

Parliament Adopts Draft Law 'On transparency of Foreign Influence' at First Hearing Originally Scheduled for March 9

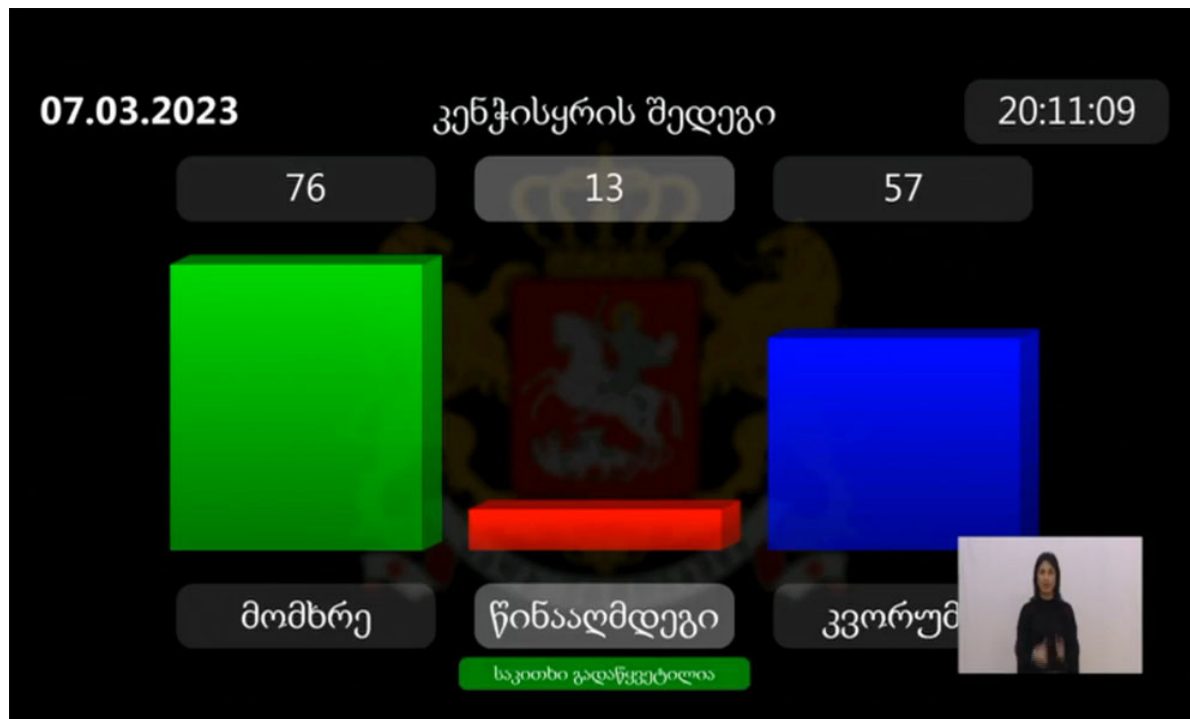
BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Parliament of Georgia supported the draft law 'Agents of Foreign Influence' at the first hearing. 76 MPs voted in favor of the draft law, and 13 voted against it. The hearing was originally scheduled for March 9, however, at the plenary session on March 7th, the decision was changed, and as a large part of the opposition had left the session hall, the session started without a break.

During the discussion of the project, legislative violence between the MPs broke out.

The second draft law on agents initiated by 'People's Power' "On the registration of foreign agents" was not discussed at the session of the Parliament.

After the parliament's decision to reschedule the hearing became public, the citizens announced the rally and gathered in front of the parliament. At the rally, the citizens learned about the adoption of the bill in the



first hearing. The draft law "On the transparency of foreign influence" was presented by the members of the "People's Power" party who for-

mally left 'Georgian Dream': Sozar Subari, Dimitri Khundadze, Mikheil Kavelashvili, Guram Macharashvili, Dachi Beraia,

Victor Japaridze, Eka Sepashvili, Davit Kacharava and Zaal Mikeladze.

In order to "ensure transparency", the said draft law envis-

ages the registration of such non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities and media outlets, whose income (more than 20%) is received from abroad, as agents of foreign influence.

According to the draft law, everyone who is considered to be an "agent of foreign influence" must be registered in the public registry in a database with the same name. At the time of registration, it will be necessary to reflect the received income. At the same time, the organizations will have the obligation to fill in the financial declaration every year.

The draft law "To identify agents of foreign influence" empowers the Ministry of Justice to conduct research and study-monitoring of the issue at any time.

Avoiding registration as an agent of foreign influence or not filling out the declaration will result in the organization being fined 25 thousand GEL.

Special Forces Use Water Cannon and Pepper Spray to Desperse Rally in Tbilisi

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Police Special Forces have deployed water cannons and pepper spray near the Parliament building to break up the rally protesting the adoption of the 'Foreign Influence Agents' bill. Many participants of the rally were injured and arrested. Special forces were mobilized

on Chichinadze and Chitadze streets where the Parliament of Georgia is located.

The newly elected Public Defender of Georgia Levan Ioseliani responded to the Police using force to break up the rally and called on the Ministry of Internal Affairs not to use special weapons and disproportionate force against the peaceful citi-

zens, and appealed to the participants of the rally not to go beyond the legal framework.

"The Public Defender of Georgia responds to the ongoing rally in front of the Parliament of Georgia and explains that gathering and demonstration is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the constitution, which is one of the necessary prerequisites for the existence and development of a free and democratic society.

Only in the event that the rally becomes violent and/or illegal, the authorities should stop the protest only as a last resort, and the use of force must meet the strict test of necessity and proportionality.

Proportionate use of coercive measures by the police, including active special weapons (special batons, tear gas, acoustic means, rubber bullets, water jets, etc.) is allowed to achieve a legal goal, within the scope of the necessity of the effective means.

In addition, it is mandatory to warn the participants of the action in advance and to give them a reasonable time to fulfill the legal requirements. The type and intensity of coercive measures should be determined taking into account the specific situation, the nature of the offense and the individual characteristics of the offender. It is important that law enforcement officers try to keep the damage to a minimum and proportionate. It should be taken into account that the use of such means that cause severe mutilation is prohibited," the statement reads.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Government Deploys Police Riots to Disperse Peaceful Protest Rally in Front of Parliament



Meanwhile, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has issued a statement in which it claims that "proportional force should be used" against protesters who are detained. The statement added that the protest was staged for the defense of freedom and the right to peaceful assembly, according to the law. The situation remains tense as the protest continues, and police continue to use force to control the crowd.

According to one of the rally participants, a few protestors have been detained at the rally, including Girchi - More Freedom leader Zurab Japaridze. The witness reported that law enforcers were seen beating them prior to the detention.

At the time of writing, a protest is underway on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi, Georgia, where the riot police have deployed pepper spray and water cannons against peaceful demonstrators.

Protesters took to the streets after the Georgian Parliament's recent vote on the 'Foreign Agents Law' constitutional amendments. The bill, which was rejected by 76 deputies, with 13 others absent, would have given Russia increased influence over Georgia's judiciary.

Cases of Violence Against Law Enforcement Officers Were Recorded and They Will be Strictly Punished, Kobakhidze Says

Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze stated at a briefing in the party office that there were cases of violence

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.5973; Euro - 2.7690; GBP - 3.1191; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.4364; Swiss Franc - 2.7844

Georgian Dream's 'Investigative Commission' on August 2008 War: A Propaganda Tool for an Anti-Western Agenda?

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The satellite party of the Georgian Dream, which is called European Socialists, came out with the initiative of starting the investigation of the war in August 2008 and started collecting the signatures of MPs to create an "Investigative Commission". This initiative was already supported by another parliamentary division of the Georgian Dream called People's Power, and the leaders of the Georgian Dream also saw many "unanswered questions" regarding the August war. Independent experts and the real opposition see in this "initiative" Putin's order, which should be followed by another wave of a big anti-Western campaign.

This version was persistently repeated, but no one inside the country was convinced, then the focus was shifted to international courts, although the Hague Court, after several years of work, in December 2022 determined that neither the Georgian government nor the Georgian military had committed any crime, and the responsibility rests with the local separatists and the Russian military. At

that time, it was noted in Georgia that the Prosecutor of the Hague Court ended the pro-Russian rhetoric in Georgia by completing this investigation. The Kremlin, of course, would still remain in its position, but the leaders of the Georgian Dream could no longer say that Georgia started the war.

But they were deceived. The Georgian Dream again brought the topic of the August war into the political agenda, and this has no 'local' significance at all. Many from the real opposition assume that the topic of the August war was brought up at the behest of Moscow.

Fridon Injia does not demand an investigation in the prosecutor's office and the creation of a parliamentary commission from a 'neutral' position but directly asserts that Mikheil Saakashvili started preparing for war in 2007, and 'starting a war' in 2008 is Saakashvili's 'main crime', which was 'hushed up'. He also added that Saakashvili was acting according to the instructions of the West, agreed to all the steps with the Americans, and could not have planned and implemented 'these actions' without them.

That is, the local investigation, according to the vision of Injia and others, should reveal the 'crime of the West' at the start of the 2008 war.

If we evaluate the existing reality, the Georgian Dream has been openly opposing the West for a long time. The investigation of the August War should probably bring a new powerful stream to the anti-Western campaign - it was the West that incited Saakashvili and started the war against the 'unanimous, Orthodox country'. It is clear that Moscow will gladly pick up on this - In Georgia, many people doubt the legitimacy of the Hague Court's decision, and the West's involvement in Ukraine has only fueled the tension. It's puzzling why the West is advocating for Saakashvili's release. Is it because they fear he will reveal their role in instigating the war? It's possible that Injia's 'initiative' is part of a larger propaganda effort, which both the Georgian Dream and the Kremlin will exploit for their anti-Western agenda.

Injia needs the signatures of 50 MPs to create a parliamentary investigative commission, and gathering these signatures

is unlikely to be difficult. So next to the law of "foreign agents" another anti-Western structure will be created. The August 2008 war was also remembered in the West. At a conference organized by The Brookings Institution, former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted that in 2008, the Russian Foreign Minister tried to make a secret agreement with her to get rid of Saakashvili.

She refused to do so, and the Russians then failed to achieve their goal. As for the non-imposition of sanctions at that time, there was a financial crisis in the world at that time and many countries were not about imposing sanctions. Former Republican Party representatives Khatuna Samnidze and Davit Berdzenishvili were also recalled, who in 2012-2016, together with some pro-Western forces, joined Bidzina Ivanishvili's coalition and created a Western image of this union. According to them, in 2014, Bidzina Ivanishvili apologized to Putin for harsh criticism of Russia by Levan Berdzenishvili and Tina Khidasheli. Recalling the story of 9 years ago was followed by

severe criticism from the Dream leaders and the statement of the Republicans was declared a lie.

Davit Berdzenishvili evaluated the already 10-year rule of the Georgian Dream step by step. According to him, Bidzina's government was 'problematic' from the beginning, but it became unequivocally bad and dangerous before the establishment of its one-man rule. The years 2016-2020 were a delay-stoppage of the country's western movement. The hijacking of the elections in 2020-2021 created a state crisis, from February 24, 2022, the Georgian Dream sided with Russia and threatened to take away the Western choice from Georgia.

Overcoming polarization in Georgia, according to some Western friends, should be based on the implementation of 12 recommendations of the European Union. However, it turned out that the Western orientation was just words for some, and polarization is happening around this very issue. On one side there are those who want integration with the West, and on the other side, there are those who try to distance themselves from the West. Which force will win - this is the main issue of Georgian politics.

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against law enforcement officers and 'law breakers' will be punished with all the strictness of the law.

Kobakhidze added that the personal information of the initiators and supporters of the 'Foreign Influence Agents' bill was leaked.

"As for the ongoing protest in

Weather

Wednesday, March 8

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 13°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 3°C

Thursday, March 9

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 17°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 5°C

front of the parliament, there are sincere citizens and also representatives of the radical opposition who are trying and will certainly try to see the benefits of this protest. Unfortunately, there have been cases of violence against law enforcement officers. There are serious physical injuries in the case of law enforcement officers.

Any violator will be punished with all the severity of the law, and the last issue that I would like to touch on is the addresses of the initiators and supporters of this draft law from the people who pretend to be European. This is fascism," he said.

US Embassy in Georgia Says Adoption of Russian Bill is a 'Dark Day' for Georgia's Democracy

The US Embassy in Georgia responded to the adoption of a Russian bill in the Parliament of Georgia and called it a 'dark day' for Georgia's democracy.

According to the embassy, the continuation of the discussion of

laws inspired by the Kremlin is incompatible with the integration of Georgia with Europe.

"Today is a dark day for Georgia's democracy. Parliament's advancing of these Kremlin-inspired laws is incompatible with the people of Georgia's clear desire for European integration and its democratic development. Pursuing these laws will damage Georgia's relations with its strategic partners and undermine the impor-

tant work of so many Georgian organizations working to help their fellow citizens. The process and the draft laws raise real questions about the ruling party's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration," the statement reads.

Chairman of Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze responded to the statement of the US Embassy and said that today the dark day is only for the 'radical opposition and its supporters'.



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