



Whose democracy?
Consequences of the EU-Georgia row

Péter Pál Kránitz



Written by Péter Pál Kránitz, Senior Research Fellow, HIIA
December 5, 2024

Whose democracy? Consequences of the EU-Georgia row

The European Parliament's five-party resolution, which challenges the legitimacy of the 26 October elections in Georgia and the new government, calls for early elections under international supervision and imposes new sanctions on the South Caucasus country, is a serious interference in Georgia's internal politics. The dramatic erosion of EU's relations with Georgia, a reliable partner, could have unforeseen consequences in a geostrategically crucial region. It is the responsibility of the new European Commission to bring relations back to the previously established, mutually beneficial partnership.

A particularly serious and hostile step, largely unknown among allies in international relations, was taken by the European Parliament (EP) when it issued a [resolution](#) rejecting the results of the October parliamentary elections in Georgia, delegitimising the re-elected government of the Georgian Dream Party, which has ruled the country for twelve years, and calling for early elections under international supervision. This is particularly difficult to understand in the light of the preliminary [assessment](#) of the election observation mission to Georgia by the EP, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which described the election as well organised and orderly, underlining its democratic legal frameworks, stressing that parties were free to campaign and voters had a wide choice thanks to the eighteen candidate lists. The resolution was signed by representatives of five European party families, the European People's Party, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the European Conservatives and Reformists, Renew Europe and the Greens/European Free Alliance. One of the Hungarian governing party's MEPs opposed the proposal in the debate of the draft resolution.

The European Union is making a mistake when it deliberately dismantles its partnership with Georgia, which will result in the South Caucasian state's deepening cooperation with other partners such as Türkiye, China or members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Georgia has been a reliable partner of the EU for many years and is at the forefront of European integration, in economic, legal and democratic terms. According to Transparency International's [assessment](#), Georgia is a regional leader in the fight against corruption, while the Georgian state budget has

been the most [transparent](#) globally for years. The EU-Georgia Association Council has [welcomed](#) the progress made by the Georgian Dream governments in the field of human rights, freedom of expression and gender equality. The government under the Georgian Dream has even replaced the super-presidential system of extraordinary presidential supremacy with parliamentary democracy and introduced a system of proportional representation of national lists, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

The European Union risks a great deal by exacerbating its relationship with Georgia. The double standards that the EU applies to candidate countries are also destroying the remaining trust of Georgian society in the European community, especially when they see that opposition parties, television channels critical of the government, churches, and books are being banned, and elections being postponed indefinitely in other candidate countries without consequence. The EU-Georgia row could have even more serious consequences in the geopolitical arena. If Georgia's integration with the EU goes off the rails, the Georgian foreign policy and foreign economic strategy, which is based on Western cooperation, could be modified and Georgia could move closer to the cooperation schemes along the geographic space of the ancient Silk Road, to deepened partnership with the CIS and Turkic states, to the ever fuller integration of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and to further normalisation of economic ties with Russia. The lack of European FDI and the slow development of EU-Georgian trade indicators deprive the Georgian-EU partnership of the mutual economic basis of the community of interests, which will be filled by other world economic actors.

Responding to the European Parliament's decision, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobahidze [said](#) that as long as the EU uses the accession process for political blackmail, his government will not put the opening of accession negotiations on the agenda and will not accept financial support from the EU. He added, however, that his government would not budge from its earlier goal of EU membership by 2030 and would be ready to sign the Association Agreement the very next day if the EU stopped pressuring Georgia on its internal affairs. His statements were, however, [twisted](#) by the mainstream Western media and [presented](#) as if the Georgian government had frozen the EU accession process. However, it should be remembered that the accession process was frozen by the German government before negotiations could even begin.

The ensuing street violence in Georgia, the refusal to recognise the election results and the legitimacy of the government by the Georgian opposition parties and the head of state could create

an extremely risky internal political situation. If the Georgian government destabilises, the risk of military provocation from breakaway territories that violate Georgia's territorial integrity and the risk of escalation of the Russian-Georgian conflict is multiplied.

It is the responsibility of the new European Commission to stop exerting political pressure that violates Georgia's sovereignty and to return to the bilateral cooperation that worked well in the past. If Georgia's long-term integration into the European Union runs blind, Europe may be forced to abandon its geopolitical ambitions in the South Caucasus and risk its hard-won economic position in a region that is crucial for European energy security.