

EU High Representative and European Commission Urge Government to Withdraw 'Foreign Agents' Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and the European Commission have jointly issued a statement concerning Georgia's adoption of the 'Foreign Agents' law in its third reading.

In their statement, the EU reaffirmed its solidarity with the Georgian people and their commitment to democracy and a European future. The EU expressed deep concern over reports of intimidation, threats, and physical assaults targeting civil society representatives, political leaders, journalists, and their families, emphasizing that such actions are unacceptable. The EU called on the Georgian authorities to thoroughly investigate these documented incidents.

The statement referred to the European Council's decision to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country, based on Georgia fulfilling nine specific steps outlined in the Commission's recommendation of November 8, 2023. These steps include protecting human rights, ensuring civil society and media operate freely, promoting depolarization, and combating disinformation.

The EU reiterated its position that the spirit and content of this law do not align with EU norms and values. It was emphasized that this law would undermine the vital work of civil society and independent media, posing a threat to fundamental rights such as freedom of association and expression that are central to Georgia's commitments under the Association Agreement and any potential EU accession path.

The adoption of this law was viewed by the EU as a setback for Georgia's progress towards EU integration. The statement urged the Georgian authorities to reconsider and withdraw the law,



recommitting to the EU path and advancing the necessary reforms outlined in the nine steps.

The EU affirmed its readiness to continue supporting the Georgian people in their efforts toward a European future.

"The EU stands with the Georgian people and their choice in favour of democracy and of Georgia's European future. The intimidation, threats and physical assaults on civil society representatives, political leaders and journalists, as well as their families is unacceptable. We call on the Georgian authorities to investigate these documented acts.

The European Council granted Georgia the status of a candidate country on

the understanding that the relevant 9 steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 are taken. These steps require human rights to be protected and civil society as well as the media to be able to operate freely. They also refer to the need for depolarisation and the fight against disinformation.

Nevertheless, and despite large protests and unequivocal calls by the international community, the Georgian government ruling majority adopted the law "on transparency of foreign influence" in Parliament in third reading. The EU has clearly and repeatedly stated that the spirit and content of the law are not in line with EU core norms and values. It will undermine

the work of civil society and independent media while freedom of association and freedom of expression are fundamental rights at the core of Georgia's commitments as part of the Association Agreement and of any EU accession path.

The adoption of this law negatively impacts Georgia's progress on the EU path. The choice on the way forward is in Georgia's hands. We urge the Georgian authorities to withdraw the law, uphold their commitment to the EU path and advance the necessary reforms detailed in the 9 steps.

The EU stands ready to continue supporting Georgians working towards a European future," the statement reads.

Global Legislators Condemn 'Foreign Agents' Law, Express Solidarity with Georgian Democracy

By Liza Mchedlidze

The US Senator Ben Cardin and chairs of foreign affairs committees from various countries issued a joint statement condemning Georgia's adoption of a Russian-style 'Foreign Agents' law. They expressed deep concern, noting that this law undermines democracy and Georgia's goal of Western integration. The U.S. Senator and Foreign Ministers emphasized that the law mirrors Vladimir Putin's policies and directly targets civil society and independent media, crucial components of democracy.

They reaffirmed their support for Georgian organisations promoting Euro-Atlantic integration and condemned parliamentarians who aligned with Rus-

sia. Emphasizing their commitment to holding accountable those responsible for enacting the "Russian-style" law and for targeting nonviolent demonstrators, the U.S. Senator and Foreign Ministers assured the Georgian people of unwavering solidarity in their fight for democratic values.

"Despite repeated expressions of concern from friends and allies, the Georgian parliament has taken an alarming and repressive step that undermines democracy and contradicts its stated goal of Western integration. As Euro-Atlantic legislators, we understand that a parliament's role is to reflect the will of its people, and Georgians have unequivocally rejected this Kremlin-inspired law as incompatible with their

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MAY 15, 2024

Chair Cardin Leads Trans-Atlantic Foreign Affairs Committee Chairs in Joint Statement on Georgian Parliament's Passage of Russian-Style 'Foreign Agent' Law

WASHINGTON - Today, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led the chairs of foreign affairs committees in the parliaments of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the European Union, Latvia, Lithuania,

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identity, European values, and democratic principles. Simply put, this so-called 'foreign agent' law mirrors the policies of Vladimir Putin, who continues to illegally occupy 20 percent of Georgia's territory.

"Respected Georgian organizations such as Transparency International (TI Georgia), the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), are playing pivotal roles in Georgia's path towards Euro-Atlantic in-

tegration. This law flies in the face of such worthy efforts and serves as a direct assault on civil society and independent media elements fundamental to any democracy. The United States and Europe will continue to support them as their leadership and vision for Georgia exemplify

true patriotism, in stark contrast to the 84 members of Parliament who aligned themselves with Russia in yesterday's vote.

"We will never abandon the Georgian people who have bravely displayed their steadfast commitment to democratic values through peaceful resistance,

nor will we hesitate to hold accountable those responsible for enacting this Russian-style law and for the brutal targeting of nonviolent demonstrators, including by Bidzina Ivanishvili and his cronies. To the Georgian people, we declare: You are not alone," the statement reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Parliament Rejects President Zourabichvili's Veto on Gender Quota Law



The Parliament dismissed President Salome Zourabichvili's veto opposing the law abolishing gender quotas and instead supported the law.

In her motivated remarks, the President emphasized that one of the priorities of the 12 recommendations of the European Commission was gender equality.

According to Zourabichvili's position, the repeal of quotas represents a backward step in this regard.

"The low rate of women's participation in political processes is one of the main challenges in

Georgia. The specific changes made to increase women's participation in politics have not yet significantly improved women's representation in political roles. In this context, the changes adopted by the Parliament will further deteriorate the representation of women in politics," Zourabichvili wrote.

Lithuanian and Estonian Foreign Ministers Correct Shalva Papuashvili's Statement

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Gabrielius Landsbergis, responded to a statement made by Shalva Papuashvili following a meeting with the ministers. According to Papuashvili, during the meeting they agreed that they had made the correct decision by "not listening to their European colleagues and refraining from imposing sanctions."

"In response to confusion

about the meeting with the Chair of the Parliament of Georgia Shalva Papuashvili, I feel the need to clarify that we did not agree that Georgia was right to ignore European advice and values, and we expressed extremely strong views, not 'some concerns'," Landsbergis wrote on X.

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna also responded to Papuashvili's statement, saying, "Let me be clear - we did not agree on any of this. My message is the opposite: Georgia is not moving in the right direction."



Situation in Georgia

Statement by the Secretary General

Strasbourg, 15.05.2024 – Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric today made the following statement:

"The adoption at third read-

Weather

Thursday, May 16

Day Showers
High: 16°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 9°C

Friday, May 17

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 20°C

Night Clear
Low: 8°C



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ing of the draft law 'on transparency of foreign influence' by the Parliament of Georgia, without waiting for the opinion of the Venice Commission, is very disappointing and does not reflect the spirit of constructive dialogue.

"Regrettably, international partners' concerns regarding the draft law's incompatibility with European democratic and human rights standards were ignored, while the lack of genuine parliamentary deliberations is not in accordance with an inclusive democratic process.

"As the Venice Commission is to issue its opinion soon, its legal recommendations should provide the basis for meaningful dialogue and allow a way forward in line with Council of Europe norms and values.

"I am also deeply troubled by numerous reports, including by

the Public Defender of Georgia, regarding intimidation campaigns, physical assaults, the disproportionate use of force, unlawful detentions, the spread of personal data and the use of stigmatising official narratives to target peaceful protestors, civil activists, journalists, and opposition representatives. I call on the Georgian authorities to take immediate steps to prevent such actions which are irreconcilable with the principles of a democratic society, while ensuring proper and effective investigations into all reported cases of alleged rights abuses.

"The Council of Europe stands ready to assist Georgia in ensuring full compliance with international standards, thereby consolidating its democratic development and further progress towards EU accession."

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