

Ex-Minister Acquitted and Freed in Georgia

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TBILISI, Georgia — Georgia's former defense minister was freed following his acquittal on charges extortion and money laundering. Witnesses in his previous trial said they had been pressured to testify against him.

Supporters of Irakli Okruashvili say the charges against him are politically motivated. He threw the country into political turmoil in 2008 when he said President Mikheil Saakashvili had asked him to organize the killing of a billionaire opposition supporter.

Okruashvili fled to France, but a Georgian court sentenced him in absentia to 11 years in prison. He returned to Georgia in November after an anti-Saakashvili coalition won in parliamentary elections.

He was arrested and jailed but immediately appealed his convictions. A Tbilisi court freed Okruashvili on Friday.

(AP)

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