

Statement of the Riigikogu On the Crisis of Democracy in Georgia

Despite widespread protests, calls from the EU and Georgia's allies and a veto by the President of Georgia, on 28 May 2024 the Parliament of Georgia, with the votes of the ruling party Georgian Dream, passed the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, which is inspired by the Russian Federation's so-called Foreign Agents Law that the Putin regime uses to repress civil society, the press and political opposition.

Estonia stood by Georgia during the aggression of the Russian Federation in 2008, and has tirelessly supported the aspirations of the people and the government of Georgia to become a full member of the European Union and NATO. Estonia also supported granting the status of a candidate country of the European Union to Georgia in 2023. Georgia has been the priority country of Estonia's development cooperation since 2006, with main focus on supporting democracy, civil society and the European space of values in Georgia.

The Government of Georgia has used disproportionate force against the protesters against the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, including tear gas, illegal arrests, psychological persecution and physical violence. The European Union has repeatedly stated that by passing the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, Georgia is in breach of what was agreed upon in the 2023 Enlargement Package of the EU. The Government of Georgia has not followed the agreed reform programme, or the so-called nine steps. The Government of Georgia has committed to fighting disinformation and attacks against the European Union's values, to involving opposition parties and civil society in the political process, and to ensuring freedom of assembly and expression and the free functioning of civil society. Instead, the Government of Georgia and the parliamentary majority, as well as the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, have in recent months significantly stepped up their rhetoric against both Europe and Estonia.

The Venice Commission's assessment of Georgia's Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, published on 21 May 2024, found the law to be incompatible with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as it violates the principles of the rule of law, legality and proportionality, as well as the principle of non-discrimination.

In view of the above, the Riigikogu:

- condemns the actions of the Government and the parliamentary majority of Georgia in adopting the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and abandoning the European values;
- calls on the Parliament and Government of Georgia to repeal the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence without delay;
- calls on the Government of Georgia to immediately stop the violence against demonstrators, civil society and opposition politicians;
- calls on the Government of Georgia to conduct a legal investigation against the authorities and individuals who used violence against peaceful protesters;
- calls on the Government of Georgia to uphold its commitment to promote the rule of law and protect human rights, and to implement the reforms that are demanded by the overwhelming majority of the citizens of Georgia and which are a precondition for the accession to the European Union.

As long as the Government and Parliament of Georgia:

- have not started to resolve the crisis of democracy in a way that respects the rule of law and civil rights;
- have not returned to the reform and democratisation programme agreed upon with the EU;
- have not repealed the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence,

the Riigikogu considers it necessary that the Republic of Estonia:

- blocks in the Council of the European Union all further processes relating to Georgia's accession to the EU, including the opening of accession negotiations and the framework of accession conditions;
- freezes development cooperation with Georgia's state agencies and uses the funds released to support Georgia's civil society;
- proposes to the Council of the European Union to impose sanctions, including an entry ban into European Union, on Bidzina Ivanishvili, members of the Government of Georgia, the leaders of the Parliament of Georgia and the leadership and Parliamentary Group of the Georgian Dream party;
- if the above proposal is not supported, imposes sanctions of the Government of the Republic, including an entry ban into the Republic of Estonia, on Bidzina Ivanishvili, members of the Government of Georgia, leaders of the Parliament of Georgia and the leadership and the Parliamentary Group of the Georgian Dream party;
- proposes to the Council of the European Union to impose sanctions on the representatives of the power structures and law enforcement agencies of Georgia, including the judges and prosecutors who have been involved in the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations of the citizens of Georgia and the repressing of Georgia's opposition and civil society;
- if the above proposal is not supported, imposes sanctions of the Government of the Republic on the representatives of the power structures and law enforcement agencies of Georgia, including the judges and prosecutors who have been involved in the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations of the citizens of Georgia and the repressing of Georgia's opposition and civil society;
- supports in the Council of the European Union the freezing of the visa-free regime between Georgia and the European Union until the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence is repealed.

The Riigikogu expresses its respect to the brave Georgian people who stand for Georgia's democratic and pro-European future.

Lauri Hussar
President of the Riigikogu

Tallinn, 2024