

## EU Commission Report: Georgia Accession Stalled Amid Democratic Concerns

By Liza Mchedlidze

The European Commission released a report raising serious concerns about Georgia's democratic practices and commitment to EU-aligned reforms, stating that recent setbacks have hindered the country's progress toward EU membership.

The report follows Georgia's December 2023 grant of EU candidate status, noting that its accession process has since stalled due to actions taken by the Georgian government in 2024. After the October parliamentary elections, the OSCE-led International Election Observation Mission flagged significant issues, including changes to election laws, breaches in voter secrecy, procedural irregularities, and intimidation tactics. These findings align with previous EU recommendations for comprehensive electoral reforms to restore public trust.

Commenting on the report's conclusions, EU Ambassador to Georgia Pawel Herczyński highlighted a "backsliding" in essential democratic principles, saying, "This [backsliding on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights] is unprecedented for a country that aspires to join the EU." The report states that Georgia's candidate status came with specific conditions tied to rule of law and democratic integrity, which it claims the Georgian government



has failed to implement.

The report advises the Georgian government to repeal the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and legislation affecting Family Values and Protection of Minors, both identified as inconsistent with EU values.

Summarizing the report's findings, Ambassador Herczyński remarked, "There aren't many reasons to celebrate" this year as "Georgia has gone backwards while other candidate countries have advanced."

Although the report main-

tains that the EU's door remains open, it reinforces that the accession process is "merit-based and without shortcuts." Georgia's leaders are urged to "read the report very, very carefully" to find a path forward, with Herczyński concluding,

"Georgia's next government should reverse course, recommit to democratic principles and values if it wants to bring the country closer to the EU. This has to start with full transparency about the electoral process."

## EU High Representative Calls for Investigation into Georgia's Election Irregularities

By Liza Mchedlidze

On October 30, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, held a press conference regarding the EU's 2024 Enlargement Report. In his address, Borrell voiced serious concerns over recent Georgian parliamentary elections, urging an investigation into significant irregularities that he argued indicate a troubling departure from EU principles.

"Georgia has conducted parliamentary elections which were marked by serious irregularities," Borrell stated, stressing the need for "a transparent and independent" investigation. He noted that while independent observers did not declare the elections entirely free or fair, the reported irregularities are numerous and require thorough examination to determine their impact on results. This call for scrutiny aligns with the EU's ongoing demands for reforms and transparency in Georgia's

electoral processes.

Highlighting the broader implications, Borrell warned that these elections "consolidate a trend" observed in recent months where Georgian authorities have moved the country "away from the European Union, away from its values and its principles." The 2024 Enlargement Report, he added, outlines a "clear path for reengagement" should Georgian leaders demonstrate renewed political commitment.

The report specifies that the repeal of controversial legislation, such as the Law on Foreign Influence and the Family Values law, will be pivotal. These laws, Borrell argued, have a chilling effect on civil society and contradict EU principles, particularly regarding media freedom and anti-discrimination. He emphasized that addressing these concerns would demonstrate a concrete commitment from Georgia to re-align with EU standards.

During the Q&A, Borrell also responded to questions regarding Hungarian Prime Minister



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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7468; Euro - 2.9759; GBP - 3.5640; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8298; Swiss Franc - 3.1682

# EU High Representative Calls for Investigation into Georgia's Election Irregularities

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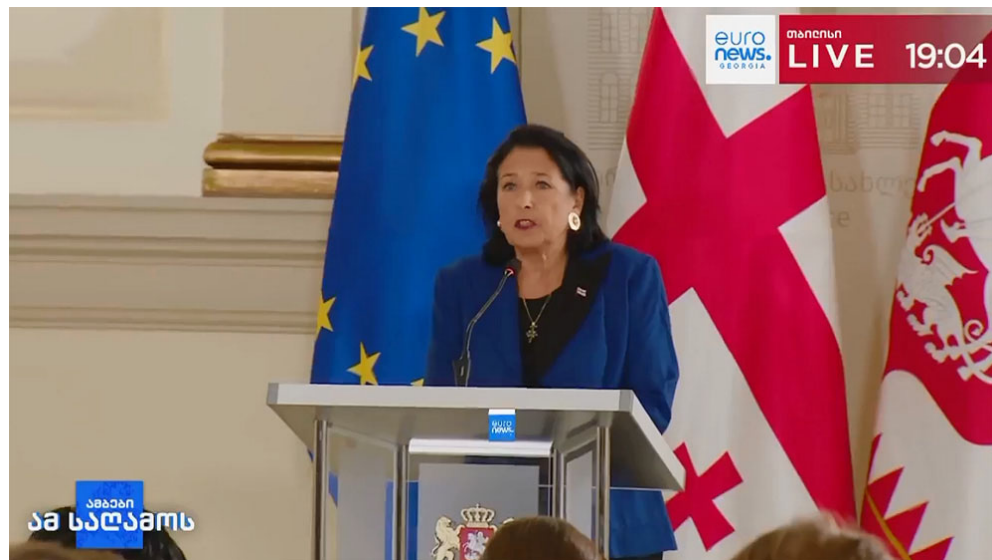
Viktor Orbán's recent visit to Georgia, clarifying that it fell within the framework of Hungary's bilateral relations with Georgia, independent of EU foreign policy. Borrell reiterated the EU's position, underscoring expectations for Georgia's Cen-

tral Election Commission to address the irregularities reported by election observers. These issues, he noted, were pervasive not only on election day but also in the lead-up to it, marred by voter intimidation, ID confiscation, and procedural inconsistencies, particularly affecting public sector employees.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Georgian President Rejects Summons, Urges Prosecutor's Office to Investigate Election Fraud Impartially



Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, facing a summons from the Prosecutor's Office in connection with an investigation into alleged election fraud, firmly stated she would not comply. In a press briefing, Zourabichvili called on the Prosecutor's Office to focus on a trans-

parent investigation rather than, as she described, "politically targeting" her. "You are accountable to the people," she said, addressing the Prosecutor's Office directly. "The public demands an immediate investigation." Zourabichvili ques-

tioned the timing of her summons, noting it coincided with recent comments by Russian Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev, who had called her a "puppet president" and suggested her removal. "I don't know who is following Medvedev's instructions and who isn't," she remarked pointedly.

Zourabichvili presented video evidence of election-day irregularities, insisting that the footage spoke for itself. "Here is the evidence," she said. "It's clear what happened on October 26 and how the elections were conducted." She criticized the Prosecutor's Office for summoning her, arguing that in a "normal country," investigators should independently gather evidence.

The President further highlighted evidence amassed by citizens, NGOs, and international observers, which she claimed demonstrated "widespread" electoral manipulation. Zourabichvili also echoed concerns raised by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) over visible ballot markings that compromised voter privacy.

Urging the Prosecutor's Office to proceed impartially, Zourabichvili said, "Do your job and stop holding the President politically accountable. As for me, I will continue to do my job."

### Bank Accounts of Atlantic Council Employees Seized in Georgia Amid Scam Call Center Investigation

The bank accounts of Sofo Gelava and Eto Buziashvili, employees of the Atlantic Council, have been seized by Georgian authorities in connection with an investigation into alleged fraud related to scam



call centers. According to the financial police, a court authorized the restrictions three days ago.

Both Russian disinformation researchers have had access to their bank accounts restricted for the past three days. The Ministry of Finance stated, "The bank accounts of the individuals involved in the call centers case were seized by court order." This action has drawn criticism from the U.S. Helsinki Commission, which described the account restrictions as an attack on Georgian civil society and the American organization that employs them. Commission Chairman Joe Wilson added that the Georgian government is "moving toward Russian-style authoritarianism."

# Georgia accession process de facto halted as EU calls on government to change course

Georgia's EU accession process has been de facto halted due to the course of action taken by the Georgian government since Spring 2024, the European Commission said today with the adoption of its annual Enlargement Package, calling on Georgia to repeal recent legislation undermining the rule of law and fundamental rights, and to stop spreading disinformation about EU values.

The European Council had granted candidate status to Georgia in December 2023, on

the understanding that nine steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 were taken. The government had prepared a dedicated action plan to carry out the nine steps, and expressed its commitment to advance on EU-related reforms. "However, as of March 2024, there have been concern-

ing developments that do not reflect the government's stated commitment to the EU path," the European Commission said. "These include the decision to resuscitate the Law on transparency of foreign influence and its adoption on 28 May, and the adoption on 17 September of the legislative package on family values and protection of minors" – a course of action that "runs counter to the values and principles upon which the EU is founded".

The Commission also pointed to the recent elections of 26 October 2024, noting that the pre-

liminary findings of the joint International Election Observation Mission led by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) had identified several shortcomings that occurred in a tense and highly polarised environment. "These preliminary findings confirm the need for a comprehensive electoral reform that was already highlighted in past key recommendations."

Georgia needs to revert to the implementation of the nine steps as a matter of priority, the EC said in its 2024 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, adding it should repeal the Law on transparency of foreign influence, the legislative package on "family values and the protection of minors", and refrain from

other activities undermining the rule of law and fundamental rights. "Georgia's alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy remains low, and while it made efforts to restrict the circumvention of sanctions via its territory, Georgia has not aligned with EU sanctions packages against Russia and Belarus," the EC added.

"Moreover, the authorities need to stop spreading disinformation against EU values and instead step up actions to combat disinformation and tackle hostile political rhetoric," the European Commission said, concluding: "Unless Georgia reverts the current course of action which jeopardises its EU path, and demonstrates tangible efforts to address outstanding concerns and key reforms, the Commission will not be in a position to consider recommending opening negotiations with Georgia."

(euneighbourseast.eu)



## Weather

Thursday, October 31

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 17°C

Night Clear

Low: 6°C

Friday, November 1

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 18°C

Night Clear

Low: 5°C

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*On the occasion of the 101<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye, Ambassador of Türkiye H.E. Ali Kaan ORBAY held a Reception on October 29.*





