

# LGBT+ Pride event in Georgia evacuated as far-right protesters storm site

Organizers say police refused to protect them.



Anti-LGBTQ+ activists clash with police as they try to interfere with a gathering of LGBTQ+ community for the Tbilisi Pride Festival in Tbilisi | AFP via Getty images

BY GABRIEL GAVIN AND DATO PARULAVA

JULY 8, 2023 | 5:00 PM CET | 3 MINUTES READ

TBILISI — Georgia’s annual LGBT+ Pride event was evacuated by the police on Saturday after hundreds of counter-protesters stormed the site.

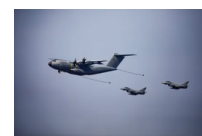
In a statement, organisers of the festival in the capital of Tbilisi announced that they had been forced to shut down the annual

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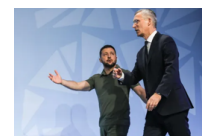
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festivities after the authorities failed to maintain the perimeter.

“Today’s developments indicate that today’s planned events were pre-coordinated and agreed upon between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the violent group Alt-Info,” Tbilisi Pride said.

The interim deputy minister of internal affairs, Aleksandre Darakhvelidze, said that “the pride festival was to take place in an open territory” and therefore authorities were unable to provide protection.

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Smoke rose above the site, a field just outside the city, as LGBT+ rainbow flags were burned and right-wing activists danced to traditional Georgian folk music. Attendees had been told to board buses for safety moments before.

Reacting to the attacks, the British Ambassador to Georgia, Mark Clayton, said he was “shocked and saddened to see that despite the planning and preventive measures, Tbilisi Pride festival was cancelled due to safety risks for participants.”

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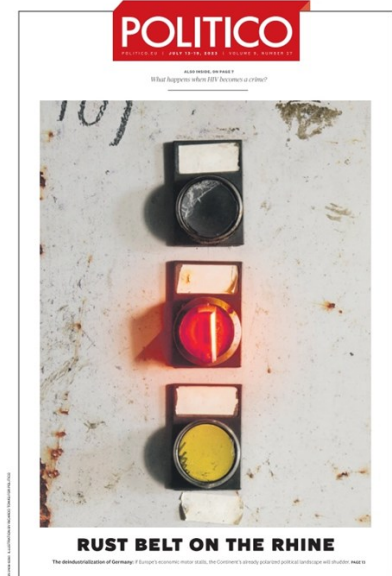
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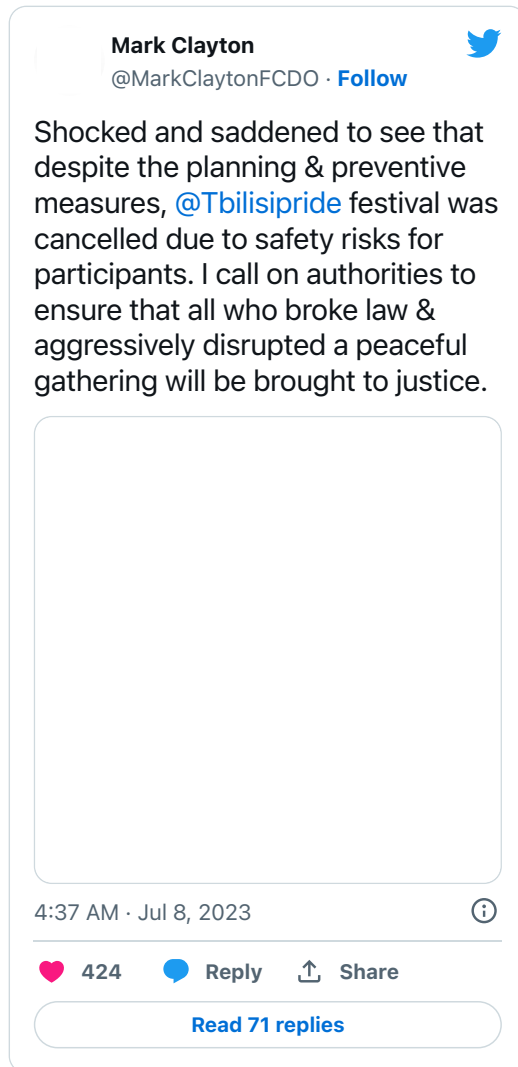
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He called on the Georgian government to “ensure that all who broke law and aggressively disrupted a peaceful gathering will be brought to justice.”

Despite the condemnations, Shalva Papuashvili, chairman of Georgia’s parliament, insisted “the police had an appropriate response” and “properly ensured the safety of both participants and journalists.”

Rémy Bony, executive director of LGBT+

NGO Forbidden Colours, said that EU countries should give refuge to the organisers at their embassies because “their lives are in danger. Thousands of anti-LGBTIQ hooligans are hunting them down.”



Alt-Info, a far-right group with close ties to the Georgian Orthodox Church, has repeatedly organized counter-protests against the annual festivities. In 2021,

dozens of journalists were injured at the annual event and a cameraman later died.

In the wake of the violence that year, the EU mission to the country issued a strongly-worded letter to the government in which they decried “direct attacks on Georgia’s democratic and pro-European aspirations” and criticized the burning of an EU flag outside the parliament.

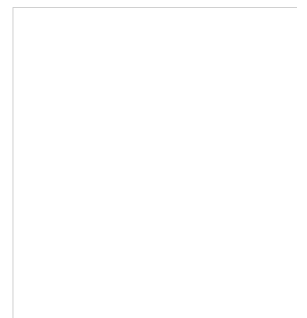
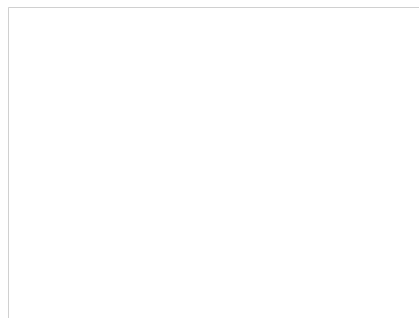
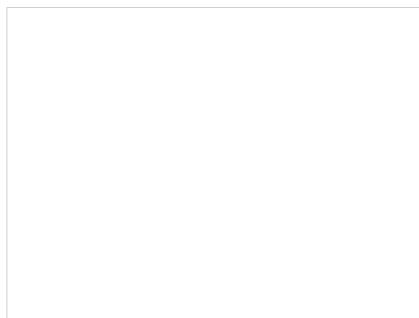
Speaking to POLITICO from the crowd on Saturday, Levan Chachua, the leader of the nationalist, religious Georgian Idea political group, said: “I would refuse to ... join the EU if that will prevent us from entering the heavenly kingdom.”

Georgia has a stated intention to join the EU. But Brussels has warned that its government, which has sought closer ties with Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine, has presided over a significant backsliding in human rights and civil liberties.

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