

# [***Protesters throng main streets of Georgia's capital after parliament passes so-called 'Russian law'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1D-3FC1-JC5B-G3HF-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

TBILISI, Georgia — Huge throngs of protesters blocked streets in the capital of Georgia and milled angrily outside the parliament building after lawmakers on Tuesday approved a “foreign influence” bill that critics call [*a Russian-style threat to free speech and the country’s aspirations*](https://apnews.com/article/georgia-protest-russian-law-media-83271a5a81a235fc8c9e8d3d2e1877ff) to join the European Union.

Soon after the 84-30 vote, a crowd of protesters in front of parliament tried to break metal barriers near the building. At least 13 people were arrested and Georgian news reports showed one with severe cuts and bruises on his head.

The protests expanded after nightfall, with thousands of demonstrators marching to Heroes Square about two kilometers from the parliament and blocking off the streets that converge on the square.

The bill requires media and nongovernmental organizations and other nonprofit groups to register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power” if they receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad.

The government says the bill is needed to stem what it deems as harmful foreign actors trying to destabilize ***politics*** in the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million people.

The opposition has denounced the bill as “the Russian law” because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin.

European Council President Charles Michel said Tuesday that if Georgians “want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles.”

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. was “deeply troubled" by the legislation, which she said "runs counter to democratic values and would move Georgia further away from the values of the European Union. And let’s not forget also NATO.”

Enacting the law “will compel us to fundamentally reassess our relationship with Georgia,” she added.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Affairs James O'Brien met Tuesday with Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and told journalists that “if the law goes forward out of conformity with EU norms, and there’s undermining of democracy here and there’s violence against peaceful protesters, then we will see restrictions coming from the United States.”

The bill is nearly identical to one that the [*governing Georgian Dream party was pressured to withdraw last year*](https://apnews.com/article/georgia-foreign-agents-law-protests-parliament-1ab288cb3a3ccf330830ce7cae5603e2) after street protests. Renewed demonstrations have rocked Georgia for weeks, with demonstrators scuffling with police, who used tear gas and water cannons [*to disperse them*](https://apnews.com/article/georgia-media-legislation-foreign-influence-protest-f42557d18f04af03cc68a372acd174f6).

President Salome Zourabichvili, who is increasingly at odds with the governing party, has vowed to veto the bill, but Georgian Dream has a majority sufficient to override it. Zourabichvili has 14 days to act.

Over the weekend, thousands poured into the streets of the capital, Tbilisi.

Inside parliament, the debate was interrupted by a brawl. Georgian Dream lawmaker Dimitry Samkharadze was seen charging toward Levan Khabeishvili, head of the main opposition party United National Movement, after he accused Samkharadze of organizing mobs to beat up opposition supporters.

In a speech Tuesday, Georgian Dream lawmaker Archil Talakvadze accused “the radical and anti-national political opposition united by political vendetta” of using the protests for their own political purpose and “hoping for events to take a radical turn.”

Ana Tsitlidze of the United National Movement said the protests showed how unified Georgia was “in fighting for its European future."

Another prominent opposition figure, Giorgi Vashadze, asserted that the Georgian Dream party "is completely outside the constitution, outside the law, and they are betraying our country’s European future.”

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