

EU Suspends Assistance to Georgia in Combating Russian Disinformation, Citing Use of Disinformation by Georgian Authorities

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On October 21, Peter Stano, the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy Lead Spokesperson, addressed the halt in EU assistance to Georgia for combating Russian disinformation. Stano explained that the support was suspended after Georgian authorities began using disinformation against the European Union itself. He discussed the matter during a briefing about the presidential election and referendum results in Moldova, where the EU suspects Russian interference.

When asked if the EU was providing Georgia with the same level of assistance as it does to Moldova in the fight against Russian disinformation, Stano replied: "Our support to Georgia has been multi-faceted, and we were working with partners in Georgia, especially with the government, quite intensively on many issues."

However, he noted that relations had taken a "different turn" when the Georgian government began to use disinformation against the EU. "The Georgian authorities started to use disinformation against the Eu-



ropean Union and that's why our relationship took a slightly different turn," he said.

Stano further explained that the situation has been widely discussed by EU foreign ministers and leaders this year. He added, "There is no dedicated

EU mission helping Georgia to increase its resilience to fight foreign interference and disinformation, because unfortunately in this case, the disinformation comes also from the official side, from the governing authorities."

Despite this, the EU is still assisting Georgia through its European Union Monitoring Mission, which focuses on the situation in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. Stano expressed hope for future cooperation, say-

ing, "It will be possible to resume the full-fledged cooperation with Georgian authorities if the upcoming elections will be free, fair, and according to international and European standards."

TI Georgia Reports Misuse of Administrative Resources in 2024 Elections

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) released an interim report on the misuse of administrative resources ahead of the 2024 parliamentary elections. Covering the period from July 1 to October 15, the report alleges that the ruling Georgian Dream party has blurred the lines between state functions and party interests, raising concerns about the fairness of the election process.

The report highlights several key issues, starting with the passage of the controversial foreign influence law. TI Georgia notes that despite widespread protests and criticism from Western partners, the law was pushed through, restricting freedoms of expression and association, and impacting electoral fairness. Additionally, changes to the Central Election Commission (CEC) rules allowed Georgian Dream to appoint members without opposition involvement, a

move that was criticized by international organizations.

The watchdog also points to the removal of gender quotas for parliamentary and local elections, which was pushed through despite a presidential veto. The expansion of the Anti-Corruption Bureau's powers was another significant concern. According to TI Georgia, the bureau can now cancel party registrations and access sensitive data, which could violate privacy laws and the constitution.

TI Georgia's report also focuses on the misuse of executive resources. It accuses the Communications Commission of harassing media outlets critical of the government by imposing heavy fines for refusing to air certain campaign ads. The report also documents violence against opposition party members, including threats, voter intimidation, and vote-buying.

In terms of financial

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Misuse of Administrative Resources in Parliamentary Elections 2024 - Interim Report

21 October, 2024

The monitoring conducted by "Transparency International - Georgia" has shown that the use of administrative resources for the parliamentary elections of October 26, when the line between the ruling party and the state has effectively been erased, is a serious problem for the fairness of the election environment.

The main challenges include: the worsened legislation, including the negative impact of the "Russian law" on the electoral environment; the use of the Anti-Corruption Bureau and Communications Commission to harass civil society and critical broadcasters; attacks on opposition representatives and their ineffective investigation; coercion of voters, including public servants, through threats, intimidation, illegal collection of personal data, and taking away of ID cards; large-scale mobilization of public sector employees for the purposes of the ruling party's election campaign; misuse of budget programs for narrow partisan purposes, and other corrupt practices.

The monitoring from July 1 to October 15, 2024, revealed the following findings:

Misuse of Legal Administrative Resources for Electoral Purposes

- Adoption of the "Russian Law": In April 2024, the government re-initiated the previously failed legislative initiative - the so-called law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" ("Russian Law"). Despite mass protests within the country and extremely harsh reactions from Georgia's Western partners, the government still passed the law. According to the Venice Commission, the restrictions set by the Law to the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and privacy are incompatible with the strict test set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The events surrounding the adoption of the law have negatively impacted the electoral processes.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7207; Euro - 2.9509; GBP - 3.5421; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8314; Swiss Franc - 3.1471

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TI Georgia Reports Misuse of Administrative Resources in 2024 Elections

resources, the watchdog notes that Georgian Dream used public funds to support large-scale projects that coincided with their election campaign, including multi-million-dollar social aid

programs and infrastructure developments. These efforts, TI Georgia argues, gave the ruling

party an unfair advantage. The report concludes with several recommendations, calling

for the government to ensure stability in election legislation, avoid last-minute amendments,

and investigate allegations of voter manipulation and violence against opposition parties.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Bloomberg: Russia's Cyber Espionage Campaign Targeted Georgia's Government and Key Industries



On October 21, Bloomberg reported that Russia conducted a hacking campaign against nearly all Georgian government agencies and major companies between 2017 and 2020.

Among those affected were critical institutions such as Georgia's Foreign Ministry, Finance Ministry, and National Bank, as well as major energy

and telecommunications providers, including pro-government media outlets Imedi TV and Maestro.

The Bloomberg article highlights the long-standing concerns about Russian interference, stating, "Claims of Russian hacking in an attempt to

influence electoral outcomes hit the mainstream after the country was accused of meddling in the U.S. election in 2016." The report further notes that this extensive spying campaign allowed Russia to eavesdrop on Georgia, a country it seeks to control.

Documents reviewed by Bloomberg and European officials indicate that Russian intelligence not only monitored communications but also sought vulnerabilities in Georgia's critical infrastructure, including power and communications networks.

Additionally, the report reveals that Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) hacked into the Central Election Commission, likely gaining access to email accounts.

A separate document indicates that hackers associated with Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) executed a months-long covert operation targeting Georgia's Foreign Ministry. This operation focused on gathering data from high-ranking officials, including a current deputy foreign minister and ambassadors to the U.S. and the EU.

According to unnamed European government officials cited by Bloomberg, Georgian authorities were warned by their Western counterparts about potential Russian hacking. However, it remains unclear whether any actions were taken in response.

Kobakhidze Dismisses EU Ministers' Statement on Georgia's Membership

Prime Minister Irakli

Kobakhidze has dismissed a statement from the foreign ministers of 13 EU member states, asserting it holds no value. The ministers, from countries including Germany, France, and Poland, indicated that Georgia cannot join the EU unless the government changes its course.

Kobakhidze downplayed the

statement, alleging it stems from a failed revolutionary process, stating, "This process has not succeeded, and therefore, no such statement has any value." He further emphasized that attention should be directed toward Moldova, which he claimed did not meet democratic standards in its elections held on



October 20. The Prime Minister reiterated a belief that once the war in Ukraine concludes and elections occur, "justice will be restored immediately." His remarks come in light of the EU ministers' assertion that Georgia's integration process has been suspended, a decision reached by the

European Council on June 27, 2024.

The ministers emphasized that without a change in governance, Georgia's chances for EU membership remain bleak, insisting that to view this decision in any other light is either misguided or false.

NDI Deploys International Election Observation Mission for the October 26 Elections in Georgia

TBILISI - The National Democratic Institute (NDI) deployed an international delegation today to observe the October 26 parliamentary elections in Georgia.

The delegation includes 22 political and civic leaders, elections experts, and regional specialists from nine countries; they join six thematic long-term analysts who were deployed in July. The leaders of the delegation are the Hon-

orable Tom Malinowski, former United States Congressman and former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; Ambassador Per Eklund, former European Union Ambassador to Georgia; and Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes, NDI's President.

"This will be Georgia's first election since it submitted its application for European Union candidacy," said Mr. Malinowski. "It will give Georgian citizens an opportunity to decide the direction of their country, and the Georgian government and all political stakeholders a chance to demonstrate their commitment to democratic procedures and values."

During its stay in Georgia, the delegation will meet with a wide array of stakeholders, including the Central Election Commission (CEC), government officials, civil society leaders, citi-

zen observers, and political party leaders. They will observe the elections process with particular focus on the areas of election administration, the legal framework, the information and media environment, political climate and campaign environment, and inclusion of Georgia's diverse citizenry as candidates and voters.

On election day, the mission will visit polling stations across nine regions and Tbilisi to observe the administration of the polls, including the opening, voting, tabulation, transmission, and publication of results. After the election, the mission will present a preliminary statement with its findings and recommendations.

"This is a chance to reaffirm Georgia's place on the global stage as a resilient and forward-looking democracy," said Ambassador Eklund. "It is incum-

bent upon all political parties to demonstrate that Georgia, despite rising political polarization, continues to make democratic progress and is committed to its transparent, pluralist, and democratic path."

NDI has observed approximately 200 elections in every region in the world, including elections in Georgia since 1992. NDI's International Observation Mission will be conducted in accordance with Georgia's law and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

"NDI's observation mission is a demonstration of the international community's support for credible elections and democratic governance in Georgia," said Dr. Wittes. "These elections mark a pivotal moment for the country's democratic future, and NDI is honored to stand with Georgian citizens as they make their

voices heard in determining their country's future."

This deployment follows a pre-election assessment mission conducted in February.

This mission is made possible with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS). The International Republic Institute (IRI) is also conducting an International Election Observation Mission in Georgia.

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NDI is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all.

Weather

Tuesday, October 22

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 16°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 4°C

Wednesday, October 23

Day Clear
High: 17°C

Night Clear
Low: 5°C

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