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Georgia President Vetoes Controversial 'Foreign Influence' Law

By AFP

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Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili, speaks at a joint news conference with foreign ministers of Baltic and Nordic states on May 15. **AP / TASS**

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili on Saturday put a mostly symbolic veto on the "foreign influence" law that sparked unprecedented protests and warnings from Brussels that the measure would undermine Tbilisi's EU aspirations.

Ruling Georgian Dream party lawmakers voted through the legislation this week in defiance of protesters concerned the ex-Soviet republic is shifting away from a pro-Western course back toward Russia.

The move has sparked a wave of protests unprecedented in the recent history of the Black Sea nation.

According to opinion polls, more than 80% of the population wants to join the European

Union and NATO, and is staunchly anti-Kremlin.

"Today I set a veto... on the law, which is Russian in its essence, and which contradicts our constitution," Zurabishvili said in a televised statement, speaking about the bill that critics describe as resembling Russian legislation used to silence dissent.

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Brussels has said the measure is "incompatible" with Georgia's bid for EU membership, which is enshrined in the country's constitution.

European Council chief Charles Michel said on X, formerly Twitter, that the veto offered "a moment for further reflection."

He called on lawmakers to "make good use of this window of opportunity" to keep Georgia on its EU path.

Georgian Dream has enough lawmakers in parliament to override the veto.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has signaled his party's readiness to consider Zurabishvili's proposed amendments to the law, should she lay them out in her veto document.

But the figurehead president — at loggerheads with the ruling party – has ruled out the prospect of entering "false, artificial, misleading negotiations" with Georgian Dream.

The bill requires NGOs and media outlets that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as bodies "pursuing the interests of a foreign power."

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