



Plenary sitting

B9-0302/2022

7.6.2022

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia
(2022/2702(RSP))

Pedro Marques, Andrea Cozzolino, Sven Mikser
on behalf of the S&D Group

B9-0302/2022

**European Parliament resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia
(2022/2702(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Georgia, in particular of 16 September 2020 on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia,
 - having regard to the recent visit to Georgia of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 28-29 April 2022,
 - having regard to the 19 April Agreement mediated in 2021 by the President of the European Council,
 - having regard to the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part of 30 August 2014,
 - having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure.
- A. whereas Georgia and the EU in their Association Agreement in force since 1 July 2016 committed to developing political dialogue with the aim of strengthening respect for democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including media freedom;
- B. whereas freedom of expression, freedom of the media and the safety of journalists are essential elements of a vibrant democracy and their protection by the authorities is an important indicator for the consolidation of democracy; whereas independent media are a fundamental cornerstone of democracy and one of the main pillars in the fight against disinformation;
- C. whereas the 19 April Agreement mediated by the President of the European Council in 2021 underlined the need to address perceptions of politicised justice, inter alia by adopting and implementing an ambitious judiciary reform that increases the independence, transparency and accountability of the judicial system;
- D. whereas an unprecedentedly high number of violent physical attacks against journalists have occurred in Georgia since the mass violence by mainly far-right activists against over 50 journalists and peaceful demonstrators that forced the cancellation of the Tbilisi Pride march on 5 July 2021, leading to statements of concern by several international organisations in defence of media freedom and to the significant downgrading of

PE732.359v01-00

Georgia in the World Press Freedom Index (from score 71.36 and rank 60 in 2021 down to score 59.9 and rank 89 out of 180 in 2022);

- E. whereas on 4 April 2022, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced six persons to five years of imprisonment over attacking two cameramen and a journalist during the 5 July 2022 violent attacks against the Tbilisi Pride march;
 - F. whereas on 16 May 2022, Nika Gvaramia, director of the TV channel Mtavari, was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison under Article 220 of the Criminal Code and on charges of money laundering, bribery and document forgery, a sentence that in Georgia has widely been perceived as an attempt to silence a voice critical of the current government and a case that was critically assessed by the Public Defender of Georgia already back in 2019;
 - G. whereas the perception of selective investigations and prosecutions targeting those in opposition to the current government undermines public trust not only in judicial institutions but also in the government while the repetition of similar cases against media owners linked to the opposition undermines the efforts aimed at increasing the independence of the judiciary;
 - H. whereas Georgia has been experiencing a surge in Russian disinformation in past years and especially since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, targeting in particular women and the LGBTQI+ community, human rights activists and ethnic minorities;
 - I. whereas Georgia submitted an application for EU membership on 3 March 2022, thereby manifesting the European aspirations of the people of Georgia;
-
- 1. Acknowledges Georgia's solid legal framework for guaranteeing the freedom of expression and the freedom of media, but expresses its concern over the tangible deterioration of the situation of the media and the safety of journalists in Georgia since summer 2021;
 - 2. Notes the increasing number of cases of intimidation, violence against and persecution of journalists and calls on the Georgian authorities to thoroughly investigate any case of violence and to prosecute those responsible for inciting and for carrying out violent attacks against journalists and other media workers;
 - 3. Highlights in particular the persistent lack of diligent investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the violence against journalists and peaceful demonstrators on occasion of the Tbilisi Pride march on 5 July 2021; insists that impunity for perpetrators of such acts cannot be tolerated under any circumstances as they are in breach of Georgia's national legislation and international and European commitments alike;
 - 4. Notes that at least five journalists were confirmed to be among the members of Georgian society whose conversations were recorded, as shown by the revelations about widespread illegal wiretapping in October 2021; calls on the Georgian authorities to

effectively conduct investigations into the wiretapping scandal;

5. Underlines the importance of media freedom, which should entail editorial independence and pluralistic, impartial and non-discriminatory coverage of political views in programming by private and in particular public broadcasters;
6. Emphasizes the need to guarantee a safe and enabling working environment for journalists, media workers and media outlets both in legislation and in practice; therefore, encourages Georgia to make use of international cooperation to improve the media legislation and environment in line with best international practices;
7. Welcomes the diverse and pluralistic media landscape in Georgia, but deeply deplores its polarisation that reflects the increasing and damaging polarisation of the political landscape;
8. Reiterates its call on the Georgian authorities to refrain from interfering in media freedom or pursuing politically motivated judicial cases against media owners or representatives;
9. Expresses its concern about the highly polarised public debate about the sentencing on 16 May 2022 of Nika Gvaramia, executive director of the opposition TV channel Mtavari, which highlights the persistent mistrust in Georgia's judiciary system and emphasizes once more the urgent need for the government to genuinely advance judiciary reform through a broad and inclusive cross-party process, in accordance with commitments taken as an associated partner of the EU;
10. Calls on the Georgian authorities to unwaveringly uphold the highest standards of democracy, rule of law and fundamental freedoms, including in the area of media freedom, and thereby to unambiguously demonstrate the political determination to implement the ambitious European aspirations of the people of Georgia, as revealed through the country's application for EU membership submitted on 3 March 2022;
11. Expresses its concern over the steady rise in Russian disinformation and information manipulation in Georgia in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and urges the Georgian government to take active steps to prevent disinformation campaigns by foreign or domestic actors against the country, vulnerable groups or persons, or political parties, to develop media literacy education programs for its citizens and to support the civil society in the creation of fact-checking mechanisms;
12. Urges all Georgian political actors to refrain from exploiting Russian disinformation attempts for the purpose of targeting their respective political opponents as this only contributes to the further spread of disinformation and endangers social cohesion and democracy;
13. Encourages Georgia to make the best possible use of all the instruments and initiatives dedicated to strengthening resilience within the framework of the Eastern Partnership;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council,

the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and to the President, Government and Parliament of Georgia.