



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# The EU's belated and futile reaction to the political crisis in Georgia



There was a high **probability** that the parliamentary elections in Georgia would turn into a political crisis, just the way the ruling Georgian Dream Party did.

It declared a convincing victory, despite the numerous and severe cases of violations of election regularity and the significant influence of official Moscow in pre-election manipulations.

Despite the fact that hints of crisis were all around, the European Union shows no signs of being able to take decisive action at a critical moment, in the days immediately following the elections.

Moreover, the leadership of the EU institutions treats the Georgian post-election crisis like any other in the world and calls for dialogue and respect for democratic procedures. Its competitors are incomparably more active.

According to the first reaction of the European Commission and the outgoing High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, EU diplomacy treats Georgia similarly, even less decisively, than it does Venezuela and its disputed elections held on July 28.

## Venezuela and Georgia are not the same for the EU

“We call on the Central Election Commission of Georgia and other relevant authorities to fulfil their duty to swiftly, transparently and independently investigate and adjudicate electoral irregularities and allegations thereof. Those irregularities must be clarified and addressed. That is a necessary step to rebuilding trust in the electoral process,” the European Commission and High Representative Borrell **announced** jointly.

In the case of Venezuela, the EU simply did not recognise the results of the presidential elections, in which Nicolás Maduro secured himself a new mandate, through massive manipulation and repression of political

competitors.

But its approach to Georgia is far more cautious, regardless of the fact that it is a state that is an official candidate for membership in the Union and not a distant Latin American state.

### The EU is the international factor expected to be most involved in solving the political crisis in Georgia

The EU is the international factor expected to be most involved in solving the political crisis in Georgia, which escalated after the elections on Saturday. Based on the initial steps, it seems likely that the EU's involvement will be slow and potentially ineffective.

EU leaders will address developments in Georgia at an informal summit in Budapest on November 8. However, by that time, significant triggers for intensifying the Georgian crisis will already be in place.

## Orbán's offensive

An important one was initiated by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán by announcing that he would travel to Tbilisi, where he would stay on October 28 and 29, immediately after the announcement of the official results, according to which the pro-Russian Georgian Dream retained the majority in parliament.

Orbán will then recreate the image that the EU has no problem with the results of the elections in Georgia, which suit the authorities in Moscow, because he carries with him the authority of the current EU presidency.

### The EU leaders were wrong-footed once again by Viktor Orbán

Although the Europeans have **emphasised** again that the Hungarian Prime Minister is not

acting on their behalf but is visiting Georgia in a personal capacity, the effects of his rapid departure to Tbilisi will be strong in favour of the pro-Russian forces, as well as Moscow itself.

The EU leaders were wrong-footed once again by Viktor Orbán, just as at the very beginning of his presidency of the bloc, last July, he visited Vladimir Putin in Moscow and Xi Jinping in Beijing.

It is unclear why none of the current leaders of the EU institutions attempted to make a similar gesture as PM Orbán, and travelled to Tbilisi to personally support the pro-European forces and their claim to have won the elections last Saturday.

## Conformism in Brussels

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, will soon leave his position. But he did not travel to Georgia to meet pro-European President Salome Zourabichvili, who did not recognise the election results and claimed her nation was the victim of a Russian special operation.

Instead, Charles Michel opted for a conformist response, inviting all actors to engage in a "constructive and inclusive dialogue."



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The administration in Washington reacted in a similar tone, leaving little hope for the pro-

European forces in Georgia to expect significant support.

"We encourage Georgia's political leaders to respect the rule of law, repeal legislation that undermines fundamental freedoms, and address deficiencies in the electoral process together," **told** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

However, given its preoccupation with the forthcoming presidential elections and the fact that the state of democracy in Georgia is primarily the focus of EU diplomacy, the US's reaction could not have been sharper.

## Sanctions are one of the options

On the other hand, Moscow has reason to rejoice over the post-election situation in Georgia because it is unfolding according to its plan and expectations. "It is foolish to believe that the European Union can give someone a European future," when the EU itself was left without that future due to US pressure, said the spokeswoman of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova.

Orbán's swift visit to Georgia, coupled with the European leaders' reluctance to take a more decisive role in resolving the crisis, presents favourable conditions for Russia to maintain its dominance in one of the crucial states in its confrontation with the West.

If the crisis continues, it will significantly contribute to Russia's strategic success in deflecting the West's focus away from the events in Ukraine.

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The EU has a whole series of tools with which it has already been able to demonstrate that it will deal with Georgia seriously, as required by its strategic interests.

Some of them were **mentioned** by a group of European and Canadian parliamentarians, led by Michael Roth, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag.

Among other things, they requested the introduction of sanctions against Georgian politicians and officials who are responsible for severe violations of the democratic procedure in the parliamentary elections.

With tangible support for pro-European forces in Georgia, this or a similar move by EU leaders would discourage the establishment in Tbilisi from resorting to political repression against opponents, which it clearly announced during the campaign as one of the first steps after the election victory.