

Call for the EU to Act Now to Sanction the Violent Regime in Georgia

Georgia, a key country in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, has one of the most Europhile societies on the continent. Its location is crucial for any connectivity and transit policy toward the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. It was one of Europe's best reforming countries in the region until the Georgian Dream government systematically undermined its EU integration process.

The EU granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 that was put on hold because of a "foreign agent law" approved by the Georgian Dream government in May 2024. After an election campaign marked by systematic violence against the opposition and civil society, the Georgian Dream party set up a scheme to systematically manipulate the parliamentary election held in October 2024, which led to its phony "victory."

Based on this illegitimate mandate, the Georgian Dream government has

not withdrawn the foreign agent law but instead suspended the accession process until 2028 – an unconstitutional move given that Georgia's constitution explicitly commits the country to Euro-Atlantic integration. Now, the government is using massive force to crack down on demonstrations against this decision. Members of civil society, journalists, and opposition politicians are being brutally beaten by security forces; more and more people are being jailed. The leaders of Georgian Dream recently announced that opposition politicians would be subjected to a "Nuremberg-style trial" to shift the country into a one-party state.

All these activities are supported by Russian advisors and disinformation campaigns. The war on Ukraine has made Georgia even more important to Russia because of the transit routes it offers via the South Caucasus and the role it plays in the circumvention of Western sanctions.

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Where is the EU as a normative power that acts against the falsification of elections and violence against civil society and supports those Georgians who see their future in Europe? Where is the geopolitical EU that understands the importance of its neighbors? Where is the EU's capacity to act under the new Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy that were just appointed for a five-year term?

We, as European think tankers, call upon the EU and its member states to stop Georgian Dream in moving Georgia toward a fully authoritarian state. It is important to act now and sanction those who are responsible for violence, election fraud, and laws to undermine the freedom of speech, civil society, and human rights. The leader of Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, is responsible for all the decisions his party makes and for the policies of state capture and violence. Therefore, he should be sanctioned by the EU; his assets abroad should be frozen.

Every day the Georgian people are demonstrating for their European futures. They believe in a democratic and European path for their country. It is shocking that the EU's institutions and member states were not prepared for this massive violence against the Georgian people despite the many threats of violent actions that were made during the election campaign.

If the EU does not act more decisively now, it will lose any credibility in its neighborhood – which also has consequences for Ukraine, Moldova, and Armenia as well as, more broadly, for its standing in the world. If the

EU is not able to act, it sends signals to leaders in the Kremlin and other authoritarian regimes that will invite more violence, election manipulation, and authoritarianism. The EU's lack of consensus – especially when only one authoritarian state, i.e., Hungary, prevents it – is simply no excuse for inaction.

The EU and its member states must act now, before it is too late. Concretely, that means latest by December 16 when the next EU Foreign Affairs Council – the first in which Kaja Kallas will participate as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – will be held in Brussels. There, member states need to make substantial decisions to sanction those stakeholders who are responsible for violence, election falsification, and state capture in Georgia. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock should put Georgia on the agenda of Thursday's meeting with her counterparts from France, Poland, Italy, Spain, the U.K. and Ukraine (plus EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas) in Berlin. The EU needs to increase the cost for Bidzina Ivanishvili if he continues on his path of violence and illegitimate rule.

Signatories:

Stefan Meister, Head, Center for Order and Governance in Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), Berlin

Steven Blockmans, Associate Senior Research Fellow, CEPS and Senior Fellow, ICDS, Brussels/Tallinn

Marie Dumoulin, Director, Wider Europe Program, European Council on

Foreign Relations (ECFR), Paris

Wojciech Konończuk, Director, Center for Eastern Studies (OSW), Warsaw

Milan Nic, Senior Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), Berlin

James Nixey, Head, Russia and Eurasia Program, Chatham House, London

Amanda Paul, Senior Policy Analyst and Deputy Head of the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Center (EPC), Brussels

Kristi Raik, Deputy Director and Head of the Foreign Policy Programme of the International Centre for Defence and Security (IDCS), Tallinn

Sinikukka Saari, Senior Researcher, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), Helsinki

Nathalie Tocci, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI); former special advisor to EU HR/VP, Rome

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz, Director, Centrum Mieroszewskiego, Warsaw

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Via dei Montecatini, 17

I-00186 Rome, Italy

Tel. +39 066976831

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

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