



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 18, 2023

After Slamming Georgia’s “Foreign Agents” Law, EU Prepares One of Its Own

SINGAPORE — After opposing the Georgia government’s “Foreign Agents” law that would have required NGOs receiving more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign sources to register as “agents of foreign influence,” the European Union (EU) appears to be preparing its own version of the law.

While the EU delegation to Georgia lauded the “announcement by [Georgia’s] ruling party to withdraw draft legislation on ‘foreign influence’” in a Twitter post, the EU’s move toward preparing its own law has stoked fears among NGOs and consultancies alike. Under the proposed EU law, entities would soon have to declare foreign revenues under binding regulations.



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NGOs began to suspect that Brussels might be drafting a law similar to the United States’ [Foreign Agents Registration Act](#) after they received a survey sent out on behalf of European Commission (EC) Vice President for Justice Věra Jourová and obtained by *Politico*. The survey asked these NGOs whether they obtained any funding from outside the EU. Although the document thus far appears only to have an informative purpose, many are anxious about its future ramifications.

The question about the funding “took a lot of people back [sic],” Nick Aiossa, a senior representative of [Transparency International](#) and one of those involved in the oral questionnaire, admitted. “The guiding questions suggested they were evaluating whether Transparency International was a threat to democracy.”

The measure, if enforced, will be part of the commission’s “[Defense of Democracy Package](#),” declared by EC President Ursula von der Leyen last year to regulate the transparency of political advertising by monitoring the funding of European political parties and foundations. That being said, though, von der Leyen’s remarks about the commission’s ability to tackle undesirable electoral results amid the (then impending) victory in Italy of a coalition including Giorgia Meloni’s *Fratelli d’Italia* raise the question as to whether the EC’s “defense of democracy” will be entirely non-ideological.

After all, mainstream leftist media outlets typically link foreign intervention in elections to Russia, claiming a link — frequently without adequate evidence — between politicians on what they term “the Right” and the Kremlin, notwithstanding obvious conflicts between the two, such as the case of Meloni herself backing Ukraine.

Hence, the EC’s new legislative package could be used in such a way as to eschew what the EU deems “undesirable” democratic outcomes on the pretext that these results are due to dubious foreign interference.



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At first, the legislative package was welcomed by left-leaning civil society organizations as a vital step to curtail what they saw as “right-wing” authoritarianism financed from abroad. A joint [letter](#), signed by various European NGOs (including Transparency International), was sent to the commission lauding the reform recently, saying that it is “crucial in the context of escalating geopolitical turmoil, authoritarian tendencies, and recent attacks on the foundations of democracy.”

However, there now appears to be a volte-face in the situation. Based on sources close to *Politico*, these leftist NGOs now feel uneasy declaring their own funding to the EU, “worried that they are effectively putting themselves on a future list by answering a survey.”

The timing of the survey asking about foreign funding also sparked speculation, since it was circulated in Brussels just days after the commission formally slammed a similar law recently adopted by Georgia — though hastily withdrawn following protests — that would have categorized all media and NGOs with over 20 percent foreign funding as “agents of foreign influence.”

So far Jurova has not commented on the survey or addressed the fears of the NGOs involved. The EU reform package is poised to be finalized and unveiled by May 2023.

Following riots and mass demonstrations from enraged pro-EU demonstrators in Georgia, the government quickly declared its withdrawal of its proposed “foreign agents law,” amid a fierce struggle for the nation’s future at the crossroads of Europe and Russia.

The ruling Georgian Dream party elaborated on its decision on March 9, illustrating the “divisions in society” that resulted from the law. Analysts from the globalist European Council of Foreign Relations claim that, while nominally pro-EU, Georgia is adopting a pro-Russia direction.

Georgian government officials said that the proposals were key to rooting out “foreign influence” and “spies” from Georgia’s political scene, and that Georgians have the right to know who bankrolls nongovernmental organizations working in the country.

However, pro-EU critics of the law contend that it reeks of Soviet-era clampdowns, in which dissidents were suppressed for being “[enemies of the people](#).”

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, [who supported the pro-EU protests](#), stated openly that the law “did not come out of nowhere, but was dictated by Moscow.” When EU high representative Josep Borrell said that the bill was “incompatible with EU values and standards,” fears spread that the government was trying to undermine Georgia’s attempt to join the union.

Ensuing images showed thousands turning the streets black and riot police sheltering under barrages of fireworks. At one point, rioters even faced water cannons in an effort to storm the parliament.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, one protester said, “I will go [to] the rally tonight again, we cannot stop now.... This is our big chance to end all ties with Russia. We want to be with the EU.”

Anti-Russian and pro-EU feeling appears to be strong in Georgia, which was once part of the Soviet Union. [According to polls](#), over 80 percent of Georgians support joining Europe. While the country is officially applying for EU membership, some worry that the ruling party wants to sabotage it.

In a policy paper, the European Council on Foreign Relations said that in recent years the government “has made a series of moves that seem designed to distance the country from the West and shift it gradually into Russia’s sphere of influence.”

The ruling Georgian Dream party enjoys close relations with the Kremlin. Its founder, Bidzina



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Ivanishvili, is Georgia's richest man, having built his fortune in Russia during the privatizations of the 1990s. The Kremlin said it had nothing to do with events in Georgia but was worried about the unrest.

Moreover, Tbilisi has not imposed sanctions on Moscow over the conflict in Ukraine, despite large-scale demonstrations in the country urging a tougher stance against Russia.

The ruling party decried the "radical opposition" and a "machine of lies that presented the bill in a negative light," using the "false label of a 'Russian law'" to portray the bill as a move that could threaten Georgia's hopes of EU membership. It added that it would introduce a public consultation period to "better explain to the public what the bill was for and why it is important."



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