

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff of Ilia State University:

As an academic with strong personal and professional ties to Georgia, I am deeply concerned about the educational reforms under consideration, including the merging of Tbilisi State University and Georgian Technical University. Especially troubling are the proposed changes to Ilia State University—one of the region’s premier institutions of higher learning. The changes include the closure of 90% of its programs and the resulting 92% reduction in enrollment. The proposed reforms will serve neither the economic interests of Georgians, the aspirations of students, nor the broader intellectual life of the country. As the rationale for these changes cannot be to serve the best interests of students, faculty, or citizens, the reforms are opposed to the very concept of higher education. Reduced access to quality education benefits no one and provides compelling incentive for motivated, high-achieving young minds to pursue their dreams abroad.

Also under threat is the cornerstone of higher education: academic freedom. Georgian intellectuals, including those with academic appointments at Ilia State, are valued members of the international community of scholars, and they have made substantive contributions in their respective fields, including those currently slated for closure. It is my view that faculty should be supported in their scholarly pursuits without threats from those who lack the expertise to critically assess the value of those endeavors. These reforms will disrupt scholarly productivity and tarnish, perhaps irreparably, the reputations of many fine universities.

Again, I cannot see any benefit to the citizens of Georgia, whether they be faculty, staff, students, or those with no affiliation to any of the affected institutions but who nevertheless benefit from its intellectual products. Furthermore, I cannot ignore the inhumanity of needlessly jeopardizing the livelihoods of those who work at these institutions. Faculty, staff, and administrators have dedicated their careers, in many cases over the course of decades, to providing an environment where young people study to become the next generation of doctors, archeologists, architects, philosophers, philologists, historians, diplomats, etc. Instructional staff likely pursued this vocation not for financial enrichment, but out of a love of learning and a commitment to public service.

I write to you to express, personally, solidary with the students, faculty, and staff of Ilia State University. May wisdom prevail, and may Tbilisi retain its standing in the international academic community as a leading destination for advanced studies and innovative research.

Respectfully,

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