



TEXTS ADOPTED

P10_TA(2024)0017

The democratic backsliding and threats to political pluralism in Georgia

European Parliament resolution of 9 October 2024 on the democratic backsliding and threats to political pluralism in Georgia (2024/2822(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Georgia,
- having regard to the statement by the High Representative and the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement of 17 April 2024 on the adoption of the ‘transparency of foreign influence’ law,
- having regard to the statement by the High Representative of 18 September 2024 on the Georgian law on ‘family values and protection of minors’,
- having regard to the statement by the European External Action Service Spokesperson of 4 April 2024 on the draft law on ‘transparency of foreign influence’,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 14 and 15 December 2023 and of 27 June 2024,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled ‘2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2023)0690),
- having regard to Resolution 2561 (2024) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe entitled ‘Challenges to democracy in Georgia’,
- having regard to the Bucharest Declaration adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at the thirty-first annual session from 29 June to 3 July 2024,
- having regard to the Association Agreement between the European

Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part¹,

- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
 - having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR),
 - having regard to the joint statement by the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Chair of the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus and the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Georgia of 18 April 2024 on the reintroduction of the draft law on 'transparency of foreign influence' in Georgia,
 - having regard to Rule 136(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the past months have seen significant attacks on democracy in Georgia, which have been characterised by the hasty adoption of anti-democratic legislation criticised by the UN, the Venice Commission and the EU, concurrent with attacks on civil society and independent media, prolonged mass protests and the subsequent violent suppression of those peaceful protests, and deep political and societal tensions and polarisation;
- B. whereas the exercise of freedom of opinion, expression, association and peaceful assembly is a fundamental right enshrined in the Georgian Constitution;
- C. whereas Georgia, as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as a member of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, has committed itself to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights;
- D. whereas Article 78 of the Georgian Constitution provides that 'the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competence to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization';
- E. whereas the EU expects Georgia, a candidate country for EU accession, to abide fully by the Association Agreement and other international commitments it has made and, in particular, to fulfil the conditions and take the steps set out in the Commission's recommendation of 8 November 2023; whereas the European Council decided to grant candidate status to Georgia solely on the understanding that these steps would be taken, including combating

¹ OJ L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4, ELI:
http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/494/oj.

disinformation and interference against the EU and its values, engaging opposition parties and civil society in governance, and ensuring freedom of assembly and expression, as well as meaningfully consulting civil society and involving it in legislative and policymaking processes and ensuring that it can operate freely;

- F. 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 in safeguarding and watching over their implementation;
- G. whereas on 20 February 2024, the Parliament of Georgia passed amendments to the Electoral Code changing the procedure for the election of chair and so-called professional members of the Central Election Commission and abolishing the post of deputy chair, which is filled by a representative of the opposition;
- H. whereas on 4 April 2024, less than a year before the elections, the Georgian Parliament adopted amendments to the country's Electoral Code that modified fundamental aspects of the country's electoral legislation, abolishing mandatory parliamentary quotas for women, which required that at least one out of four candidates on a party list be of a different gender than the majority;
- I. whereas on 28 May 2024, the Georgian Parliament adopted the so-called transparency of foreign influence law, after overriding the veto of President Salome Zourabishvili and despite mass protests by Georgian citizens and repeated calls from Georgia's European partners to withdraw the draft law which, in spirit and content, contradicts EU norms and values; whereas adopting this law has effectively frozen Georgia's accession process and led to the suspension of EU financial assistance for Georgia;
- J. whereas the law was adopted in a procedure which, according to the Venice Commission, left no space for genuine discussion and meaningful consultation, in open disregard for the concerns of large parts of the Georgian population; whereas the restrictions set by that law to the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association and the right to privacy are incompatible with the strict test set out in Articles 8(2), 10(2), and 11(2) of the ECHR and Article 17(2), 19(2) and 22(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as they do not meet the requirements of legality, legitimacy, necessity and proportionality in a democratic society, and they are also incompatible with the principle of non-discrimination set out in Article 14 of the ECHR;
- K. whereas this legislation comes at a time of increasing and ongoing attacks against civil society in Georgia in a seeming effort to narrow civic space by starving independent groups of funds; whereas this legislation is modelled on the foreign agent legislation in Russia;

- L. whereas on 6 June 2024, the US imposed visa restrictions on dozens of Georgian officials over the adoption of the 'foreign agents law';
- M. whereas the European Council, in its conclusions of 27 June 2024, called on Georgia's authorities to 'clarify their intentions by reversing the current course of action which jeopardises Georgia's EU path, de facto leading to a halt of the accession process';
- N. whereas on 11 July 2024, the US Congress Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted Georgia sanctions legislation known as the Megobari Act, which imposes sanctions against Georgian officials responsible for undermining the country's democratic system;
- O. whereas on 17 September 2024, the Georgian Parliament passed a law on 'family values and the protection of minors', which aims to ban reliable information about sexual orientation and gender identity;
- P. whereas the Georgian authorities have not taken into account a single recommendation of the Venice Commission regarding the annulment or modification of the above-mentioned laws on 'transparency of foreign influence' and 'family values and the protection of minors', the abolition of gender quotas in local and parliamentary elections, and the formation of the Central Election Commission;
- Q. whereas there is growing anti-Western and hostile rhetoric from the ruling Georgian Dream party against Georgia's democratic partners, as well as promotion of Russian disinformation, manipulation and conspiracy theories; whereas that hostile rhetoric also targets Ukraine, as the ruling party uses despicable political banners depicting Ukrainian cities destroyed by Russia, thus capitalising on the suffering of brave Ukrainians; whereas the Georgian Dream party is pursuing a narrative of the West as a 'global war party' which is trying to push Georgia back into a war with Russia;
- R. whereas an increasing number of incidents indicate that Georgia is experiencing an insecure media environment, which poses a threat to its democracy; whereas Reporters Without Borders' annual index on press freedom ranks Georgia 103rd out of 180 countries, a drop of 26 places from the previous year;
- S. whereas on 28 August 2024, the leader of Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, at the inauguration of his party's electoral campaign, spoke of his intention to ban democratic opposition parties; whereas he was seconded by the Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, who stated that, if the party received a majority in the Georgian Parliament, it would ban certain opposition parties, and referred to the opposition as a 'criminal political force';
- T. whereas the Russian Foreign Minister's statement expressing his

readiness to help Georgia normalise its relations with ‘the neighbouring ... states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia’ was praised by the leaders of the ruling party, demonstrating the Georgian Government’s departure from its policy of non-recognition of the occupied regions of Georgia;

- U. whereas parliamentary elections will take place in Georgia on 26 October 2024; whereas the law on ‘transparency of foreign influence’ has effectively blocked the requirement to have domestic observers, whose presence, according to OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights principles, would contribute to an increase in the transparency of and trust in the electoral process;
1. Expresses its deep concern about the democratic backsliding in Georgia, which has occurred exponentially throughout this year and especially ahead of the parliamentary elections on 26 October 2024; strongly condemns the adoption of the law on ‘transparency of foreign influence’ and the law on ‘family values and protection of minors’, as well as the changes to the Electoral Code; considers that the above are tools used by the government to violate freedom of expression, censor media, impose restrictions on critical voices in civil society and the NGO sector or to discriminate against vulnerable people; underscores that the foregoing are also incompatible with EU values and democratic principles, run against Georgia’s ambitions for EU membership, damage Georgia’s international reputation and endanger the country’s Euro-Atlantic integration; strongly underlines that unless the above-mentioned legislation is rescinded, progress cannot be made in Georgia’s relations with the EU; regrets that Georgia, once a champion of democratic progress with Euro-Atlantic aspirations, has been in a democratic backsliding free fall for a considerable period;
 2. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to investigate the consequences of the democratic backsliding that these laws represent for their donor role in Georgia and to communicate this possible impact to the Government and Parliament of Georgia; calls for all EU funding provided to the Georgian Government to be frozen until the above-mentioned undemocratic laws are repealed and for strict conditions to be placed on the disbursement of any future funding to the Georgian Government;
 3. Expresses its concern about the climate of hatred and intimidation fuelled by statements by Georgian Government representatives and political leaders, as well as by the government’s attacks on political pluralism; condemns comments by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili and leading figures of the government threatening to ban opposition parties and referring to the opposition as a ‘criminal political force’; notes that such intimidation seriously undermines the political process and the freedom of expression, and contributes to an environment of fear;

4. Calls for a thorough investigation of police brutality against peaceful protestors during the spring protests against the law on 'transparency of foreign influence' in Georgia;
5. Reiterates its calls on the Commission to promptly assess how Georgia's 'transparency of foreign influence' and 'family values and protection of minors' laws, its abolition of gender quotas and other changes in its electoral legislation, the implementation of the Venice Commission's recommendations in general and the conduct of the elections in line with accepted international standards, affect Georgia's continuous fulfilment of the visa liberalisation benchmarks, in particular the fundamental rights benchmark, which is a crucial component of the EU visa liberalisation policy;
6. Reiterates its unwavering support for the Georgian people's legitimate European aspirations and their wish to live in a prosperous country, free from corruption, that fully respects fundamental freedoms, protects human rights and guarantees an open society and independent media; underlines that the decision to grant Georgia EU candidate country status was motivated by the wish to acknowledge the achievements and democratic efforts of Georgia's civil society, as well as the overwhelming support for EU accession among its citizens, with over 80 % of the Georgian people consistently in favour; appreciates the efforts made by Georgia's President Salome Zourabishvili to return Georgia to the democratic and pro-European path of development and strongly condemns the Georgian Dream party's effort to silence her through impeachment procedures on unwarranted grounds;
7. Deplores the personal role played by Georgia's oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, who returned to active politics on 30 December 2023 when he became 'honorary chairman' of the Georgian Dream party, in the current political crisis and in yet another attempt to undermine the Euro-Atlantic orientation of the country in favour of pivoting towards Russia; reiterates its call on the Council and the EU's democratic partners to impose immediate and targeted personal sanctions on Ivanishvili for his role in the deterioration of the political process in Georgia as well as other activities benefiting the Russian Federation;
8. Calls for the EU and its Member States to hold to account and impose personal sanctions on all those responsible for undermining democracy in Georgia, who are complicit in the violence committed against political opponents and peaceful protestors and who spread anti-Western disinformation; welcomes the personal sanctions imposed by the US on Georgian Dream officials;
9. Expresses concern about the fact that many recent legislative proposals adopted by the Georgian Dream majority in the Georgian Parliament betray the aspirations of the large majority of the

Georgian people to live in a democratic society, continue democratic and rule of law reforms, pursue close cooperation with Euro-Atlantic partners and commit to a path towards EU membership;

10. Emphasises that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and to peaceful protest are fundamental freedoms and must be respected under all circumstances, particularly in a country aspiring to join the EU;
11. Underlines that the public watchdog role exercised by civil society and independent media is essential to a democratic society and crucial in advancing EU accession-related reforms and therefore calls on the Georgian authorities to do their utmost to guarantee an enabling environment in which civil society and independent media can thrive;
12. Recalls that the European Council of 14 and 15 December 2023 granted Georgia candidate country status on the understanding that the relevant steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 would be taken; stresses that recently adopted legislation clearly goes against this ambition and has effectively put on hold Georgia's integration into the EU;
13. Reiterates its call on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement and the President of the Commission to remind the Georgian Government of the commitments it made and the values and principles it subscribed to when it applied for EU membership;
14. Reiterates the tangible opportunities that Georgia would take advantage of once the accession negotiations begin, such as pre-accession assistance that would improve the standard of living of Georgian citizens, as well as support the institutions, infrastructure and social services;
15. Urges the Georgian authorities to ensure that the upcoming parliamentary elections in October 2024 adhere to the highest international standards, guaranteeing a transparent, free and fair process that reflects the democratic will of the people; presses for the abolition of the ingrained practice of misusing public resources and administrative capacity for the benefit of the ruling party; urges the Georgian authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure that all respected civil society organisations involved in election observation can observe these elections without hindrance or interference in their work;
16. Shares the concerns raised by the Venice Commission about the adoption of amendments to the legal framework for elections in Georgia and the Electoral Code, agreeing that these changes to the Electoral Code will have a major impact on the stakeholders'

perceptions of and trust in the impartiality and fairness of the election administration;

17. Expresses alarm at the decision to open only a limited number of polling stations abroad, despite numerous requests from the Georgian diaspora, thereby depriving the majority of Georgians living abroad of the right to vote; is deeply concerned by reports that the Government of Georgia is creating obstacles for the coalition of 30 NGOs and Transparency International Georgia in their efforts to conduct the 'Go Out and Vote' campaign; considers these obstacles to be an attempt to undermine democracy in the country;
18. Notes that, amid significant international backlash questioning the legitimacy of the upcoming elections, the Prime Minister of Georgia 'recommended' that the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) revoke its decision of 24 September 2024 designating Transparency International Georgia as having 'declared electoral goals', and the ACB did revoke it on 2 October 2024; recalls that the initial decision, if enforced and not revoked, would deprive one of Georgia's leading civil society organisations of access to foreign funding, severely hindering its ability to continue operations, including election observation, as well as raise concerns about the political neutrality of the ACB;
19. Deplores the use by Georgian Dream of violent images of the war in Ukraine as a means of manipulating opinions and spreading disinformation and pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian sentiment in its campaign ahead of the October 2024 elections;
20. Expects Georgian Dream to respect the will and free choice of the Georgian people in the upcoming parliamentary elections and ensure a peaceful transfer of power; demands that Georgian Dream and its leaders immediately stop the violence, intimidation, hate speech, persecution and repression that it is committing against the opposition, civil society and independent media;
21. Strongly believes that the upcoming elections will be decisive in determining Georgia's future democratic development and geopolitical choice, as well its ability to make progress with its EU member state candidacy; recognises that it is still possible to consolidate Georgia's democratic future as an EU candidate country with a young, engaged generation of leaders, which was exemplified by the spontaneous protests against the foreign agent law that took place during 2024;
22. Expresses deep concern about the increased influence of Russia in Georgia, including increased immigration from Russia, increased trade ties with Russia and Georgia's willingness to pursue reconciliation with Russia despite Russia's war in Ukraine and its occupation of a fifth of Georgian sovereign territory; calls on the

Government of Georgia to impose sanctions against Russia in response to its war of aggression against Ukraine, continue its previous policy of non-recognition of the occupied territories and honour its commitment to enforce effective measures to avoid the circumvention of European sanctions; encourages the Government of Georgia to align fully with the EU's foreign policy and the EU's strategy towards Russia;

23. Strongly reiterates its urgent demand for the immediate and unconditional release of former President Mikheil Saakashvili on humanitarian grounds for the purpose of seeking medical treatment abroad; emphasises that the Georgian Government bears full and undeniable responsibility for the life, health, safety and well-being of former President Mikheil Saakashvili and must be held fully accountable for any harm that befalls him;
24. Notes that the Georgian Government has further worsened access to public information, including Soviet-era archives, using the EU General Data Protection Regulation to falsely justify draconian restrictions to archive access, and that some of Georgia's most important Soviet-era archives (including the archives of the former KGB and the former Central Committee of the Communist Party) have been completely closed since October 2023 without any explanation; highlights Russia's manipulation and falsification of history, including Soviet history, as part of its war of aggression against Ukraine and its military threats against other countries; regrets the growing cult of Stalin and the related increase in Soviet nostalgia in Georgia, supported by the ruling government, which underscores its closer alignment with Russia;
25. 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.