

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 10, 2024

Irakli Kobakhidze
Prime Minister of Georgia
7 Ingorokva Street
State Chancellery
Tbilisi, Georgia

Dear Prime Minister Kobakhidze:

We write to express our grave concern regarding the “foreign agents” bill that your government has reintroduced, a year after it rightly withdrew it from consideration. This bill is fundamentally at odds with your government’s professed desire to further integrate into the transatlantic community and the spirit of the 2009 United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, which our two countries signed just months after Russian forces invaded your country. We strongly urge your government to once again withdraw this harmful bill and recommit Georgia to expanding democracy and economic freedom, protecting security and territorial integrity, strengthening the rule of law, and respect for human rights as enshrined in the charter.

The clear pretext of the “foreign agents” bill is to impose control over the very same partners who have worked alongside the Georgian people for decades in support of their transatlantic integration. Put simply, the passage of this bill would undermine the will of the Georgian people who seek a future in the West.

We reject the notion that this bill is modeled on U.S. legislation; instead, we draw your attention to the proposed bill’s similarities to a law against “foreign agents” enacted in Russia by Vladimir Putin in 2012, which was also justified under the guise of “transparency.” As you know, that law has since been used by Putin and his thugs to quash opposition to his rule, completing Russia’s descent back into Soviet-style authoritarianism. We believe the people of Georgia deserve and desire a better, more democratic future. The passage of this law only enables Russia’s malign influence to expand in Georgia.

The rhetoric surrounding this bill is also deeply concerning. On April 29, former Prime Minister and current Honorary Chairman of Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, gave a speech stating that he would “punish” the opposition for alleged crimes committed during its period in power and in the opposition.¹ Mr. Ivanishvili’s speech also insinuated that the United States and our partners in Europe have sought to undermine Georgia’s sovereignty, despite the fact that we have steadfastly supported your country’s sovereignty since your independence, including the 16 years since Russia outright invaded and occupied parts of your country in 2008. We condemn these offensive and atrocious statements by Mr. Ivanishvili.

Our concerns have only been amplified by your government’s response to peaceful protests against the bill’s reintroduction. We are aware of reports of dozens of protestors, including American citizens, being kidnapped off the street and beaten by police. Last week, the chairman of an opposition party – who is also a sitting member of your parliament – was beaten in the streets of Tbilisi by government special forces.

Interestingly, Russian arch propagandist and fascist ideologue Alexander Dugin has stated that “Georgia is on the right track,” and Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has expressed support for the bill.² That your actions have drawn condemnation from your country’s closest partners and praise from the country that

¹ <https://civil.ge/archives/602348>

² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/01/georgia-russia-foreign-influence-bill-protests-democracy-eu/>

occupies 20% of your sovereign territory should be a clear indication that you are taking Georgia down the wrong path.

The situation in Georgia is clear. The government can choose to listen to the voices of the Georgian people or continue down a dark road to Russian-style authoritarianism. We state, in no uncertain terms, that choosing this latter path would cause the United States to fundamentally reassess the nature of our relationship. Just as Congress took note of the authoritarian descent in Belarus and passed the bipartisan Belarus Democracy Act of 2004, we are determined to respond to further attacks against the prosperous, Euro-Atlantic future that Georgia deserves. As such, we urge you to withdraw this bill and other measures that impede the rights and freedoms of the Georgian people, after which we would be glad to hold direct talks to restore and reinvigorate our strategic partnership. Further, in the event this harmful legislation is not withdrawn, we would join our colleagues in the Senate in encouraging fundamental changes in U.S. policy toward Georgia, including reconsideration of U.S. financial assistance, the expansion of visa bans to the United States, and financial sanctions on those responsible for undermining Georgia's democratic development.

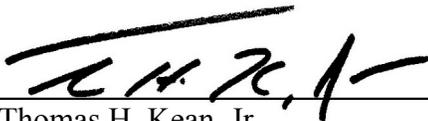
Sincerely,



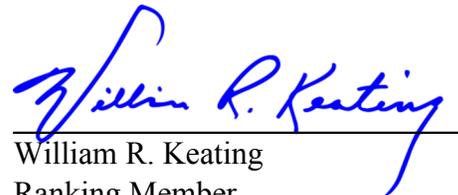
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Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee



Gregory W. Meeks
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee



Thomas H. Kean, Jr.
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe



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Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe



Austin Scott
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



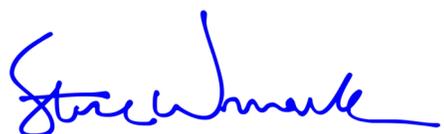
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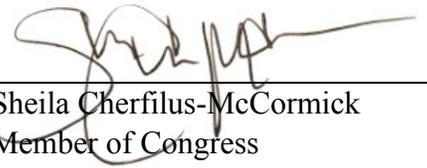
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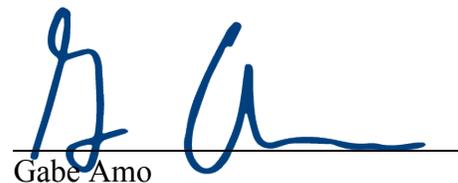
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