

# [***In New Recordings, Former Georgian President And Putin Foe Alleges Abuse Amid Claims He Is Being Poisoned***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6729-J2S1-DXVP-508B-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Lawyers representing Mikheil Saakashvili, whose health has declined since his imprisonment in October 2021, claim he will die without immediate medical treatment.

**Body**

**Lawyers representing Mikheil Saakashvili, whose health has declined since his imprisonment in October 2021, claim he will die without immediate medical treatment.**

Former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili says he has repeatedly lost consciousness after altercations with prison guards overseeing his incarceration. In audio recordings obtained by**Forbes**, Saakashvili alleges a history of abusive treatment that has left him with severe injuries and cognitive decline. Meanwhile, his legal team claims he is being slowly poisoned and could die if he does not receive immediate medical attention.

The former Georgian leader, who led the country from 2004 until 2013 on a pro-Western platform, returned to the country in 2021, when he was immediately arrested and jailed on corruption charges he was convicted of while in exile. After being transferred between several prison facilities, he has been under guard in a civilian hospital in Tbilisi since May. Reports of his declining medical condition haveemerged since, and last week his legal team issued the results of a toxicology report produced by a U.S.-based doctor that said arsenic and mercury were found in Saakashvili s system. The presence of the chemicals are likely the result of heavy metal poisoning, according to a copy of the report shared with**Forbes.**

The U.S. doctor, David Smith, was one among a team of five hired by Saakashvili s legal team to draw awareness to his case. They are being represented by New York real estate attorney Massimo D Angelo, who filed an amicus brief in a Georgian court this month calling for the former president s immediate release and deferral of his sentence because of his deteriorating health.

D Angelo went to Tbilisi to meet with Saakashvili at the VivaMedi Clinic in October. In a recorded interview with D Angelo obtained by**Forbes**, an audibly disoriented Saakashvili alleged he has suffered many episodes of beatings by prison guards including a few in which he repeatedly lost consciousness. He complained of dangerously elevated blood pressure and described being dragged by his hands, losing clumps of hair and an ongoing fever which he says doctors have not been able to explain. He also recounted a violent incident in which guards entered his cell in the middle of the night to confiscate his watch.

I blacked out for many hours, Saakashvili said of the episode during the interview with D Angelo. They started to squeeze my hands and to grab me and pull me down to the floor or something and then I blacked out. Often after losing consciousness, he said, he awakens to severe pain in his neck and shoulders.

James C. Cobey, a physician whoshareda Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and who specializes in examining victims of torture, also traveled with D Angelo to Tbilisi. He said that the former Georgian leader couldn t move his left arm when he visited him, and that it appeared he was suffering from a ruptured cervical disk. Cobey told**Forbes**that Saakashvili said he didn t know how he had sustained the injuries, and said that it is evident he needs immediate surgery on his neck. He needs to go to another country where there's no political problem around his future, Cobey said.

If something bad happened to [Saakashvili], it will be not only be bad for Georgian Dream, the ruling party, but it will be also very bad for the image of Georgia. <footer>Kornely Kakachia, director Georgian Institute of ***Politics***</footer>

Calls for Saakashvili s release have been growing louder after another team of medical experts, led by the Georgian-based Empathy Center, which also included Cobey,concluded this monththat Saakashvili has 10 different diagnoses, including anorexia and muscle atrophy. One doctorsaidhe has lost almost 90 pounds since his incarceration. The Georgia Public Defenders office recommended last week he receive medical attention immediately outside the prison.

John Fer, a spokesperson for the U.S. embassy in Tbilisi, said that the U.S. believes it is the responsibility of the Georgian government to ensure Saakashvili s human rights are respected, and health issues addressed. We are monitoring the treatment of former president Mikheil Saakashvili very closely, Fer said in a statement. We will continue to advocate for the authorities to take appropriate steps to ensure his health and welfare.

The ruling Georgian Dream party, which has taken an increasingly pro-Russia stance, did not respond to a request for comment. According to theAssociated Press, Irakli Kobakhidze, the Georgian Dream party chairman, recently told a local network: We are asked to make this decision politically, to release Saakashvili, in order to destabilize the country, and of course we cannot make such a decision.

Saakashvili is a polarizing figure in Georgia. As leader and founder of the United National Movement party, he led the so-called Rose Revolution protests in 2003 that drove out the incumbent government, and oversaw the country when it was invaded by Russia in 2008. With his pro-Western stance, he antagonized Russian president Vladimir Putin, who once suggested Saakashvili be hangedby his testicles.

But after losing power in 2013, Saakashvili left Georgia and waslater convictedon abuse of power charges, and for attempting to cover up evidence in the murder trial of a Georgian banker by government officials, in what his legal team claimed were politically motivated charges. At the time, four U.S. senators, including the late Arizona senator John McCain,saidSaakashvili and his government were not faultless but asserted that the pursuit of justice should not become a tool of political retribution and a source of national division, especially when Georgia has so many pressing challenges at present.

After leaving Georgia, Saakashvili spent some timeliving in Brooklyn, New Yorkand working as aprofessorat Tufts University in Boston, before he moved to Ukraine, where he got involved again in ***politics*** and was appointed governor of the Odessa region by then Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko. In 2020 he was appointed head of the Ukraine National Reform Council under President Volodymr Zelensky.

Last year, however, he returned to Georgia to support the UNM ahead of the national municipal elections, but was arrested and imprisoned to serve a six year sentence. This is bad for everybody. It's bad for the Georgia opposition. It's bad for the government. It's bad for Georgia's reputation internationally, said Lincoln Mitchell, a political analyst and adjunct professor at Columbia University who researches U.S.-Georgia relations. Nobody benefits from Saakashvili dying in prison.

Video footage shared with**Forbes**shows another episode when Saakashvili is struggling with a group of men who are dragged him from a vehicle, before they carry him by his limbs into Gldani prison. The footage was previously broadcast on local Georgian networks, and occurred in November 2021, according to D Angelo, a month after Saakashvili was arrested.

**Mikheil Saakashvili s incarceration | Footage from November 2021 shows the former Georgian leader being dragged into Gldani prison.**

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During his time as president, Saakashvili ordered the military to quellprotests that erupted across Georgia after disturbing footage of prisoners being abused emerged. Now behind bars, he said he is on the receiving end of verbal abuse. Thousands of prisoners day and night screaming their menaces, just screaming your name, he told D Angelo, according to the recording shared with**Forbes**. It s scary.

David Smith, the San Francisco-based doctor who did the toxicology assessment, wrote that Saakashvili s increased risk of mortality is imminent if he does not receive medical care outside of Georgia. Saakashvili was expected to appear in court last week and on Friday but did not, citing poor health, according to D Angelo.

For the country of nearly four million people, which formed in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union, the uncertainty surrounding Saakashvili s future could threaten to damage the country s fragile democracy, said Kornely Kakachia, director of the Georgian Institute of ***Politics***.

Georgia s first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, died under suspicious circumstances in 1993. We have this kind of history, Kakachia said. If something bad happened to [Saakashvili], it will be not only be bad for Georgian Dream, the ruling party, but it will be also very bad for the image of Georgia.

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