

# Protests in Georgia After PM Delays EU Bid to 2028

By [Irakli Metreveli for AFP](#)

November 29, 2024



Demonstrators with the flag of Georgia (L) and the European Union gather to protest in front of Georgia's parliament in central Tbilisi. **Giorgi Arjevanidze / AFP**

Protests erupted in Georgia on Thursday after Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said the country would not pursue European Union accession until 2028, accusing Brussels of "blackmail."

The announcement came hours after the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution rejecting the results of Georgia's Oct. 26 parliamentary elections, alleging "significant irregularities."

The resolution called for new elections within a year under international supervision and for sanctions to be imposed on top Georgian officials, including Kobakhidze.

Accusing the European Parliament and "some European politicians" of "blackmail,"

Kobakhidze said: "We have decided not to bring up the issue of joining the European Union on the agenda until the end of 2028."

But he pledged to continue implementing reforms, asserting that "by 2028, Georgia will be more prepared than any other candidate country to open accession talks with Brussels and become a member state in 2030."

The former Soviet country officially gained EU candidate status in December 2023.

But Brussels has frozen Georgia's accession process until Tbilisi takes concrete steps to address what it calls democratic backsliding.

Opposition lawmakers are boycotting the new parliament, alleging fraud in the October elections, in which the ruling Georgian Dream party gained a new majority.

Pro-Western President Salome Zurbishvili — at loggerheads with Georgian Dream — has declared the ballot "unconstitutional" and is seeking to annul the election results through the Constitutional Court.

Following Kobakhidze's statement, street protests erupted in Tbilisi and several major cities across Georgia.

Waving EU and Georgian flags, thousands rallied outside parliament, blocking traffic on the Georgian capital's main road.

"Georgian Dream didn't win the elections, it staged a coup. There is no legitimate parliament or government in Georgia," said 20-year-old demonstrator Shota Sabashvili.

"We will not let this self-proclaimed prime minister destroy our European future."

In the western city of Kutaisi, police detained several demonstrators, the independent Pirveli TV station reported.

Zurbishvili held an "emergency meeting" with foreign diplomats, her office said.

"Today marks a significant point, or rather, the conclusion of the constitutional coup that has been unfolding for several weeks," she told a news conference alongside opposition leaders.

"Today, this non-existent and illegitimate government declared war on its own people," she added, calling herself the country's "sole legitimate representative."

## **'Existential crisis'**

On Thursday, Georgian Dream MPs voted unanimously for Kobakhidze to continue as prime minister.

But constitutional law experts have said any decisions made by the new parliament are invalid because it approved its own credentials in violation of a legal requirement to await a court ruling on Zurbishvili's bid to annul the election results.

**Related article:** [Kremlin 'Strongly Rejects' Accusations of Election Interference in Georgia](#)

One author of Georgia's constitution, Vakhtang Khmaladze, said: "From the legal point of view, a head of government approved by an illegitimate parliament is equally illegitimate."

"With democratic state institutions no more, Georgia's statehood faces an existential crisis," he told AFP.

Georgian Dream, which has been accused of moving Tbilisi away from Europe and closer to Moscow, denies allegations of electoral fraud.

The party's nomination of Kobakhidze for prime minister in February raised eyebrows in the West because of his claims that European countries and the United States were trying to drag Georgia into the Russia-Ukraine war.

Addressing lawmakers ahead of Thursday's vote, Kobakhidze presented his cabinet's new program, entitled "With peace, dignity, prosperity, towards the European Union."

"Our goal is to achieve EU membership by 2030," he said. "It is also crucial for the EU to respect our national interests and traditional values."

## **'Large-scale fraud'**

The 46-year-old lawyer and university professor served as parliamentary speaker between 2016 and 2019 and as vice president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe rights watchdog from 2020 to 2022.

He is seen as a loyal ally of powerful oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Dream's honorary chairman.

Ivanishvili, Georgia's richest man, holds no official government position but is widely believed to pull the strings of power.

After the October vote, a group of Georgia's leading election monitors said they had evidence of a "complex scheme of large-scale electoral fraud" that swayed results in favor of Georgian Dream.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets to protest the alleged fraud.

The goal of EU membership is enshrined in Georgia's constitution and supported by 80% of the country's population, according to opinion polls.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/11/29/protests-in-georgia-after-pm-delays-eu-bid-to-2028-a87165>