

OSCE Office for Human Rights Raises Concerns Over Georgia's Foreign Agents Law

By Liza Mchedlidze

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has issued a statement expressing concerns over Georgia's new Foreign Agents Registration Act, warning of its potential negative impact on civil society.

According to ODIHR, the law requires individuals and organizations that receive foreign funding to register as foreign agents and imposes sanctions for non-compliance. The office states that this adds to concerns about other recent legislative measures and could significantly affect civil society organizations and human rights defenders.

"This law profoundly impacts the work of civil society and all those working to defend human rights," said ODIHR Director Maria Telalian. "Civil society is vital to all democracies, and any new requirements should enhance their important work in line with international standards rather than imposing limitations."

The newly adopted law is intended to replace the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, which was passed last year. ODIHR notes that while

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NEWSROOM

PRESS RELEASE

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Human rights

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WARSAW, 2 April 2025 – Georgia's new law 'On the Foreign Agents Registration Act', requiring all individuals or organisations considered to act in the interest of a foreign entity to register as foreign agents, due for example to foreign funding, and imposing sanctions for lack of compliance, adds to concerns over other legislation adopted recently and the law's negative impact on civil society, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) said today.

"This law profoundly impacts the work of civil society and all those working to defend

the new legislation is modeled after the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), the American law includes legal

safeguards that prevent civil society organizations from being labeled as foreign agents simply for receiving

foreign funding. Instead, FARA focuses on ensuring transparency in lobbying and advocacy efforts on behalf of foreign entities.

ODIHR emphasizes that importing legal frameworks from one country to another should be done cautiously and within the context of national institutional and legal frameworks. The office warns that the law could restrict freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression.

In its statement, ODIHR calls on Georgian authorities to reconsider the implementation of the law and offers its assistance in reviewing and improving Georgia's legislative framework. The office highlights that all OSCE participating states have committed to upholding fundamental rights, including freedom of assembly and association, and recognizing the role of civil society in democracy and the rule of law.

"While the regulation of lobbying activities can help ensure transparency and integrity in decision-making, such measures must respect fundamental rights and not limit political and public participation," the statement concludes.

ODIHR remains open to providing legal guidance and expert advice to Georgian authorities to ensure that legislation aligns with international democratic standards.

Helsinki Commission Members Express Concerns Over Anaklia Port Development Deal with Chinese Conglomerate

By Liza Mchedlidze

Members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission have issued a statement expressing their concerns regarding the

Georgian government's decision to award the rights to develop the Anaklia deep-water port to a Chinese conglomerate, including firms that have been sanctioned by the United States. The state-

ment was released by U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairman Senator Roger Wicker, Co-Chairman Representative Joe Wilson, Ranking Member Senator Sheldon Whitehouse,

Ranking Member Representative Steve Cohen, Commissioner Representative Marc Veasey, and Senator John Cornyn.

The members voiced serious concerns over the potential geopolitical and economic implications of the deal, which they believe could significantly affect Georgia's independence and security. The Anaklia Port, located on the Black Sea coast, is considered a strategically important infrastructure project for Georgia, and the decision to involve a Chinese company, particularly one with ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), raises alarms for U.S. officials.

"We are troubled by reports of Georgian Dream's decision to surrender control of its Anaklia deep-sea port to a CCP-backed, US-sanctioned conglomerate," the statement reads. "Developers involved in this deal, including the China Communications Construction Company, have a history of using infrastructure development projects to exploit and destabilize their host countries and deepen those countries' dependence on China."

The U.S. Helsinki Commission members emphasized that the involvement of Chinese firms, specifically those with ties to the Chinese government, could undermine Georgia's sovereignty and its future as an independent, democratic state. They expressed concern that

China's growing influence in the Black Sea region, particularly in collaboration with Russia, could destabilize the region and restrict free trade and commerce.

"China's growing presence in the Black Sea, in collaboration with Russia, makes the region less safe and restricts free trade and commerce," the statement continued. "By going forward with this deal, Georgian Dream would be further endangering their country's democratic trajectory and ability to determine its own economic future."

The Helsinki Commission urged the Georgian government to reconsider its decision and to ensure that the process of developing critical infrastructure is handled fairly and transparently. The commission called on Georgian Dream to evaluate bids for the Anaklia port development in a way that considers the long-term national interests of Georgia, rather than potentially compromising its sovereignty and security by aligning with foreign powers that may have conflicting interests.

"We urge Georgian Dream to reconsider this decision and evaluate bids to develop its critical infrastructure fairly and transparently," the statement concluded.



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By Malkhaz Matsaberidze

Georgia’s Democracy Index Worsens

Events that unfolded in Georgia in 2024 have led to what observers call a “democratic backslide,” reflected in a lower numerical score. According to the 2024 Democracy Index published by the reputable research organization The Economist Intelligence Unit (and featured in The Economist magazine), Georgia’s score has dropped to 4.7, placing it 94th. In 2023, Georgia had 5.20 points on a 10-point scale and was ranked 89th. This decline represents the steepest drop among all the countries in the region in 2024.

The Democracy Index data show that Georgia’s highest democracy score was in 2013, at 5.95 points, placing the country in 78th place. A similarly high rating of 5.93 was maintained until 2017. However, from 2018 onward, the score began to fall, first to 5.50, then 5.42 (2019), 5.31 (2020), 5.12 (2021), 5.20 (2022), 5.20 (2023), and finally 4.70 in 2024.

The Economist’s classification divides regimes into four categories:

- 1. Full democracy (8.00–10.00)
- 2. Flawed democracy (6.00–7.99)
- 3. Hybrid regime (4.00–5.99)

4. Authoritarian regime (below 4.00)

Georgia has always been classified as a hybrid regime and has never moved into the flawed democracy category. Moreover, its score has been on a downward trajectory since 2018, culminating in a particularly sharp drop in 2024.

The Democracy Index is an average score based on 60 questions spread across five categories. According to the 2024 report, Georgia’s decline is tied to the following factors:

- Electoral process and pluralism (5.67): Issues related to the credibility of elections and unequal conditions for the opposition
 - Functioning of government (3.21): Judicial interference, lack of accountability, and excessive concentration of power
 - Political participation (5.56): Decline in civic engagement and restrictions on protest
 - Political culture (3.75): Growing polarization and reduced trust in state institutions
 - Civil liberties (5.29): Restrictions on independent media and limitations on protests
- According to the 2024 report, Georgia’s democratic decline

underscores persistent governance challenges and the hurdles the country faces in its democratic development. The Economist notes that the next few years will be decisive in determining whether Georgia can implement democratic reforms, bolster civil liberties, and restore political pluralism.

Georgia’s government has been advised on how to improve its democratic indicators — specifically, by calling new parliamentary elections and releasing those detained during the 2024 protests. This demand for new elections comes not only from the opposition but also from EU member states. However, the ruling Georgian Dream party rules out both possibilities.

So far, the ongoing political developments in Georgia offer little hope that its democracy indicators will improve in 2025. On the contrary, there is a possibility that Georgia’s democracy index could fall so low as to exit its “familiar” hybrid regime category and slip into the authoritarian regime category.

Recently, Parliament — where Georgian Dream, along with its offshoot “People’s Power” and the “European Socialists,”

holds sway — passed three significant bills in the first reading: on “Treason,” on “Registration of Foreign Agents,” and on “Broadcasting.”

Georgian Dream claims that the definition of “treason” precisely matches the phrasing introduced into legislation in 1991 by Georgia’s first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The motive for reintroducing this specific language, they suggest, is to prosecute the so-called “collective United National Movement,” likely labeling them as traitors. Supporters of the bill also point out that the article on “treason” was abolished in 2007 by the United National Movement, shortly before the war with Russia.

Regarding the “Foreign Agents’ Registration Act,” officials say it will be a direct copy of the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), granting the Georgian government the same legislative tools as the United States. The rationale is to protect Georgia’s sovereignty and monitor how foreign-sourced funds are being allocated.

Amendments to the “Law on Broadcasting” include prohibiting broadcasters from receiving

direct or indirect compensation in exchange for placing social advertisements. It will also forbid receiving direct or indirect funding—monetary or otherwise—from any foreign entity. In addition, it bans foreign entities from purchasing broadcasting services (aside from commercial advertising and product placement) and from directly or indirectly financing or co-financing the preparation or airing of programs.

With this latest Democracy Index, Georgia can no longer claim to be a “regional leader,” as it has been overtaken by Armenia. Indeed, Armenia — now at 5.35 points and ranked 82nd — also remains a hybrid regime but is 12 places ahead of Georgia. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, with a score of 2.80 and ranked 126th, is classified as an authoritarian regime, characterized by persecution of the opposition, tight media control, and concentration of power in the hands of the government. It appears that Georgian democracy is moving closer to Azerbaijan’s realities than to those of more democratic states.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

UK Imposes Sanctions on Georgian Judges Levan Murusidze and Mikheil Chinchaladze



The United Kingdom has imposed sanctions on Georgian judges Levan Murusidze and

Mikheil Chinchaladze, citing reasonable grounds to suspect their involvement in serious corruption. The UK government announced the sanctions, stating that both individuals have been implicated in corrupt activities related to their judicial roles.

According to the UK government, Mikheil Chinchaladze, as Chairman of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal, allegedly received financial rewards for improperly performing his duties. The statement claims that Chinchaladze used his position to influence judicial appointments and decisions in favor of the ruling Georgian Dream Party, undermining

the integrity of the judicial system.

Similarly, Levan Murusidze, a member of the High Council of Justice of Georgia, is accused of using his influence to ensure that judicial appointments and decisions benefitted the Georgian Dream Party. As a foreign public official, Murusidze allegedly received financial advantages in exchange for misusing his judicial authority.

The sanctions are being imposed under the Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions Regulations, which allow for the freezing of assets and economic resources of individuals involved in significant corruption. The UK’s move underscores ongoing efforts to hold individuals accountable for corrupt practices, particularly those who exploit their public offices for personal gain.

Mamuka Khazaradze Granted 50,000 GEL Bail by Tbilisi City Court

Mamuka Khazaradze, leader of the Lelo – Strong Georgia party, was granted a 50,000 GEL bail as a preventive mea-

sure after he failed to comply with a request from the Temporary Investigative Commission of the Georgian Parliament.



The decision was made by Tbilisi City Court Judge Arsen Kalatozishvili, who set a 30-day deadline for Khazaradze to submit the bail amount.

The trial focused on whether a preventive measure should be imposed on Khazaradze. The state prosecution requested a 50,000 GEL bail, while Khazaradze’s defense team argued for his release without any preventive measure. Khazaradze was present at the hearing.

Khazaradze was summoned to

appear before the Temporary Investigative Commission on March 25 for an explanation, but he did not attend. Following this,

he testified before a magistrate judge.

He faces charges under Article 349 of the Criminal Code, which pertains to “failure to comply with the request of the Temporary Investigative Commission of the Parliament of Georgia.” The charge carries penalties ranging from a fine to imprisonment of up to one year, or a ban on holding public office or engaging in certain activities for up to three years.

Weather

Thursday, April 3

Day Partly Cloudy High: 21°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 11°C

Friday, April 4

Day Partly Cloudy High: 21°C

Night Partly Cloudy Low: 11°C

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43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof. Zaza Gachechiladze
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

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