

THE 9-MONTH PHASE OF THE WEST–GEORGIA DISCORDANCE: THE AFTERMATH OF THE ADOPTION OF THE WIDELY DEBATED LAW AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IT

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Summary

The article presents events that took place in and around Georgia during the period from April to October 2024 (up to the parliamentary elections held on October 26). These include the circulation and adoption of the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence”, the pre-election processes triggered by these actions, and the complex developments surrounding Georgia.

All the processes that took place during these 9 months were only seemingly connected to the mentioned bill and later the law. In reality, this complex historical period was significant both in terms of restoring Georgia's sovereignty and its genuinely Georgian-centric orientation, as well as adjusting the sphere of Western influence in the South Caucasus.

Through a comprehensive examination of the realities mentioned in the work, the true goal of the West and the essence of the Georgian authorities' struggle are revealed. During this fateful period, Georgia's leadership took another crucial step toward freeing itself from Western influence, which had been entrenched since the time of M. Saakashvili's rule. As a result, the country ceased to be a pawn in the hands of the West and, most importantly, avoided the dangerous path of becoming a platform for opening a second front against Russia.

ԱՐԵՎՄՈՒՏՔ–ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆ ԽՈՐԸ ԱՌՃԱԿԱՏՄԱՆ 9-ԱՄՍՅԱ ՓՈԽԼԸ.

ԱՂՄԿԱՀԱՐՈՒՅՑ ՕՐԵՆՔԻ ԸՆԴՈՒՆՄԱՆ

ԵՎ ՎԵՐՋԻՆԻՍ ԴԵՄ ՊԱՅՔԱՐԻ ՀԵՏՆԱՊԱՏԿԵՐԸ

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Սեղմագիր

Հոդվածում ներկայացված են Վրաստանում և նրա շուրջ տեղի ունեցած իրադարձությունները 2024 թվականի ապրիլից մինչև հոկտեմբեր ընկած ժամանակահատվածում (մինչև հոկտեմբերի 26-ին կայացած խորհրդարանական ընտրությունները): Դրանք ներառում են «Օտարերկրյա ազդեցության թափանցիկության մասին» օրինագծի շրջանառությունն ու ընդունումը, ինչպես նաև այդ գործողությունների հետևանքով առաջացած նախընտրական գործընթացներն ու Վրաստանի շուրջ բարդ զարգացումները:

Այս 9 ամիսների ընթացքում տեղի ունեցած բոլոր գործընթացները միայն առաջին հայացքից էին կապված նշված օրինագծի, իսկ հետո՝ օրենքի հետ: Իրականում, այս բարդ պայմանական ժամանակաշրջանը կարևոր նշանակություն ունեցավ ինչպես Վրաստանի ինքնիշխանության վերականգնման և նրա իսկապես վրացակենտրոն ուղղվածության վերահաստատման, այնպես էլ Հարավային Կովկասում Արևմուտքի ազդեցության ոլորտի ճշգրտման տեսանկյունից:

Աշխարհում մանրամասն վերլուծված իրողությունների միջոցով բացահայտվում են Արևմուտքի իրական նպատակն ու վրացական իշխանությունների պայքարի բուն իմաստը: Վերոհիշյալ ճակատագրական ժամանակահատվածում Վրաստանի ղեկավարությունը ևս մեկ կարևոր քայլ կատարեց Արևմուտքի ազդեցությունից ազատվելու ուղղությամբ, որը արմատավորվել էր դեռ Մ. Սահակաշվիլի կառավարման ժամանակներից: Արդյունքում, երկիրը դադարեց Արևմուտքի ձեռքում խաղաքար լինելուց, ամենակարևորը, չգնաց ՌԴ-ի դեմ երկրորդ ճակատ բացելու համար հարթակի վերածվելու վրանգավոր ճանապարհով:

**9- МЕСЯЧНАЯ ОСТРАЯ КОНФРОНТАЦИЯ ЗАПАД–ГРУЗИЯ.
ПОДОПЛЁКА ПРИНЯТИЯ НАШУМЕВШЕГО ЗАКОНА
И БОРЬБЫ С НИМ**

В. Д. Саркисян

Аннотация

В работе представлены события, произошедшие в Грузии и вокруг нее в период, длящийся с апреля по октябрь 2024 г. (до парламентских выборов, состоявшихся 26 октября): рециркуляция и принятие законопроекта «О прозрачности иностранного влияния», вызванные этими действиями предвыборные процессы и сложные развития вокруг Грузии.

Все процессы, произошедшие в течение этих 9-и месяцев, только на первый взгляд касались упомянутого законопроекта, а затем и закона. Фактически, этот сложный исторический период имел важное значение как с точки зрения восстановления суверенитета Грузии, ее подлинно грузиноцентричной ориентации, так и корректирования сферы влияния Запада на Южном Кавказе.

Посредством всестороннего рассмотрения упомянутых в работе реалий раскрывается как реальная цель Запада, так и истинный смысл борьбы грузинских властей. В упомянутый судьбоносный период руководство Грузии сделало еще один важный шаг в сторону избавления от западного влияния, укоренившегося еще со времен правления М. Саакашвили. В результате, страна перестала быть пешкой в руках Запада и, самое главное, не пошла по опасному пути превращения в плацдарм для открытия 2-го фронта против РФ.

THE 9-MONTH PHASE OF THE WEST–GEORGIA DISCORDANCE: THE AFTERMATH OF THE ADOPTION OF THE OUTRAGEOUS LAW AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IT²

(Part I)

Foreword

The recirculation and adoption of the law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” in Georgia were anything but an ordinary legislative initiative. The period between the initiation of the draft law in April 2024 and the parliamentary elections held on October 26 can be named a period of genuine conflict between the West and the Georgian authorities. The adoption of the law mobilized both the West-fueled Georgian NGOs, media, and socio-political forces, which over the years have increased their influence tenfold over the years, and the West as a whole, which used numerous tools in its arsenal against the Georgian authorities over the nine months, ranging from remarks and warnings to specific sanctions, threats, and blackmail.

Developments preceding the recirculation of the draft law

Since M. Saakashvili came to power, Georgia has been considered and perceived as a country in the Western (anti-Russian) orbit. For this reason, the decrees signed by the RF President V. Putin on May 10, 2023, which canceled the visa regime between Russia and Georgia that had been in effect since 2000³, and lifted the ban on direct flights as of May 15⁴, came as an unexpected twist for many. However, those circles that were aware of the changes

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² The original Armenian article submitted to the Editorial office on 12.12.2024.

³ Decree of the RF President V. Putin of 10.05.2023 № 335 “*On the procedure for entry into the Russian Federation and departure from the Russian Federation of Georgian nationals*”. (in Rus.), 10.05.2023, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202305100004?index=1> (download date: 02.10.2024). “*From May 15, 2023, Georgian citizens will be able to enter and exit the Russian Federation without obtaining visas based on current identifying documents <...>, with the exception of citizens entering Russia in order to work or for a period over 90 days for a temporary stay in Russia, including to receive an education*”, – the document says. The decree also sets out rules for Georgian citizens seconded to Russia as employees of the Georgian Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy in the Russian Federation and their family members. According to the document, they will be issued single-entry visas for a period of three months, and after the accreditation of these employees by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, they and their family members will be able to visit Russia without a visa for the entire period of accreditation.

⁴ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 10.05.2023 No. 336 On the recognition as invalid of the decree of the President of the Russian Federation of June 21, 2019 No. 287 “On Invalidation of decree of the president of the Russian Federation of June 21, 2019 No. 287 “On certain measures to ensure the national security of the Russian Federation and the protection of citizens of the Russian Federation from criminal and other illegal actions”. (in Rus.), 10.05.2023, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202305100003> (download date: 02.10.2024).

in the behavior of the current Georgian authorities and in the “behind the scenes” space of Georgian-Russian relations were not surprised at all. These circles were well aware that the Georgian authorities, in contrast to the extremely pro-Western and Turkish course of M. Saakashvili, have recently adopted a balanced foreign policy vector. By declaring that their goal is to obtain the status of an EU candidate country and to move towards European integration, Georgian authorities are nevertheless firmly stepping out of the field of the Western dictate.

After the start of the Russian-Ukrainian military operations (February 24, 2022), Georgia refrained from joining a number of Western actions against Russia. In response to all this, the West, mobilizing political forces, organizations and public circles in Georgia under its influence, attempted to carry out a coup in Georgia in February-March, bring the aforementioned elements to power and open the second front against Russia. The initiative to adopt the well-known draft laws **“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”** and **“On Registration of Foreign Agents”** served as a pretext for this. These draft laws were withdrawn under strong pressure from forces and public circles, led by the West. However, by thwarting the mentioned Western goal with their calculated steps at this stage⁵, the Georgian authorities announced a year later that the previous concerns had not been dissipated, and the problem remained relevant. It should be added that in 2023, similar drafts were presented in the Parliament by 4 MPs who left the ruling coalition and announced about the formation of the **“People’s Power”** movement⁶ on August 2, 2022. As for the ruling force, it supported the legislative initiative from the very beginning⁷.

⁵ Sargsyan V., The other side of scandalous draft laws: Georgia’s choice (in Rus.). Region and world, Scientific-analytical journal, Vol. XIV, N 2, 2023, pp. 9-19.

⁶ On August 2, the newly formed four made a statement on the creation of the **“People’s Power”** movement. According to the statement, their goal is to arm the public with the truth to protect Georgia’s national interests. The main reason for their departure from the ruling party was the threat of Georgia being drawn into the war (between Russia and Ukraine – **V.S.**), an attempt at provocation related to the same external forces. *“We believe that the threat of war remains real and guarantees of its prevention can be created only through proper public awareness. In the absence of information, society can remain vulnerable to threats to peace and the country’s independence in Georgia. ...One of our main goals is not to attack Western institutions, but to protect and save the reputation of Western institutions in Georgia. Our movement will do everything to restore the Georgian society’s trust in Western institutions”*, the deputies noted in the statement, adding that if they see that the government is no longer able to withstand the pressure related to the war, they do not rule out transforming the public movement into a political party. [See: სოზარ სუბარი, დიმიტრი ხუნდაძე, მიხეილ ყაველაშვილი და გურამ მაჭარაშვილი საზოგადოებრივ მოძრაობა „ხალხის ძალას“ აფუძნებენ და არ გამორიცხავენ, რომ პოლიტიკურ პარტიად გარდაიქმნას. 02.08.2022, <https://1tv.ge/news/sozar-subari-dimitri-khundadze-mikheil-yavelashvili-da-guram-macharashvili-sazogadoebriv-modzraoba-khalkhis-dzalas-afudzneben-da-ar-gamorickhaven-rom-politikur-partiadac-gardaiqm/> (download date: 20.02.2023).

⁷ “On February 20, the leader of the “Georgian Dream” faction, Mamuka Mdinaradze, stated that there is agreement on the general principles, adding that the bill only requires registration within 10 days: *“If the external financing of any organization exceeds 20%, it has 10 days to register in the registry. Then, within a year, it must submit a declaration of its income and expenses. Apart from this transparency, nothing else is considered. Therefore, it is impossible to present an argument as to why this principle can be rejected”*. [See: “ქართული ოცნების” სახელით შემოძლია ვთქვა, რომ პრინციპების დონეზე შევთანხმდით და მხარს დავუჭერთ “ხალხის ძალის” მიერ წარდგენილ კანონპროექტს - მამუკა მდინარაძე. 20.02.2023, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/249362> (download date: 03.10.2024)]. “A day later, on February 21, the chairman of the ruling “Georgian Dream” party, Irakli Kobakhidze, stated that the draft Georgian law “On transparency of foreign influence” fully complies with human rights standards, unlike the laws adopted abroad. I. Kobakhidze referred to similar laws adopted in the

Recirculation of the draft law in 2024. Justifications of the authorities, reaction of the opposition and the West

In 2024, the ruling force “Georgian Dream” submitted the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” to the Parliament, justifying it by the increase of secret funding of radical groups in Georgia by foreign donors.

Regarding the appearance of the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” in 2024⁸, the Executive Secretary of the “Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia” party and the Head of the Parliamentary Faction M. Mdinardze stated on April 3 that “...the draft law will be initiated in the Georgian parliament with exactly the same text as was initiated last year with only one difference... In the draft law initiated by us today, instead of the term “agent of foreign influence” the term “organization pursuing the interests of a foreign power” will be used ...Let me remind you that the draft law provides a single requirement for organizations receiving foreign funding, i.e. to disclose their annual financial reports, and violation entails only financial sanctions. This is a minimal standard of transparency and accountability before society...”⁹.

Representatives of the opposition parties denounced the decision of the parliamentary majority to recirculate the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*”, unanimously stating that it contradicts the country’s European aspirations¹⁰. The statement on the recirculation of the draft law raised serious concern in the European Union as well. In a message dated April 4, the structure reminded that: “...the European Council granted Georgia candidate status¹¹, understanding that the relevant steps¹², mentioned in the

USA and the RF. See: Georgian draft law on ‘foreign agents’ is better than foreign counterparts – Kobakhidze”. (in Rus.), 21.02.2023, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20230221/gruzinskiy-zakonoproekt-ob-inoagentakh-luchshe-zarubezhnykh-analogov---kobakhidze-275107192.html> (download date: 03.10.2024)].

⁸ საქართველოს კანონი, უცხოური გავლენის გამჭვირვალობის შესახებ, თბილისი, 28 მაისი 2024 წ., N4194-XIVმს-Xმპ, ვებგვერდი. 03.06.2024, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6171895?publication=0> (download date: 11.07.2024).

⁹ Georgian authorities initiate the law “On foreign agents” again. (in Rus.), 03.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240403/vlasti-gruzii-vnov-initsiiruyut-zakon-ob-inoagentakh-287142245.html> (download date: 07.10.2024).

¹⁰ However, MP from the opposition “Girchi” party Vakhtang Megrelishvili said on April 4 that there should be no protests regarding the initiation of the draft law. According to the MP, parliamentary elections will be held in six months, and protest against any stupidity of the ruling party should be expressed at the ballot box. Beka Liluashvili, MP from the opposition “For Georgia” party of former Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, also stated that his party intended to submit an alternative draft law to parliament, noting that it had no concerns about transparency. “If anyone has a problem with transparency and is uncomfortable with accountability, it is the authorities”, – stated the MP [See: Will there be protests against the law “On Foreign Agents” in Georgia? What the opposition is preparing for. (in Rus.), 04.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240404/budut-li-v-gruzii-aktsii-protiv-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-k-chemu-gotovitsya-oppozitsiya-287171025.html> (download date: 08.10.2024)].

¹¹ In 2009, the European Union’s ‘Eastern Partnership’ (EaP) program was launched, which included Georgia. In June 2014, the European Union and Georgia signed the Association Agreement (AA), which entered into force on July 1, 2016. On March 3, 2022, Georgia submitted an application for EU membership. On June 23, 2022, the European Council recognized Georgia’s European perspective and expressed its readiness to grant Georgia candidate status if the 12 priorities related to Georgia’s membership application, as outlined in the European Commission’s opinion, are met – known preconditions, including reducing of polarization, de-oligarchization, improving media, ensuring an environment of full judicial independence, etc. On November 8, 2023, the European Commission recommended that the European Council grant Georgia candidate status. The

recommendation of the European Commission of November 8, 2023¹³, had been taken, and the 9th step includes the recommendation for Georgia to ensure that civil society can operate freely, and the 1st step calls for Georgia to combat disinformation directed against the EU and its values”¹⁴. On the same day, the UN Human Rights Council reacted to the legislative initiative of the “Georgian Dream”, urging the government to withdraw the draft law: “We urge the authorities to withdraw the draft law labelling civil society & media that receive over 20% of their funding from abroad as “organizations acting in the interest of a foreign power”. This poses serious threats to freedom of expression & association”¹⁵. The next Western structure to express concern was the Council of Europe, the Secretary General of which, Maria Pejčinović Burić, issued a statement on April 4¹⁶, and on the same day, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also stated that he opposed any attempt by the Georgian government to reintroduce the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence”¹⁷. The US state department Spokesman Matthew Miller, in a message released on April 5, called on the Georgian government to rely on EU aspirations and added: “We are deeply

European Commission published a report on EU enlargement, including key findings related to Georgia, and a 2023 communication on EU enlargement policy, noting 9 new steps that Georgia should take. On December 14, 2023, the European Council decided to grant Georgia candidate status, taking into account the implementation of the relevant steps outlined in the European Commission’s recommendation of November 8, 2023. [ცმ. შარლ მიშელი - ევროკავშირის საბჭომ გადაწყვიტა, აღიაროს საქართველოს ევროპული პერსპექტივა. 23.06.2022, <https://1tv.ge/news/sharl-misheli-evrokavshiris-sabchom-gadawyvita-aghiaros-saqartvelos-evropuli-perspektiva-da-mzadaa-statusi-mianichos-rogorc-ki-dasakhuli-prioritetebi-shestruldeba-saqartvelos-momavali-evrokavshir/> (download date: 02.10.2024), ევროკავშირის წარმომადგენლობა საქართველოში, ევროკავშირი და საქართველო, ევროკავშირთან ურთიერთობა, პოლიტიკური ურთიერთობები. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/georgia/evrokavshiri-da-sakartvelo_ka?s=221#2774 (download date: 09.10.2024)].

¹² The 9 steps provided in the EU enlargement package for 2023 include combating disinformation, external information manipulation, and interference that work against the European Union and its values, improving Georgia's approach to the European Union's common foreign and security policy, addressing the issue of political polarization, ensuring a free, fair, and competitive electoral process, approving systemic approaches to de-oligarchization and judicial and legal comprehensive and effective reforms, etc. [See: ევროკავშირის წარმომადგენლობა საქართველოში, 2023 წლის კომუნიკაცია ევროკავშირის გაფართოების პოლიტიკასთან დაკავშირებით (ამონარიდი საქართველოს შესახებ). 15.11.2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy-extract-about-georgia_en?page_lang=ka&s=221 (download date: 08.10.2024)].

¹³ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, Brussels, 8.11.2023, COM(2023) 690 final, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en (download date: 09.10.2024).

¹⁴ Georgia: Statement by the Spokesperson on the draft law on “Transparency of Foreign Influence”. 04.04.2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/georgia-statement-spokesperson-draft-law-%E2%80%9Ctransparency-foreign-influence%E2%80%9D-o_en (download date: 08.10.2024).

¹⁵ მოვლუდებთ ხელისუფლებას, გაიწვიოს კანონპროექტი - გაეროს ადამიანის უფლებათა კომიტეტი 04.04.2024, <https://www.ghn.ge/news/310225-movutsodebt-khelisuflebas-gaitsvios-kanonproekti-gaeros-adamianis-uflebat-komiteti> (download date: 10.10.2024).

¹⁶ CoE Sec Gen: Constructive dialogue and upholding of our standards remain key. 04.04.2024, <https://georgiatoday.ge/coe-sec-gen-constructive-dialogue-and-upholding-of-our-standards-remain-key/> (download date: 10.10.2024).

¹⁷ NATO Sec Gen rejects reintroduction of bill on transparency of foreign influence in Georgia. 04.04.2024, <https://info.imedi.ge/en/politics/1151/nato-sec-gen-rejects-reintroduction-of-bill-on-transparency-of-foreign-influence-in-georgia> (download date: 11.10.2024).

concerned that the draft law presented in the Georgian parliament will take Georgia off the European path and harm civil society organizations that improve the lives of Georgian citizens”¹⁸. On April 5, the chairpersons of the foreign affairs committees of 12 European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and the United Kingdom) issued a joint statement expressing concern and urging the ruling force of Georgia to withdraw the draft law from parliamentary discussion¹⁹.

Debate around the draft law. Outlining deep problems

As expected, a powerful campaign against the adoption of the “*Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence*” has once again unfolded. Information quickly spread over social networks with four arguments as to why the draft law of the Georgian parliamentary majority is a “*Russian law*”. The authorities called all these arguments disinformation disseminated by the largest opposition party, “United National Movement”, and public organizations. The authorities stressed that the USA, Israel, and Australia already have laws on transparency of foreign funding, while similar draft laws are under discussion in the European Union and France. Moreover, compared to, for example, the *American Foreign Agents Registration Act* (FARA), envisaging imprisonment for violations, the Georgian draft law is much more liberal. NGOs and the media are only required to declare income if more than 20% of it comes from abroad, and violation of the law results only in a fine. In addition, to avoid labeling, the term “foreign agent” is absent from the Georgian draft law. “*Last year, the Georgian people and we, the authorities, were promised that foreign funding would be transparent, but we were deceived: instead of foreign money becoming more transparent, it became more hidden. ...American and European taxpayers’ money flows into Georgian politics through NGOs, while foreign political funding is prohibited worldwide*”, – said Shalva Papuashvili, Chairperson of the Georgian Parliament, presenting the reasons for the legislative initiative of the authorities²⁰. According to the statement of the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Faction, “Georgian Dream” Mamuka Mdinaradze, Georgia cannot have problems in relations with the European Union because of the law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*”, since the European Union itself has adopted a similar law²¹.

¹⁸ მეთიუ მილერი: ჩვენ მოვუწოდებთ საქართველოს მთავრობას, რომ მიჰყევს ევროკავშირის მისწრაფებებს. 05.04.2024, <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/331849/metiu-milери-chven-movutsodebt-saqartvelos-mtavrobas-rom-mihkves-evrokavshiris-mistsrapebebs> (download date: 09.10.2024).

¹⁹ ევროპის 12 ქვეყნის საგარეო კომიტეტები „ოცნებას“ ეწ. რუსული კანონის გაწვევისკენ მოუწოდებენ. 05.04.2024, <https://bm.ge/news/evropis-12-qveynis-sagareo-komitetebi-otsnebas-ets-rusuli-kanonis-gatsvevisken-movutsodeben> (download date: 10.10.2024).

²⁰ Speaker of the parliament drew particular attention to the “American National Endowment for Democracy” (NED) and the “European Endowment for Democracy” (EED), whose leadership includes members who sharply criticize the Georgian authorities. According to Papuashvili, over the course of a year these funds financed parties and radical groups operating in Georgia. [See: Arguments of the “Georgian Dream” – Four lies regarding the law “On foreign agents”. (in Rus.), 05.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240405/chetyre-lzhi-kasatelno-zakona-ob-inoagentakh---argumenty-gruzinskoy-mechty-287190669.html> (download date: 10.10.2024)].

²¹ Leader of ruling party – Law “On foreign agents” will not affect Georgia-EU relations. (in Rus.), 05.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240406/zakon-ob-inoagentakh-ne-povliyaet-na-otnosheniya-gruzii-es--lider-partii-vlasti--287200951.html> (download date: 10.10.2024).

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze also countered the critics, stating that the information being spread that state structures have access to information on NGO funding is false. *“The adoption of the draft law is timely, because the public has little information on the sources of funding of NGOs, and state structures have access to a maximum of 18% of the information”*, – the Prime Minister stated, publicizing the results of investigations, conducted by some NGOs²². I. Kobakhidze also stated that a significant part of the expenses is not declared to the Ministry of Finance, therefore, according to him, not 82%, but more than 90% of the funds spent by NGOs are completely opaque. Turning to the presented draft law, Minister of Finance Lasha Khutsishvili assured on the same day that the draft law envisages only for the publication of financial statements of organizations and does not imply any restrictions on their activities. The minister added that the law does not envisage labelling *“agent”* either²³.

Beginning of discussion of the draft law in the Georgian Parliament. The eve of stormy processes

In the situation of such socio-political sentiments in Georgia, the parliament began to discuss the draft law on April 8. On the same day, protests started in front of the Georgian parliament building²⁴. The precession called the *“March of Freedom”*, which was held on the initiative of NGOs on April 9, the day of the adoption of the Act On restoration of Statehood Independence of Georgia and the National Unity Day, civil accord and remembrance of those who gave their lives for the Fatherland, along the central Rustaveli Avenue of the capital, invoked sharp criticism from the authorities²⁵. The authorities also made a big fuss over the fact that the social network Facebook blocked posters with information about the need to adopt the law *“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”*. The Executive Secretary of the ruling *“Georgian Dream”* Mamuka Mdinaradze said that *“Meta”* received false information from Georgia, and this, according to him, highly speculative information was provided by its contractor companies, led by the founder of the *“Association of Georgian Reforms”* Sergi Kapanadze and others²⁶. According to him, in Georgia, opponents of the law on transparency

²² Why Georgia wants to pass the law “On foreign agents” – the Prime Minister’s arguments in detail. (in Rus.), 08.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240408/pochemu-v-gruzii-khotyat-prinyat-ob-inoagentakh---argumenty-premera-v- detal'yakh-287219670.html> (download date: 12.10.2024).

²³ Lasha Khutsishvili – The draft law presented in connection with transparency only provides for the publication of financial statements, therefore, it will not be able to restrict any activity. (in Rus.), 08.04.2024, <https://1tv.ge/lang/ru/news/lasha-khucishvili-predstavlenyj-v-svjazi-s-prozrachnostju-zakonoproekt-predusmatrivaet-tolko-publikaciju-finansovoj-otchetnosti-sootvetstvenno-on-ne-smozhet-ogranichivat-tu-ili-inuju-dejatelnost/> (download date: 12.10.2024).

²⁴ The draft law “On foreign agents” was discussed in the Georgian parliament amid protests. (in Rus.), 08.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240408/zakonoproekt-ob-inoagentakh-obsuzhdalsya-v-parlamente-gruzii-na-fone-aktsii-protesta-287223743.html> (download date: 12.10.2024).

²⁵ MP of the ruling force Rati Innatavishvili in relation to the march, organized in such a symbolic day for Georgia, stated: *“There can be no greater symbolism and no greater lustration, just as it is impossible to commit a more hostile act – they are holding marches on April 9 against transparency and independence”*. [See: Hostile attitude towards Georgia: MP on march against law “On foreign agents”. (in Rus.) (09.04.2024), <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240409/vrazheskoe-otnoshenie-k-gruzii--deputat-o-marshe-protiv-zakona-o-inoagentakh-287247843.html> (download date: 15.10.2024)].

²⁶ On April 8, 2024, Prime Minister I. Kobakhidze stated that public organizations “Factcheck” and

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of foreign funding have no arguments, and for this reason, they are trying to block the arguments of the authorities²⁷.

According to the statement of the Public Defender of Georgia Lasha Ioseliani, distributed on April 11, in order to achieve transparency of foreign funding of non-governmental organizations in Georgia, the law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” might not have been adopted. According to the public defender, the goal is legitimate, but it could have been achieved by making other changes to the current legislation. According to him, by making appropriate changes to the law of Georgia “*On Grants*”, it is easy to achieve the legitimate goal of transparency of foreign aid flows and increase accountability on the part of the recipient organization²⁸.

On the same day, Georgian Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili responded to a statement by EU Ambassador to Georgia Pawel Herczynski, according to whom the draft law initiated by Georgian authorities contradicts the EU values and principles, and if it is adopted, it would be difficult for the European Commission to give a positive assessment. Ilia Darchiashvili noted that transparency is the cornerstone of Georgia’s European integration, and therefore it is incorrect to say that the Georgian draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” hinders the EU membership. “*Everyone must be accountable to the Georgian people. This law should not and cannot prevent European integration. This process is closely linked to the recommendations that the European Commission has given us, and the European Council confirmed it*”, – said Darchiashvili²⁹.

The draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” was also widely discussed during the official visit of Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze to the Federal Republic of Germany. During a joint press conference in Berlin on April 12, German Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz sharply criticized the draft law and expressed concern over its reappearance on the agenda³⁰. At the same press conference, the Georgian Prime Minister politely stated that

“Detector of myths”, affiliated with political parties, censor social media. Behind these organizations are former Deputy Foreign Minister Sergi Kapanadze and Tamar Kintsurashvili, who held the position of director of the Georgian Public Broadcasting Company in the previous government. “*It evidences their style and values, i.e. lack of transparency and censorship is Europe for these people. That is how they present the topic. Nevertheless, we know very well what the contradicting statements are*”, – Kobakhidze said, adding that lack of transparency and censorship are absolutely unacceptable [See: Why Georgia wants to pass the law on “Foreign Agents” - The Prime Minister’s Arguments in Detail. (in Rus.), 08.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240408/pochemu-v-gruzii-khotyat-prinyat-ob-inoagentakh---argumenty-premera-v-detalyakh-287219670.html> (download date: 17.10.2024).

²⁷ The law “On foreign agents” – Why Facebook* blocked the banners of the Georgian authorities? (09.04.2024) (in Rus.), <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240409/pochemu-zablokirovan-banner-s-argumentami-vlasti-gruzii-po-zakonu-ob-inoagentakh-287246657.html> (download date: 17.10.2024).

²⁸ საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველის განცხადება „უცხოური გავლენის გამჭვირვალობის შესახებ“ საქართველოს კანონის პროექტთან დაკავშირებით, 11 აპრილი, 2024, <https://www.ombudsman.ge/geo/akhali-ambebi/sakartvelos-sakhalkho-damtsvelis-gantskhadeba-utskhouri-gavlenis-gamchvirvalobis-shesakheb-sakartvelos-kanonis-proektan-dakavshirebit> (download date: 17.10.2024).

²⁹ Head of the MFA: The law on transparency must not hinder the integration of Georgia to EU. (in Rus.), 11.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240411/zakon-o-prozrachnosti-ne-dolzhen-pomeshat-integratsii-gruzii-v-es--glava-mid-287281275.html> (download date: 17.10.2024).

³⁰ Olaf Scholz: In Germany, as in the EU, we look critically at the law on transparency of foreign influence, we hope that Georgia will not adopt the law. (in Rus.), 12.04.2024, <https://itv.ge/lang/ru/news/olaf-sholz-v-germanii-kak-i-v-evrosojuze-my-kriticheski-smotrim-na-zakon-o-t-g-agentakh-nadeemsja-cto-gruzija-ne->

they would not back down and that the Georgian draft law complies with all the basic principles of democracy. According to Kobakhidze, the opponents of the draft law have not substantiated why public organizations should not keep the principle of transparency³¹.

On April 14, in another statement, the Prime Minister of Georgia invited the ambassadors of the US, EU and EU member states to hold a live public discussion of the draft law *“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”*. According to the head of government, this will help the public to understand the need to adopt the law supported by the Georgian authorities. The Prime Minister also boldly stated that in accordance with the practice that has developed in Georgia in recent years, foreign diplomats continue to actively participate in the political debates taking place in the country, in particular, they vigorously try to assume the role of legislators, actively participate in the legislative process and dictate to the main body of representative power – the parliament, elected by the people – which law should be adopted and which should be rejected. *“Although this practice of supplanting the political opposition does not meet the standards of diplomacy, given the shortage of political and intellectual resources of the opposition, we can approach this with some understanding”*, – prime minister noted, adding that critical statements these statements were devoid of any arguments and justification³². It should be noted that this proposal by the Prime Minister of Georgia remained unanswered, and I. Kobakhidze reminded the public of this in necessary cases as a trump card.

April 15. A new wave of actions against the authorities

Thus, on April 15, the discussion of the draft law *“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”* in the legal committee of the Georgian Parliament began in parallel with protest actions: on the same day, opposition MPs (from the parties “United National Movement”, “Strategy Agmashenebeli”, the parliamentary political group “Eurooptimists” and others) held a protest action in the building of the legislative body, giving before the hearings in the committee a press conference and demanding to withdraw the draft law, and representatives of public organizations and the civil sector protested outside³³. This meeting was even accompanied by a mass fight³⁴. On the same day, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze

[primet-zakon/? cf chl tk=ygezQJn8DibobZgzUI.3IiPNNGzqol7bdxhKCeVqwTg-1729172545-1.0.1.1-uAqWBaA8S5OneZ9d1E_IP.KIInLVhFOdjQoTo6NFRsk](https://www.primet-zakon.ru/?cf_chl_tk=ygezQJn8DibobZgzUI.3IiPNNGzqol7bdxhKCeVqwTg-1729172545-1.0.1.1-uAqWBaA8S5OneZ9d1E_IP.KIInLVhFOdjQoTo6NFRsk) (download date: 17.10.2024).

³¹ Scholz urged Georgia not to adopt the law on “foreign agents”, while Kobakhidze insisted on his own. (in Rus.), 12.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240412/sholts-prizval-gruziyu-ne-prinimat-zakon-ob-inoagentakh-a-kobakhidze-nastoval-na-svoem-287295527.html> (download date: 18.10.2024).

³² საქართველოს მთავრობა, საქართველოს პრემიერ-მინისტრის განცხადება. (2024-04-14), https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=596&info_id=88164 (download date: 18.10.2024).

³³ Georgian parliament has begun consideration of the draft law “On Foreign Agents”. (15.04.2024) (in Rus.), <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240415/parlament-gruzii-pristupil-k-rassmotreniyu-zakonoproekta-ob-inoagentakh-287331822.html> (download date: 18.10.2024).

³⁴ Opposition MP from the “Citizens” party Aleko Elisashvili attacked the Chairman of the “Georgian Dream” faction Mamuka Mdinaradze, who was speaking from the parliamentary podium, and hit him on the head, after which a big commotion began in parliament [See: Fight in Georgian parliament – Discussion of the law “On Foreign Agents” had to be interrupted. (in Rus.), 15.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240415/draka-v-parlamente-gruzii---obsuzhdenie-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-prishlos-prervat-287335689.html> (download date: 18.10.2024)]. Let us add that the act was condemned by both pro-government and some opposition (representatives of “Lelo for Georgia”, “Girchi”, and other parties) parliamentary forces. [For a more detailed

met in Washington with US Ambassador to Georgia Robin Dunnigan, EU Ambassador Pawel Herczynski and UK and Northern Ireland Ambassador Mark Clayton, discussed the draft law and reaffirmed that the law fully complies with the fundamental principles, and repeated the proposal to organize an open discussion of the draft law so that Georgian society and friends of Georgia would have no questions left³⁵.

Late in the evening of April 15, after a heated 12-hour debate, the Georgian Parliament's legal committee approved the draft law "*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*"³⁶, which once again provoked violent actions by demonstrators who surrounded the parliament, resulting in arrests of offenders³⁷. On April 16, in parallel with the renewed protests, the Georgian Parliament began discussing the controversial draft law in its first reading, after having familiarized themselves with two alternative drafts proposed by the "People's Power" party (founded in 2021 by former Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia) and voting against discussing them³⁸. On the same day, the Council of Europe issued a statement according to which the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Theodoros Roussopoulos asked the European Commission "Democracy through Law" (Venice Commission) to expedite the preparation of an opinion on the compliance of the Georgian draft law "*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*" with the standards of the Council of Europe³⁹. However, on April 17, amid protests that have been going on for the third day⁴⁰, the Georgian Parliament voted in favor of the draft law in its first reading with

analysis of the topic, please refer to the article "Fight in the Georgian parliament – What politicians say". (in Rus.), 15.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240415/draka-v-parlamente-gruzii---chto-govoryat-politiki-287339765.html> (download date: 18.10.2024)].

³⁵ საქართველოს მთავრობა, პრემიერ-მინისტრი აშშ-ის, ევროკავშირისა და დიდი ბრიტანეთის ელჩებს კანონპროექტზე "უცხოური გავლენის გამჭვირვალობის შესახებ" ესაუბრა. 15.04.2024, https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=596&info_id=88171 (download date: 18.10.2024).

³⁶ Committee of the Georgian parliament approved the draft law "On Foreign Agents". (in Rus.), 15.04.2024, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20554027> (download date: 18.10.2024).

³⁷ Detentions at a rally against the law "On Foreign Agents" in Tbilisi - Special forces have been mobilized at the scene. (in Rus.), 15.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240415/zaderzhaniya-na-aktsii-protiv-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-v-tbilisi---na-meste-mobilizovan-spetsnaz-287347280.html> (download date: 18.10.2024).

³⁸ The Parliament of Georgia has started to consider the draft law "On Foreign Agents". (in Rus.), 16.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240416/parlament-gruzii-pristupil-k-rassmotreniyu-proekta-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-287360590.html> (download date: 18.10.2024).

³⁹ PACE President asks the Venice Commission for an opinion on the draft law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence". 16 APRIL 2024, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/-/pace-president-asks-the-venice-commission-for-an-opinion-on-the-draft-law-on-transparency-of-foreign-influence> (download date: 18.10.2024).

⁴⁰ Some participants in the protest against the law also obstructed the professional work of the Imedi TV crews and insulted them. Condemning this, pro-government MP and head of the newly created People's Power party Sozar Subar recalled the actions of the former ruling force, which led the opposition, against the same TV company: "*The nature of the "National movement" does not change, they forget nothing and learn nothing. When they were in power, they raided TV channels with batons, closed them down, took away their owners and beat up journalists. Today they are doing the same*" [See: Opinion of politicians – Attack on «Imedi» journalists at the action against the law "On Foreign Agents". (in Rus.), 17.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240417/napadenie-na-zhurnalistov-telekompanii-imeri-vo-vremya-aktsii-protesta---mnenie-politikov-287382707.html> (download date: 19.10.2024)]. The "Imedi" TV company, founded by the Jewish billionaire Badri Patarkatsishvili in 2001 and having started broadcasting since 2007, has been subjected to harassment by the Saakashvili regime. Due to the refusal to widely cover the protest demonstrations that had begun in Tbilisi, as well as B. Patarkatsishvili's sharp opposition to the Saakashvili regime, culminated in a violent incident on November 7, 2007. On that date, several hundred-armed Special Forces units invaded the territory of the TV company, ordered

83 votes and zero votes against. Only representatives of the parliamentary majority from the parties “Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia” and “People’s Power” took part in the vote. On the same day, the Prime Minister of Georgia gave a detailed press conference, thoroughly presenting the necessity to adopt the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” from the point of view of the imperative of fully ensuring the independence and sovereignty of the state, controllability of external interference, ensuring transparency and accountability in all spheres. The prime minister also described the entire mosaic of hypocritical, groundless and openly anti-state steps and actions of organizations and forces that opposed the draft law, as well as the collective West⁴¹. And the Western-led Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili said on the same day that she would use her veto power if parliament passed the law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*”, despite the fact that the veto would be overridden⁴². Reacting to the processes taking place in Georgia, RF Minister Sergei Lavrov noted in an interview with the media that “...in Georgia demonstrations portrayed President Salome Zourabichvili as a champion of free speech, even though they have the most lenient law. The United States, France, Poland, and many EU countries similar laws exist, imposing fines and criminal liability for receiving money and not disclosing it, or for using the funds for unintended purposes”⁴³.

Georgia as an “NGO state”. Characteristics of the goals of the West by the authorities

In this period of heated debate and domestic political tension, the data cited by Nikoloz Samkharadze, MP from the ruling “Georgian Dream” party, is extremely interesting, according to which there are 25,000 public organizations operating in Georgia, 90% of which are funded from foreign sources. Emphasizing the importance of ensuring transparency of external funding, the MP noted that this is one of the highest figures in the world, given the

the channel’s employees to assume a prone position, and the TV broadcast was abruptly interrupted when the announcers tried to deliver a live commentary on the attack. As a result of the armed attack, the TV company’s studio and equipment were significantly damaged. Consequently, a process was initiated to divest the TV company from the possession of its affluent proprietor (including the deprivation of airtime, the suspension of the broadcasting licenses, the seizure of property, legal proceedings, and the transfer of management rights to a third party, etc.). Following the untimely demise of B. Patarkatsishvili in London on February 13, 2008, the proprietor of 100% of the shares of the TV channel from August 27, 2009, eventually became the Georgian Media Production Group LLC, 45% of the shares of which belonged to the former Minister of Economy from the then ruling party “United National Movement” Giorgi Arveladze. Following the change in government in 2012, the TV channel was returned to the family of B. Patarkatsishvili for a symbolic price based on an agreement to renounce their shares.

⁴¹ საქართველოს მთავრობა, პრემიერ-მინისტრის პრესკონფერენცია „უცხოური გავლენის გამჭვირვალობის შესახებ“ კანონპროექტთან დაკავშირებით. 17.04.2024, https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=596&info_id=88175 (download date: 19.10.2024).

⁴² Georgian President promised to veto the law “On Foreign Agents” for EU. (in Rus.), 17.04.2024, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/17/04/2024/661fae209a79476c786b5df3> (download date: 19.10.2024). It should be added that only 76 votes are needed to overcome the veto, meanwhile the parliamentary majority has 83 seats in the parliament.

⁴³ Sergei Lavrov called the law “On Foreign agents” in Georgia the most lenient. (in Rus.), (22.04.2024), <http://ru.gruzinform.ge/news/61783/sergej-lavrov-nazval-mAgCajSim-zakon-ob-inoagentaK-v-gruzii.html> (download date: 20.10.2024).

fact that Georgia has a population of 3.7 million people. *“This means that there is almost one NGO for every 148 Georgian citizens”,* – said N. Samkharadze in the BBC interview⁴⁴. The leader of the ruling “Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia” party, Irakli Garibashvili, was even more outspoken, directly or indirectly stating that conditioning Georgia’s accession process to the EU on this draft law is a false category. *“...Today the country will not become (an EU member – ed.). We are not ready to become an EU member, especially since there are so many problems. Today the EU is not ready for expansion, and it will take time. And the next steps will depend on many factors. To put it simply: if by the time the country is ready, and we are told that tomorrow we will become an EU member, we can abolish the law, revise it and adopt a new one or change it”*⁴⁵. This statement of I. Garibashvili can be considered a successful chess move and a message that the draft law is just a pretext for the West to exert artificial pressure on Georgia, which is strengthening its sovereignty and freeing itself from Western dictates.

Confrontation between the West–the Georgian authorities throughout the discussion and adoption of the draft law

At the press conference after the EU Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Luxembourg on April 22, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell said that the ministers had discussed the situation in Georgia and had expressed concern about the law *“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”*. He recalled that the Georgian Government had committed to withdraw the draft law and not to recirculate it and stressed that this commitment had not been fulfilled⁴⁶. Contradicting Josep Borrell, Mamuka Mdinardze, Executive Secretary of the ruling “Georgian Dream” party, said: *“We ask Mr. Borrell and all other friends and partners of ours and their representatives, why is transparency distancing Georgia from Europe? When we are criticized, let someone answer the question why Georgia cannot do what France, the EU, etc. can do in a more strict form. No answer to this”*⁴⁷. Prime Minister I. Kobakhidze’s reaction was even harsher: *“Any European politician, including Josep Borrell, when he makes a statement regarding a law discussed by the [Georgian] parliament, they automatically enter into a political debate. Today, Josep Borrell is involved in political debates that should be conducted within the country”,* – he stated, adding that political parties in the parliament debate the law, not someone from outside, including even a partner and friend⁴⁸. Thus, the prime minister directly accused the

⁴⁴ MP – In Georgia 90% of NGOs receive funding from abroad. (in Rus.), 17.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240419/v-gruzii-90-iz-25-tysyachi-npo-poluchayut-finansirovanie-iz-za-rubezha---deputat--287428036.html> (download date: 20.10.2024).

⁴⁵ Leader of Georgia’s ruling party named conditions for revocation of the “On Foreign Agents”. (in Rus.), 20.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240420/lider-pravyaschey-partii-gruzii-nazval-usloviya-otzyva-zakona-ob-inoagen-takh-287449573.html> (download date: 20.10.2024).

⁴⁶ HR Borrell: “This Law is Incompatible with EU Values”. 22.04.2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/600787> (download date: 20.10.2024).

⁴⁷ Why Georgia is unable to emulate the EU can? The leader of the “Georgian Dream” harshly answered to the criticism. (in Rus.), 23.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240423/pochemu-gruzii-nelzya-to-chtomozhno-es-lider-gruzinskoy-mechty-rezko-otvetil-na-kritiku-287503704.html> (download date: 20.10.2024).

⁴⁸ Georgian PM calls Borrell’s words regarding the law “On Foreign Agents” interference in country’s affairs. (in Rus.), 22.04.2024, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20626201> (download date: 20.10.2024).

European diplomat of interfering in the internal affairs of Georgia. No less harsh was the reaction of the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Shalva Papuashvili to Josep Borrell's statement: *"I am sure that Josep Borrell has not read the draft law, absolutely sure ... This law is based on the interests of the Georgian people. It may be not in the interests of others, especially those, whose finances are coming to Georgia in a non-transparent way, and unfortunately, the EU funds in Georgia also are non-transparent"*, – Sh. Papuashvili said, adding that the law counters only those, whose finances are non-transparent⁴⁹. On April 24, the Speaker of the Parliament also touched upon the discussion of the situation in Georgia that took place the day before in the European Parliament and the draft resolution initiated by some members of this structure, which calls for the introduction of sanctions against the founder of the "Georgian Dream", Bidzina Ivanishvili, and those MPs who vote *"for"* the draft law *"On Transparency of Foreign Influence"*. In addition, statements were made demanding the release of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, as well as threats to freeze negotiations on Georgia's membership in the European Union, stop the EU financial aid, etc., if the controversial draft law is adopted⁵⁰. The Chairman of the Georgian Parliament noted that in the past there had been similar resolutions and threats that if Saakashvili would not be released, then there would be no membership status. Despite this, Saakashvili is still in prison and Georgia has been granted membership status of a member country. According to Sh. Papuashvili, the same members of the European Parliament demanded from Georgia will impose sanctions against Russia, but Georgia will not pay for the imposition of sanctions with the lives of its citizens⁵¹. *"This group of MEPs, when they tell us that the law does not comply with European values, they mean that we are not on the side of criminals, we do not attack the police, Mikheil Saakashvili is in prison as a criminal. It turns out that if we do this, then it is contrary to European values"*, – said Sh. Papuashvili, adding that this group of deputies is absolutely far away not only from European values, but also from universal human values as well⁵².

The confrontation between Georgia and the West entered a new phase when, as a result of the above-mentioned discussions and initiatives, on April 25 the European Parliament adopted a resolution, with 425 votes *"for"*, 25 *"against"* and 30 *"abstentions"* (the total number of votes was 705 MEPs), stressing that EU accession negotiations should not be opened as long as this law is part of Georgia's legal order (point 3). The resolution also calls

⁴⁹ Borrell criticizes the Georgian draft law, even hasn't read it – head of the Georgian parliament. (in Rus.), 23.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240423/borrel-kritikuet-gruzinskiy-zakonoproekt-dazhe-ne-prochitav-ego--glava-parlamenta-gruzii-287509433.html> (download date: 20.10.2024).

⁵⁰ MEP Miriam Lexmann, asking the Council of Europe to impose sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili and release Mikheil Saakashvili, stated that the proposed law will undermine the work of civil society and independent media [с.м. MEP Lexmann calls for sanctions on Ivanishvili and Saakashvili's release. 23.04.2024, <https://itv.ge/lang/en/news/mep-lexmann-calls-for-sanctions-on-ivanishvili-and-saakashvilis-release/> (download date: 21.10.2024)].

⁵¹ All the same faces – Papuashvili about the MEPs opposing the law "On Foreign Agents". (in Rus.), 24.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240424/vse-te-zhe-litsa--papuashvili-o-evrodeputatakh-vystupayuschikh-protiv-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-287531448.html> (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁵² Speaker of the Georgian parliament sharply responded to accusations by MEPs. (in Rus.), 24.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240424/spiker-parlamenta-gruzii-rezko-otvetil-na-obvineniya-evroparlamentariev-287527436.html> (download date: 21.10.2024).

on the Georgian government to refrain from introducing legislative proposals that are contrary to the principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms and, therefore, contrary to the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership (paragraph 4), calls on the European Commission to immediately assess the impact of the law on Georgia's further fulfilment of the visa liberalization criteria (point 13)⁵³, to discuss the issue of introducing personal sanctions against the "honorary chairman" of the "Georgian Dream" party Bidzina Ivanishvili for his role in the deterioration of the political processes in Georgia and work contrary to the interests of the people (point 16), to withdraw its proposed constitutional legislation curtailing LGBTIQ rights, which represent an attack not only on the LGBTIQ community, but also on freedom of speech and a free civil society (point 18), to release former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili on humanitarian grounds and allow him to receive appropriate medical care abroad (point 19), etc.⁵⁴. Chairperson of the Georgian parliament called this resolution of the European Parliament devoid of value, *"a sad story in the archives of the European Parliament". "Today we are talking about the group of MEPs who make such decisions against the Georgian people. This is not the first such declaration. It is already the fourth in a row⁵⁵. And just as the three previous declarations had no value for our country, including for the European Union, so it will be with this declaration as well"*⁵⁶. The speaker of the parliament called the authors of the resolution a team sponsoring former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. He stressed: *"Those who are Saakashvili's friends cannot be friends of the Georgian people"*. One of the leaders of the ruling "Georgian Dream" party, Mamuka Mdinardze, called the European Parliament's call to reconsider the visa-free regime for Georgia *"empty blackmail"*⁵⁷. Prime Minister I. Kobakhidze also called the resolution devoid of value and a repetition of the process that took place in 2022⁵⁸. And Georgian Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili assured that there will be no obstacles in the matter of liberalizing Georgia's visa regime, and after the adoption of the resolution, Georgian citizens will not lose the right to visit Europe without a visa⁵⁹. The resolution of the European Parliament provoked a rather sharp reaction

⁵³ As of March 28, 2017, Georgian citizens in possession of biometric passports are permitted to travel to EU countries for tourist and business purposes without a visa for a period of up to 90 days, with a maximum limit of once every six months.

⁵⁴ European Parliament, P9_TA(2024)0381, Attempts to reintroduce a foreign agent law in Georgia and its restrictions on civil society, European Parliament resolution of 25 April 2024 on attempts to reintroduce a foreign agent law in Georgia and its restrictions on civil society (2024/2703(RSP)). 25 April 2024 – Strasbourg. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0381_EN.html (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁵⁵ The first strong resolution on Georgia was adopted on June 9, 2022, the second one – on December 14, 2022, the third one – on February 16, 2023.

⁵⁶ Head of the Georgian government: the resolution of the EU parliament has no value. (in Rus.), 25.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240425/pechalnaya-istoriya-v-arkhive--spiker-parlamenta-gruzii-orezolyutsii-evroparlamenta-287548598.html> (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁵⁷ Leader of the "Georgian Dream": the resolution of the Europarlament has nothing in common with Europe. (in Rus.), 25.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240425/rezolyutsiya-evroparlamenta-ne-imeet-nichego-obschego-s-evropoy--lider-gruzinskoy-mechty-287551777.html> (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁵⁸ Prime Minister of Georgia: the resolution of the Europarlament is not worth a dime. (26.04.2024) (in Rus.), <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240426/premer-ministr-gruzii-rezolyutsii-evroparlamenta--grosh-tsena-287566598.html> (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁵⁹ Head of MFA: citizens of Georgia will continue travelling to Europe without visa. (25.04.2024) (in Rus.), <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240425/grazhdane-gruzii-prodolzhat-ezdit-bez-viz-v-evropu--glava-mid->

from one of the most influential structures in Georgia – the Georgian Orthodox Church. The message distributed by the public relations service of the Patriarchy of Georgia, says: *“The resolution of the European Parliament, which states that the adoption of the Georgian government’s law on banning LGBT propaganda among adolescents is unacceptable, represents pressure on the values recognized by majority of the population. ...The fact is that the campaign to discredit the church has been carried out by externally funded NGOs and TV channels for many years, which takes place in parallel to the growing popularity of the LGBT lifestyle and the promotion of sin. Adoption of alien, unfamiliar, and dangerous ideologies for the population of Georgia strengthens the process of polarization of society. We do not expect help from anyone in ideological matters, and we do not even need it. We note that the government has clearly embarked on the path of protecting traditional values”*⁶⁰.

Parallel rallies of April 29. Speech by B. Ivanishvili at the rally of the ruling party

On April 29, 2024, developments in Georgia gained a new momentum. After almost 10 hours of discussion, the Legal Committee of the Parliament adopted the draft law *“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”* in the second reading. Naturally, the committee meeting, which was broadcast live, took place in an extremely tense atmosphere⁶¹. On the same day, two rallies were held simultaneously: the ruling “Georgian Dream” invited tens of thousands of people to Rustaveli Avenue for defense of the draft law, while in another place, almost 4 km away, a rally of people opposing the draft law was held⁶². Let us add that the opposition rallies of the representatives of NGOs and the pro-Western part of the population against the draft law, which began on April 15, have continued, sometimes getting stronger, sometimes weaker in terms of the number of participants. Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder and honorary Chairman of the “Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia” party, promised at a rally attended by several thousand people to punish the former ruling “United National Movement” and to make the country an EU member. *“I promise that we shall overcome all obstacles, strengthen the sovereignty, preserve peace, increase the Georgian economy and become an EU member state in 2030”*, – said B. Ivanishvili, adding that that have accumulated enough resource to start a full strengthening of sovereignty, and the law *“On Transparency of Foreign Influence”* serves just for that purpose. The founder of the

[287552037.html](https://www.287552037.html) (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁶⁰ საპატრიარქო: ევროპარლამენტის რეზოლუციაში ჩანაწერი, რომ დაუშვებელია მოზარდებში ლგბტ პროპაგანდის აკრძალვის კანონის მიღება, წარმოადგენს ქვეყნის უმეტესი მოსახლეობისათვის აღიარებული ფასეულობების წინააღმდეგ ზეწოლას. 27.04.2024, <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/335224/sapatriarqo-evroparlamentis-rezolutsiashi-CHANATSERI-ROM-DAUSHVEBELIA-MOZARDEBISHI-LGBT-PROPAGANDIS-AKRZDALVIS-KANONIS-MIGEBATSA-RMOADGENS-QVEKNIS-UMETESI-MOSAKHLEOBISATVIS-AGIAREBULI-PASEULOBEBS-TSINAAGMDEG-ZETSOLAS> (download date: 21.10.2024).

⁶¹ Georgia’s Parliament approved the law on foreign agents in second reading. (in Rus.), 29.04.2024, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6679223> (download date: 22.10.2024).

⁶² Two actions in Tbilisi: “Georgian dream” at the parliament, and opposition - in Mziuri park. (in Rus.), 29.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240429/dve-aktsii-v-tbilisi-gruzinskaya-mechta-u-parlamenta-a-oppozitsiya---v-parke-mziuri-287632943.html> (download date: 22.10.2024).

“Georgian Dream” bitterly criticized the former power, the “United National Movement” party, which he named a “collective *national movement*”. *“After the elections we will have the opportunity to pass a strict political and legal verdict to the “Collective National Movement”. ...Many perpetrators of the regime’s criminal instructions have already been sentenced. Now the main criminal of the regime, Mikheil Saakashvili, is serving his sentence. Although, unfortunately, the “National Movement” has not been condemned as a united criminal and treachery group”, – Ivanishvili said, adding that it deserved this for the “9-year long bloody government” and for 12 years of sabotage acts during the opposition*⁶³.

Second reading of the draft law under increasing pressure from the West and resistance of the Georgian authorities

Under the conditions of continuing opposition rallies, periodic clashes between the Special Forces and demonstrators⁶⁴, the Georgian Parliament, at its session on April 30, in accordance with its regulations, began discussing the draft law article-by-article in the 2nd reading⁶⁵. On the same day, an informal meeting of the EU General Affairs Council was held in Brussels, attended by the foreign ministers and ministers for European affairs of the EU member states and candidate countries, including Georgian Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili. After the meeting with the latter, the European Commissioner for Values and Transparency Vera Jourova touched upon the draft law under discussion, noting that the main message of her directives is to find out who is making the law and at whose expense. The European official also tried to justify herself, explaining why similar legislation is in force in Europe: *“The difference between European and Georgian legislation is that we do not consider such entities to be non-governmental organizations. We are talking about organizations operating on the common European market, and we want to know about contracts concluded with governments of third countries, and not just about the amounts*

⁶³ Ivanishvili promised to punish the “National Movement”, strengthen the economy and make Georgia a member of the EU. (in Rus.), 29.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240429/ivanishvili-poobeschal-nakazat-natsdvizhenie-ukrepit-ekonomiku-i-sdelat-gruziyu-chlenom-es-287633198.html> (download date: 22.10.2024).

⁶⁴ As a result of clashes between special forces and demonstrators that took place from the evening of April 3 to May 1, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 6 representatives of the Georgian law enforcement system were injured, and 63 individuals were detained. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Alexander Darakhvelidze stated that violence is constantly used not only by demonstrators, but also by opposition leaders. According to him, the footage clearly shows how the leader of the former ruling and currently the largest opposition party, the “United National Movement”, Georgian MP Levan Khabeishvili, breaks through the police cordon, obstructs them and is injured while resisting [See: Leader of “National Movement” was injured in resistance to the police – MIA of Georgia. (in Rus.), 30.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240501/lider-natsdvizheniya-poluchil-povrezhdeniya-soprotivlyayas-politsii--mvd-gruzii---287675396.html> (download date: 25.10.2024)]. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, naturally, ignoring the actual reports from the Interior Ministry about the atrocities of demonstrators and regular attacks on the police, unilaterally condemned the violence against demonstrators and called on the Georgian authorities to ensure the right of demonstrators to peaceful assembly. [Borrell strongly condemns violence against protesters in Georgia, 01.05.2024, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/borrell-strongly-condemns-violence-against-protesters-in-georgia/> (download date: 25.10.2024)].

⁶⁵ No rush! – Consideration of the law “On Foreign Agents” in Georgia may last several days. (in Rus.), 30.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240430/ne-speshim---rassmotrenie-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-v-gruzii-mozhet-prodlitsya-neskolko-dney-287646582.html> (download date: 24.10.2024).

that came from outside. The is the difference”, – answered the European official and stated that instead the European Commission insisted that Georgia has a strong judicial and procurator system to enable struggling against organized crime and corruption. The European Commissioner did not forget to discuss with the Georgian foreign minister the issues related to the situation of the LGBTIQ community, and the issues related to the planned amendment to the Constitution, stating that Georgia should pay more attention to the protection of minorities such as LGBTIQ and not open the door to discrimination and harsh rhetoric⁶⁶.

On May 1, the Georgian parliament continued its second reading of the draft article-by-article and adopted it late in the evening with 83 votes “for” and 23 votes “against”⁶⁷. Prime Minister I. Kobakhidze stated in the briefing that the draft law was adopted in order to “*calm the country*” in the long term. According to the prime minister, polarization and radicalism are the main tools for achieving the interests of certain forces, and the lack of transparency of NGOs plays an important role in this regard⁶⁸. On the same day, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze met in Tbilisi with the European Commission’s Director General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations Gert-Jan Koopman. Although the official statement says that the issues related to Georgia-EU cooperation, the importance of opening accession negotiations and Georgia’s progress in implementing the 9 steps prescribed by the European Commission, as well as the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” were discussed⁶⁹, nevertheless it is quite clear that the main issue on the agenda was precisely the last one.

As expected, the adoption of the draft law in the 2nd reading was harshly criticized by the West: a statement was released by the Head of the Press Service of the US state department, Matthew Miller. According to him, “*the US condemns the Kremlin-inspired “foreign*

⁶⁶ Georgian MFA needs to review EU directive on ‘foreign affairs’ – European Commissioner. (in Rus.), 30.04.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240430/ne-speshim---rassmotrenie-zakona-ob-inoagentakh-v-gruzii-mozhet-prodlitsya-neskolko-dney-287646582.html> (download date: 24.10.2024).

⁶⁷ Adoption of the draft law in the 2nd reading in parliament was again accompanied by protests [See: Georgian parliament supported the draft law “On Foreign Agents” in the second reading. (in Rus.), 01.05.2024, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20691995> (download date: 25.10.2024)]. Speaking to demonstrators outside parliament, Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili announced that the fight is no longer against the draft law, but for the sake of victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections, for the repeal of all those laws that remove Georgia from the European path. [See: Georgian President addressed youth as riots at the parliament continue. (in Rus.), 01.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240501/prezident-gruzii-obratilas-k-molodezhi---besporyadki-u-parlamenta-ne-prekraschayutsya-287698433.html> (download date: 25.10.2024)]. As a result of the attack on the Georgian parliament palace by protesters on May 1, the building and infrastructure of the legislative body were damaged. The parliament reported that the events scheduled for May 2 (presidium and plenary sessions) will be relocated to other locations due to ongoing cleaning and restoration efforts within the parliament building. [საქართველოს პარლამენტი - აქციის მონაწილეების მიერ პარლამენტის სასახლეზე თავდასხმის შედეგად ინფრასტრუქტურა დაზიანდა, რის გამოც დღეს ბიუროს და პლენარული სხდომები არ გაიმართება [ფოტო/ვიდეო]. 02.05.2024, <https://itv.ge/news/parlamentshi-dghes-biuros-da-plenaruli-skhdomebi-ar-gaimarteba/> (download date: 25.10.2024)].

⁶⁸ Prime Minister: NGO transparency will bring peace and economic stability to Georgia. (in Rus.), 01.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240501/premer-prozrachnost-npo-prineset-gruzii-mir-i-ekonomicheskuyu-stabilnost--premer-287693151.html> (download date: 25.10.2024).

⁶⁹ საქართველოს მთავრობა, ირაკლი კობახიძე ხერტ იან კოოპმანს შეხვდა. (in Rus.), 01.05.2024, https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=596&info_id=88361 (download date: 25.10.2024).

influence” legislation, ...which along with the “Georgian Dream’s” anti-Western rhetoric puts Georgia on a precarious trajectory. ...Comments mischaracterizing foreign assistance in Georgia – which we have provided for 32 years to strengthen Georgia’s economy, democracy, and ability to deter Russian aggression – fundamentally undermine the strong relationship we have developed with the government and people of Georgia”⁷⁰. Deputy of newly established “People’s Power” party Guram Macharashvili considered Matthew Miller’s statements inappropriate. “The statement of any of our foreign partners is as inappropriate as yesterday’s statement by Giorgi Vashadze (leader of the opposition party “Strategy Agmashenebeli”), who said in front of TV cameras that a peaceful protest was underway, while behind him the gates of the parliament were seen burning. ...They apparently failed to study our psychology. We thank everyone for their help, but if they ask us for slavery, we will not be able to agree to it. If they want to help in order to buy stones, Molotov cocktails, to set fire and sabotage at the doors of the parliament, then let them take back such help”, – stated the MP⁷¹. Reacting to the adoption of the draft law in the second reading, the US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan and the Director General of the Enlargement directorate of the European Commission Gert-Jan Koopman said that the adoption of the draft law would be a serious obstacle to Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration. In response, Irakli Kadagishvili Chairman of the Georgian Parliamentary Committee on Procedural Affairs and Rules, said: “It is very bad to speak with a country in preliminary ultimatums. When you do not want to listen to an explanation of the essence of the sovereign steps taken by the country and directly say that this is a Russian (law - ed.), let’s say it this way, it is insulting”. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk also called on the Georgian authorities to withdraw the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence” and to start a dialogue with civil society and the media⁷².

During the discussion of the draft law on May 3, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, in a conversation with the US State Department’s Political Advisor Derek Sholly, expressed his disappointment over two attempts to stage a revolution in Georgia with the support of the former US Ambassador to Georgia in 2020–2023, as well as public organizations funded from abroad. The head of the Georgian government stressed that if these revolutions succeeded, then now the second front of military actions against Russia would have opened in the country⁷³. Assessing the unrest that occurred during the discussion of the draft law in the second reading on April 30 and May 1, during which protesters threw stones, bottles and smoke bombs at the police and parliament building, set fires, and the police used tear gas, pepper packets and

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, Georgia’s Western Trajectory at Risk. 01.05.2024, <https://www.state.gov/georgias-western-trajectory-at-risk/> (download date: 25.10.2024).

⁷¹ Stop lying! Tbilisi responds sharply to US State Department statement. (in Rus.), 02.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240502/prekratite-lgat-v-tbilisi-rezko-otvetili-na-zayavlenie-gosdepa-ssa-287711091.html> (download date: 25.10.2024).

⁷² UN High Commissioner believes that the draft law on foreign agents in Georgia should be withdrawn. (in Rus.), 02.05.2024, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20701293> (download date: 25.10.2024).

⁷³ დერეკ შოლესთან გამოცხატე იმედგაცრუება 2020-2023 წლების ორი რევოლუციური მცდელობის გამო, რომელიც აშშ-ის ყოფილი ელჩის მხარდაჭერით და გარედან დაფინანსებული „ენჯელების“ მეშვეობით განხორციელდა - პრემიერი. 03.05.2024, <https://ajaratv.ge/article/132215> (download date: 25.10.2024).

water cannons, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Sh. Papuashvili, regretted that not a single foreign embassy or international donor organization condemned the violent actions.

“Moreover, many of them called the violent attacks “peaceful”. The sad experience has taught us that ignoring violence encourages more violence in the future”, – Papuashvili wrote in the social network, adding that “opposition parties and a number of public organizations are behind the illegal activities of demonstrators at youth meetings against the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence”⁷⁴.

The draft law is at the center of the RF–West confrontation and mutual accusations

The domestic Georgian passions around one of the most discussed legislative initiatives in the history of post-Soviet Georgia, which raged before the draft law in the 3rd reading (continuing demonstrations and protests, which the Speaker of the Parliament S. Papuashvili compared with Kiev’s “Maidan”, seeing parallels between the actions)⁷⁵, and the “eruption” of various external impulses did not subside. On May 6, Russian Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin noted in connection with the draft law: *“We see what is happening in Georgia, they are trying to protect themselves, but “the virus has already been launched” ...All this is financed by those states that do not want Georgia to be sovereign and independent”⁷⁶.* On the same day, in a briefing, US State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller responded to questions regarding the Georgian law *“On Transparency of Foreign influence”*, saying that they intend to continue to insist on their own, and they believe that the law under discussion will put Georgia on an uncertain trajectory, jeopardize its Euro-Atlantic path and undermine relations between the US and Georgia. The spokesperson also commented on why it is normal for the US to have a foreign agent’s law (the US “Foreign Agent Registration Act” (FARA)) and not for Georgia and Russia to have such a law. According to Miller, the difference lies in the nature of these laws⁷⁷. Reacting to the words of M. Miller, MP from the ruling “Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia” party R. Ionatamishvili stated that if the American people deserve transparency, the Georgian society deserves as well. As the MP noted, mother of the convicted former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili - Guly Alasania, Founder of opposition TV channel “Formula”, wanted by Georgian authorities

⁷⁴ სამწუხაროდ, არცერთმა უცხოურმა საელჩომ და დონორმა ორგანიზაციამ არ დაგმო ძალადობის შემთხვევები - პაპუაშვილი. 03.05.2024, <https://bm.ge/news/samtsukharod-artsertma-utskhourma-saelchom-da-donorma-organizatsiam-ar-dagmo-dzaladobis-shemtkhvebi-papuashvili> (download date: 25.10.2024).

⁷⁵ “There is a striking similarity between Maidan and wedding, with the same photos, absolutely the same rituals and visual production. The couple, the man playing the piano, and the various visual effects employed to artfully present these violent actions, which are actually being carried out, are particularly striking”, – Sh. Papuashvili said [See: Head of the parliament compared protests in Tbilisi with “Maidan”. (in Rus.), 08.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240508/mezhdu-aktsiyami-protesta-v-tbilisi-i-maydanom-legko-provesti-paralleli---papuashvili-287802652.html> (download date: 29.10.2024)].

⁷⁶ Georgia wants to protect itself with the law “On Foreign Agents” – State Duma speaker. (in Rus.), 06.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240506/gruziya-zakonom-ob-inoagentakh-khochet-sebya-zaschitit-spiker-gosdumy-287774383.html> (download date: 28.10.2024).

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, Department Press Briefing – May 6, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/briefings/departement-press-briefing-may-6-2024/> (download date: 28.10.2024).

former Defense Minister of Georgia David Kezerashvili (the TV company was founded in 2019 by Minister of Defense in 2006–2008 D. Kezerashvili – **V.S.**), as well as public organizations of parties “Droa” and “Grichi–More Freedom” do not represent the Government of Georgia⁷⁸.

Final stage of the discussion of the draft law. Adoption of the draft law – the cause of a new aggravation of the situation

On the morning of May 13, 2024, the Legal Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Georgia considered in an extremely tense situation (against the background of protests that started at night in the areas adjacent to the parliament, chants by NGO activists, clashes taking place between demonstrators and the police, a strike by some students, as well as the absence of opposition MPs from the session) and passed the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” in the 3rd reading⁷⁹.

On the same day, Spokesperson of EU Foreign Relations Peter Stano in Brussels said that the EU had called on the Georgian authorities to ensure the right of Georgians to protest. The official added that the EU and member states were “*closely*” monitoring the situation. Replying to the question about possible sanctions against Georgia, he said that the EU “*is not there yet*” and that this should be a joint decision by EU member states⁸⁰. The next day, 14 May, the plenary session of the parliament took place again in an extremely tense atmosphere, which was even interrupted by a fight between the deputies of the ruling power and the opposition. However, the parliament adopted the draft law “*On Transparency of Foreign Influence*” in the 3rd reading by 84 votes “*for*” and 30 votes “*against*”. President Salome Zurbishvili announced that she will veto the draft law, and Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze noted that if specific comments are submitted, they are ready for discussion within the framework of the veto⁸¹.

We would like to add that after the adoption of the law in the 3rd reading, the situation around the parliament building became extremely tense. Some protesters, having damaged

⁷⁸ Georgian society deserves transparency – MP responds to US State Department statement. (in Rus.), 07.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240507/gruzinskoe-obschestvo-zasluzhivaet-prozrachnosti--deputat-otvetil-na-zayavlenie-gosdipa-ssha-287783943.html> (download date: 29.10.2024).

⁷⁹ The Committee for legal issues of the Georgian parliament adopted the draft law “On Foreign Agents” in the 3rd reading. (in Rus.), 13.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240513/yurkomitet-parlamenta-gruzii-v-tretem-chtenii-prinyal-zakonoproekt-ob-inoagentakh-287882466.html> (download date: 05.11.2024).

⁸⁰ European Commission’s foreign affairs spokesperson said that Georgia is, after all, a candidate country and called on the authorities to return to the European path [See: EU condemns ‘intimidation, threats and physical assaults’ against protesters in Georgia. 07.05.2024, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/eu-condemns-intimidation-threats-and-physical-assaults-against-protesters-in-georgia/> (download date: 05.11.2024).

⁸¹ პარლამენტმა „უცხოური გავლენის გამჭვირვალობის“ კანონპროექტი მესამე მოსმენით მიიღო. 14.05.2024, <https://itv.ge/news/parlamentma-uckhouri-gavlenis-gamchvirvalobis-kanonproeqti-mesame-mosmenit-miigho/> (download date: 06.11.2024). According to the law, evasion from registration as “*organization, pursuing the interest of a foreign state*” or the failure to submit the declaration shall be subject to a fine GEL 25,000. The law provides for the following categories of fines: if the organization evades to fill in the forms of the declaration in the course of 10 working days since entrance to the website of the Ministry of Justice: GEL 10,000; if the defects in the prescribed period will not be eliminated, the fine will be GEL 10,000; committing an offense under the law after one month shall entail a fine in the amount of GEL 20,000.

the barriers, tried to reach the doors of the parliament, and the rest tried to climb up them. The police dispersed the demonstrators, arrested a number of offenders, and at 17:00 on the same day, the red security level was activated in the Georgian Parliament⁸². It should be noted that this legislative initiative of the Georgian authorities so worried the West that on the same day, May 14, the sanctions coordinator, US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia James O'Brien called a press conference and stated what restrictions may be imposed on the Georgian side. *"There will be financial restrictions, travel bans on those people and their families who are responsible for these actions"*, – said James O'Brien, adding that if the law does not meet EU standards and norms and if the strong rhetoric against the US and other partners continues, the US-Georgian relations will be at risk⁸³. On the same day, Prime Minister I. Kobakhidze replied to the "unwanted guest" by stating that the issue of possible sanctions against Georgia by the United States had not been discussed during his meeting with James O'Brien. The day before, the media reported that a US official was going to Georgia with a package of sanctions against the founder and honorary Chairman of the ruling "Georgian Dream" party Bidzina Ivanishvili. O'Brien also expressed a desire to meet with B. Ivanishvili, but the latter refused, explaining that sanctions against him had already been *de facto* imposed⁸⁴.

(To be continued)

⁸² Georgia's parliament has introduced a red security level. (in Rus.), 14.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240514/v-parlamente-gruzii-vveli-krasnyy-uroven-bezopasnosti-287908819.html> (download date: 06.11.2024).

⁸³ O'Brien named the conditions for the imposition of sanctions by the US against Georgia. (in Rus.), 14.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240514/obraven-nazval-usloviya-vvedeniya-sanktsiy-ssha-protiv-gruzii-287914552.html> (download date: 06.11.2024).

⁸⁴ Sanctions not discussed at meeting with US Secretary of State - Georgian Prime Minister. (in Rus.), 14.05.2024, <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/20240514/sanktsii-na-vstreche-s-gossekreterem-ssha-ne-obsuzhdalis-premer-gruzii-287915025.html> (download date: 06.11.2024).