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Plenary sitting

<NoDocSe>B9‑0303/2022</NoDocSe>

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<TitreType>MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION</TitreType>

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

<TitreRecueil>pursuant to Rule 144 of the Rules of Procedure</TitreRecueil>

<Titre>on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia</Titre>

<DocRef>(2022/2702(RSP))</DocRef>

<RepeatBlock-By><Depute>Ryszard Antoni Legutko, Raffaele Fitto, Anna Fotyga, Adam Bielan, Alexandr Vondra, Angel Dzhambazki, Beata Kempa, Dace Melbārde, Dominik Tarczyński, Elżbieta Kruk, Jacek Saryusz‑Wolski, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Nicola Procaccini, Valdemar Tomaševski, Veronika Vrecionová, Vincenzo Sofo, Witold Jan Waszczykowski, Zbigniew Kuźmiuk, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Hermann Tertsch</Depute>

<Commission>{ECR}on behalf of the ECR Group</Commission>

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B9‑0303/2022

European Parliament resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia

(2022/2702(RSP))

*The European Parliament*,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Georgia;

- 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, which fully entered into force on 1 July 2016,

- having regard to the application by Georgia for EU membership submitted on 3 March 2022,

- having regard to the US Department of State 2021 Human Rights Practices Report on Georgia

– having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure;

A. whereas numerous reports, including documents of the U.S. Department of State highlight serious problems with the independence of the judiciary, arbitrary or selective arrests that many consider politically motivated including persecution of the 3rd President of Georgia Mikeil Saakashvili; unlawful interference with privacy; violence and threats against journalists; restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and expression and violence against the LGBT community.

B. whereas on May 16, a Tbilisi court sentenced Nika Gvaramia, presenter and editor-in-chief of Mtavari Arkhi (Main Channel), to three-and-a-half years in prison; whereas he was imprisoned for alleged abuse of power as director of Rustavi 2 station, in a sentence largely seen by civil society as a retaliation for his criticism of the ruling party;

C. Whereas Rights groups, including the Public Defender of Georgia and the anticorruption watchdog Transparency International (TI) Georgia analysed the case, concluding that there were no legal grounds for holding Gvaramia criminally liable;

D. Whereas the ruling on Nika Gvaramia, as well as other selective investigations, call into question independence and impartiality of Georgian judiciary;

E. Whereas on 5-6 July 2021 representatives of radical groups physically assaulted more than 50 media representatives reporting on the Georgia’s Pride march, which resulted in death of one person, bodily damage to several journalists and destruction of their equipment; whereas the reaction of police during the event was inadequate, and despite public condemnation of the violent attack by the Prime Minister, none of its organisers were brought to justice;

F. Whereas an increasing number of incidents indicate that Georgia is experiencing an insecure media environment, which poses a threat to Georgia's democracy; whereas Reporters Without Borders’ Annual Index on press freedom ranks Georgia 89 out of 180 countries, a decline from the 60th place it held in 2020;

G. Whereas Georgian legal framework for the media provides a solid foundation for ensuring freedom of expression; whereas, however, there are numerous instances of pressure put on journalists and outlets who are backing the opposition or just having critical or independent views;

H. Whereas the founder of the Georgian Dream, sole oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, despite not holding any official political position, still plays a major role in the country and is believed to be de facto in control of the government and economy, with at least 4 of the cabinet members being former employees or close associates of Ivanishvili, including the Prime Minister, who was his personal assistant;

I. Whereas former President Mikheil Saakashvili, whose health is constantly deteriorating, is still held in prison, despite opinions from independent doctors that his condition cannot improve unless he is taken to civilian hospital;

J. Whereas Georgia has submitted its application to join the EU on 3 March 2022, confirming the historical determination of a long line of governments and an overwhelmingly large majority of the population to advance Georgia’s European integration and fully re-join the European family; whereas for many years Georgia was considered as a front-runner in the Eastern Partnership;

1. Is seriously concerned with the aggressive rhetoric and discriminatory treatment towards the media representatives by members of the Georgian government and of the ruling party; regrets continued divisive rhetoric from the ruling party that weakens Georgia’s resilience; urges the government and political elites to focus on efforts that promote harmony within the society and will be conducive in achieving the ultimate goal of EU membership;

2. Is appealed by lack of action on the side of government during and after the events of 5 July 2021; strongly condemns the acts of violence and calls on the authorities to bring to justice perpetrators and organisers of these attacks;

3. Condemns sentencing of Nika Gvaramia on bogus charges and calls for his immediate release;

4. Commends Nino Lomjaria, the Public Defender of Georgia, for her actions in safeguarding the freedom of media, despite constant attacks from the side of the ruling party;

5. Is seriously concerned about the deteriorating health of imprisoned former President Mikheil Saakashvili; asks EU leaders, in particular France and Czechia, as countries holding current and upcoming EU presidency, to exert pressure on the Georgian Dream leaders to fully respect Saakashvili’s rights and dignity; reminds that the government of Georgia is fully responsible for his health and well-being; invites the President of Georgia to use her constitutional prerogatives to solve this issue;

6. Expresses its concern with the role played by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili in the Georgian politics, especially the ongoing trend of nomination of his close former associates to the highest positions in the country, thanks to which he retains high level of control over the government and its decisions, including those on politically-motivated persecution of journalist supporting the opposition; is deeply worried by Ivanishivili’s personal and business links to the Kremlin which determine the position of the current government of Georgia towards sanctions on Russia; therefore calls on the Council to consider imposing personal sanctions on Mr Ivanishvili as person directly responsible for current backsliding in the areas of media freedom and ambigous relations with Russia;

7. Considers that government’s actions aimed at weakening independent business critical towards the ruling party undermine strategic projects such as Anaklia deep sea port and are damaging for the economic development of Georgia and negatively affect the prospects of prosperity and economic opportunities of the Georgian people as well as Georgia’s transit potential and its links with European and global economy;

8. notes that since regaining its independence and in particular since the Rose Revolution of 2003 people of Georgia made huge sacrifices for its freedom and democratic development, its European and Euro-Atlantic future; commends firm will of Georgian people to promote democratic institutions, rule of law and human rights in Georgia;

9. points out that the people of Georgia are withstanding Russia’s pressure that is using hybrid tactics to derail Georgia from its democratic development and to undermine its freedom;

10. Welcomes the support for EU integration by the overwhelming majority of the Georgian population, as well as united voice in this regard by both the government and opposition; genuinely regrets the ongoing backsliding in the areas of media freedom and independence of the judiciary in Georgia; notes, however, that – against the background of Russian war of aggression against Ukraine – this is a historic moment for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and therefore supports granting the candidate status to all three of them; is of the opinion that despite the lack of demonstrated commitment to the democratic development from the current government, think that granting EU candidate status will reinvigorate democratic reforms in Georgia, and give additional tools and new impetus for positive changes;.

12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Georgia.