



United States Mission to the OSCE

On Recent Developments in Georgia

As prepared for delivery by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Tracey Newell
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 30, 2024

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The United States is dismayed that Georgia's parliament chose to override President Zourabichvili's veto of ruling party Georgian Dream's "foreign influence" law on May 28. This decision runs counter to the will of the vast majority of the Georgian people who for decades have clearly shown their desire for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic trajectory.

As Secretary Blinken stated on May 23, this law would, quote, "stifle the exercise of freedoms of association and expression, stigmatize organizations that serve the citizens of Georgia, and impede independent media organizations working to provide Georgians with access to high quality information." End quote. Further, we have seen clear indications of an intimidation campaign and the use of violence to suppress peaceful dissent in response to Georgian citizens expressing their opposition to the law.

Madam Chair, neither the foreign influence law nor the government's repressive tactics deployed to quell peaceful dissent are in keeping with Georgia's commitment to democracy and its international law obligations and OSCE commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Nor do the foreign influence law and the repressive actions of Georgian authorities advance Georgia's long-stated goal, enumerated in its constitution, of Euro-Atlantic integration and strategic partnership with the United States.

In response to these developments, Secretary Blinken announced on May 23 the launch of a strategic, comprehensive review of our bilateral cooperation, as well as a new visa restriction policy for Georgia. This policy will apply to individuals who are responsible for – or complicit in – undermining democracy in Georgia, as well as to their family members. This includes individuals responsible for suppressing civil society and freedom of peaceful assembly in Georgia through a campaign of violence or intimidation.

Our concerns about Georgia's legislation have been heightened by reports of the placement of posters falsely impugning independent journalists and NGO activists and organizations as foreign agents and by harassing phone calls to them and their family members threatening them for opposing the legislation.

Madam Chair, the United States and Georgia have enjoyed a strong partnership going back many decades. As a staunch supporter of Georgia, we urged the ruling party to respond to the will of the Georgian people and reconsider the foreign influence law, up until the moment the Parliament overcame the President's veto.

I would like to underscore, Madam Chair, that Georgia's legislation does not exist in a vacuum. Similar repressive foreign agents and so-called "sovereignty protection" laws that have been enacted or are under consideration in other participating States also raise serious concerns.

Thank you, Madam Chair.