



OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF GEORGIA

(2020-2024)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 10th Convocation of Parliament, the legislative body was established as a closed institution, both in terms of access to information and citizen participation. Combating civil society emerged as one of the parliament's primary priorities, ultimately culminating in the adoption of the so-called "Russian Law."

In May 2024, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) [called on](#) the Georgian government to retract the so-called "Russian Law." Subsequently, in October, Georgia's membership in the OGP [was suspended](#).

A study conducted by Transparency International Georgia evaluated the 10th Convocation of Parliament's activities concerning openness and transparency during its tenure (2020–2024).

The report assesses parliamentary openness and transparency practices, focusing on the Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance operations. The report's conclusion presents recommendations for the incoming 11th Convocation of Parliament.

2. KEY FINDINGS

In a parliamentary republic, transforming the representative body into a closed institution poses significant threats to democratic development and hinders good governance.

During the 10th Convocation, the Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance functioned primarily as a formal structure, failing to address alarming trends of opacity and declining public accountability. The Council's efforts did not contribute to improving the legislative body's transparency.

In December 2015, to ensure parliamentary transparency and systematic and coordinated work, the [Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance](#) was established by the order of the chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia. As a result of close cooperation between the Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance and the civil sector, a number of necessary [steps have been taken](#) over the years. However, the 10th Parliament has actively begun implementing the policy of turning the legislative body into a closed and opaque institution.

In the 10th Convocation of Parliament, the openness, transparency, and accountability of the legislative body have deteriorated in the following areas:

► **Parliament has become a closed institution for the media and civil society**

- Media and civil society representatives were unjustifiably denied entry to the parliament building. A security regime was declared when critical issues were being discussed, and entry to the parliament building was prohibited. As a result, civil society and media representatives could not participate in parliamentary activities. The Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance did not respond to this issue;
- Parliament revoked permanent permits for representatives of non-governmental organizations that monitor parliament, thereby worsening the practice of cooperation and external monitoring of the people's representative body;
- According to the trend of recent years, parliament supported only legislative proposals submitted by state institutions, which made an essential mechanism for citizen engagement meaningless;
- The accreditation rules for the media were tightened;
- Parliament no longer released timely and complete public information. It was prohibited to release information that could serve as a basis for public criticism of members of parliament (MPs) (e.g., the number of speeches made by MPs);
- Parliament no longer reviewed the reports of accountable bodies.

► **Parliament has also worsened the standards of accountability and openness through legislation**

- Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of parliament have abolished the obligation to discuss important reports at a plenary session (e.g., reports of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Special Investigation Service, personal data protection, and public information). Reports are only discussed at a session if the leading committee, bureau, or faction requests it. The obligation to discuss committee reports at a plenary session has also been abolished;

- A committee chairperson and parliamentary majority decide on the **speakers' order and the speech's duration at the session**. This is a step towards restricting the right of opposition MPs to speak.

► **Parliament did not enact the Code of Ethics**

- Parliament has become a place of confrontation and insults, and the use of hate speech against female MPs is worth particular mentioning;
- The Code of Ethics, which did not provide effective sanctions for unethical behavior, has not been enacted. The composition of the Ethics Council has not been established to date.

► **The Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance has become a formal structural unit**

- The Council did not respond to any of the pressing issues related to the openness, accountability, and transparency of parliament;
- The involvement of civil society in the Council's activities was only formal;
- The Council's action plan was developed without the engagement of civil society organizations and did not contain significant commitments. However, parliament was unable to implement this plan either.

3. ASSESSMENT OF OPENNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE 10TH CONVOCAATION OF PARLIAMENT

During the reporting period, the process of implementing 12 EU recommendations was underway, and the transparent activities of parliament were particularly important. However, parliament worsened openness, transparency, and civic engagement not only through practice but also through legislative amendments. The iron fence, which was erected at the entrance to the legislative body's building for almost the entire Convocation, became a kind of symbol of the transparency of the 10th Parliament.

It became a rule to declare a security regime in parliament and, as a result, **to prohibit civil society and the media from entering parliament**, the purpose and result of which was to limit civic engagement. **During hearings of essential draft laws of high public interest, such as the so-called "Russian Law", access to parliament was [restricted](#), limiting the space for expressing critical opinions. During the hearing of the so-called "Russian Law", those members of civil society who could attend the committee were restricted from speaking, and the chairman of the Legal Issues Committee asked them [to leave the hall](#) for critical questions.**

The 10th Convocation of Parliament revoked the permanent permits for monitoring organization representatives and required them to vacate their offices in parliament. Several organizations, including Transparency International Georgia, had offices in the parliament building based on a memorandum signed with parliament. This good practice of civil society's cooperation with parliaments of several convocations was changed by the 10th Parliament.

A year before the parliamentary elections, when the openness of parliament and the strengthening of access to information about the activities of individual MPs were even more important, parliament became an even more closed and opaque institution for critical media representatives. The revised **media accreditation [regulations](#)** enacted in 2023 reinforced systemic obstruction of journalistic activities. As a result of these regulations, punitive mechanisms were put in place against critical media representatives, access to information [deteriorated](#), and consequently, the quality of public information was reduced.

In 2023, updated [security rules](#) for parliament building were approved, significantly reducing the openness and transparency of parliament. For security reasons, parliament has limited public participation in its activities. The new rules also contradict freedom of expression.

In 2023, parliament supported [amendments](#), according to which a former MP could no longer enter parliament building without a pass.

The limitation of public involvement in parliamentary activities was also reflected in the process of considering legislative proposals. According to the trend of recent years, parliament supported only [legislative proposals](#) submitted by state institutions, which made this vital mechanism for citizen involvement meaningless. In addition, even the expediency of a legislative proposal mechanism was [discussed](#) at the session of the Open Governance Council.

Parliament no longer [provided](#) timely and complete public information. They also prohibited the release of information that had been provided to non-governmental organizations for years and had become the basis for public criticism of MPs (for example, the number of speeches made by MPs).

The parliamentary majority adopted [amendments](#) to the Rules of Procedure, according to which **essential reports are no longer considered at plenary sessions** (for example, reports on the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Special Investigation Service, personal data protection, and

public information). Reports are considered at the session only if the leading committee, bureau, or faction requests it. The obligation to consider committee reports at plenary sessions was also abolished. These amendments significantly worsened parliamentary control and openness. The purpose of considering reports at plenary sessions was not to satisfy the interests of MPs but to inform the public about the activities and services essential to the country and the implementation of parliamentary oversight over them. Even if a leading committee or faction is not interested in hearing reports, **citizens have the right to receive information of public interest. Accordingly, the result of the amendments was not to increase the efficiency of the work of parliament but to create more comfort for MPs.**

4. EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF THE STANDING PARLIAMENTARY COUNCIL FOR OPEN GOVERNANCE

The Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance has become a formal structural unit in the 10th Parliament.

It is worth noting that since 2015, the Parliament of Georgia has been one of the leaders in the Open Government Partnership (OGP). The main initiator of the reforms carried out to increase the transparency and accountability of parliament has always been civil society. The working process on open government was collaborative, with both the parliamentary majority and the opposition participating. The results achieved over the years in the process of parliamentary openness were also the result of this joint work. However, cooperation with the 10th Parliament became significantly more difficult, and the Council continued functioning without civil society.

In the 10th Convocation of Parliament, the Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance did not support the inclusion of significant commitments in the action plans or share important initiatives submitted by non-governmental organizations. The Council did not respond to the deterioration of the openness and transparency of parliament, including when access to parliament building was unreasonably restricted.

In 2022, international and non-governmental organizations were required to vacate the working space in the parliament building, which they had used during several parliaments. In the wake of the events that developed in March 2023 related to the attempt to adopt the so-called “Russian Law”, **some members of the Advisory Group suspended cooperation with parliament. The suspension process was followed by the Council’s decision to terminate membership of these organizations.**

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) [called](#) the Georgian government to withdraw the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence”. OGP has studied the appeal of civil society and determined that the government’s actions were inconsistent with the values and principles of OGP. The Georgian government was given a 30-day deadline in May to present a concrete plan on how it would address [the problems](#), which included the “Russian Law” initiated in parliament. On May 14, 2024, the Georgian Dream party adopted the “Russian Law”, and in October, Georgia’s membership [was suspended](#).

4.1. COUNCIL’S COMPOSITION AND THE ADVISORY GROUP

The Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance was established in the 10th Parliament on January 21, 2021. The Council had three chairpersons. Until May 27, 2021, the chairperson of the Council was Mariam Kvrivishvili, and then Givi Mikanadze was appointed to this position, eventually [replaced](#) by Shalva Papuashvili.

Regarding cooperation with the civil sector, it should be noted that **the number of members of the Advisory Group has significantly decreased**. This process began in March 2023, when the parliamentary majority supported the draft law on “foreign influence agents” (later, this initiative was withdrawn). The organizations issued a joint statement on suspending cooperation with the Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance. 4 member organizations of the group signed the statement: the Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) - the chair of the Advisory Group, Transparency International Georgia, Civil Society Institute (CSI), and Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA). The Council expelled 7 organizations from the Advisory Group due to absenteeism, including those organizations that made a statement on the suspension of membership in March.

During the reporting period:

- 9 Council meetings were held (in 2021 - 2 meetings; in 2022 - 3 meetings; in 2023 - 4 meetings)
- 2 action plans were approved.

4.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLANS

The commitments made under the 2021-2022 Action Plan were not fully and timely fulfilled.

The 2023-2024 Action Plan was approved late. It contains only 3 commitments, which are mainly related to the analysis of various issues and the study of practice. They are not designed to achieve tangible results to improve citizen engagement in parliamentary activities and the parliament's transparency.

When drafting the Action Plan, the Council took into account only 1 of the 21 initiatives submitted by the non-governmental organizations that were members of its Advisory Group. The Action Plan failed to address [critical issues](#) such as *improving the Parliament's Code of Ethics and equipping it with effective mechanisms, increasing the accountability of the government OGP to parliament, strengthening parliamentary control, increasing the availability of reports on access to information by public institutions, introducing the possibility of submitting legislative proposals online, etc.*

The 2023-2024 action plan **has not been implemented.**

Action Plan	Number of commitments	Working groups	Initiators of commitments	Fulfillment of commitments
Open Parliament's Fourth (2021-2022) Action Plan	19 commitments	19 working groups	Of the commitments envisaged by the plan: • 12 were initiated by local and international organizations; • 4 - the Public Defender, • 1 - the Public Defender and an international organization; • 1 - the Education and Science Committee and an international organization; • 1 - the Budget Office.	Fully/substantially implemented - 10 commitments (52.63%) Limitedly implemented - 6 commitments (31.57%) Not started - 3 commitments (15.78%)
Open Parliament's (2023-2024) Action Plan	3 commitments	3 working groups	The initiators of the commitment are: • United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) • Parliament of Georgia (2 commitments)	No activities were carried out - parliament has not provided information about the implementation of any activities, and no information can be found on the website.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT PARLIAMENT

Key recommendations to a new parliament:

- In a parliamentary republic, the openness and accountability of the people's representative body are of paramount importance for the democratic development of the country. Parliament should meet the highest standards of openness, transparency, and accountability and control the implementation of open governance by the executive branch;
- Parliament should promote public involvement in parliamentary activities; the procedure for submitting legislative proposals should be simplified, and parliament should consider legislative proposals not formally but substantively, with the involvement of the author of the proposal;
- The existing rules for media accreditation should be changed so that the media can work in parliament without hindrance and provide information to the public;
- The parliament's Rules of Procedure should be revised, and the norms regarding the consideration of reports of bodies accountable to parliament should be changed. Reports should be considered by parliament at plenary sessions;
- Regarding entry into the parliament building, it is essential not to refuse citizens access unreasonably. Parliament should facilitate the involvement of civil society and the media in the activities of the legislative body and should not create artificial barriers. The Parliament of Georgia should simplify the procedure for citizens to enter the building. Citizens should be able to enter the parliament building without a pass after passing a security check;
- The Ethics Council should be fully and promptly staffed in parliament to give the approved Code of Ethics and the sanctions provided for therein a compelling character and a means of implementation. Effective response mechanisms should be written down in the Code of Ethics;
- The Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance and its members should respond to the deterioration of the openness and transparency of parliamentary activities, and their activities should not be formal. To exercise oversight, the Council should be interested in the current situation in the executive government sector and hold public hearings;
- The Standing Parliamentary Council for Open Governance should focus on ambitious activities and reforms. The process of implementing the Council's action plan should be active, including the work of working groups and individual MPs. The Council should fully fulfill those ambitious commitments that will bring tangible results in improving parliament's openness.