

**Deputy Assistant Secretary Josh Huck**  
**Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on**  
**Europe**  
**“A Look at US Policy in Georgia and Moldova Ahead of Their 2024 Elections”**  
**July 23, 2024**

Chairman Kean, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe: thank you for your invitation to speak today about the U.S.-Georgia bilateral relationship in advance of parliamentary elections this October.

I want to thank the members of this committee for their continued support of strong U.S.-Georgia relations. That support has never been more critical than now.

This hearing comes at an extremely important time in both our bilateral relationship, and for the future of Georgia’s democracy. Over the past several months, the Georgian government has deviated sharply from the country’s past democratic trajectory, putting its Euro-Atlantic aspirations – and our bilateral relationship – at risk. It has passed undemocratic legislation, demonized civil society, permitted escalating violence and intimidation against civil society and opposition politicians, and issued disinformation and rhetorical attacks against the United States and European partners who have supported and assisted Georgia for decades.

The “foreign influence” law, passed on May 28, symbolizes this anti-democratic shift. This law, which mirrors a law put into force in Russia, is designed to silence critical voices and cow Georgia’s vibrant civil society. The Georgian Dream government passed this law despite mass protests by its citizens, U.S. objections, and the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission’s finding that the law was incompatible with European norms.

Over the past many months, the State Department has emphasized to the Georgian people that we continue to support their democratic, Euro-Atlantic aspirations, while also making clear to the Georgian government that it was headed in the wrong direction. During a visit to Tbilisi in May, Assistant Secretary Jim O’Brien and I underscored U.S. objections to the Georgian government’s

undemocratic actions, warning of consequences if the ruling party did not change course. Similarly, Under Secretary Uzra Zeya and Under Secretary John Bass recently reiterated to Georgian officials that the government's actions are incompatible with the democratic values that underpin membership in the EU and NATO.

As a result of Georgia's ruling party's decisions, on May 23 the Secretary announced a visa restriction policy to promote accountability for those undermining democracy in Georgia. He also announced a comprehensive review of our bilateral relationship, including our assistance to Georgia.

On June 6, we took steps to impose visa restrictions on dozens of Georgian ruling party officials, parliamentarians, and law enforcement personnel responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia. These steps built on our previous actions, such as visa restrictions on corrupt judges and financial sanctions on FSB-linked Georgian-Russian oligarch Otar Partskhaladze. We are working closely with interagency colleagues on additional steps, including potential redirection or suspension of assistance programs and the cancellation of political engagements. DOD recently announced indefinite postponement of a military exercise in Georgia.

It remains our hope that Georgia's leaders will reconsider their actions, return Georgia to its democratic trajectory, and fulfill the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the Georgian people. We have made clear to the government that the best way to demonstrate its commitment to democratic principles is to repeal the foreign influence law, stop the progress of other undemocratic legislation, and ensure the pre-election period and the October parliamentary elections are conducted freely and fairly. We have also made clear that party leaders must cease spreading disinformation about the United States and EU.

Like the United States, the EU and European partners have also made clear that the decisions of the Georgian government will have serious consequences for Georgia's ambition to join the EU. We support the EU's recent announcement of a de facto freeze in Georgia's EU accession and of 30 million euros from the European Peace Facility intended for Georgia.

2024 is a crucial year for Georgia's future and its democratic progress, highlighted by parliamentary elections in October. We have underscored to the government that we will be watching the conduct of electoral processes closely. We supported Georgia's request for an OSCE election observation mission, and have called on the government to ensure access for international and domestic election observers.

We remain steadfast in our support to Georgian civil society in the face of increasing government pressure and harassment, and are actively supporting their efforts to ensure the October elections are free and fair. The Georgian people must be able to decide the future of Georgia. We must also remain mindful of the threats Georgia still faces from Russia, which occupies twenty percent of Georgia's sovereign territory and continues to flood Georgia with disinformation.

In closing, I want to reaffirm that, despite these difficult times, the United States' commitment to the Georgian people remains steadfast and unchanged. Americans and Georgians share a special friendship, grounded in our shared values and love of liberty and independence. We will continue to support the further development of a vibrant, secure, and democratic Georgia.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I look forward to your questions.