

Georgian Dream Reintroduces Controversial 'On Foreign Agents' Bill Under Different Title

By LIZA MCHELDIDZE

Georgian Dream has recently reintroduced a legislative initiative in the Parliament of Georgia, titled the 'Transparency of Foreign Influence' bill. This reintroduction comes after a similar attempt made by Georgian Dream last year, which was ultimately withdrawn amidst widespread protests in March. Since the withdrawal of the previous "on foreign agents" law, the leadership of Georgian Dream has maintained their stance of not reintroducing the bill in any form throughout the year, until recently.

In the explanatory note of the draft law, it is stated that the purpose of the draft law is to ensure transparency regarding foreign influence:

"It is necessary to adopt a legislative act that defines the concept of an organization carrying out the interests of a foreign power and will regulate the registration of relevant subjects as an organization carrying out the interests of a foreign power and other issues related to the transparency of their activities."

At the April 3 briefing, the executive secretary of the party, Mamuka Mdinaradze, said that despite the law being withdrawn, none of their funders have taken responsibility for the "anti-state actions and their radical political agenda" of non-governmental organizations.

As Mdinaradze said, the text of the new bill will be similar to the old one, and the term "agent of foreign influence" will be replaced by "organization carrying the interests of a foreign power."

According to the deputy, the law will be adopted by the end of the spring session - the last Friday of June.

"The parliamentary majority, in con-



sultation with the Political Council, decided to resubmit the draft law on the transparency of foreign influence to the parliament. The bill will be initiated with exactly the same text as it was last year, with one difference: instead of the term 'agent of foreign influence,' the term 'organization channeling the interests of a

foreign power' will be used.

All other entries in the bill remain unchanged. We remind you that the draft law envisages only one requirement: the publication of their annual financial report by organizations receiving foreign funding, for which only financial sanctions are provided for violations. This represents the mini-

mum standard of public accountability and transparency that any organization, even those with only a formal claim to integrity, must meet. Therefore, the content of the draft law does not even provide a minimal basis for criticism. The law will pass through all three readings by the end of the current session," Mdinaradze stated.

By LIZA MCHELDIDZE

Within the framework of his official visit to Paraguay, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, held a meeting with Paraguay's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rubén Ramírez Lezcano.

According to their reports, the ministers welcomed the historic visit of the head of Georgia's Foreign Ministry to Paraguay. They expressed hope that this visit, occurring for the first time since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries, would elevate the relations of the two nations to a completely new level.

"For his part, the head of the Foreign Ministry of Georgia noted the importance of developing relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries and emphasized the need for further development of friendly relations with Paraguay based on shared values and interests. Special attention was paid to the growing economic potential of both Georgia and Paraguay and the common features of the two countries in terms of economic openness, an attractive investment environment, and an open economy. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Paraguay expressed interest in strengthening trade and economic cooperation with Georgia, as a country with an important geostrategic location. Minister Lezcano was also in-

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Meets with Paraguay's Foreign Minister

terested in sharing the successful experience of Georgia in the field of tourism," the statement reads.

Based on disseminated information, Ilia Darchiashvili briefed his counterpart on the current regional situation, discuss-

ing security challenges and Georgia's enhanced regional significance after being granted candidate status.

The ministers exchanged views on co-operation across various sectors and politically. They expressed satisfaction with

the strengthening of cultural and people-to-people relations, emphasizing the need for further action in these areas.

The implementation of a visa-free travel regime between the two countries in 2023 was also emphasized as a positive development.

"Ilia Darchiashvili invited his colleague to visit Georgia, and the successful cooperation between the two countries within the framework of international organizations was positively evaluated at the meeting.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Paraguay accepted Ilia Darchiashvili's invitation to visit Georgia this year.

The ministers signed the agreement titled "Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Paraguay on cooperation in the field of diplomatic training."

"As mentioned by the ministers, the memorandum presents a good opportunity for the countries to exchange diplomatic training programs and projects in various directions," the statement reads.



Growing Pro-Russian Political Forces and Georgian Dream Ahead of 2024 Parliamentary Elections

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

In recent years, the number of political parties openly oriented towards the Kremlin has been growing rapidly in Georgia, they neither complain about lack of funds nor are their activities hindered by anyone. The Georgian Dream, which is in power, quietly monitors their activity. But before the parliamentary elections of 2024, the mushrooming political parties also face a dilemma: if they fail to pass the 5% threshold, their votes will be lost.

Before the parliamentary elections of 2024, the Georgian Dream refused to reduce the 5% electoral threshold and also prohibited the creation of party blocs before the elections. Western-oriented political forces perceived this action of the government as directed against them, because it is doubtful whether all pro-Western political forces will be able to overcome 5%. Mikheil Saakashvili, who is in prison, said on March 27 that none of them could overcome the 5% barrier except for the National Movement and called for unification.

The representatives of the Georgian Dream agreed with this statement of the third president, who is hated by them - let the truth come out. The 5% electoral threshold is indeed a serious problem for pro-Western political forces, but political commentators and journalists forget about the other side of the political spectrum. Pro-Russian parties, whose not only activity, but also their number is growing rapidly. You cannot surprise Georgian Dream with anti-Western statements and pro-Russian rhetoric, sometimes it is impossible to distinguish whether this or that statement was made by a representative of the Georgian Dream or by some open pro-Russian force.

Nevertheless, the Georgian Dream will never become openly pro-Russian, it will not give up the Western vector, the desire to join the European Union, and so on. The political trajectory of People's Power is interesting. Known for its anti-Western

statements and the author of the Foreign Agents bill, People Power was created by the parliamentary members of the ruling party and the Georgian Dream.

In August 2022, they withdrew, so that they could freely criticise the West, but together with it they still formed a parliamentary majority. Less than two years after this news, People's Power was registered as a separate party.

"We are not separated from each other," - they say in the Georgian Dream, this separation raises questions about the Western foreign vector of the ruling power, but now let's look at the issue from a different angle - People's Power is going to participate in the elections separately, because the creation of a bloc is prohibited. He hopes to overcome the 5% barrier.

The electorate of People's Power is openly pro-Russian, and such an electorate, in the end, is not large. This kind of electorate "people power" should take away from the current ruling party and other openly pro-Russian forces. The Georgian

Dream will not be able to give a guarantee of overcoming the 5% barrier to its split party, it itself has a serious problem of mobilising the electorate.

In addition to People's Power, other openly pro-Russian political parties are active. Among the pro-Russian parties, the activity of the Conservative Party founded by Alt-Info is noteworthy.

According to experts, this force differs from other pro-Russian parties in that it is openly focused on violence. Alt-Info started preparing for the 2024 elections about a year ago and is actively opening its offices in the regions. Alt-Info with its conservative party criticises both People's Power and Georgian Dream for 'spoofing' their slogans. They also intend to participate in the next elections separately and overcome the 5% threshold. Levan Vasadze of pro-Russian orientation became active, who recently openly criticised Bidzina Ivanishvili and insulted her personally.

Levan Vasadze was politically active and was known for his anti-Western stance, in 2021 he

created the party 'Ertoba, Raoba, Imedi - Eri', but then disappeared from politics. His attack on Ivanishvili was explained by some with the fact that Alt-Info feels oppressed after being removed from the premiership and doubts that the government will support its electoral division People's Power and the Patriot Alliance of Inashvili and Tarkhan-Mouravi, which is a much older pro-Russian force.

At the beginning of this year, Inashvili and Tarkhan-Mouravi reminded the public of themselves by donating a huge icon of the Matrona of the Moscow saint to the Trinity Cathedral, where Stalin was also depicted.

But this is not all, and the number of pro-Russian groups and organisations does not end there. 8 months before the parliamentary elections of 2024, the organisation Unity of Georgians in open connection with the Kremlin was formed into a political party. Experts point to the connections of this organisation with former chief prosecutor Otar Fartskhadze. They will have enough finances and support, but it is unknown what its

founders are going to do and whether or not they plan to participate in the next parliamentary elections.

The Georgian Dream is trying to combine seemingly incompatible things - to present itself as a force oriented towards the West, because the majority of the population of Georgia sees the future of the country as part of the West, and at the same time to strongly criticise the West, thereby attracting the pro-Russian electorate.

But, as we can see, several political forces are going to work independently on the pro-Russian electorate, some of which can already establish ties with Moscow independently. The planners of the election strategy of the Georgian Dream seem to consider it expedient to 'disperse' the pro-Russian forces and not allow some of them to participate in the elections, so that these political forces do not interfere with each other and do not all end up below the 5% threshold. However, whether they will manage to control all such forces or not is difficult to say.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President Salome Zourabichvili Condemns Reintroduction of 'Foreign Agents' Bill by Georgian Dream



President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili condemned the reintroduction of the 'Foreign Agents' bill by Georgian Dream.

Zourabichvili asserted that the ruling party is actively undermining Georgia's progress towards the European Union. The president suggested that the

solution lies in responding during the elections.

"The most fortunate thing is that you were able to (I apologize to Mr. Papuashvili for using this term, but) initiate the Russian law during the week from March 31 to April 9, a period which, for the recent history

well. You don't want to see, you don't want to hear that Georgian society is united in this direction - to strengthen independence, Russia will never return here," Zourabichvili said.

NGOs Condemn Abolition of Gender Quota, Citing Constitutional Rights and European Integration



Non-governmental organizations have issued a statement highlighting that the abolition of the mandatory gender quota contradicts the will of the people as reflected in the Constitution of Georgia. They argue that this decision violates women's rights and poses obstacles to the country's process of European integration. The statement was signed by 80 organizations.

NGOs wrote that achieving

gender balance in the Parliament of Georgia directly reflects the will of the country's population and is considered one of the primary components of representative democracy.

"According to research, the majority of voters in Georgia support the equal representation of women and men in parliament (50-50), including the use of a mandatory gender quota (NDI, 2023), and believe that this will have a positive impact on the country's development (UNDP, UNFPA, 2020)," the statement reads.

The statement highlighted that gender equality was among the 12 conditions set by the European Commission for Georgia's path toward a European perspective.

"One of the 12 conditions defined by the European Commission for Georgia was gender equality. Instead of progress (one of the three implemented recommendations was related to the issues of gender equality and women's participation in politics), the adoption of the bill to cancel the mandatory gender quota is a clear regression and a step back," the statement said.

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The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

Weather

Thursday, April 4

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 19°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 7°C

Friday, April 5

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 17°C

Night Showers
Low: 8°C

published by
The Messenger

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