

## **With the adoption of the ‘Foreign Agents’ law, Georgia’s democracy needs an urgent lifeline**

*Statement by the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF*

**Brussels, 14 May 2024**

The infamous “foreign agent” law was adopted today by the parliamentary majority of the Georgian Dream ruling party in a striking defiance of peaceful protests attended by hundreds of thousands of people over the past four weeks and dozens of international reactions highlighting the detrimental impact of this bill on Georgia’s democracy and EU accession process. The adoption of this law and the process that led to it mark Georgia’s rapid descent into authoritarianism.

*“The people of Georgia and its civil society need an urgent lifeline to safeguard the country’s fundamental rights and freedoms, preserve its vibrant civil society and media, and remain on the path to join the European Union.”* said **Natia Kuprashvili**, EaP CSF Steering Committee member and Georgian National Platform National Facilitator.

In solidarity with the Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and our Georgian membership, we, the members of the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF, strongly condemn the adoption of this law and call on the international community to stand united in condemning this law and providing emergency support to civil society.

The protests of the last weeks - some of the largest in the history of independent Georgia - show an increase of citizens’ engagement, the emergence of grassroots movements, a truly vibrant civil society and media, in short everything that the ruling party aims at silencing with this law.

In response to protests, we witnessed systematic and targeted intimidation, harassment and violence. They give us an indication of the direction towards which the Georgian Dream is taking the country to and of the treatment civil society will be subject to even more as of today.

As we witnessed in Azerbaijan and Belarus, a repressive legislation serves as a tool for authoritarian regimes to purge independent civil society, suspend its operations, cut access to funding, and legitimise human rights abuses.

As of today, Georgian civil society is faced with crucial dilemmas: whether to continue operating at great personal costs or discontinue its operations. Such decisions have real-life implications on people’s lives and families. Georgia civil society’s human capital must be preserved to avoid depletion, dispersion and atomisation.

Recalling that “the European Council granted Georgia candidate status on the understanding that the relevant steps set out in the Commission’s recommendation of 8 November 2023 are taken.

Step 9 includes a recommendation for Georgia to make sure that civil society can operate freely, and Step 1 calls on Georgia to fight disinformation against the EU and its values.”

We therefore:

- Urge the President of Georgia to veto the law;
- Urge the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority to immediately and unconditionally revoke the ‘*On the transparency of foreign influence*’ law, in line with the country’s obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which the country is a party;
- Urge the Georgian government to end its systematic crackdown on civil society and independent media once and for all, and investigate recent cases of ill-treatment, harassment and physical attacks against activists, journalists, and opposition figures, including the case of EaP CSF National Facilitator and Steering Committee member, Natia Kuprashvili;
- Call on the European institutions, EU member states and the international community to unequivocally condemn the adoption of the bill and engage in coordinated action to provide immediate emergency support to Georgian civil society and media, including core operational support, while exploring alternative ways of engaging with and supporting them;
- Call on the European institutions and EU member states to continue to acknowledge and support the European aspirations of the Georgian people;
- Call on the European institutions to condition any future financial assistance to Georgia, including budget support, on the unconditional withdrawal of the law;
- Call on the Council of the European Union to impose targeted sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leadership of the Georgian Dream ruling party and all 84 parliamentarians who voted in favour of the law in its last hearing;
- Call on the European institutions to carefully monitor political developments in Georgia, particularly ahead of their upcoming parliamentary elections in October 2024, and in light of Step 4 of the European Commission recommendations: ‘ensure a free, fair and competitive electoral process’;
- Call upon fellow civil society organisations in the Eastern Partnership region and the EU, and international organisations to stand in solidarity with Georgian civil society independent media once again and continue to publicly denounce the adoption of this law and similar attempts of introducing “foreign agents” and other repressive legislation in the EU and the EaP countries.

**Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society  
Forum**