

Urgent need for a long term approach to counter attacks against democracy in Georgia

14 March 2023

After days of large-scale protests and mobilisation of local and international stakeholders, we welcome the withdrawal by the Georgian Parliament of the highly controversial Foreign Agent Bill, inspired by the infamous Russian law, which has long been used as a tool for harassing independent voices and shrinking civic space. Dropping this anti-democratic legislation was a necessary step for the continued development of democracy in Georgia, but the international community must be vigilant against further attempts to undermine political space.

We recommend the European Commission and Georgia's international partners to focus on the following points to support democracy, political competition and the rule of law in a long-term manner:

A new type of engagement

The Foreign Agent Bill should be a wake-up call for the EU and European governments and give way to far greater engagement with Georgian society beyond the executive branch. Support for the European Union remains very [high](#) in Georgia. We call for:

1. **Enhanced support to transparency mechanisms and oversight bodies to hold the government to account.** Strong support to Parliament, key elements of the justice system and local authorities is essential in the current political situation.
2. **New diplomatic efforts and public communication aimed at engaging directly with Georgian society, from the national to grass-roots level.**

Recognise civil society and independent media's prominent role in the accession process

This crisis showed once again that civil society is essential to hold the Government accountable, and that it requires strong, targeted and sustained support. We call for:

3. **An update to the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society 2018-2024 to better reflect the role of the civil society in the new accession process setting.**

Georgian civil society actors must be involved in the discussions on the next Roadmap in a transparent and open process.

4. **The mobilisation of NDICI cushion funds to enable a rapid and comprehensive response to support civil society priorities.** Deprived from the EU candidate status, the Georgian civil society suffers the most as it prevents it from obtaining accession funds, primordial to improve the state of democracy.
5. **Consider Georgia's participation in the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme as permitted by Article 24 of EU Regulation 2021/692.** This would encourage further links between Georgian CSOs and other European CSOs.

Set the ground to fairer and inclusive elections in 2024

The Foreign Agent Bill is only the latest attempt for the Georgian government to consolidate its political dominance, leaving little chance for other actors to constitute democratic alternatives. We call for:

6. **Support for electoral reforms as agreed under the 2021 EU-facilitated conciliation process.**
7. **Support campaign finance transparency, media actors and capacity building of citizen election observers during the pre-electoral period.** The introduction of a new proportional parliamentary system is an opportunity which cannot be missed for Georgian democracy.

The EPD community together with their Georgian partners will continue to monitor the situation.

Signed by the European Partnership for Democracy:

ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy

ARTICLE 19

Canal France International – Agence française de développement médias

Club de Madrid

Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy

Democracy Reporting International

Demo Finland

Elbarlement

Election-Watch.EU

European Exchange

EDGE - Experts in Democracy, Governance and Elections

Kofi Annan Foundation

Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy

People in Need

The Oslo Center

Westminster Foundation for Democracy