

Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen Urges Georgia to Protect Democracy and Civil Society During Visit

By Liza Mchedlidze

Elina Valtonen, Finland's Foreign Minister and current Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), visited Georgia on October 14–15 as part of her tour of the South Caucasus. Her visit included meetings with Georgian officials, civil society representatives, and a trip to the occupation line near Tskhinvali.

Valtonen met with Georgian Dream Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili on October 14. According to a post on X, Valtonen said they discussed "the unresolved conflict, the need for Russia to fulfil its obligations under the 2008 six-point agreement, and the OSCE's role." She added that she also raised concerns about Georgia's domestic political climate, writing that "safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms is key to resilience and sovereignty."

The Finnish minister expressed alarm over what she described as growing repression. "Despite repeated calls from international bodies, including the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, repression against civil society actors, peaceful protesters, and independent journalists continues," Valtonen said. "Silencing these voices undermines not only democratic values, but also the resilience of society in the face of growing security challenges."

She urged the Georgian government to "find a way out of the crisis and restore trust in democratic institutions," emphasizing that the OSCE "stands ready to help."

While Valtonen openly voiced her concerns, the Georgian Foreign Ministry omitted any mention of her remarks on democracy or human rights in its official statements. The Ministry and pro-government media instead highlighted Foreign Minister Botchorishvili's comments, which focused on the OSCE's support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"The traditional visit of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office to Georgia is a clear demonstration of the Organization's unwavering support for our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Botchorishvili said at a joint press conference. She added that the two sides discussed the situation in the South Caucasus, Georgia's security and humanitarian priorities, and relations with the European Union.

At the same press conference, Valtonen said she conveyed "serious concerns" about Georgia's restrictive legislation and the government's actions targeting civil society, journalists, and opposition figures. She welcomed Georgia's continued engagement in the Geneva International Discussions and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), calling such participation "vital for progress."

Valtonen emphasized that reconciliation and accountability were essential for peacebuilding. "The OSCE stands ready to offer expertise in cooperation with the EU Monitoring Mission. Reconciliation and dealing with the past represent crucial elements in building peace for the future," she said.

She also voiced concern about the freezing of civil society organizations' bank accounts and restrictive amendments to the Law on Grants that require govern-



ment approval for foreign funding. "These actions are of grave concern," she said. "We also strongly condemn the arrests of almost all opposition leaders and call for free, fair, and proportionate legal proceedings for all those arrested for exercising their freedom of expression and assembly."

Valtonen underlined the importance of independent voices. "NGOs, human rights defenders, and journalists are the lifeblood of democratic resilience," she said. "Their voices must not only be heard, they must be protected."

Reflecting on Georgia's democratic trajectory, Valtonen said, "It will be up to the Georgian people to decide what kind of government, what kind of future they want for themselves." She noted that while the EU would welcome Georgia's membership, "in recent months we have

observed that the Georgian government has not been willing to take many of those steps, or some of the steps it has taken have been in the opposite direction."

Valtonen met with representatives of Georgian civil society organizations on October 14, later writing on X that "the space for civil society and free media in Georgia is shrinking at a worrying pace." She reaffirmed Finland's "full support for Georgian civil society in their aspirations for a democratic and European future."

On October 15, Valtonen traveled to the occupation line near Tskhinvali, accompanied by the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). "Today I witnessed the excellent work of EUMM Georgia in maintaining stability on the ground for the benefit of local communities," she wrote afterward. "As Chair of the OSCE, Finland stands firmly by the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders, as enshrined in the Helsinki Principles. We call on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the 2008 agreement and withdraw to pre-conflict positions."

At a press conference a day earlier, Foreign Minister Botchorishvili said Valtonen's visit to the occupation line was "very important" and would allow her to "personally observe the situation on the ground." She said the EUMM "has the ability to accompany the visit and provide relevant information as an observer organization about what is happening along Georgia's occupation line."

Valtonen concluded her visit by reaffirming the OSCE's readiness to support Georgia in strengthening democratic institutions, protecting fundamental freedoms, and addressing the consequences of conflict.

Venice Commission Urges Georgia to Repeal or Revise Laws on Foreign Funding and Media

Strasbourg, 15 October 2025
CDL-AD(2025)034
Or. Engl.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
(VENICE COMMISSION)

GEORGIA

OPINION

ON THE LAW ON THE REGISTRATION OF FOREIGN AGENTS,
THE AMENDMENTS TO THE LAW ON GRANTS AND OTHER LAWS
RELATING TO "FOREIGN INFLUENCE"

Adopted by the Venice Commission
at its 144th Plenary Session
(Venice, 9-10 October 2025)

By Liza Mchedlidze

The Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional law, has sharply criticized Georgia's recently adopted laws on foreign funding for media and civil society groups, urging the government to repeal or significantly revise the controversial measures.

In a 24-page opinion released on October 15, the Commission assessed Georgia's Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and related amendments to the Law on Grants, the Law on Broadcasting, and the Law on Political Associations. All four laws were passed ear-

lier this year by the ruling Georgian Dream party in a one-party parliament.

The Commission recommended the repeal of the Georgian FARA and the ban on foreign funding for broadcasters. It also called for the repeal or "thorough revision" of amendments to the grants law, which require foreign donors to obtain government approval before issuing grants to local organizations. "The combination of vague provisions, sweeping powers, and insufficient safeguards creates risks of arbitrariness, selective justice, and political misuse," the opinion stated.

The Commission noted that the Anti-Corruption Bureau, which is responsible for implementing several of the laws, "lacks sufficient safeguards for independence and political neutrality."

In its official press release, the Venice Commission said it had examined the laws "through a systemic approach, to take into account the combined effect of simultaneously applicable laws on the same entities and individuals." It added that authorities should focus on improving existing legislation "rather than adopting new laws" that may undermine rights and freedoms.

The body also expressed disappointment that Georgian authorities "have not wished to engage with it in the preparation of this opinion," while reaffirming its willingness to continue dialogue "in a manner which is in line with international standards."

According to the opinion, Georgia's FARA "risks undermining the rule of law, civic space, and democratic freedoms." The Commission said that, together with the previously adopted Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the measure "generates further confusion and uncertainty."

It argued that the law's vague definitions of "foreign principal," "agent of a foreign principal," and "political activities" leave too much room for interpretation. "The lack of clarity and precision undermines foreseeability and legal certainty," the opinion said.

The Commission also dismissed government claims that the law mirrors U.S. FARA. "What matters is not only the statutory text, but also the underlying legal principles, the relevant case-law, the institutional framework within which the statute operates," it said. "The au-

thorities' reliance on the U.S. FARA as an 'exact analogue' cannot in itself support the compatibility of GEOFARA with international standards."

The opinion described the "agent of foreign principal" label as "inherently stigmatising," warning that it could have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and association.

The Venice Commission also criticized the recent amendments to the Law on Grants, which require government consent for foreign-funded grants. It said the measure "lacks a demonstrated justification in terms of necessity and proportionality" and "provides no clear and objective criteria for refusal."

It further noted that the Anti-Corruption Bureau's "extensive investigatory and enforcement powers" could be used in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner. The Commission recommended that the amendments be repealed or at least "thoroughly revised" to include proper safeguards.

On media regulation, the Commission said that the blanket ban on foreign funding for radio and television outlets "fails

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