

**European Platform
for Democratic Elections**

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Georgia: Last chance to stop Russian-style crackdown on civil society

International human rights organizations, civil society groups, and election observers are urging European and national leaders to promptly address the Georgian government's attempt to crackdown on civil society as the country approaches its General Elections in October.

Since April 15th, Georgians have been rallying in protest against the proposed "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law, which bears striking resemblance to the Russian so called "Foreign Agent Law". This law threatens to equip the government with tools to suppress civil society and independent media, derailing Georgia from its democratic path towards EU integration.

Urgent and decisive international political support for the Georgian civil society is crucial to defend Georgian democracy from Russian-style authoritarianism.

The "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law would require organizations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as agents of foreign influence. Failure to comply would subject them to forced registration and investigation by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. By passing this law before the October 26 elections, the ruling party in Georgia would gain a significant means to greatly restrict citizen oversight of the electoral process, something never seen before to this extent.

Russian inspired "Foreign Influence" law is an instrument to crackdown on civil society and independent media

Similar legislation on "Foreign Agents" has been introduced in Russia in 2012. Increasingly repressive amendments to the law led to the complete annihilation of independent media and civil society activity in Russia. Independent election watchdog Golos was one of the first declared "foreign agent". Today, independent citizen election observation in Russia is fully prohibited. In 2022, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Russian "Foreign agents" law violated the European Convention on Human Rights.¹

Georgian authorities resort to violence against peaceful protesters

On 2 May, Georgian police turned violent against peaceful protestors using tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons, detaining dozens of people. The unprecedented use of

¹ <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-217751%22%5D%7D>

violence by the Georgian authorities to suppress peaceful protests against the law emphasizes the critical need for the international community to support the Georgian people.

Recommendations

1. EU Heads of States and Governments should acknowledge the urgency of the matter as once the legislation is passed the deterioration of civil society and electoral integrity may accelerate severely.
2. EU should urge Georgian government to investigate recent cases of pressure and harassment against citizen election observers and human rights defenders in the country
3. EU member states and their representatives in Georgia should show solidarity with the Georgian people who took to the streets in defense of their democratic rights and European future.
4. Along with the Presidents of European Council and Commission as well as the HR/VP, the diplomatic community in Georgia should show presence on the streets of Georgia in solidarity with the Georgian people.

In case the Georgian government should adopt the repressive law, we propose following five recommendations to be considered by European institutions:

1. The European Commission should put on hold Georgia's EU integration process which requires the government in Tbilisi to fulfill the nine steps set out by the European Commission which include ensuring a free, fair and competitive electoral process ²
2. The European Commission should follow the European Parliament's resolution of 25 April 2024³ and introduce restrictive measures such as travel ban and asset freeze against Georgian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili for his role in the deterioration of the political process in Georgia, as well as sanctions against those responsible for the violent crackdown on peaceful protestors
3. The European Commission should suspend budget support to Georgia and financing of government-led projects;
4. European Institutions increase financial support and explore alternative ways of supporting Georgian civil society and democratic movements, including through the European Endowment for Democracy.
5. The EU and its Member States should support a large-scale and long-term election observation effort both through international institutions as the OSCE/ODIHR and domestic observers in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in October.

Background:

In early 2023, the parliamentary majority announced a draft law on "Transparency of Foreign Influence". The government ultimately dropped the legislation in response to public protest, but have reintroduced a similar version of the bill in April 2024.⁴ Despite promises to terminate its plans, the ruling Georgian Dream faction reintroduced the "Transparency of Foreign Influence" bill and adopted it in the first reading on 17 April 2024 with the third and final reading set to take place on 17 May 2024.⁵

² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy-extract-about-georgia_en

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0381_EN.html

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgias-parliament-drops-foreign-agents-bill-2023-03-10/>

⁵ <https://tepsa.eu/analysis/what-can-the-eu-do-about-the-georgian-governments-drift-towards-russia/>

Signatories:

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4. Swedish International Liberal Centre SILC - Sweden
5. Norwegian Helsinki Committee - Norway
6. Civil Network OPORA - Ukraine
7. Unhack Democracy - Hungary
8. Promo-LEX - Moldova
9. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor – Armenia
10. Stefan Batory Foundation (Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego) - Poland
11. Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors GNDEM
12. The European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations ENEMO
13. Centre for Monitoring and Research (Centar za monitoring i istraživanje CeMI) - Montenegro
14. “Wschód” Initiative (Inicjatywa “Wschód”) - Poland
15. Freedom Foundation (Fundacja Wolności) - Poland
16. Economic Freedom Foundation (Fundacja Wolności Gospodarczej) - Poland
17. Committee for the Defence of Democracy (Komitet Obrony Demokracji) - Poland
18. BoMiasto Association (Stowarzyszenie BoMiasto) - Poland
19. Action Democracy (Akcja Demokracja) - Poland
20. Civic Development Forum (Forum Obywatelskiego Rozwoju) - Poland
21. Active Democracy Foundation (Fundacja Aktywna Demokracja) - Poland
22. Public Affairs Institute (Instytut Spraw Publicznych) - Poland
23. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka) - Poland
24. Visible Foundation (Fundacja Widzialne) - Poland
25. Eastern European Democracy Center (Wschodnioeuropejskie Centrum Demokratyczne) - Poland
26. CEE Digital Democracy Watch (Fundacji Obserwatorium Demokracji Cyfrowej) - Poland
27. Schuman Foundation (Fundacja Schumana) - Poland
28. Bronisław Geremek Centre Foundation (Fundacja Centrum im. Bronisława Geremka) - Poland
29. Education and Social Mobilisation Foundation (Fundacja Edukacji i Mobilizacji Społecznej) - Poland
30. OFF School Foundation (Fundacja OFF School) - Poland
31. Polish Ecological Club - Masovia region (Polski Klub Ekologiczny Okręg Mazowiecki) - Poland
32. Visegrad Insight - ResPublica Foundation (Fundacja ResPublica) - Poland
33. Association of Legal Intervention (Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej) - Poland
34. Friends of the Youth Climate Strike Foundation (Fundacja Przyjaciół Młodzieżowego Strajku Klimatycznego) - Poland
35. KARTA Center Foundation (Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA) - Poland
36. Initiative “Protest with an Exclamation Point” (Inicjatywa Protest z Wykrzyknikiem) - Poland
37. Citizens Network Watchdog Poland (Sieć Obywatelska Watchdog Polska) - Poland
38. Astra Network - Poland
39. Free Courts Foundation (Fundacja Wolne Sądy) - Poland
40. Civis Polonia Foundation (Fundacja Civis Polonus) - Poland
41. Donors' Forum (Forum Darczyńców) - Poland
42. European Civic Forum

43. Bulgarian Centre for Non-profit Law - Bulgaria
44. Open Society Foundations Bratislava (Slovakia) - Slovakia
45. Alliance4Europe
46. Association for International Affairs (AMO) - Czechia
47. Open Lithuania Foundation - Lithuania
48. Open Society Institute - Sofia - Bulgaria
49. The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) - Netherlands
50. Human Rights Without Frontiers - Belgium
51. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) - Denmark
52. East and Horn of Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN)
53. Election Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN SA)
54. West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON)
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