



Plenary sitting

B9-0251/2024

22.4.2024

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on attempts to reintroduce a foreign agent law in Georgia and its restrictions on civil society
(2024/2703(RSP))

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on behalf of the ECR Group

B9-0251/2024

European Parliament resolution on attempts to reintroduce a foreign agent law in Georgia and its restrictions on civil society (2024/2703(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions and reports on Georgia,
 - having regard to the decision of the European Council of December 2023 to grant Georgia candidate status to the EU,
 - having regard to the recommendations of the Georgia 2023 Report of 8 November 2023 (SWD(2023)0697), accompanying the Commission’s 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy of 8 November 2023 (COM(2023)0690),
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in its decision of 15 December 2023, the European Council granted candidate country status to Georgia, on the understanding that the relevant steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 be taken;
- B. whereas civil society in Georgia has traditionally been very vibrant and active and played a pivotal role in soliciting and promoting democratic changes in the country, as well as safeguarding and watching over their implementation;
- C. whereas on 17 April 2024 Georgia’s parliament gave initial approval to the ‘transparency of foreign influence’ draft law which was submitted by the ruling Georgian Dream majority and which is widely considered to be based on an infamous law that Russia has used extensively to crack down on dissent;
- D. whereas the bill would require foreign-funded non-governmental organisations, media and trade unions to register as ‘organisations pursuing the interests of foreign powers’, while excluding certain types of organisations, such as businesses or NGOs receiving government funding;
- E. whereas the proposed bill has drawn criticism and condemnation from Georgian society and the international community and is seen as an instrument of foreign interference — backed by Russia and intended to undermine Georgia’s bid to join the European Union;
- F. whereas the Georgian Government had already tried to introduce this law in 2023, but after a wave of public protests and demonstrations the ruling party pledged to ‘unconditionally withdraw’ the proposed legislation;
- G. whereas Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili said that the ‘insistence of the authorities to push through this law against the will of the population and despite partners’ protest is a direct provocation — a Russian strategy of destabilisation’ and pledged that she would veto the bill, although her veto can be overridden by the parliamentary majority;

- H. whereas step nine of the Commission's Georgia 2023 Report of 8 November 2023 includes a recommendation for Georgia to make sure that civil society is able to operate freely, while step one calls on Georgia to fight disinformation against the EU and its values;
- I. whereas the bill has once again sparked huge street protests which have been dealt with brutally by the police, including with the use of tear gas and riot gear against demonstrators;
- J. whereas there is still an exceptionally high level of support among the Georgian population for joining the EU, with over 80 % of people in favour;
- K. whereas the founder of the Georgian Dream party, the country's sole oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili returned to active politics on 30 December 2023 becoming 'honorary chairman' of the Georgian Dream party; whereas the updated party statute bestows a range of prerogatives upon Ivanishvili as honorary chairman, formalising the concentration of power in his hands without outlining any accountability mechanisms;
- L. whereas Michael Saakashvili, who served as Georgia's president from 2004 until 2013 and is a leader of the largest opposition party, has been held in detention since October 2022 and has been mistreated in prison;
- M. whereas an increasing number of incidents indicate that Georgia is experiencing an insecure media environment, which poses a threat to Georgia's democracy; whereas Reporters Without Borders' annual World Press Freedom Index ranks Georgia 77th out of 180 countries;
- N. whereas parliamentary elections in Georgia will be held on 26 October 2024 and the reintroduction of the 'foreign agents' bill has to be viewed in this context;
1. Calls on Georgia's Government to reject the proposed 'foreign agents' legislation and renew its commitment to democracy; underlines that any attempts to politically control or curb its activities goes against democratic values as well as the Commission's recommendations and that the adoption of the bill will be detrimental to the starting of accession talks with the EU;
 2. Stands in full solidarity with the Georgian people and Georgia's vibrant civil society, which traditionally has played a very active and important role in bringing the country closer to the West, promoting democratisation and pushing for Euro-Atlantic integration in line with the desires of the Georgian people;
 3. Is aware that almost all of the largest NGOs, trade unions and civil society organisations are currently funded with the assistance of international grants, mainly coming from the EU and US and therefore sees the proposed bill as a deliberate action by the Georgian Dream party to limit the engagement of Western democratic world in Georgia, thereby making the country more open to Russian influence;
 4. Is concerned about excessive use of force against the peaceful protesters demonstrating against the reintroduction of the controversial bill by the authorities; reminds the ruling Georgian Dream party that it had already pledged to unconditionally withdraw the bill

after a previous wave of mass protests and calls for it to be dropped once and for all;

5. Reminds the Georgian Government that a large majority of the population strongly supports the country's western course and EU accession;
6. Deplores the personal role played by Georgia's sole oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili in the current political crisis and in yet another attempt to undermine the western-oriented course of the country in favour of pivoting towards Russia; reiterates its call on the Council and the EU's democratic partners to consider imposing personal sanctions on Ivanishvili for his role in the deterioration of the political process in Georgia and in working against the interests of its people;
7. Underlines that the Georgian Government bears full responsibility for the health and well-being of the former president and must be held accountable should anything happen to him; reiterates its call on the authorities to release him on humanitarian grounds and to allow him to receive proper medical treatment abroad; calls on President Salome Zourabishvili, likewise, to use her constitutional prerogatives to resolve this issue;
8. Calls on international institutions to closely monitor the electoral process in Georgia ahead of the upcoming elections; is of the opinion that long-term electoral observation missions are crucial to objectively and impartially assess the quality of the entire electoral process;
9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the President, Government and Parliament of Georgia.