

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

## Venice Commission Strongly Urges Repeal of 'Foreign Agents' Law

The Venice Commission recently published its conclusions on a controversial Georgian law regarding Transparency of Foreign Influence, strongly recommending its repeal. The review was conducted at the request of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Commission criticized the Georgian parliament for adopting the law without waiting for its opinion, ignoring calls from key European figures for a thorough review.

The Venice Commission found that the law imposes restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association, and privacy, which do not comply with European and international standards. Specifically, the law fails to meet the necessary criteria of legality, legitimacy, necessity in a democratic society, proportionality, and non-discrimination as outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The law designates entities receiving foreign funds as pursuing the interests of foreign powers, which can severely impact their financial stability and credibility. The burdensome registration and reporting requirements, along with the threat of



severe administrative fines and constant surveillance, hinder the effective operation of these organizations and create a chilling effect.

The Commission warned that the law, purportedly aimed at ensuring transparency, could actually stigmatize and silence organizations and media critical

of the government, thereby undermining public debate, pluralism, and democracy.

In light of these issues, the Venice Commission recommended that the Georgian authorities abandon the special registration and reporting requirements for organizations receiving foreign support. They noted

that existing Georgian laws already ensure transparency and suggested that, if necessary, these laws could be amended to align with European standards, especially regarding lobbying activities.

The Venice Commission concluded by strongly urging the repeal of the law to avoid signifi-

cant negative consequences for democratic freedoms, including the freedoms of association and expression, the right to privacy, and non-discrimination. They also offered their continued support to the Georgian authorities and the Parliamentary Assembly in addressing these concerns.

## Georgian Dream Accuses Venice Commission of Biased Political Assessments and Inaccuracies

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Georgian Dream MP Salome Kurasbediani accused the

Venice Commission of using its platform to make biased political assessments instead of providing professional reasoning,

stating that this "damages the reputation of the Venice Commission". She made these remarks at a briefing held at the

central office of Georgian Dream in response to the Venice Commission's 24-page detailed conclusion on the "Transparency of Foreign Influence" bill, which urged the Georgian government to repeal the law.

Kurasbediani stated that the Venice Commission's conclusion contains false factual information, particularly regarding the publication timing of the final text of the law. She stated that the final text was announced and published immediately during the Parliament's plenary session.

Georgian Dream MP accused the Venice Commission of presenting a biased assessment and stated that there are documented incidents of violence against police. She also criticized the Commission for shifting from legal analysis to political evaluation. Kurasbediani argued that the Venice Commission incorrectly claimed that current Georgian legislation already ensures NGO financial transparency. She asserted that existing norms do not mandate comprehensive financial declarations from NGOs.

Kurasbediani accused the Venice Commission for portraying the concept of transparency for NGOs and media in a negative and undemocratic light. She

believes that this portrayal is incorrect and harms the credibility of the Venice Commission, as well as its fundamental values.

Additionally, she criticized the Commission for mentioning similarities between the Georgian law on transparency and laws from Russia, Hungary, and Kyrgyzstan, but only dedicating three lines to this issue without further legal reasoning.

"The conclusion of the Venice Commission, as I have already mentioned, is full of political messages, lacks legal and professional justification, and contains several factual inaccuracies.

In the end, they even stated that the transparency of NGOs and media is bad and undemocratic. Obviously, all this undermines the credibility of this institution and the values it is supposed to serve.

The paradoxical position of the Venice Commission - that information about the financial income and expenses of NGOs should be hidden from the public - is saddening and disappointing," Kurasbediani said.

According to her, "the conclusion of the Venice Commission confirmed once again that there are no legal or other arguments against the Georgian law on transparency."





The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

German Ambassador Warns of Consequences for Georgia's 'Foreign Agents' Law



German Ambassador to Georgia, H.E. Peter Fischer, stated that if the government accepts the "Foreign Agents" law in its current form, Germany will not vote to open the negotiation space for Georgia when announcing the decision of the European Commission. Fischer further emphasized that Georgia has already deviated from the European path.

you read the statement that the German chancellor and the French president jointly published, which was related to the adopted law. Georgia has already deviated from the European path. There are

standards that candidate countries must meet, and this law falls outside the standard. As for the decision of the European Commission to be made in December, if this law is adopted as it is now, Germany will not vote to open the negotiation space for Georgia. You must adhere to the standards; otherwise, you will not be able to move forward," Fischer stated.

Tbilisi Mayor Says 'No One Fears Sanctions' Regarding Alleged US Congressional Bill on 'Foreign Agents' Law



Politico recently released information about an alleged bill initiated by members of the United States Congress. This bill allegedly targets individuals responsible for introducing a Russian-style "Foreign Agents" law in Georgia. Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze criticized this information, labeling it as "simply the language of blackmail and threats." He emphasized that while "no one fears sanctions", such an approach is not conducive to constructive dialogue.

taken, because you don't talk to partners and friends like that, it's not the right attitude. If we really want friendship, partnership, the door is open. No one is limited in this direction, but effective

steps must be taken and we only welcome this. Once again, no one is afraid of these sanctions and there will be no problem in this regard, although it is inconceivable to sanction the representatives of the government. For what? Because the majority of the representatives of the parliament elected by the majority of the population of the country adopt a law, which is its direct obligation. I think this is incredible, however, big injustice is happening in the world today, I am not surprised," said Kaladze.

EBRD and Credo Bank support MSMEs in Georgia

BY REZO BITSADZE  
16 May 2024

- Loan of up to \$10 million to the EBRD's longstanding partner in Georgia
- Investment to improve access to finance through on-lending to MSMEs
- Loan agreement signed at the EBRD's Annual Meeting 2024 in Yerevan

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is providing a financing package to Credo Bank to support the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Georgia.



The EBRD will provide a loan of up to US\$ 10 million (Euro 9.28 million) to on-lend to local businesses, improve their access to finance and help them increase their competitiveness, including in economically less-developed regions of the country.

Credo Bank will provide financing in foreign and local currencies through its countrywide branch network and digital channels, continuing to support

women-led businesses and other underserved groups.

At a signing ceremony at the EBRD's Annual Meeting 2024 in Yerevan, Francis Malige, EBRD Managing Director for Financial Institutions, said: "This \$10 million investment with our longstanding partner Credo Bank illustrates our unwavering commitment to supporting Georgia's MSMEs, enhancing financial inclusivity, and em-

powering economic growth, particularly for women-led businesses. We are dedicated to furthering Georgia's prosperity and market orientation."

Zaza Pirtskhelava, Credo Bank's Chief Executive Officer said: "With this transaction Credo Bank and the EBRD are reaffirming their longstanding strategic collaboration to support the growth and development of businesses in Georgia. Over the years, the EBRD has made substantial investments in Credo Bank and its customers, totalling more than GEL 120 million, to advance financial inclusion, promote sustainability and empower women-led businesses. Credo Bank remains committed to providing affordable and innovative financial products and services to local

MSMEs."

Credo Bank is the EBRD's longstanding partner and is the fifth largest commercial bank in Georgia. It boasts a widespread rural presence, with 90 branches and digital infrastructure catering to over 480,000 active customers, with a noteworthy emphasis on empowering women entrepreneurs. It is owned by international social impact and development finance institutions such as Access Microfinance Holding AG (Germany), responsAbility Investment Management AG (Switzerland), Triodos Investment Management BV (the Netherlands) and Proparco (France).

To date, the EBRD has invested more than Euro 5 billion in 296 projects in the financial, corporate, infrastructure and energy sectors in Georgia. Of those investments, 83 per cent have been made in the private sector. (<https://www.ebrd.com/>)

Weather

Wednesday, May 22

Day Cloudy  
High: 21°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 10°C

Thursday, May 23

Day Clear  
High: 23°C

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: 13°C

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