



TEXTS ADOPTED

P10_TA(2024)0054

Georgia's worsening democratic crisis following the recent parliamentary elections and alleged electoral fraud

European Parliament resolution of 28 November 2024 on Georgia's worsening democratic crisis following the recent parliamentary elections and alleged electoral fraud (2024/2933(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Georgia, in particular that of 9 October 2024 on democratic backsliding and threats to political pluralism in Georgia¹,
- 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 part²,
- having regard to the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions of the international election observation mission (I-EOM) led by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE-ODIHR) on the parliamentary elections held in Georgia on 26 October 2024 and to the statement by the Head of the European Parliament's election observation delegation,
- having regard to the Statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, of 29 October 2024 on the latest developments following the parliamentary elections in Georgia, and to the joint statement by the High Representative and the Commission of 27 October 2024 on the parliamentary elections in Georgia,

¹ Texts Adopted, P10_TA(2024)0017.

² OJ L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4, ELI:
http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_internation/2014/494/oj.

- having regard to the joint statement by Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Donald Tusk, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland on the situation in Georgia of 7 November 2024,
 - 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 Chair of the Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 28 October 2024 on the parliamentary elections in Georgia,
 - having regard to the joint statement of EU ministers of 28 October 2024 on the elections in Georgia,
 - having regard to the joint statement by the Friends of Georgia, which represents European parliaments, of 6 November 2024 entitled 'On international inquiry commission to investigate irregularities of elections in Georgia',
 - having regard to Georgia's status as an EU candidate country, granted by the European Council at its summit of 14 and 15 December 2023,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 30 October 2024 entitled '2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy' (COM(2024)0690), which includes the first progress report on Georgia,
 - having regard to Rules 136(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas parliamentary elections were held in Georgia on 26 October 2024; whereas the months leading up to the elections were characterised by significant attacks on democracy in Georgia, such as the hasty adoption of anti-democratic legislation criticised by the United Nations, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), and the EU; whereas the pre-election period failed to meet democratic standards due to actions by the ruling Georgian Dream party and the authorities that fostered a climate of fear, including through the arrest, home raids and intimidation of opposition politicians, civil society leaders, journalists, researchers and other persons critical of the government, and violence committed against them;
- B. whereas, during the campaign, the ruling Georgian Dream party exploited Georgian society's natural fear of war by reiterating that it was the 'party of peace', claiming that the opposition would supposedly drag the country into war with Russia under orders from the West, conspiratorially referred to as the 'Global War Party'; whereas leaders of the Russian Federation and its propagandists openly supported Georgian Dream both before and after the elections; whereas the top leaders of the ruling party made public

statements during the campaign expressing their intent to ban key opposition parties following the elections, raising concerns about the fairness and inclusivity of the political process;

- C. whereas Georgia's 26 October 2024 parliamentary elections offered a choice of candidates but were marred by serious irregularities, documented reports of vote manipulation and the suppression of voter freedoms, particularly through vote buying, observer harassment, removal of media from polling stations, intimidation of voters inside and outside of polling stations, tracking of voters and confiscation of identity documents in rural areas, which were then handed to loyal activists of the ruling party to vote, organised transportation of voters, hate speech, insufficient polling access for Georgian citizens abroad, and improbable differences in female and male voter turnout in rural precincts; whereas public sector employees and recipients of social benefits faced pressure to support the ruling party;
- D. whereas international observers noted deepening political divisions and a significant imbalance in the allocation of financial resources, as well as the many advantages enjoyed by the ruling party, making an already uneven playing field even more uneven; whereas the effectiveness of the financial oversight of the campaign was undermined by limited enforcement and concerns over the impartiality and political instrumentalisation of the oversight body;
- E. whereas Georgia's parliamentary elections of 26 October 2024 marked the country's first full use of a proportional system, with electronic devices for voter identification and vote counting; whereas these technologies raised concerns over transparency, voter secrecy and a lack of independent verification;
- F. whereas recent amendments to the Electoral Code, including the removal of gender quotas, changed the composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and, along with the enactment of the 'law on transparency of foreign influence', have restricted fundamental freedoms, stigmatised civil society organisations and undermined the integrity of Georgia's democratic institutions;
- G. whereas respected Georgian independent election observation missions concluded that a combination of pre-election coercion, election day manipulation and restricted observer access meant that the elections did not reflect the true will of the Georgian people; whereas a system of identity card confiscations, data gathering and unauthorised presence created a coercive environment, reinforcing the complicity of state actors in facilitating electoral fraud; whereas the principle of voter secrecy was widely violated on election day; whereas the elections were rigged through a combination of voter intimidation, obstruction of observation, and manipulation of voter procedures, and cannot be considered as free and fair;

- H. whereas widespread anomalies in voter turnout and party vote shares for the ruling party were consistent with many reports of electoral malpractice;
- I. whereas almost all the polls before the election suggested that Georgian Dream would fall short of a majority; whereas the discrepancy between pre-election polling and the election results reported by the CEC cannot be explained by a statistical margin of error;
- J. whereas the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, publicly condemned the elections as rigged, refused to recognise the validity of the result, and called for an international investigation and fresh elections; whereas the President asserted that acknowledging the outcome would be tantamount to 'accepting Georgia's subjugation to Russia' and described the election process as a 'Russian special operation'; whereas the four opposition coalitions that surpassed the electoral threshold rejected the election results and refused to legitimise the resulting parliament; whereas four opposition blocs – the United National Movement, the Strong Georgia Coalition, the Coalition for Change and Gakharia for Georgia – turned down their parliamentary mandates and refused to join the 11th convocation of parliament, arguing that the parliamentary elections of 26 October 2024 were illegitimate; whereas on 13 November 2024, repeating statements he made in August, Georgian Prime Minister Kobakhidze iterated plans to constitutionally ban major opposition parties if they refuse to accept their parliamentary mandates; whereas Georgia thus finds itself in a constitutional crisis;
- K. whereas the new parliament was convened on 25 November 2024 without the participation of opposition members; whereas President Salome Zourabichvili stated in reference to the inaugural session of parliament that 'today the parliament of Georgia no longer exists' as Georgian Dream has 'trampled the constitution';
- L. whereas, in his statement after the elections, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) recalled that the international observers had not declared the elections free and fair, asked for a transparent inquiry and investigation into the irregularities and the pressuring and intimidation of voters, and highlighted the need to reverse the trend of democratic backsliding in Georgia;
- M. whereas the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, travelled to Tbilisi to congratulate the Georgian Dream party before the final election results were published and without first consulting other EU leaders, and was the only EU leader to do so;

- N. whereas Georgian civil society organisations filed court complaints and called for investigations into electoral fraud, though in many cases investigative bodies did not initiate inquiries and did not properly examine the violations; whereas the CEC has so far refused to publish the commissioned audit on the electronic voting system, and has certified the results of the elections, notwithstanding the above-mentioned irregularities;
- O. whereas legal action by Georgian civil society organisations was followed by punitive measures by the authorities against civil society representatives, including unwarranted summons for questioning and heavy fines for speaking out about election fraud;
- P. whereas Georgian courts have continued to fast-track and dismiss, en masse, lawsuits brought by opposition political parties and local observers alleging voting irregularities, while rejecting motions to summon witnesses and motions that would oblige the CEC to hand over the delivery and receipt records of markers and papers procured and used for ballots;
- Q. whereas on 16 November 2024, despite numerous complaints and calls by independent election observers for the results to be annulled, Georgia's CEC announced the final summary protocol of the parliamentary elections of 26 October 2024, attributing victory to the ruling Georgian Dream party, with 53,92 % of the vote;
- R. whereas protests in Tbilisi initially erupted on 28 October 2024, with thousands gathering to challenge the legitimacy of the ruling party's declared victory; whereas the demonstrations continued on 4 November 2024, growing in scale and intensity; whereas police forcibly dispersed demonstrations in Tbilisi using disproportionate violence against peaceful protesters and journalists, and arrested several demonstrators;
- S. whereas, according to Article 78 of the Constitution of Georgia, 'the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization';
- T. whereas Georgia, as an EU candidate country, should abide fully by the Association Agreement and fulfil the nine steps set out in the Commission's recommendation of 8 November 2023; whereas although the European Council granted candidate status to Georgia in December 2023, its EU accession process has since been *de facto* halted due to the course of action taken by the Georgian Government since the spring of 2024;
- U. whereas oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of Georgian Dream, who also wields considerable influence over Georgia's economy, has played a defining role in the country's democratic backsliding and in

undermining its Euro-Atlantic orientation in favour of a pivot towards Russia;

1. Deplores the fact that Georgia, a candidate country for EU accession, held parliamentary elections on 26 October 2024 that did not respect international standards for democratic elections or its commitments as a member of the OSCE to carry out free and fair elections; emphasises that violations of electoral integrity are incompatible with the standards expected from an EU candidate country; highlights the fact that the conduct of the election was a further manifestation of the continuing democratic backsliding for which the ruling party is fully responsible;
2. Strongly condemns the numerous and serious electoral violations, including documented cases of intimidation, vote manipulation, ballot-stuffing, interference with election observers and the media, reported manipulation involving electronic voting machines that allowed multiple votes per identity document, significant imbalances in financial resources, the advantages of incumbency and a failure to investigate severe procedural irregularities;
3. Considers that the reported extensive electoral fraud undermines the integrity of the election process, the legitimacy of the results and the public's trust in any new government, and that the results do not serve as a reliable representation of the will of the Georgian people;
4. Acknowledges Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili's strong condemnation of the elections as rigged and her decision not to recognise the results; appreciates the efforts made by Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili to steer the country back towards a democratic and European path of development;
5. Considers that, with the legitimacy of the vote severely undermined by the magnitude of the violations, the international community should not recognise the election results; rejects, therefore, any recognition of the parliamentary elections and calls for them to be re-run within a year, with the process conducted in an improved electoral environment by an independent and impartial election administration, under diligent international observation, in order to ensure a genuinely fair and transparent electoral process;
6. Supports the call for an independent, transparent international investigation into the allegations of electoral manipulation, voter intimidation and systemic violations, which were reported to have taken place in the pre-election period and on election day;
7. Welcomes the decision by the European External Action Service (EEAS) to send a technical mission to Georgia; calls on the EEAS and the Commission to establish a broad mission mandate that would go beyond the limitations of the OSCE election observation framework and methodology, which is significantly different from the EU

election observation methodology, because the OSCE methodology is not always capable of adequately capturing everything that occurs in a country before election day, particularly in countries such as Georgia where there is a well-established system of pressure on public officials, voter intimidation and obstruction of local election observers;

8. Expresses concern about the seizure by the Prosecutor's Office of voter verification devices and election documentation; calls on the authorities to allow verification by voters of their participation in the elections in accordance with the highest standards of data protection; underlines the importance of safeguarding all election-related data and making these accessible to relevant stakeholders, given that they could contain key evidence of any irregularities;
9. Expresses serious concern about the coordinated dismissal by Georgian judicial institutions of numerous election fraud and manipulation complaints and the CEC's complete failure to investigate any of the reported election incidents; considers that, by not responding to the genuine concerns within society and the reports by local and international observers, the Georgian authorities are wilfully steering the country to the verge of a domestic political crisis and a state of international isolation from Georgia's democratic partners;
10. Expresses deep concern at the significant decline in female political representation in Georgia, compounded by the abolition of gender quotas, and calls for legislative changes to encourage gender equality in politics;
11. Calls for the EU and its Member States to impose personal sanctions on the officials and political leaders in Georgia who are responsible for the democratic backsliding, violations of electoral laws and standards, administrative abuses and misuse of state institutions, such as Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, Mayor of Tbilisi and Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream party Kakha Kaladze, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Shalva Papuashvili, and chairman of the Georgian Dream party Irakli Garibashvili, and to extend these sanctions to judges passing politically-motivated sentences; reiterates its call on the Council and the EU's democratic partners to impose immediate and targeted personal sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili and to freeze all his assets within the EU for his role in the deterioration of the political process in Georgia and for acting against the country's constitutionally declared interests, including efforts to restore Russia's sphere of influence over the country;
12. Emphasises that respect for fundamental rights is vital to the EU's visa liberalisation benchmarks and urges the Commission and the Council to review Georgia's visa-free status, with the possibility of

suspension if it is considered that EU standards on democratic governance and freedoms are not being upheld;

13. Calls for the EU to severely limit formal EU-level contacts with the Georgian Government and Parliament;
14. Condemns Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's visit to Georgia, which was a violation of EU positions and another attempt to undermine the EU's common foreign and security policy; emphasises that, once again, Prime Minister Orbán did not speak for the EU;
15. Recalls that as a result of the adoption of new anti-democratic legislation, such as the 'law on transparency of foreign influence' and the 'law on family values and protection of minors', the process of Georgia's integration into the EU has effectively been suspended; recalls that the EU has also frozen the allocation of funds to Georgia; underscores that the continuing democratic backsliding in Georgia is not only a regrettable development, considering that Georgia was once a champion of Euro-Atlantic aspirations, but also needs to be reversed and the said pieces of anti-democratic legislation repealed in order for the country's relations with the EU to get back on track; regrets that the political environment in Georgia indicates an authoritarian shift by the ruling party and a betrayal of the pro-European aspirations of the Georgian people; recalls its steadfast support for Georgia's democratic development and the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of its people; reminds the Georgian Government that a large majority of the population strongly supports the country's pro-Western course and its accession to the EU;
16. Is alarmed by the climate of intimidation and polarisation fuelled by statements by Georgian Government representatives and political leaders, as well as by attacks against political pluralism, including through threats to ban opposition parties, to arrest their leaders and even ordinary supporters, and to silence dissent; warns the Georgian authorities that any attempts to ban legally established political parties would alienate Georgia from the EU and make any move towards EU accession impossible;
17. Strongly condemns Russia's systematic interference in democratic processes within Georgia, including through voter intimidation, vote buying and disinformation, such as the 'Global War Party' conspiracy; deplores the disinformation narratives disseminated and amplified by ruling party officials and government-affiliated media in the run-up to the elections; calls on the Georgian authorities to ensure fact-based information and communication, to refrain from anti-EU propaganda that is at odds with the stated goal of EU accession, and to strengthen the resilience of Georgian society to Russian disinformation and propaganda;)

18. Recalls that the European Council granted Georgia candidate country status at its summit of 14 and 15 December 2023 on the understanding that the relevant steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 would be taken; stresses that the recent parliamentary elections clearly run counter to this ambition; agrees with the assessment presented in the Commission's 2024 Enlargement Package, which states that Georgia's EU accession process is to be halted indefinitely as a result of the democratic backsliding initiated by the Georgian Government; underlines that the policies implemented by Georgian Dream are incompatible with Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration;
19. Reiterates its unwavering support for the Georgian people's legitimate European aspirations and their wish to live in a prosperous and democratic country, free from corruption, that fully respects fundamental freedoms, protects human rights and guarantees an open society, independent media and free and fair elections; urges the Georgian authorities to guarantee the right of citizens to assemble and to refrain from using unwarranted force against them;
20. Calls on the Council, the Commission, the EEAS and the new VP/HR to conduct a comprehensive review and overhaul of EU policy towards Georgia; calls on the Commission to use the frozen EUR 120 million originally intended as support for the Georgian authorities to enhance the EU's support for Georgia's civil society, in particular the non-governmental sector and independent media, which are increasingly coming under undue pressure from the ruling political party and the authorities, as well as to support programmes supporting democratic resilience and electoral integrity; welcomes the proposal of VP/HR Borrell to do so; calls for the EU's funding mechanisms to be adjusted to take into account the needs that arise in a more hostile and anti-democratic environment;
21. Strongly reiterates its urgent demand for the immediate release of former President Mikheil Saakashvili on humanitarian grounds; 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; reiterates its call on President Salome Zourabichvili to use her constitutional right to pardon him;
22. 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.