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NATIA DZIDZIGURI STORY

Natia Dzidziguri, a European Studies specialist and a teacher of the Spanish language, has been charged with petty hooliganism, failure to comply with a lawful order of a police officer, and the act of insulting a public official in the course of their duties.

The incident occurred on November 19, 2024, on Melikishvili Avenue in Tbilisi, Georgia. Ms. Dzidziguri was participating in a public demonstration alongside other protesters, voicing opposition to alleged election fraud, the anti-Western policy direction of the Georgian Dream political party, and its restrictive stance toward civil society. During the protest, she unexpectedly found herself in a crisis that ultimately led to her arrest.

"The street was crowded with protesters. At one point, I observed a police car parked on the sidewalk. Toward this vehicle, police officers were leading or, more accurately, dragging one of the protesters. One officer restrained him by the neck with their arms, another was pulling his hair, and others were holding his hands. Witnessing this scene was deeply distressing for me, so I addressed the officers, asking them not to arrest the protesters. At that moment, one of the policemen turned to me, the one in the front rows on Melikishvili Avenue; he recognized me, pointed me out to others, and said- 'Drag her in too. She is whining too much.' Immediately afterward, several other police officers rushed at me. Without explanation, they forcibly apprehended me and placed me in the police car."

The situation escalated significantly when Natia was forcibly placed into the police car.

From the moment of her arrest, Natia was subjected to continuous psychological abuse and sexual harassment. Upon being placed in the arrest vehicle, she was made to kneel. Throughout the journey, the young woman repeatedly requested the police officers to allow her to sit, as she felt unwell. In response, the officers made insulting remarks and shouted at her in a cynical manner.

"They pointed at me with highly demeaning gestures and directed my movements. I was forced to kneel in the back of the vehicle despite there being only one police officer seated in the back. I requested to be placed on the seat, but my request was denied. I further stated, 'If possible, please place me on the seat, as I will be in violation of safety regulations if not.' The officers responded, 'Should we make you a seatbelt?' and 'We will stop and place you on the seat soon.' However, throughout the entire journey, I remained on my knees, and the vehicle continued in that manner."

It is noteworthy that Ms. Dzidziguri was also subjected to sexual harassment by one of the police officers. Upon her request to be placed on the seat, "The law enforcement," seated in the back row of the minivan, repeatedly gestured for Ms. Dzidziguri to sit on his lap. Natia remained in this position for approximately 25 minutes throughout the entire journey to the police department.

It is important to note a significant fact: two police officers provided testimony in Ms. Dzidziguri's case, although neither was involved in her actual detention. According to Natia, she is able to identify the law enforcement officers involved, including the one who arrested her.

"When the report was prepared at the department, the name of a female patrol inspector was recorded among the arresting officers when, in fact, one of the heads of the Special Tasks Department detained me. I even have his photograph and can positively identify him."

No neutral evidence was presented in the case to substantiate the commission of a violation of the law. Judge Zviad Tsekvava, relying solely on the testimony of the police officers, found Ms. Dzidziguri guilty of violating Articles 166 and 173 of the Code; when imposing the sentence, a note to the article was used.

Unfortunately, state authorities have not yet taken effective action in response to the crime committed against the detainee.

According to available information, the Special Investigation Service has initiated an investigation under Article 333 of the Criminal Code, which pertains to the abuse of official authority. However, the actions of the responsible police officer may also be characterized as degrading and inhuman treatment. Ms. Dzidziguri was summoned and interrogated by the Special Investigation Service, where she informed the investigator that, during her arrest, she herself requested that the police officers activate their body cameras to document the harassment she was subjected to.

Concurrently, Vakhtang Gomelauri made a statement asserting that he does not believe even 1% of Ms. Dzidziguri's account to be accurate.

"This is a truly shameful accusation. I'll tell you plainly, I've never heard anything like this. How can I put it? Such behavior and accusations have never occurred before. They put me on my knees, and... we don't treat police officers or murderers like that when we detain them. We certainly don't treat murderers and repeat offenders that way, and a young girl... how can you even imagine that a Georgian police officer... They put her on her knees and took her away like that? It's utter nonsense. Let them prove it-yes, let them prove it. They could accuse you of coming to my house and torturing my child, my... but do they have to prove that in an elementary manner?"—said Gomelauri.

In response, Ms. Dzidziguri addressed Gomelauri on social media:

"I appeal to Gomelauri: As the Minister of Internal Affairs, you should first familiarize yourself with the details of the case before drawing conclusions. I provided the Special Investigation Service with information yesterday, and you are welcome to review the case. You should know better than I that defamation is a criminal offense, and you should not be engaging in such behavior. Why were the police officers' body cameras turned off? I requested that they be turned on so that the situation, including my being on my knees, could be recorded. The only response I received was laughter. Are the three witnesses who observed these events also lying?"

Despite the fact that Ms. Dzidziguri clearly remembers the faces of the officers who used violence against her and has photographs of them, the investigative service has yet to take action in terms of identifying and holding the perpetrators accountable. Furthermore, the Special Investigation Service has not even granted Ms. Dzidziguri the status of a victim."