

Foreign Ministers of 12 EU Member States Address Borrell on Georgia's 'Foreign Agents' Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

Foreign ministers from 12 countries have penned a letter to EU High Representative Joseph Borrell regarding "foreign influence" law. The letter expresses deep concern over the Georgian Parliament's persistence in adopting this legislation despite widespread opposition from civil society and international partners, including Borrell's own statement in April.

The letter highlighted the proposed law as a troubling indicator of democratic and human rights regression in Georgia, citing violence against peaceful demonstrators and journalists as well as a departure from Western democratic standards. It underscored the urgent need for decisive action to safeguard Georgia's European aspirations.

The ministers urged Borrell to provide a prompt oral update on the legislation's impact on implementing the 9 steps outlined in his previous remarks after the Foreign Affairs Council on April 22. They stressed the importance of this assessment being made public before the final parliamentary vote in Georgia.

"As the Georgian Parliament advances with the adoption of the so-called "foreign influence" legislation despite multiple signals of concern from its own civil society as well as from Georgia's partners, including your own statement of the 17th April, we should look for further ways to send an unequivocal message to Tbilisi that this legislation is incompatible with Georgia's progress on its EU path.

This proposed law is yet another sign of a concerning trajectory of democratic and human rights backsliding in Georgia. The use of violence against peaceful protesters and journalists covering the protests, suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms, are not compatible with

Mr. Joseph Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission

Mr. Olivér Várhelyi
Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement
European Commission

Dear High Representative,
Dear Commissioner,

We address you with great concern about the rapidly deteriorating situation in Georgia. We have been wholeheartedly supporting Georgia's reform agenda and European aspirations for years, and today we continue standing with the Georgian people and their European choice – the choice for democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

However, having been granted EU candidate status by the European Council last December on the understanding of further reforms, especially regarding the 9 steps identified by the European Commission, Georgia's government – to our deep regret – seems to be on the path of jeopardizing the opportunity to advance the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

As the Georgian Parliament advances with the adoption of the so-called "foreign influence" legislation despite multiple signals of concern from its own civil society as well as from Georgia's partners, including your own statement of the 17th April, we should look for further ways to send an unequivocal message to Tbilisi that this legislation is incompatible with Georgia's progress on its EU path.

This proposed law is yet another sign of a concerning trajectory of democratic and human rights backsliding in Georgia. The use of violence against peaceful protesters and journalists covering the protests, suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms, are not compatible with democracy and the values Europe stands for. The government's pivot away from the democratic West and its standards was reinforced by the recent speech by the honorary chairman of the Georgian Dream party.

Sending a direct and clear message now is of great importance to secure Georgia's European future tomorrow. Therefore, concrete consequences ought to be indicated, should Georgia's governing party proceed with the adoption of the law which is not in line with EU core norms and values. Our principled position and determined actions are what the Georgian people who are striving for a European future for their country expect from us.

In this context, we are asking you to promptly provide an oral update by the European Commission on how the proposed legislation would impact the implementation of the 9 steps as suggested also in your press remarks after the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 April. We kindly ask you to undertake this as a matter of priority and to make sure that this public assessment appears before the final vote at the Georgian parliament.

Yours sincerely,

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Jan Lipavský
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the
Czech Republic


Lars Lokke Rasmussen
Minister for Foreign Affairs of
Denmark


Margus Tsahkna
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Republic of Estonia


Elina Valtonen
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Stéphane Séjourné
Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of
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Annalena Baerbock
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Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Republic of Germany


Micheál Martin
Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs of
Ireland


Baiba Braze
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Latvia


Gabrielius Landsbergis
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Lithuania


Hanke Bruins Slot
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands


Radosław Sikorski
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Poland


Tobias Billström
Minister for Foreign Affairs of
Sweden

Dear Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative for Foreign and Security Affairs, Mr Josep Borrell i Fontelles,

In view of the events in Georgia this morning, the possible swift final adoption of the law on transparency of foreign influence and the need to support Georgia's free pro-European people we want to ask you the following urgent questions:

1. Will the HR/VP, ahead of the 27 May Foreign Affairs Council, propose immediate imposition of targeted restrictive measures against Mr Ivanishvili, Mr Kobakhidze, and Mr Papuashvili, as well as imposition of such measures against all Members of the Parliament of Georgia who vote in favour of the law on transparency of foreign influence (hereinafter: "the law") and the repeal of any potential veto thereof issued by the President of Georgia, to go into effect immediately following the final binding vote?
2. Will the HR/VP and the Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement instruct the EEAS and DG NEAR, respectively, to suspend any high-level engagement with the government of Georgia the objective of which is not to repeal the law, including by reallocating financial support to strengthening Georgia's civil society, and to refrain from opening EU accession negotiations for as long as the law is in force?
3. Does the HR/VP commit to summoning, upon adoption of the law, the Ambassador of Georgia to the EU in order to express the EU's condemnation and convey his intention to take the above measures and will recalling the EU ambassador for consultations be considered?

Thank you in advance for your consideration and efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Thijs Reuten (S&D)
Viola Von Carmon-Taubadel (Greens/EFA)
Petras Auštrevičius (Renew)
Miriam Lexmann (EPP)

MEPs Address EU High Representative Joseph Borrell on Situation in Georgia

By Liza Mchedlidze

Four Members of the European Parliament have addressed the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Affairs, Joseph Borrell, regarding the situation in Georgia. In their letter, they expressed concern about recent events in Georgia, particularly the potential swift adoption of "Foreign Agents" law. They emphasized the importance of supporting Georgia's pro-European population.

The MEPs posed urgent questions to Mr. Borrell regarding the EU's response to these developments. They inquired whether the High Representative will propose immediate imposition of targeted restrictive measures against specific individuals, including Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, and Parliament Charman Shalva Papuashvili, as well as against all Members of the Georgian Parliament who vote in favor of the law. They also inquired about the potential suspen-

sion of high-level engagement with the Georgian government and the withholding of EU accession negotiations until the law is repealed.

Furthermore, the MEPs asked whether Mr. Borrell is committed to summoning the Ambassador of Georgia to the EU to express the EU's condemnation of the law and convey the intention to take the aforementioned measures. They also inquired whether recalling the EU ambassador for consultations will be considered as a response to the situation in Georgia.

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In view of the events in Georgia this morning, the possible swift final adoption of the law on transparency of foreign influence and the need to support Georgia's free pro-European people we want to ask you the following urgent questions: Will the HR/VP, ahead of the 27 May Foreign

Affairs Council on 22 April. We kindly ask you to undertake this as a matter of priority and to make sure that this public assessment appears before the final vote at the Georgian parliament," the letter reads.

Joint letter is signed by the foreign ministers of the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

Affairs Council, propose immediate imposition of targeted restrictive measures against Mr Ivanishvili, Mr Kobakhidze, and Mr Papuashvili, as well as imposition of such measures against all Members of the Parliament of Georgia who vote in favour of the law on transparency of foreign influence (hereinafter: "the law") and the repeal of any potential veto thereof issued by the President of Georgia, to go into effect immediately following the final binding vote?

Will the HR/VP and the Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement instruct the EEAS and DG NEAR, respectively, to suspend any high-level engagement with the government of Georgia the objective of which is not to repeal the law, including by reallocating financial support to strengthening Georgia's civil society, and to refrain from opening EU accession negotiations for as long as the law is in force?

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6804; Euro - 2.8892; GBP - 3.3593; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9266; Swiss Franc - 2.9552

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MEPs Address EU High Representative Joseph Borrell on Situation in Georgia

sador for consultations be considered?" The letter addressed to EU High Representative Joseph Borrell is signed by Viola von Cramon-Taubadel from the Greens/EFA group, Petras Auštrevičius from the Renew group, and Miriam Lexmann from the EPP (European People's Party).

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Legal Committee Approves 'Foreign Agents' Draft Law in Swift Session Without Opposition



The legal committee has passed the draft law on "Foreign Agents" in its third reading. The session was very brief, lasting only one minute and six seconds. There was no opposition present in the hall. They claim that they were unable to attend the session because the police had blocked the entrance.

The draft law will be discussed in the final reading during the plenary session. Once it's voted on and approved in this

reading, it will become law. After that, Parliament will send the approved law to the President for signature.

President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili has already stated her intention to veto the law. She has 14 days to take this action. Once the veto is re-

turned to Parliament, lawmakers will review the President's decision and then vote again on the bill. The parliamentary majority has sufficient votes to override the veto.

GYLA Urges Investigation into Police Violence at 'Foreign Agents' Protests

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Asso-

ciation has called for a thorough investigation into the police violence against activists during the May 13 protests against the "foreign agents" law.

The organization urged Minister of

Katsitadze, to conduct a thorough investigation into the violence that occurred on the morning of May 13, 2024. They emphasized that an inadequate response from the agency can contribute to fur-



Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauro to promptly address the incident and take preventive measures. Otherwise, it may seem that senior officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs are tolerating this behavior, potentially leading to more incidents in the future.

GYLA has urged the head of the Special Investigation Service, Koka

ther rights violations by law enforcement officers.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on May 13, during the early morning hours when the Georgian Dream deputies swiftly passed the "Foreign Agents" law in its third reading in parliament, 20 protesters gathered outside were arrested.

EU condemns 'intimidation, threats and physical assaults' against protesters in Georgia

The European Union has called on the Georgian authorities to ensure the right of Georgians to protest, EU lead spokesperson for external affairs, Peter Stano, said at a press briefing today.

He said that the EU saw "brutal actions" overnight and "strongly condemns acts of intimidation, threats and physical assaults against the protesters, against civil society activists, against politicians and against



journalists and media workers."

"We call on the authorities to investigate properly... and we expect that those responsible for it will be brought to justice," he said.

He added that the EU and the member states are watching the situation "closely". Answering the question on possible sanctions against Georgia, he said that the EU is "not there yet" and that it should be a common decision by EU Member States.

"Georgia, after all, is a candidate country – and we again, we hope, we expect and we call on authorities to go back to the European path and deliver on all the commitments they made voluntarily when they applied for the candidate status," Stano said.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Tuesday, May 14

Day Showers
High: 13°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 7°C

Wednesday, May 15

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 20°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 10°C

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On the occasion of Europe Day 2024, the Ambassador of the European Union H.E. Mr. Pawel Herczyński hosted a Gala Concert of the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Maestro Nikoloz Rachveli, followed by a reception at Rustaveli State Drama Theatre on May 9.







