

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## Georgian NGOs Unite in Defiance Against 'Foreign Agents' Law

Georgian non-governmental organizations have issued a joint statement declaring their disobedience to the "Foreign Agents" law, most commonly referred to as the "Russian law". They asserted their unwavering commitment to disobedience against the "Russian law" and reaffirmed their dedication to Georgia's European path.

In the statement, the NGOs expressed their steadfast opposition to the "Russian law", which they argue poses a threat to Georgia's economy, international reputation, civil order, and peace.

The NGOs highlighted the government's decision to re-initiate the "Russian law" despite earlier promises to the Georgian people, viewing it as an attempt to undermine the civil sector. However, they emphasized the unity and resilience of the Georgian people in defending their European future and refusing to live under Russian influence.

The statement reads that despite attempts by the authorities to intimidate them through various means, including physical violence, arrests, and fines, the NGOs vow to continue their work of helping people and supporting each other. They pledge to provide assistance to those who have been arrested or fined, both legally and financially:

"We will not obey the Russian law!

55 days ago, the government broke the word given to the Georgian people and re-initiated the Russian law. They wanted to break the civil sector by passing



this law, but they received unprecedented unity and tireless opposition. The Georgian people firmly defend and will defend their European future and will never get used to living under

the Russian boot. Russian law will not work in our country! It will remain a piece of paper that no one will obey!

The authorities knowingly created a threat to the economy,

international reputation, civil order and peace of our country. They did this on purpose, so that the citizens of this country could no longer help each other. But we have been proving for 55

days that people never get tired of loving their country. Our protest and struggle will continue until this law is repealed!

They tried to intimidate us with special forces, beatings and swearing, arrests and illegal fines, but they did not consider that nothing can stop us in the righteous work called helping people. We will continue our work - we will help people and each other and we will not obey the Russian law!

We will not leave anyone alone, we will protect all those arrested and all fined. Our lawyers will fight in domestic and international courts. We will collect money to pay each other the fines imposed on us for the love of Georgia and the fight for freedom.

Our struggle is seen and supported by the whole civilized world. With the adoption of the Russian law, monitoring of the elections is in danger, but we, Georgian civil organizations, promise to protect the elections and the vote of each citizen. We will be with you in every polling station and we will observe to protect free and fair elections!

This is Georgia! We will not go Russian! Georgian people will excite the whole world once again with their fight for freedom.

We declare disobedience - not Russian law! Yes to Europe!," the statement reads.

## Former Judge Claims Intimidation and Threats within Georgian Judicial System Linked to Bidzina Ivanishvili

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Besarion Alavidze, the former judge of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal claims that there were times when the "clan of judges" confronted him about specific decisions and openly threatened him. Alavidze told TV Pirveli that during his tenure as a judge, he received a threat from one of the chairpersons of the Supreme Court if he did not make a decision that was favorable to Bidzina Ivanishvili.

A former judge alleged that he received a message warning that

if he did not deliver the desired decision in a high-profile case, Bidzina Ivanishvili and the current government would "blow my brains out".

Furthermore, he claims receiving an offer concerning another case, where signing it in advance was suggested to potentially alter the attitude towards him. He also claims receiving threats from the "clan of judges", warning that speaking openly to journalists about court issues would lead to repercussions.

Despite the alleged intimidation, Alavidze affirmed his deter-

mination to continue speaking out.

"I received a message from one of the chairpersons of the Supreme Court, saying that if I did not make the desired decision on one of the high-profile cases favorable to Bidzina Ivanishvili and the government that had already been completed, they would implode my brain.

Also, for example, I received an offer in connection with one of the cases, where I was told that if I signed the case in advance, for example, the attitude and mood towards me would



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7847 Euro - 3.0295; GBP - 3.5577; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.1491; Swiss Franc - 3.0584

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change. I also received another threat from the clan that if I, for example, talked to journalists publicly and openly about the problems in the court, I would have a problem, they would run me over and they would not

back down on anything. Still, I'm not going to stop," Alavidze stated.

Regarding the silent protest against the "Foreign Agents" law by the judges, the former Supreme Court judge stated that they have "exposed" the government.

"I think they exposed, emphasized, and highlighted that Article 78 of the Constitution is violated by the adoption of the Russian law. If this law is Russian, we don't want to get into it. However, the fact that we have a small group of these judges who express their position in this way

is a result of the intimidation of the court," he said.

Besarion Alavidze was appointed to the Supreme Court of Georgia in February 2011 for a 10-year term. He was one of the nine judges who examined the Rustavi 2 case and attributed it to Kibar Khalvashi.

Alavidze has been speaking about the clan within the judicial system for years. For example, he stated that the "clan of judges" members Murusidze-Chinchaladze (US sanctioned judges for corruption) had "vic-

tims".

In 2022, Alavidze mentioned that numerous judges had been targeted by the "clan" and treated unfairly. He noted that they were either coerced into writing statements and leaving the system or pressured into transferring to lower instance courts. During that period, he also remarked that the "clan of judges" act according to "street rules", summoning judges to offices, and directly influencing outcomes.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Georgian Parliament Overrides President's Veto to Adopt 'Foreign Agents' Law

The law will now be returned to the President for signature. If Salome Zourabichvili, who has stated she will not sign it, refuses again, the Chairman of the Parliament will have the authority to sign the law in the following five days.

Failure to register or submit the declaration within the established period will result in a fine of 25,000 GEL. Committing the same action within one month will result in a fine of 20,000 GEL.

Additionally, the Ministry of Justice will have the right to fine individuals 5,000 GEL for not providing the requested information (including secret, personal, commercial, or professional information).

sign the document to appoint the referendum after the necessary signatures are collected.

"I will sign the referendum: Do we want a European future or do we want Russian slavery?" she declared.

Salome Zourabichvili believes that it is necessary to reflect the clear position of the population regarding Georgia's foreign course through a referendum.

The procedure for conducting the referendum is regulated by the "Organic Law of Georgia on the Referendum". The President needs at least 200,000 voters to ap-



The Parliament of Georgia has overridden the President's veto and adopted the "Foreign Agents" law.

According to the procedure, the Parliament first voted on the President's motivated remarks and rejected them. Following this, the original version of the "Foreign Agents" law was put to a vote.

84 deputies supported the law, while four opposed it.

Once Shalva Papuashvili signs and publishes the law, it will enter into force.

Within a maximum of three months after the law's entry into force, entities receiving more than 20% of their funding from foreign sources as of 2023 will be required to register as organizations representing the interests of a foreign power.

### President Zourabichvili Ready to Call Referendum Upon Georgian Citizens' Request



President Salome Zourabichvili has expressed her willingness to call a referendum if the Georgian citizens wish. Addressing the people gathered at the parliament today, she stated that she will

ply for a referendum. After that, the President of Georgia calls for a referendum with a decree that requires the co-signature of the Prime Minister of Georgia.

## Situation in Georgia

### Weather

Wednesday, May 29

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 28°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 17°C

Thursday, May 30

Day Partly Cloudy High: 28°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 18°C

### Statement by the Secretary General

Strasbourg, 28.05.2024 – Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric



today made the following statement:

"I strongly deplore today's decision by the Parliament of Georgia to overrule the President's veto and proceed with the final endorsement of the law "on transparency of foreign influence" in its current form, despite criticism by international partners as to its incompatibility with European standards.

"By taking this step, the Georgian authorities regrettably gave up an ultimate occasion to withdraw this bill and refused to en-

gage in meaningful dialogue, disregarding the unequivocal recommendations by the Venice Commission, whose authoritative legal opinions reflect our democratic standards.

"Hence, I am deeply concerned as to the law's adverse impact on informed public debate, pluralism, and democratic checks and balances, which could potentially jeopardise also the environment for free and fair elections.

"Equally worrying remains the apparent impunity for re-

ported acts of intimidation, disproportional use of force and stigmatising narratives against civil society organisations, civil activists and peaceful protestors. These acts must be investigated without delay and those responsible for rights abuses should be held accountable, in view of discouraging such practices that have no place in a democratic society.

"The Council of Europe remains fully supportive of the Georgian people's European aspirations."

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