

PACE Co-rapporteurs Call for Repeal of Georgia's 'Foreign Agents' Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

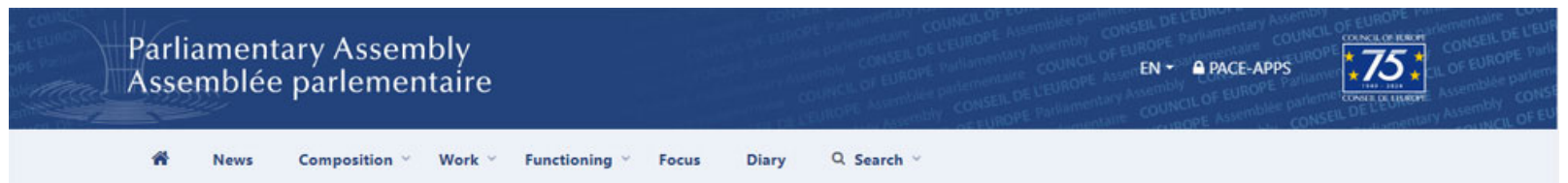
Following the publication of the Venice Commission's urgent opinion on "Foreign Agents" law, the PACE co-rapporteurs for Georgia, Claude Kern and Edite Estrela, have urged the Georgian authorities to repeal this law.

"Our Georgian counterparts have asked us for authoritative legal arguments with regard to our concerns about the law on transparency of foreign influence. These arguments have now been delivered in the univocal opinion by the Venice Commission that was requested by the President of the Assembly. We therefore urge the ruling majority not to override the Presidential veto and to repeal this law, as recommended by the Venice Commission," said the co-rapporteurs.

They emphasized the importance of the Venice Commission's opinion in providing legal clarity and guidance. Kern and Estrela stated:

"Our Georgian counterparts have asked us for authoritative legal arguments with regard to our concerns about the law on transparency of foreign influence. These arguments have now been delivered in the univocal opinion by the Venice Commission that was requested by the President of the Assembly."

The Venice Commission's



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22/05/2024 | Monitoring



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"Our Georgian counterparts have asked us for authoritative legal arguments with regard to our concerns about the law on transparency of foreign influence. These arguments have now been delivered in the univocal opinion by the Venice Commission that was requested by the President of the Assembly. We therefore urge the ruling majority not to override the Presidential veto and to repeal this law, as recommended by the Venice Commission," said the co-rapporteurs.

As outlined in the Venice Commission opinion, Georgia already has a comprehensive legal framework to regulate the funding and transparency of NGOs and the media. In the view of the co-rapporteurs, the authorities could focus on strengthening the existing legal framework, if there is an objective need for it, in close co-operation with the Council of Europe.

"We remain ready to continue our dialogue with the Georgian authorities and society on this subject in the framework of the ongoing monitoring procedure for Georgia," the co-rapporteurs concluded.

The Assembly will hold a current affairs debate on recent challenges to democracy in Georgia during its Standing Committee meeting in Vilnius on 24 May 2024.

opinion highlighted that Georgia already possesses a comprehensive legal framework to regulate the funding and transparency of NGOs and the media. The co-rapporteurs emphasized that:

"As outlined in the Venice Commission opinion, Georgia already has a comprehensive legal framework to regulate the funding and transparency of

NGOs and the media."

They suggested that instead of introducing new legislation, the authorities could focus on strengthening the existing legal framework in close cooperation with the Council of Europe.

"In the view of the co-rapporteurs, the authorities could focus on strengthening the existing legal framework, if there

is an objective need for it, in close co-operation with the Council of Europe."

Moreover, they reiterated their readiness to continue the dialogue with the Georgian authorities and society on this subject within the ongoing monitoring procedure for Georgia:

"We remain ready to continue our dialogue with the Georgian

authorities and society on this subject in the framework of the ongoing monitoring procedure for Georgia."

In light of the ongoing challenges to democracy in Georgia, the Assembly is set to hold a current affairs debate during its Standing Committee meeting in Vilnius on May 24, 2024.

Lithuanian Seimas Urges EU Institutions for Responsive Measures on Georgia's 'Foreign Agents' Law



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Seimas calls on the Parliament of Georgia to withdraw the law on transparency of foreign influence

Press release, 21 May 2024

The Seimas urged the Parliament of Georgia to withdraw the adopted law "on transparency of foreign influence", to ensure freedom of association and freedom of expression, to foster the country's civil society, to engage in dialogue with it, and to uphold the constitutional commitment of further pursuing integration into the EU and NATO and continuing necessary reforms.

- All press releases
- From Speaker of the Seimas
- From Board of Seimas
- From plenary sittings
- From Committees and Commissions

By Liza Mchedlidze

The resolution adopted by the Seimas of Lithuania concerning Georgia's integration into the EU focuses on the concerns surrounding Georgia's "Foreign Agents" law.

Expressing deep concern, the resolution highlighted the adoption of Georgia's "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law, likening it to Russia's "Foreign Agents Law" and deeming it incompatible with European values.

Regretting the divergence of Georgia's government actions from the aspirations of its society and integration goals with the EU and NATO, the Seimas extended support to Georgians defending freedom of expression and their European future. It strongly condemned violence against peaceful protesters and journalists, as well as campaigns against civil society.

The Seimas called for the withdrawal of the law, the preservation of freedom of association and expression, engagement with civil society, and adherence to commitments for EU and NATO integration.

Furthermore, the resolution

urged EU institutions to consider responsive measures if Georgia proceeds with the law and continues to persecute civil society. It also expressed regret that the actions of the Georgian authorities do not align with the aspirations and goals of Georgian society for integration into the European Union and NATO.

The Seimas resolution supports the Georgian people in their defense of freedom of expression and the country's European future.

The resolution expresses "support for the Georgian people in their defense of the right to freely express their civic position and their country's European future;

strongly condemns the use of violence against peaceful protesters and against journalists reporting on the demonstrations, as well as the organized campaign of defamation, intimidation, and direct physical violence against representatives of civil society, emphasising that such actions aimed at suppressing peaceful assemblies and freedom of expression are unacceptable, particularly in an EU candidate country;

reminds that the Georgian government ruling majority will

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7259; Euro - 2.9546; GBP - 3.4684; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0207; Swiss Franc - 2.9827

Lithuanian Seimas Urges EU Institutions for Responsive Measures on Georgia's 'Foreign Agents' Law

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have to take responsibility for actions violating the principles of a democratic society and inconsistent with the political criteria set for EU candidate countries; calls on the Parliament of Georgia to withdraw the adopted law "on transparency of foreign influence", to ensure freedom of association and freedom of expression, to foster the country's civil society, to engage in dia-

logue with it, and to uphold the constitutional commitment of further pursuing integration into the EU and NATO and continuing necessary reforms; urges the EU institutions to consider the possibility of responsive measures if the Georgian government rejects President Salome Zourabichvili's veto, proceeds with implementing this law, and continues the persecution of civil society," the resolution reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Prime Minister Kobakhidze: Venice Commission Rejects 'Professional Dignity' and Lacks Legal Arguments

I felt uncomfortable as a jurist when I read this document; the face the Venice Commission showed was so weak. They have nothing to say, and the document is full of absurd entries and lies. Along with many lies, there is completely absurd legal reasoning without arguments,"

the independence of our country more than they did even 3-4 years ago," added Kobakhidze.

GYLA Questions Whether Judges Appointed for Life Were Interviewed

publish information about the interviews with judges appointed for life on its website.

"The election of judges to be appointed for life was unexpected for the monitoring organizations, as the procedure provides for an interview with candidates



Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze criticized the Venice Commission, stating that it had rejected "professional dignity" and assessed that the conclusion "lacks legal arguments".

"I read the conclusion, and as a jurist, I can say that the Venice Commission has rejected professional dignity altogether.

said Kobakhidze in an interview with the public broadcaster.

According to him, the public is not focused on what the Venice Commission said, but on where the "truth" is.

"That's why we sometimes say that today our country is more sovereign than ever before. This means that they value



The Supreme Council of Justice of Georgia appointed 21 judges for life with a majority of 15 votes. However, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association has raised concerns regarding whether the Supreme Council of Justice conducted interviews with these judges, as required by the procedure.

GYLA stated that the Council did not

who are on a three-year probationary period. Information about the interviews with these judges was not published on the website of the Council; therefore, it is not known whether the interviews were conducted at all. If they were conducted, it is unclear why monitoring organizations were not given the opportunity to monitor them," GYLA stated.

Empowering Georgian Youth to Protect the Black Sea EU and UNDP spark educational journey for a sustainable marine ecosystem

BATUMI. 22 May 2024 – High school students from seven public schools across Anaklia, Batumi, Bobokvati, Gonio, Kobuleti, and Poti engaged in dolphin monitoring alongside Georgia's Black Sea coast. Every 10 days, using specialised protocols, they monitor and record the presence of dolphins

at various locations, including Gonio and Poti.

Their learning journey started with seminars at Batumi State University where young advocates of the Black Sea, under the guidance of esteemed researchers, explored the wonders of marine biodiversity, the pressing threats to the ecosystem, and actionable steps for

conservation.

Following this immersive experience, motivated students were offered a chance to participate in dolphin monitoring and effectively become Black Sea researchers.

Over the coming months, they will participate in diverse educational and environmental activities, including Clean Beach Days and guided tours of protected areas. The culmination of this learning journey will be marked in October with a celebratory gathering in Batumi for the annual Black Sea



Day, uniting environmental researchers, activists, and youth.

This exciting educational initiative is organised by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the National Environment Agency of Georgia's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. It falls under the EU/UNDP regional project 'European Union for Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea' (EU4EMBLAS), a joint initiative with the governments of Georgia and Ukraine.

Between 2014 and 2019, EU4EMBLAS spearheaded regular monitoring surveys conducted by an international team of researchers, building an understanding of the environmental status of the Black Sea.

The last research released in

2020 revealed environmental challenges, including plastic waste pollution along the Georgian coast (90.5 items per sq. km), microplastics at depths of 2,000 meters, hazardous chemical influxes, and the intrusion of invasive species. Positive biodiversity trends showcased the resilience of certain species sensitive to pollution and the return of the European oyster, previously extinct since the 1940s.

In its current phase, set to continue until April 2025, the EU4EMBLAS project remains committed to supporting governments, educational institutions, civil society, and communities in Georgia and Ukraine. The project offers targeted interventions to mitigate pollution and provides policymakers with recommendations to safeguard the Black Sea ecosystem.

Weather

Thursday, May 23

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 25°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 15°C

Friday, May 24

Day 🌧️ Showers
High: 18°C

Night 🌧️ Light Rain
Low: 14°C

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American Friends of Georgia - 30 Years of Charity Work

American Friends of Georgia (AFG) held the 30th anniversary Spring Charity Gala on May 18, 2023 at the Biltmore Hotel.

The Gala achieved an unprecedented milestone, raising a record-breaking total of 134,900 USD, which will be dedicated to the AFG's dual focal initiatives: the Feristsvaleba Hospice and Palliative

Home Care Program, alongside various educational projects (afgeorgia.org).

Over the past three decades, AFG has been a beacon of hope, easing the hardships faced by Georgia's most vulnerable individuals, including the homeless, those battling critical and terminal illnesses, single mothers, underprivileged children, and the elderly. Moreover, it steadfastly champions

Georgian artists, providing vital support to safeguard and showcase their rich artistic heritage and cultural legacy.

The event saw a distinguished gathering of attendees, including representatives from the diplomatic corps and business world, leading international and Georgian organizations and corporations.

The Gala's sparkling program was

culminated by a performance of Chris Botti and his band, making it an unforgettable highlight of the night.

AFG's 30 years of charitable endeavors is made possible with the steadfast support of its generous sponsors and invaluable partners.

Only Together We Can Make a Difference!







