakashvili, I cannot assess political crooks and provocateurs. I shall not sign [the petition]. Not going to do it.” – he said.²¹

On October 24, while delivering this Sunday sermon, the Metropolitan addressed M. Saakashvili: “You need to say your graces, what hunger strike are you talking about? The Patriarch has sent you communion bread and his blessings. Accept it and stay calm, peaceful and continue your repenting life. What do you want? Why are you trying to grab power?!”²²

Archimandrite Ioane Mtchedlishvili

Archimandrite Ioane Mtchedlishvili of the Holy Trinity Cathedral, with 37,000 followers on FB, is a frequent distributor of video and audio materials that criticize Saakashvili. He also shared a Sunday sermon video recording of the Patriarch’s Locum Tenens, Shio Mujiri, who is also the Metropolitan of Senaki and Tchkorotsku. The video was filled with anti-Saakashvili rhetoric.



²¹ interpressnews.ge, “I cannot assess political crooks and provocateurs. I shall not sign the petition,” 14.10.2021, available at <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/678740-meupe-stepane-saakashvilze-politikur-aperisteb-sa-da-politikur-provokatorebs-ver-vapaseb-peticiaze-xelmoceras-ar-vapireb>

²² Faxinter.news - Metropolitan Stephen on Saakashvili; 24.10.2021, available at [https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=428336968643336&external_log_id=00e05291-6731-4811-a6c5-](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=428336968643336&external_log_id=00e05291-6731-4811-a6c5-2a3a3ba4d615&q=%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%20%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A2%E1%83%94%E1%83%A4%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%94)

[2a3a3ba4d615&q=%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%20%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A2%E1%83%94%E1%83%A4%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%94](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=428336968643336&external_log_id=00e05291-6731-4811-a6c5-2a3a3ba4d615&q=%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%20%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A2%E1%83%94%E1%83%A4%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%94)

Bishop of Marneuli and Hujabi, Giorgi (Jamdeliani)

The Bishop of Marneuli and Hujabi do not restrain himself from making political statements. On October 19, an interview appeared in social media, in which the bishop talks about M. Saakashvili and the moral and political accountability placed on Georgia's 3rd President. The bishop also remembered violent acts committed during his presidency.²³

Our Savior Transfiguration Cathedral leader of Vake, Tbilisi - Father Shalva Kekelia

Father Shalva Kekelia is popular among certain segments in the society. On October 20th, a fragment of his sermon became publicly available, in which he is openly stating his political position.

“How could murderers return to power? Don't we remember how, in 2012, we started breathing freely? What kind of regime did we have? How did they murder people, confiscate property? God bless Davit Ujmajuridze's soul, a great man, living in Vake. They removed him from his car at 2AM. His car burned down right in front of Liberty Bank building, because he was funding opposition—the Rights party. They burned down his car, took him to Saguramo forest, beat him up, placed a gun on his head and shot bullets past his ear. How many crimes of this nature did they commit? And look, how menacing they are even today, the way they speak... I'm listening to it, trying to remain patient, watching how they denigrate the Church, all of this, every day, how they destroy it all, if you truly are a Christian, how could you like people like that?”²⁴

Archpriest Davit Konjraia

On October 15, Archpriest Konjaria reshared an interview with his Grace, John, in which John Gamrekeli notes that unless a criminal repents his crimes, unless they ask for forgiveness and they still continue hooliganism, there can be no reconciliation.

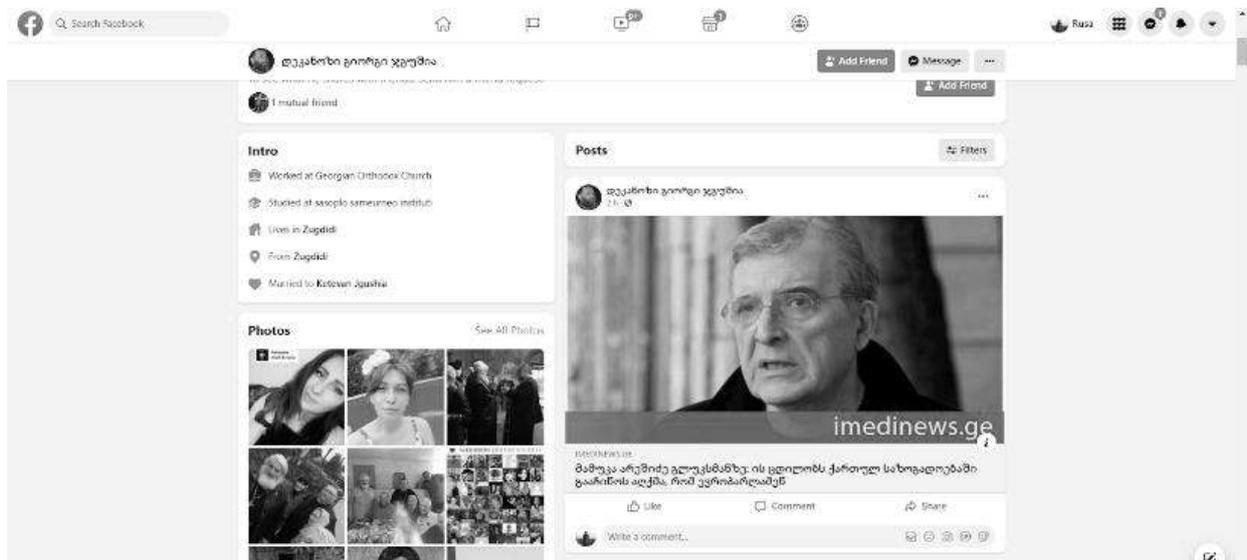


²³ Konservatori, FB page, Metropolitan Giorgi – reconciliation and justice, 19.10.2021; available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=204821551653814>

²⁴ Excerpt from Father Shalva Kekelia sermon, available at მკვლელები როგორ შეიძლება ისევ მთავრობაში მოვიდნენ? ეს მთავრობაც უნიათოები, ამათი ბრალია, რომ ესენი (ოპოზიცია)ასე არიან - INFO POSTALIONI

Archpriest Giorgi Jgushia

On October 19, Archpriest Giorgi Jgushia shared a video of an interview with an IDP, who declared that the UNM members abandoned them during the August 2008 War.²⁵ Next day, he shared an interview with Mamuka Areshidze, in which he claims that Saakashvili is trying to portray himself as if the EU MPs believe he is a political prisoner, while in reality there is a deafening silence about him.



CLERGYMEN IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Archpriest Archil Dateshidze

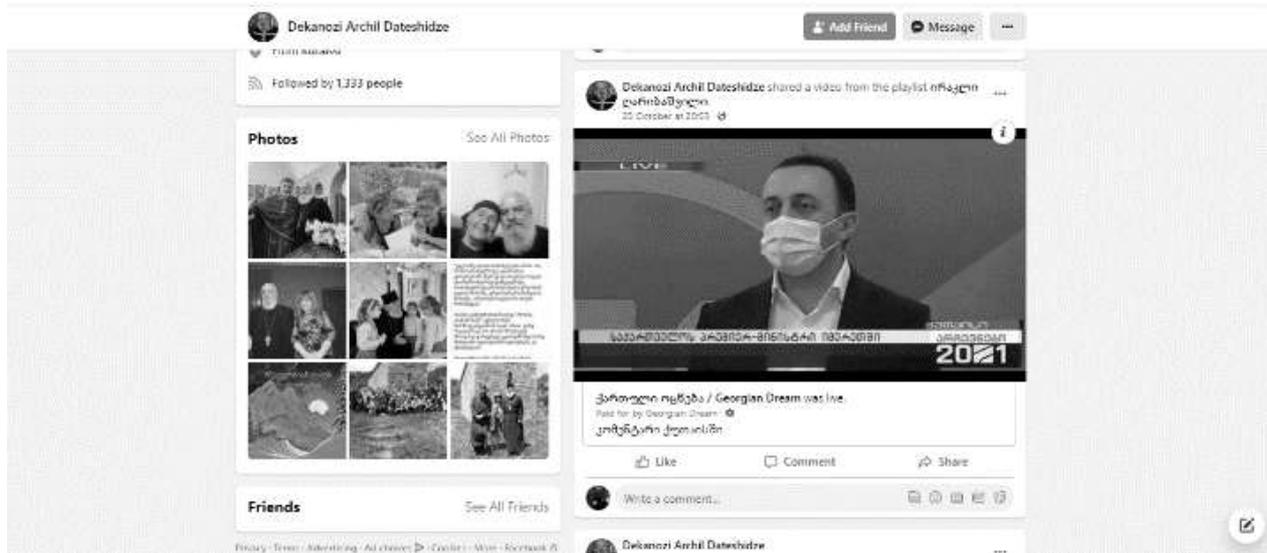
On October 22, Archpriest Archil Dateshidze shared a video made by political party Georgian Dream, in which Irakli Gharibashvili speaks about the Khobi mayoral candidate, Davit Bukia, who he says “was shy of few votes to emerge victorious.”²⁶

On October 22, Archpriest Dateshidze shared another video recording, in which PM Gharibashvili states that in Kutaisi, the Georgian Dream has an honorable candidate, a dignified man, qualified, experiences and a true Kutaisian—Joseph Khakhaleishvili. In the same recording, the PM promised the public servants that their salaries would go up.²⁷

²⁵ V•endetta, “Terrible history of IDPs abandoned by the UNM,” 19.10.2021, <https://www.facebook.com/VendettaKa/videos/270180901661312>

²⁶ Georgian Dream; FB page. Gharibashvili statement in Khobi; 22.20.2021 <https://www.facebook.com/GaribashviliOfficial/videos/437718214445694> ;

²⁷ GD; FB page, I. Gharibashvili comment made in Kutaisi, 23.20.2021; available at <https://www.facebook.com/GeorgianDreamOfficial/videos/569554384126131> ;



Archpriest Elio Chincharadze

Archpriest Chincharadze frequently shares other FB users' posts and does not always express his own opinions. He has around 5000 followers on the social network site.

On October 22, he shared a video, uploaded by another FB user, titled “how many of these promises have been met?” The video recording seems to refer to the electoral campaign video of Kakha Kaladze in 2012 and the promises he made to the voters back then.



WHO IS (NOT) CALLING FOR RECONCILIATION?

Metropolitan Nikoloz Pachuashvili

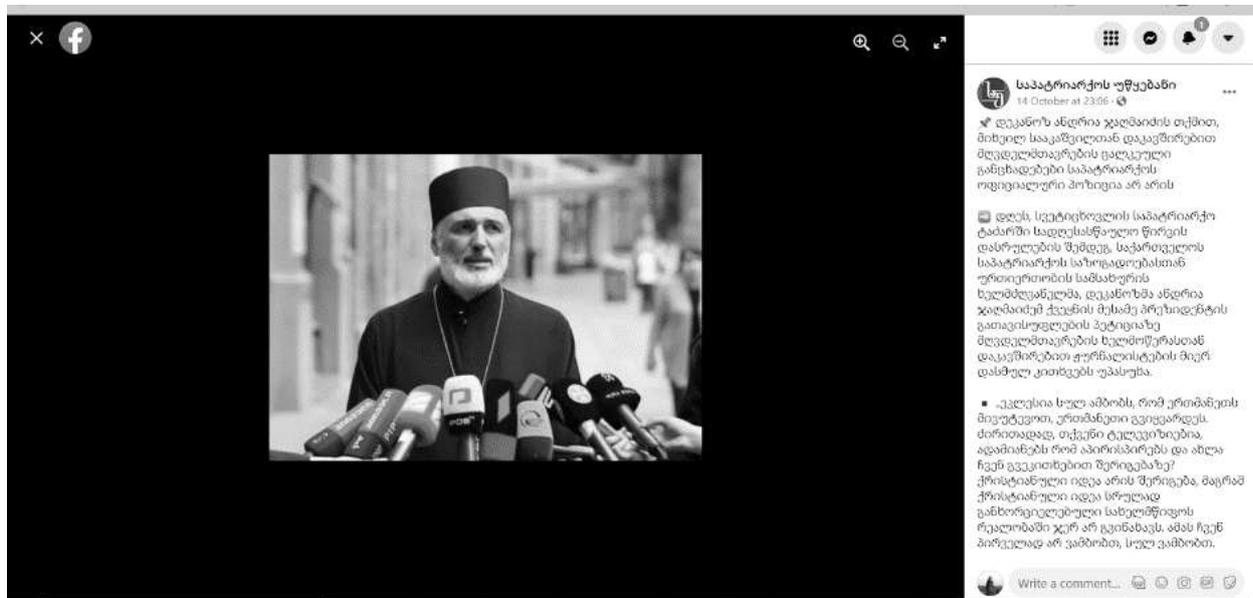
Nikoloz Pachuashvili started talking about reconciliation first. The Metropolitan of Akhalkalaki, Kumurdo and Kars called on politicians and the public to reconcile. He spoke about this following a sermon held in Mtskheta, on Svetitskhoveli Day celebrations.

“The Patriarchate and the Church are always in favor of reconciliation as far as I can remember. We have always been calling on everyone to reconcile, and today is yet another opportunity for Georgian people. Today, we celebrate a common day of forgiveness and everyone, despite everything, we ask each other to forgive and if today, our people were to follow this, our country would be extremely strong and lay the path for quick development. I do not know what it means for politicians to be ready to reconcile, but I know that this is possible and is the only way out of this situation.”²⁸

Nikoloz Pachuashvili was one of the first to pay a visit to jailed Mikheil Saakashvili.

Andria Jaghmaidze

The head of the Patriarchate’s PR office, Andria Jaghmaidze replied to Pachuashvili’s statement on the very same day. According to him, a call for reconciliation is a Christian idea, and the Church has been stating this all the time, “**but** this does not mean that fully adhering to the Christian callings is something that a State must adopt in its operational parameters and categories. If this ever was the case, perhaps we would live in a jolly place.”²⁹



²⁸ RFRL “According to Metropolitan Nikoloz, Patriarchate is for reconciliation, always.” 14.10.2021, available at https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31508702.html?fbclid=IwAR2xvb-K95wCLwrTxdMKr2DWYmyozYYuP51_P_qzH8ypVNdo71gKd3EgGEM

²⁹ Patriarchate Gazette – FB page. 14.10.2021, available at <https://www.facebook.com/sap.uwebaNews/photos/a.127386075337274/628127841929759/>

In Andria Jaghmaidze's view, signing of the petition calling for the release of Saakashvili by some bishops was an attempt to politicize Christian idea. "The Patriarchate takes no position on any of the statements made by them acting in personal capacity. Haven't you been demanding that we remain neutral from political processes? **Today you are asking us to make political statements.** When a Christian idea becomes politicized, it always gets mis portrayed and is always one more reason for conflict and the core tenet of forgiveness and love rests with individual humans anyway."³⁰

Metropolitan Bishop Shio

The Metropolitan diocesan bishop, who is also a member of the Synod, and Patriarchal Locum Tenens responded to the call for national reconciliation on October 17th. According to him, some misinterpret Christian teachings and believe that we should forgive everyone for everything, and we should always reconcile with everyone.

"People today talk about universal reconciliation. They often misinterpret Christian teaching, saying that you should forgive everyone for everything, always reconcile with anyone. Nothing like that is written in the Gospel. We have to ward off and halt evil... sometimes with fair punishment. In extreme cases, it is also justified to banish personal enemies from our lives or society." – he said and reminded his parish the words of St. Paul the Apostle – "cut the impious off!"³¹

Metropolitan's sermon is highly likely to be referring to Mikheil Saakashvili and can be characterized as a political speech.

Metropolitan bishop Malkhaz Songhulashvili

Metropolitan bishop Malkhaz Songhulashvili represents Georgia's Evangelical-Baptist Church. He addressed reconciliation on October 14, 2021 and cited a South African example, where, according to him, South Africa managed to end polarization thanks to the unity of "truth and reconciliation." He sees reconciliation as a way out.

"Our country is facing this failure. However, it is not too late, we can still turn the wheel of fortune. Let's start by taking care of a single human life and continue with building a healthy and empathetic society. This is our change. Those who can hear, let them hear what I have to say now! We all need truth and reconciliation!"³²

³⁰ interpressnews.ge, "Support received by the Third President from the clergymen is their subjective view and cannot be portrayed as the position of the Patriarchate," Andria Jaghmaidze 14.10.2021, available at <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/678802-dekanoz-andria-jagmaizis-gancxadebit-saakashviltan-dakavshirebit-meupeebis-gancxadeba-sapatriarkos-pozicia-ar-aris>

³¹ RFRL, "Shio Mujiri on national reconciliation: "cut the impious off!" 17.10.2021, available at https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31515027.html?nocache=1&fbclid=IwAR25xqrGFqOBD5XzNG_jpMNPWWZwTj0wz9IDkVbSBxGVeVroA_hTUyT_VPw

³² netgazeti.ge, Truth and reconciliation | Malkhaz Songhulashvili, 14.10.2021; available at https://netgazeti.ge/news/569401/?fbclid=IwAR34hMU-Qhm3xiP046tPMW43PWWn_N-5sOlrCkE9D4lpO7chEAU0yQf-zpo