

Venice Commission Seeks to Intervene in ECHR Case Against Georgia's Foreign Agents Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters, is seeking permission to intervene as a third party in the case of GYLA and Others v. Georgia, currently pending before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The case was brought by over 100 Georgian civil society and media organizations challenging the country's controversial Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, commonly referred to as the Foreign Agents Law.

In a previous opinion, the Venice Commission strongly recommended that Georgia repeal the law, warning that it could have a chilling effect on civil society and freedom of expression. Now, the Commission is taking the unusual step of requesting to intervene in the legal proceedings.

"The [Venice Commission] seeking to intervene as a third party shows that the Commission views this law as a serious threat to the rule of law," said Saba Brachveli, a lawyer with the Civil Society Foundation, one of the applicant organizations. "Such a move is very rare," he told Civil.ge.

"The Foreign Agents Law" was adopted in the spring of 2024 following widespread protests. It is the second such attempt to pass the legislation after a similar bill was withdrawn in 2023. The law requires organizations that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign sources to register as entities "pursuing the interests of a foreign power." Critics have called it the "Russian Law," arguing that it is intended to suppress dis-



sent and weaken civil society, while the ruling Georgian Dream party insists the law is necessary to promote transparency.

Although not yet strictly enforced, the law remains active. Georgian Dream passed a new foreign agents law in 2025, which it claims mirrors the United States' Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). However, concerns persist among civil society groups and interna-

tional observers.

The ECHR complaint was filed after Georgia's Constitutional Court declined to temporarily suspend the law, though it agreed to consider the case. The complaint, submitted on October 21 to the Strasbourg-based court, was signed by 120 civil society organizations, 16 media outlets, and four individuals.

In the filing, the applicants argue that

even without active enforcement, the mere existence of the law interferes with their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights. They cite violations of Article 10 on freedom of expression, Article 11 on freedom of assembly and association, Article 13 on the right to an effective remedy, Article 14 on the prohibition of discrimination, and Article 18 concerning the misuse of restrictions on rights.

ODIHR Regrets Georgia's Decision Not to Invite Election Observers

By Liza Mchedlidze



The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) expressed regret on July 7 over what it described as the Georgian authorities' "stated intention" not to invite an international election observation mission for the country's upcoming local elections, scheduled for October 4.

"ODIHR continues to stand ready to deploy an observation mission if the authorities decide to send a timely invitation," the statement said. The Office emphasized that such an invitation would be "in the interest of transparency and increased public confidence in Georgia's democratic institutions."

The Office described the government's position as a break from a two-decade tradition of inviting international monitors. "This is a departure from Georgia's longstanding and consistent practice over the past two decades," the statement noted. ODIHR told Civil.ge that it has received invitations to observe every local election since 2002, with the exception of 2014, when it was unable to attend due to budget constraints.

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Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said on June 18 that it would be “unnecessary” to “burden” ODIHR with observing the municipal elections, arguing that such monitoring missions are typically reserved for “exceptional” cases. His comments followed a statement from the British Embassy in Georgia, which had encouraged the government to extend an invitation to ODIHR.

ODIHR first confirmed in mid-June that it had not received an invitation. At the time, it noted that invitations are ideally issued four to six months before election day.

In the same July 7 statement, ODIHR voiced “deep concern” about broader developments in Georgia, citing restrictive legislation, arrests of protesters, and the detention of opposition leaders. “We are following current developments in Georgia with deep concern, also in light of the recent arrests and convictions of opposition politicians,” ODIHR Director Maria Telalian said. She urged the Georgian authorities to repeal laws that are “hindering the legitimate work of civil society.”

“Civil and political rights are a lynchpin of democracy and the rule of law,” Telalian added.

ODIHR said it is especially alarmed

by the “arrests of dozens of protestors in recent months and reports of the lack of respect for fair trial standards,” along with increased pressure on human rights defenders and civil society groups.

Meanwhile, Georgia’s political opposition remains divided over participation in the October elections. On June 30, eight opposition parties announced a boycott, claiming that taking part would legitimize the ruling Georgian Dream party and undermine the resistance movement.

However, two opposition parties Lelo/Strong Georgia and Gakharia for Georgia, have confirmed they will participate. On July 5, Lelo reaffirmed its decision to

run, saying the announcement had been planned prior to GD President Mikheil Kavelashvili’s July 4 offer to pardon jailed opposition leaders if their parties agreed to compete. Lelo dismissed the offer as a political maneuver.

Six opposition figures remain in jail for refusing to participate in a Georgian Dream-led parliamentary commission, including Lelo leaders Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze.

Lelo has identified the local elections as a key opportunity to challenge Georgian Dream’s control, particularly in urban centers where opposition support is stronger.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER
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Tbilisi Court Releases Maritime Agency Head on Bail Following Suicide Attempt Investigation



Tbilisi City Court has released Aleksi Akhvlediani, director of Georgia’s Maritime Transport Agency, on bail of GEL 30,000 after prosecutors charged him with negligent storage of a firearm. The charges are linked to the alleged suicide attempt of Tornike Rizhvadze, the former head of the Adjara government.

Rizhvadze, who resigned in April 2024, remains in serious condition and is on mechanical ventilation after being hospital-

ized with a gunshot wound to the lung. Authorities say the incident occurred in the early hours of July 7 at Akhvlediani’s residence in Sagarejo, located in the eastern Kakheti region.

According to the Prosecutor’s Office, Rizhvadze was visiting Akhvlediani when he accessed a

firearm left unattended in a marquee near the house. Investigators say Rizhvadze then “secretly moved it to the guest bedroom and, while alone, shot himself in the chest in an attempted suicide, resulting in a severe bodily injury.”

Police launched an investigation under Article 115 of Georgia’s Criminal Code, which covers incitement to suicide. Prosecutors argued that Akhvlediani’s failure to securely store the firearm enabled Rizhvadze to obtain it.

Akhvlediani’s defense said the two men are longtime friends. “They frequently visited each other,” his lawyer told reporters, adding that Akhvlediani “was not near Rizhvadze when the incident occurred.” She said her

client rushed Rizhvadze to the hospital before paramedics arrived, which she believes likely saved his life.

Samadashvili: OSCE Statement Confirms Georgian Dream's Fear of Democratic Oversight

Salome Samadashvili, a leader of the opposition party Lelo – Strong Georgia, said the recent statement by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) confirms that the ruling Georgian Dream party has no intention of maintaining even a democratic façade in the lead-up to Georgia’s local elections.

“The OSCE statement, which expresses concern over the fact that Georgian Dream has not officially invited observers for the local self-government elections, confirms what we have been saying for a long time,” Samadashvili said. “This is a government that genuinely has no interest in creating any democratic facade for elections. These are not elections; this is a battlefield in which the opposition must fight.”

Samadashvili argued that the OSCE’s call for an observation mission underscores the importance of the upcoming vote, scheduled for October 4, as a critical political contest. “The OSCE’s appeal to the authorities to invite its observation mission also confirms that the OSCE views the local self-government

elections precisely as an arena for conducting a significant political battle,” she said.

She emphasized that the OSCE is not preemptively declaring the elections illegitimate but is instead urging the government to ensure proper observation mechanisms. “This further confirms that, in reality, Bidzina Ivanishvili knows he will lose significant positions in the local elections and is so frightened that he does not even want to invite the OSCE observation

mission to his government,” Samadashvili added, referring to the Georgian Dream founder and influential political figure.

In its July 7 statement, ODIHR said it was “deeply concerned” about recent developments in Georgia and reiterated its willingness to observe the elections if the government sends an invitation in time. The Office noted that such a step would serve the interests of transparency and public confidence in democratic institutions.



Weather

Wednesday, July 9

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 30°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 21°C

Thursday, July 10

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 32°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 22°C

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