

A LOOK AT U.S. POLICY IN GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA AHEAD OF THEIR 2024 ELECTIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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A LOOK AT U.S. POLICY IN GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA AHEAD OF THEIR 2024 ELECTIONS

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:01 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Thomas Kean, Jr. (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. KEAN. The Subcommittee on Europe of the House Foreign Affairs Committee will come to order.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine U.S. policy toward Georgia and Moldova in advance of their upcoming elections later this year.

I would also like to welcome the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, who is joining us today. He will participate following all other members in today's you know.

I ask unanimous consent that the gentlelady from North Carolina, Ms. Ross, be allowed to sit on the dais and participate following all other members in today's hearing.

Without objection. So ordered. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

On Christmas Day nearly 33 years ago the Soviet Union ceased to exist as a sovereign State. The Iron Curtain had fallen, and with it millions of people were freed from Soviet oppression. Within a span of 2 years the 15 new republics of the Soviet Union were independent, free to decide their own fate. Old adversaries became new partners responding to the hand of friendship offered by the United States and by our allies.

Today we examine two of these former Soviet states: Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Both are proceeding down very different paths. Moldova is on track to be a post-Soviet success story. With help from the United States and the European Union Moldova has made significant process rooting out corruption and malign Russian influence. It has worked to reform its system of justice, de-monopolize its energy sector, and curtailed the influence of the oligarchs who held back Moldova's progress and prosperity for far too long. With the EU accession talks commencing last month and the World Bank projecting Moldova's GDP to increase by 2.2 percent this year Moldova's future is bright.

Moldova holds its next Presidential election in October alongside a referendum on its integration with the European Union. This is an important moment for Moldova. Will it continue down its pro-Western path or will it revert back to the Kremlin's sphere of influence? In the past Moscow has not shied away from using covert

and overt methods to try to coerce its former subjects to bend to its will again.

Congress will be watching this election in Moldova closely and we are eager to hear from the Administration what it is doing to prepare Moldova for the potential Russian interference.

Across the Black Sea Georgia has sadly followed a very different path than Moldova in recent years. Since Georgia gained its independence from the Soviet Union the Georgian people have shown a fierce determination to root out corruption, to throw off the country's Soviet past, and to pursue a closer relationship with the United States and Europe. Georgians have fought and spilled blood not just to defend their own country against Russia's war of aggression in 2008, but also along U.S.—alongside U.S. service members. Georgia was the first of the largest non-NATO troop contributors to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. That is why the recent actions of the current Georgian government led by the Georgian Dream Party are so disappointing.

Over the past several years Georgian Dream has allowed itself to be infiltrated by malign elements openly attacking its Western partners and pursued a closer relationship with Russia and with China. In May the Georgian government passed the so-called foreign agents law despite multiple warnings from Georgia's Western partners including a letter led by Chairman McCaul and Ranking Member Meeks, which I and many of my colleagues here signed. Make no mistake, Georgia's foreign agents law has ruptured Georgia's relationship with the West.

These actions threaten to reverse Georgia's decades-long hard-fought progress and spit in the face of the Georgian people, and overwhelming majority of which support joining the European Union. Many Georgian citizens bravely and peacefully took to the streets in opposition to the malign actions of their government. Sadly they were met with violent repression and arrests. In the midst of the debate over the foreign agent bill Georgian Dreams leader threatened fierce vengeance against his political opponents in a speech that would be well-suited to a tin pot dictator, not a close partner of the United States. I am eager to see how the people of Georgia respond to these actions by their government during the critical parliamentary elections in October.

In closing, I would note that there is both room for hope in Georgia and Moldova this October. I believe that the vast majority of the citizens in both countries are eager for a closer partnership with the United States and do not want to see their countries once again subjugated to the Kremlin's will.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses today in their assessment of the political situation in both countries and in what we can do to protect and promote American interests in both.

I will now recognize the ranking member, the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating, for any statement that he may have.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank our witnesses.

And actually thank the Moldovan ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Ursu, who has joined us in the back of the room here today, too, as well.

Thank you, Chairman Kean, for holding this hearing.

The Black Sea is a region of critical importance to the United States' foreign policy and I am glad that today we are taking an in-depth look at Georgia and Moldova ahead of the upcoming elections in both countries that will occur this fall. With both the Georgian and Moldovan people making their Europe-Atlantic intentions clear for decades I have confidence that they will continue to make their voices heard at the ballot box later this year.

Unfortunately, and despite public support and constitutional obligations to pursue EU and NATO membership, the ruling Georgian Dream Party has strayed from the country's Euro-Atlantic path.

Just last month Georgian Dream pushed through a Kremlin-inspired foreign agent bill to crack down on civil society and freedom of expression in the country. Today I have two messages for the Georgian government and the Georgian people.

First, to the Georgian government, your actions have not and will not go unanswered. In May the State Department implemented an initial tranche of visa restrictions on officials, and importantly family members. So long as the Georgian government continues to trample on democracy and the rule of law, I have no doubt that this Administration will continue to impose visa restrictions as well as financial sanctions as necessary.

Furthermore, while the Georgian Dream touts a trade deal and visa liberalization regime with China it is important to remember that Beijing is actively supporting Russia's war of aggression Ukraine even as the Kremlin continues to occupy 20 percent of Georgian's territory in this illegal war.

Put simply, the Georgian Dream government is making deals with those supporting Georgia's occupier. There are fewer examples than that in the ruling party's betrayal of the Georgian people, people still haunted by the memories of their own war with Russia not too long ago.

Second, to the Georgian people, your ambitions for a future in the EU and NATO are well known and this Congress and Administration will continue as we have for the last three decades to support you in these efforts. The Georgian Peoples Act which I introduced last month and the MEGOBARI Act with my friend Representative Joe Wilson exemplify our determination to support your democratic future even as your government breaks its constitutionally obligated promises to pave the way for EU and NATO accession.

While Georgian Dream's actions run counter to the will of the Georgian people, President Sandu of Moldova has fortified Moldova's Euro-Atlantic future with impressive reform efforts despite the numerous challenges thrown her way. She has transversed a pandemic, the outbreak of a Russian war on her border, Ukraine, and gas prices, as well as strengthening Moldova's relationship with the United States and the European Union. This includes beginning accession negotiations with the EU in late June.

I congratulate Moldova on this important step forward for EU integration and look forward to the day they formally join the alliance.

At the same time Russia has a long-sought-after effort to undermine Moldovan politics and democratic reform. In late 2022 I wrote a letter to Secretaries Yellen and Blinken to call attention to Ilan

Shor, a pro-Russian Moldovan business man's responsibility for stealing more than \$1 billion from Moldovan banks. I am glad to see that the Administration has sanctioned Shor and his cronies who have worked against the interests of the Moldovan people. It is also reassuring that the sanctions on Shor and his cronies were not a one-off and have been followed up with additional sanctions as appropriate.

As we look to the future, the U.S.-Moldova strategic dialog has greatly strengthened our bilateral relationship. The most recent dialog in April of this year reaffirmed our joint commitment to advance defense and security cooperation, Moldova's EU integration, and important justice and anti-corruption reforms. Furthermore, U.S. financial support has been critical to serving Moldova from complete dependence on Russian gas as Moldova now meets 100 percent of its gas needs with non-Russian supplies, an amazing achievement in such a short period of time.

Georgia and Moldova comprise a fraction of the Black Sea countries, but are demonstrative of how U.S. engagement can positively reinforce the security, economic prosperity, and democratic resilience in the entire Black Sea region. As we address the existing and future challenges in the Black Sea it is critical that we are prepared and critical we address existing and future challenges there.

I worked with Chairman Mike Turner and Senator Shaheen on a Black Sea Security Act to draft an interagency strategy toward the Black Sea region. I look forward to receiving this report from the National Security Council as soon as it is complete and I hope it will further U.S. leadership and influence in the region for the years to come.

I again want to thank Chairman Kean for holding this hearing and for our witnesses being here and I yield back.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

Other members of the subcommittee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

We are pleased to have a panel of distinguished witnesses before us today on this important topic.

From the Department of State Mr. Joshua Huck and Mr. Christopher Smith are deputy assistant secretaries in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. And from the U.S. Agency for International Development Dr. Alexander Sokolowski is a deputy assistant administrator in the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia.

Thank you for being here today. Your full statement will be made part of the record and I will ask each of you to keep your verbal remarks to 5 minutes in order to allow time for member questions.

I now recognize Mr. Huck for his opening statement. Thank you for being here.

STATEMENT OF JOSHUA HUCK, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. HUCK. Good afternoon. Chairman Kean, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Europe. Thank you for your invitation to

speak today about the U.S.-Georgia bilateral relationship in advance of parliamentary elections this October.

I want to thank the members of this committee for their continued support of strong U.S.-Georgia relations. That support has never been more critical than it is today. This hearing comes at an extremely important time in both our bilateral relationship and for the future democracy in Georgia.

The Georgian government has been deviating sharply from the country's past democratic trajectory putting its Euro-Atlantic aspirations and its relationship with the United States at risk. It has passed undemocratic legislation, demonized civil society, and issued disinformation and rhetorical attacks against the United States and European partners who have supported Georgia for decades.

The foreign influence law passed by the ruling Georgia Dream Party on May 28 symbolizes this anti-democratic shift. This law, which mirrors a law put into force in Russia, is designed to silence critical voices, smear independent NGO activists and journalists, and cow Georgia's vibrant civil society. The Georgian Dream government passed this law despite mass protests by its citizens, U.S. objections, and a clear finding from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission that the law was not compatible with European norms.

Over the past many months the State Department has engaged at all levels to make clear to the Georgian people that we continue to support their democratic Euro-Atlantic aspirations while at the same time making clear to the Georgian government that it is headed in the wrong direction.

During a visit to Tbilisi, in May, Assistant Secretary Jim O'Brien and I underscored U.S. objections to the Georgian government's undemocratic actions warning of consequences if the ruling party did not change course. Similarly, Undersecretary of State Uzra Zeya and Undersecretary John Bass recently reiterated to Georgian officials that the government's actions are incompatible with the democratic values that underpin membership in the EU and NATO.

As a result of Georgia's ruling party's decisions, on May 23 Secretary Blinken announced visa—a new visa restriction policy to promote accountability for those undermining democracy in Georgia. He also announced a comprehensive review of our bilateral relationship including our assistance to Georgia.

On June 6, we took steps to impose visa restrictions on Georgian ruling party officials, parliamentarians, and law enforcement personnel responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia. These steps built on our previous actions such as visa restrictions on corrupt judges and financial sanctions on FSB-linked Georgian-Russian oligarch Otar Partskhaladze.

We are also working closely with interagency colleagues on additional steps including potential redirection or suspension of assistance programs and the cancellation of policy engagements. DoD recently announced the indefinite postponement of a military exercise in Georgia.

It remains our hope that Georgian leaders will reconsider their actions and return to Georgia's long-stated Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We have made clear to the government of Georgia that the

best way to do this is to repeal the foreign influence law, cease spreading disinformation about the United States, stop progress of other undemocratic legislation, and ensure the pre-election period and the October parliamentary elections are conducted freely and fairly.

2024 is a crucial year for Georgia's future and its democratic progress. We have underscored to the government the importance of ensuring free and fair elections and noted that we are watching the conduct of the electoral processes very closely. We have supported Georgia's request for an election observation mission from the OSCE and we have called on the government to ensure unimpeded access for international and domestic election observers.

We remain steadfast in our support to Georgian civil society in the face of pressure from the government and even harassment and physical attacks. We engage with civil society representatives regularly and are actively supporting their efforts to ensure the October elections are free and fair.

The Georgian people must decide the future of Georgia so we must remain mindful of the threats to Georgia from Russia which still occupies 20 percent of Georgian territory.

In closing, I want to reaffirm that despite these difficult times the United States' commitment to the Georgian people remains steadfast and unchanged. Americans and Georgians share a special friendship grounded on our shared values of the love of liberty and independence. We will continue to support the further development of a vibrant, secure, and democratic Georgia.

Thank you for allowing me to speak here with you today and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Huck follows:]

Deputy Assistant Secretary Josh Huck
Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on
Europe
“A Look at US Policy in Georgia and Moldova Ahead of Their 2024 Elections”
July 23, 2024

Chairman Kean, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe: thank you for your invitation to speak today about the U.S.-Georgia bilateral relationship in advance of parliamentary elections this October.

I want to thank the members of this committee for their continued support of strong U.S.-Georgia relations. That support has never been more critical than now.

This hearing comes at an extremely important time in both our bilateral relationship, and for the future of Georgia’s democracy. Over the past several months, the Georgian government has deviated sharply from the country’s past democratic trajectory, putting its Euro-Atlantic aspirations – and our bilateral relationship – at risk. It has passed undemocratic legislation, demonized civil society, permitted escalating violence and intimidation against civil society and opposition politicians, and issued disinformation and rhetorical attacks against the United States and European partners who have supported and assisted Georgia for decades.

The “foreign influence” law, passed on May 28, symbolizes this anti-democratic shift. This law, which mirrors a law put into force in Russia, is designed to silence critical voices and cow Georgia’s vibrant civil society. The Georgian Dream government passed this law despite mass protests by its citizens, U.S. objections, and the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission’s finding that the law was incompatible with European norms.

Over the past many months, the State Department has emphasized to the Georgian people that we continue to support their democratic, Euro-Atlantic aspirations, while also making clear to the Georgian government that it was headed in the wrong direction. During a visit to Tbilisi in May, Assistant Secretary Jim O’Brien and I underscored U.S. objections to the Georgian government’s

undemocratic actions, warning of consequences if the ruling party did not change course. Similarly, Under Secretary Uzra Zeya and Under Secretary John Bass recently reiterated to Georgian officials that the government's actions are incompatible with the democratic values that underpin membership in the EU and NATO.

As a result of Georgia's ruling party's decisions, on May 23 the Secretary announced a visa restriction policy to promote accountability for those undermining democracy in Georgia. He also announced a comprehensive review of our bilateral relationship, including our assistance to Georgia.

On June 6, we took steps to impose visa restrictions on dozens of Georgian ruling party officials, parliamentarians, and law enforcement personnel responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia. These steps built on our previous actions, such as visa restrictions on corrupt judges and financial sanctions on FSB-linked Georgian-Russian oligarch Otar Partskhaladze. We are working closely with interagency colleagues on additional steps, including potential redirection or suspension of assistance programs and the cancellation of political engagements. DOD recently announced indefinite postponement of a military exercise in Georgia.

It remains our hope that Georgia's leaders will reconsider their actions, return Georgia to its democratic trajectory, and fulfill the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the Georgian people. We have made clear to the government that the best way to demonstrate its commitment to democratic principles is to repeal the foreign influence law, stop the progress of other undemocratic legislation, and ensure the pre-election period and the October parliamentary elections are conducted freely and fairly. We have also made clear that party leaders must cease spreading disinformation about the United States and EU.

Like the United States, the EU and European partners have also made clear that the decisions of the Georgian government will have serious consequences for Georgia's ambition to join the EU. We support the EU's recent announcement of a de facto freeze in Georgia's EU accession and of 30 million euros from the European Peace Facility intended for Georgia.

2024 is a crucial year for Georgia's future and its democratic progress, highlighted by parliamentary elections in October. We have underscored to the government that we will be watching the conduct of electoral processes closely. We supported Georgia's request for an OSCE election observation mission, and have called on the government to ensure access for international and domestic election observers.

We remain steadfast in our support to Georgian civil society in the face of increasing government pressure and harassment, and are actively supporting their efforts to ensure the October elections are free and fair. The Georgian people must be able to decide the future of Georgia. We must also remain mindful of the threats Georgia still faces from Russia, which occupies twenty percent of Georgia's sovereign territory and continues to flood Georgia with disinformation.

In closing, I want to reaffirm that, despite these difficult times, the United States' commitment to the Georgian people remains steadfast and unchanged. Americans and Georgians share a special friendship, grounded in our shared values and love of liberty and independence. We will continue to support the further development of a vibrant, secure, and democratic Georgia.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Huck.
I now recognize Mr. Smith for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER SMITH, DEPUTY ASSISTANT
SECRETARY, BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AF-
FAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Kean, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to speak with you today about our policy on the Republic of Moldova.

Under the constant threat of Russian aggression, interference, and disinformation, and with the prospect of EU membership hanging in the balance, there is much at stake for our partners in Moldova and for the United States in a region that is critical to our national interests. I am happy to report that thanks to our close cooperation to help Moldova meet this moment of opportunity and challenge our bilateral ties with Moldova have never been stronger than they are today.

As we have implemented our strategy for Moldova Congress has been a powerful partner every step of the way from the funding appropriated for critical assistance to the high-level engagement and policy advocacy from members, including members of this subcommittee, to advance our common objective for a Moldova that is free, whole, democratic, and secure.

Moldova's October 20th Presidential election and simultaneous national referendum on EU accession represent a historic opportunity for the people of Moldova. Amidst the devastating impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine President Sandu's government and the Moldovan people have taken bold steps to build a more democratic, secure, prosperous future firmly anchored in the West.

A core objective of our strategy is to ensure that Moldova's course toward EU integration is irreversible. It won't be easy to reach this goal, but with continued strong support from the United States and our European partners and allies we are confident Moldova can succeed.

Our strategy rests on three main lines of effort: high-level engagement with Moldova's leaders and its people to signal our strong political support; assistance to help Moldova bolster its security and territorial integrity, achieve energy independence, and integrate its economy with the West; and finally, sanctions and other measures to meet and help Moldova meet and master the challenge of Russian malign influence designed to knock the country off its rightful European course.

When President Sandu was elected in December, 2020 she ran on a bold vision of fighting corruption and bringing her country closer to Europe. During the past 4 years Moldova has made remarkable progress toward the European Union. It's open formal accession talks just last month.

U.S. assistance, including approximately \$824 million committed since February 2022 has played a significant role in advancing Moldova's rule of law, anti-corruption, energy and economic progress that helped unlock this historic achievement.

There is still work to be done to advance Moldova's integration with Europe and we must continue to support these reform efforts.

Fortunately, we are not acting alone. European and G7 partners have also provided billions of dollars to support Moldova and help them accomplish these goals. For example, since 2021 the European Union has given approximately 2.4 billion euros to support socioeconomic development, security assistance, and reforms in Moldova.

The Moldovan people have made a courageous choice to seek integration with Europe, particularly in the face of the Kremlin's intensified hybrid threats and ongoing efforts to keep Moldova in its purported sphere of influence. The Russian government has invested significant time, energy, and money to thwart Moldovans' sovereign choice to build closer ties with the West. They have done this using a variety of tactics including disinformation campaigns, malicious cyber activities, and efforts to funnel illicit funds into the country in an attempt to undermine democratic processes, especially elections.

We have taken and will continue to take concrete measures to help Moldova resist this Russian malign influence. Just this year we sanctioned Marina Tauber and Evgenia Gutul who engaged in blatant interference activities in recent elections in Moldova at the direct behest of Moscow. These sanctions sent a strong signal that the United States will not tolerate threats to free and fair elections in Moldova.

We recently cooperated with the governments of Canada, the United Kingdom, to release downgraded information that showed Russia's current plans to illicitly sway the upcoming Presidential elections and foment unrest if a pro-Kremlin candidate is not elected. And we are working to strengthen Moldova's security in all spheres from elections to border protection to energy to cyber.

Finally, the unresolved status of the Transnistria remains a challenge. We support a results-oriented OSCE process to resolve the conflict and uphold Moldova's territorial integrity and its sovereignty.

We thank all of you on this committee for your strong backing of Moldova during this critical period. The people

of Moldova have shown remarkable resilience in the face of un-remitting Russian pressure. They now face a critical decision on EU integration that will determine their future as a sovereign, independent country. Together with our European partners we will continue to provide the engagement and support Moldova needs to achieve our strategic interest in a Europe free, whole, and at peace.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]

Written Statement
Christopher Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Eastern Europe (EE)
and Policy and Regional Affairs (PRA)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
July 23, 2024

Chairman Kean, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to testify today on our relationship with the Republic of Moldova. Under the constant threat of Russian aggression, interference, and disinformation and with the prospect of EU membership hanging in the balance, this is an historic moment of challenge and opportunity in a region critical to our national interests.

Every step of the way, Congress has been a powerful partner on our Moldova strategy – from the funding appropriated for critical assistance to the high-level engagement and advocacy from members, including members of this Committee, to advance our common objective for a Moldova that is free, whole, democratic, and secure. Members of Congress have also been key interlocutors with the Moldovan government, with recent visits to Chisinau from Senators Shaheen and Murphy, where they met with President Sandu and discussed ways to combat disinformation in Moldova.

Moldova's upcoming Presidential election and simultaneous national referendum on EU accession represent an historic inflection point for the people of Moldova. Amidst the devastating impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, President Sandu's government and the Moldovan people have taken bold steps to build a more democratic, secure, and prosperous future, firmly anchored in the West.

A core objective of our strategy is to ensure that Moldova's course toward integration with the EU is irreversible.

It won't be easy. But with continued strong support from the United States and our European partners and allies, Moldova can succeed. Our strategy comprises three main lines of effort: 1. High-level engagement with Moldova's leaders to signal our strong political support; 2. Assistance to help Moldova bolster its security and territorial integrity, achieve energy independence, and integrate its economy with the West; and finally, 3. Sanctions and other measures to help Moldova meet and master the challenge of Russian malign influence designed to knock the country off its rightful path to the West.

When President Sandu was elected in December 2020, she ran on a bold vision of fighting corruption and bringing her country closer to the West. During the past four years, Moldova has made remarkable strides towards European Union accession, opening formal negotiations in June. U.S. assistance, including approximately \$824 million committed since February 2022, has played a significant role in advancing Moldova's rule-of-law, anti-corruption, energy, and economic progress in line with EU standards. We applaud Moldova's efforts on rule of law reform, including improved judicial and prosecutorial vetting. There is still work to be done and we must continue to support their reform efforts. Fortunately, European and G7 partners have also provided billions of dollars to Moldova to accomplish similar goals. Since 2021, the EU has given approximately \$2.4 billion in grants and loans to support socioeconomic development and reforms in Moldova.

The Moldovan people have made a courageous choice to seek integration with Europe, particularly in the face of the Kremlin's intensified hybrid threats and ongoing efforts to keep Moldova in its "sphere of influence." The Russian government has invested significant time, energy, and money to thwart Moldova's

sovereign choice to build closer ties with the West. They have done this using a variety of tactics, including disinformation campaigns, malicious cyber activities, and efforts to funnel illicit funds into the country in an attempt to undermine democratic processes, including elections.

We must continue to help Moldova to counter Russian malign influence. This year we sanctioned Marina Tauber and Evgenia Gutul who engaged in blatant interference activities in recent elections in Moldova with Russian support. These sanctions send a strong message that the United States will not tolerate threats to free and fair elections. We recently cooperated with Canada and the U.K. to release downgraded information that showed Russia's current plans to illicitly sway the upcoming elections and foment unrest if a pro-Kremlin candidate is not elected. And we are working to strengthen Moldova's security in all spheres, from elections, to border protection, to energy, to cyber.

We thank all of you in this Committee for your strong backing of Moldova during this critical period. The people of Moldova have shown remarkable resilience in the face of unrelenting Russian pressure. They now face a critical decision that will determine their future as a sovereign, independent country. Together with

our European partners, we will continue to provide the engagement and support Moldova needs to achieve our collective strategic interest in a Europe free, whole, and at peace.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today – I look forward to your questions.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Smith.

I now recognize Dr. Sokolowski for his opening statement. Thank you for joining us.

STATEMENT OF ALEXANDER SOKOLOWSKI, DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR EUROPE AND EURASIA, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Chairman Kean, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Europe, thank you for your invitation to speak today about USAID's efforts to support democratic development in Georgia and Moldova. I welcome the opportunity to share the agency's work to strengthen the foundations of freedom in the region.

Georgia and Moldova have been important U.S. partners seeking closer ties with the West for decades. Since independence and despite being in an increasingly threatened and turbulent neighborhood they have made remarkable progress and enacted major reforms. As a result of these efforts, in partnership with the United States last December, we saw the opening of European Union accession talks with Moldova and achievement of EU candidate status for Georgia.

Yet in Georgia we are now facing a moment of profound concern for the country's future. Tens of thousands of patriotic Georgians have spoken out on repeated occasions and protested the foreign influence law in order to protect and defend Georgia's democracy and its hopes for European integration.

The recent passage of the foreign agent—foreign influence law is an unnecessary step in the wrong direction which is threatening civil society and polarizing Georgia. The action has frozen progress toward and could derail Georgia's hopes for EU membership and is causing grave concerns about the trajectory of Georgia's democracy.

The law causes alarm among so many not just because it was based on a Russian law, but because the model of governance that it represents, one of increasing stigmatization and distrust toward civil society and restriction of its activities.

U.S. support for Georgian democracy and Georgia's impressive past accomplishments on this road were built on shared values of individual and societal freedoms, human rights, and a common vision of democratic governance, embracing a strong, active, and vibrant society and dialog with government. Now as an aside, I have been traveling to Georgia for two decades and this is the Georgia that we had known until recently. We want to see Georgia adhere to these values and realize this vision.

Given the gravity of the current situation we are conducting a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Georgia and we at USAID are working closely with our State Department colleagues on this effort.

Since 1992 USAID has provided approximately \$1.9 billion in assistance to Georgia to strengthen democratic institutions, improve health and education, and promote broad-based economic development. Today U.S. assistance to those institutions and organizations that are working toward a democratic Georgia and a Euro-Atlantic path has become all the more important.

Georgians will head to the polls in October to determine their country's future and the course of their democracy. USAID is supporting a robust multifaceted set of programs to foster free and fair elections. This includes preelection assessment missions, long-term and short-term international domestic observation, support for transparent accountable election Administration, and independent media's coverage of the elections. More than ever we believe that comprehensive oversight from multiple sources will be crucial for ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and instilling public trust.

Turning to Moldova, that country has suffered greatly as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine starting in 2022. And despite this, I recall witnessing the great generosity and hospitality of the people and the government of Moldova as they welcomed Ukrainian refugees when I traveled to the border with USAID's administrator in April of that year. USAID has stepped up and pivoted programming in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to help address the resulting challenges in Moldova.

USAID is supporting diversification of Moldova's energy sources that have enabled Moldova to break away from its 30-year dependence on Russian supply. We also continue to foster increased trade with the European market.

Moldova has also been a focus of USAID's Democracy Delivers initiative which works to surge support and resources to democratic countries to help them take advantage of windows of opportunity to implement reforms for their citizens. As part of this we have increased our efforts to combat corruption by enhancing the capacity of the National Anti-Corruption Center and the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office while also supporting civil society transparency and accountability initiatives.

Moldovans have made their intentions clear in seeking greater integration with Europe. This year's Presidential election and vote for a referendum on EU accession in Moldova will be critical tests of those intentions and for the country's democracy and sovereignty. USAID assistance has improved access to voting for all Moldovans and continues to strengthen transparency in the electoral process.

USAID supports civil society to increase awareness about election processes, to monitor elections, to inform judges on electoral legislation, and to advocate for improved electoral code.

We have helped modernize the Central Election Commission's information technology system and strengthened oversight of political financing and promoted electoral education and aligned electoral legislation with international standards.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sokolowski follows:]

**Deputy Assistant Administrator Alexander Sokolowski Testimony before
the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe
“A Look at U.S. Policy in Georgia and Moldova Ahead of Their 2024 Elections”
July 23, 2024**

Chair Kean, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Europe, thank you for your invitation to speak today about USAID’s efforts to support democratic development across Georgia and Moldova. I welcome the opportunity to share information about USAID’s work to strengthen the foundations of freedom in these countries.

Georgia and Moldova have been two important U.S. partners seeking closer ties with the West for over thirty years. Since independence, despite being in an increasingly threatened and turbulent neighborhood, they have made remarkable progress and significant reforms. As a result of these efforts, in partnership with the United States, last December, we saw the opening of European Union (EU) accession talks with Moldova and the achievement of EU candidate status for Georgia, conditional on further democratic reforms.

Yet, in Georgia, we are now facing a moment of profound concern for the country’s future. Tens of thousands of patriotic Georgians have spoken out and protested on repeated occasions the ‘foreign influence’ law to protect and defend Georgia’s democracy and its hopes for European integration.

The recent passage of the foreign influence law is a step in the wrong direction that is threatening civil society and polarizing Georgia. This action, and other anti-democratic steps and rhetoric, stalled and could derail Georgia's hopes for EU membership and cause grave concerns about the future of Georgia's democracy. The passage of the 'foreign influence' law causes alarm among so many not just because it was based on a Russian law, which has greatly limited civil society there, but because the model of governance it represents – one of increasing distrust toward civil society and restriction of its activities.

U.S. support for Georgian democracy, and Georgia's impressive past accomplishments on this road, were built on the shared values of individual and societal freedoms, human rights, and a common vision of democratic governance, embracing a strong, active, and vibrant society in constant dialogue with government. We want to see Georgia adhere to these values and realize this vision. A first step in getting back toward this vision would be to repeal the law and seek to reset and renew the dialogue between civil society and the government.

The Georgian government's decision has also impacted U.S.-Georgian ties and the trajectory of our partnership. Given the gravity of the current situation, across agencies, we have also conducted a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Georgia and our assistance to Georgia, and we have worked closely with our State Department colleagues on that effort.

Since 1992, USAID has provided approximately \$1.9 billion in assistance to Georgia to strengthen democratic institutions and governance, improve health and education, and promote inclusive economic development. Today, targeted U.S assistance to those institutions and organizations that are working towards a democratic Georgia and a Euro-Atlantic path has become all the more important.

Georgians will head to the polls in October to determine their country's future and the course of their democracy. USAID is supporting a robust, multifaceted set of programs to try to foster free and fair elections. This includes pre-election assessment missions; long-term and short-term international and domestic observation; support for transparent accountable election administration; independent media's coverage of the elections, and other efforts. As in past Georgian electoral cycles, and now more than ever, we believe that comprehensive and robust oversight from multiple sources will be crucial for ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and instilling public trust in these elections.

Turning to Moldova, the country has suffered greatly as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

USAID has stepped up and pivoted programming in the immediate aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 to help address the refugee, the energy, and the economic crises that Moldova experienced as a direct result of Russia's military aggression against neighboring Ukraine. USAID has supported diversification of Moldova's energy sources

that has enabled Moldova to break away from its 30-year dependence on Russian energy supply. We continue to foster increased trade with the European market. With U.S. support, Moldova successfully shifted its trade toward Europe, so that now approximately 55 percent of its trade is with Europe.

Moldova is also a part of USAID's Democracy Delivers Initiative which works to surge support, resources, and attention to democratic countries to help them take advantage of windows of opportunity to implement reforms for their citizens.

Moldovans have made their intentions clear by seeking sustained sovereignty, strengthening their democracy, and integration with Europe. This year's presidential elections in Moldova will be another chance to reaffirm those choices and a crucial test for its democratic processes and institutions. USAID assistance has improved access to voting for all Moldovans and continues to strengthen transparency in the electoral process. USAID supports civil society to increase awareness about election processes, to monitor elections, to train judges on electoral legislation, and to improve the country's electoral code. We have helped modernize the Central Electoral Commission's information technology systems, strengthened oversight of political financing, promoted electoral education, and aligned electoral legislation to international standards. USAID also bolsters voter education and get-out-the-vote activities, and helps organize televised debates for citizens to hear candidate priorities ahead of elections.

USAID is also helping build resilience against cyber-attacks on Moldova's government data systems. In response to widespread cyber-attacks in the summer of 2022, for example, USAID promptly deployed experts to strengthen Moldova's cybersecurity capabilities. Additionally, USAID attracted private sector investments from Google and Cisco to stand-up the first ever Moldovan Cybersecurity Academy to teach cybersecurity basics to students, government, and businesses.

The coming months and years will be key tests for Moldova's democracy. We are intensifying our focus and increasing our support to help show that democracies like Moldova are delivering for their people. Thanks to steadfast support from Congress, USAID assistance to both Georgia and Moldova has demonstrated substantial results, catalyzing and consolidating fragile democratic gains in an increasingly threatened region. This October, the conduct and results of elections in Georgia and Moldova will help determine their further political and development paths and the prospects for further progress in the region.

Chair Kean and Ranking Member Keating, thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our efforts to strengthen the foundations of freedom, sovereignty, and prosperity in Georgia and Moldova. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, Dr. Sokolowski. I appreciate your opening statement.

And I recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions.

In May the Georgian government led by the Georgian Dream Political Party passed the so-called foreign agents law. Georgian Dream claims that this law is harmless and is similar to the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, here in the United States.

Mr. HUCK, what is your response to this? How are the Georgian foreign agents law and FARA different?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you very much for the question.

And I appreciate it because we've heard this, this allegation or this statement, from Georgian Dream in the past. And it is patently not true. The two laws are very different and I can lay out a few specifics. But, in addition, for a full rundown on this, I would direct you to the Venice Commission has written a detailed report analyzing this I would be happy to share as well.

But, in the nutshell, four quick items:

First, FARA legislation does not differentiate between a profit entity or a not-for-profit entity. It's all treated the same.

The Georgian law targets only civil society and media organizations. That's the first problem.

Second, the U.S. FARA law exempts media organizations so long as 80 percent or more of the ownership is U.S., right? So, American. In Georgia, they do not make that distinction. In fact, media is specifically targeted, which has a serious impact on independent media there.

In addition, the FARA law is based on your actions. Are you, in fact, acting at the direct control of a foreign entity? The Georgian law does not make that distinction. Again, it only looks at where your foreign funding comes from. So, if you're an NGO working on early childhood education, or something of that nature, and you receive a grant from Finland—or pick any other country—you are irrefutably, irrebuttably labeled an agent of foreign influence of Finland, regardless of what the actions of your given civil society organization is.

None of this stands to reason. And so, all of this is why both we and our European partners have analyzed the bill closely and assessed it does not align with transatlantic norms.

Thank you.

Mr. KEAN. So, you are, basically, saying—and you agree—that their law is very similar to the Russia law and actually much closer to what President Putin is pushing within Russia and his allies-states?

Mr. HUCK. I would agree with that, as a Russian-inspired law, we often say, and it is quite worrisome that, while Georgia's long-time partners and allies, like the United States and Europe, have warned and urged Georgia not to move forward with this legislation, Russia, the country that occupies 20 percent of Georgia, has praised the law.

And we've made the case to Georgian Dream and to the people of Georgia that, when your friends are urging you to not do it, and your occupier is urging you to do it, it really ought to make you think.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Huck.

Mr. Sokolowski, the clear pretext of Georgia's foreign agents law is to impose control on the organizations that have worked for years to bring Georgia closer to the Euro-Atlantic community. Many of these organizations are implementing partners of the State Department and USAID. Once the foreign agents law comes into effect in September, what impacts will it have on State and USAID's implementing partners in Georgia, and what guidance are you providing to them about this new operating environment?

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Thank you very much for that question, Chairman Kean.

On one level, we are facing a situation that has some degree of uncertainty. We are waiting for implementing guidelines to come out with regard to the legislation, and we anticipate those coming out in August.

At the same time, we are not sitting and waiting. Our mission in Tbilisi has been working with our partners on what we're calling a lean-in strategy with civil society, as we help them to weather this transition in the environment and to offer them sets of services that to this point they have not needed.

And these are the kind of services that they may need in a more challenging and less conducive environment for their work. And in that, we're talking about legal assistance; assistance to help them understand how they can comply with the law; security for their staff, and so forth.

So, there's a number of different things that we're working on. We have set a goal to make sure that we are focusing and orienting our assistance to help NGO's as they enter this difficult period.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

Mr. Smith, Moldova has been slipping out of Russia's orbit for several years, and based on consistent public pollings, it seems like it will continue to do so. Is the State Department concerned about more overt and direct Russian interference and intervention in Moldova as we get closer to the October Presidential election and EU referendum?

Mr. SMITH. We see very clear—first of all, thank you so much for the question, Mr. Chairman—we see very clear action by the Russians to undermine this upcoming election and the referendum. They are engaging networks of interference financed by the Russian State and also by oligarchs and criminal organizations, designed to deprive the Moldovan people of their right to choose and their right to make a decision about their country's future. And we are working through sanctions to target those organizations and disrupt their operations, but also to support reforms necessary to ensure this election is protected from that type of influence.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Smith.

I now recognize Ranking Member Keating for any questions that he may have.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to followup with Mr. Smith because I see great benefit, even to the United States, in understanding the disinformation tactics employed by Russia in Moldova.

We have seen their actions in France recently. We have seen their actions in Slovakia and in the Baltic countries for years, but it is becoming more and more pronounced. And in Moldova, you in-

licated how illicit funds are getting into the country for this. If you could give us some more detail on that? And plus, you mentioned that the United States and Canada have seen a plan, actually, a detailed plan, of what they are doing. Could you give us more details, if that is possible in an unsecure setting, about what they are doing? It is really important for Moldova that they are able to combat this and have done a great job, I think, to the extent they can.

But this is something that will affect, with our own elections coming here, Russian disinformation tactics. So, the more we can learn about what is going on in the rest of the world, the better it is all the way around.

So, if you could, take a few minutes.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Ranking Member.

I would describe the Russian campaign in Moldova as consisting of three critical elements.

One is that they use illicit funding in order to try to get people to come out and protest.

Mr. KEATING. Now, where do the funds emanate from?

Mr. SMITH. The funds emanate from Russian-backed oligarchs, including Mr. Shor, who you mentioned in your opening statement, somebody that the United States has designated—

Mr. KEATING. This is the person that stole a billion dollars from Moldova.

Mr. SMITH. Exactly sir, and somebody who is operating a network of influence and using his financial connections to try to push illicit money into the country.

Additionally, he is promoting false narratives about the outcome of the referendum; for example, promoting the idea that, if Moldovans were to support a referendum on EU integration, that that would result in Russia suddenly attacking the country, and that that would bring Moldova closer to—

Mr. KEATING. How is this information being transmitted?

Mr. SMITH. They use social media and they also use programming on Russian-controlled television and Russian-controlled media that is broadcast from Russia.

Mr. KEATING. That is true. Because when I was there not too long ago, I learned that, in Moldova, because it is one of the poorer countries in Europe, and some of the production—that the television, including children's television, family television, all television, is Russian-originated, and within that, they have great influence.

So, go ahead.

Mr. SMITH. That's correct, sir.

And then, the third method that they use is backing particular candidates. And they have backed particular candidates who are running in this election. They have ties to those candidates. They are encouraging them and they are trying to drive a consensus among certain candidates to support a pro-Kremlin position that is counter to the will of the Moldovan—

Mr. KEATING. And they are trying to really inhibit turnout in voting as well.

Mr. SMITH. They are trying to undermine turnout by, again, spreading false information that somehow Moldova will be dragged

into the war in Ukraine if Moldovans were to support the EU referendum.

And they are also trying to drive an agenda that undermines the accomplishments of President Sandu in meeting the aspirations of the Moldovan people to fight corruption, to strengthen their democratic and economic institutions.

Mr. KEATING. And when I was there, too—and if you could tell me if this is still in play or if it has even expanded—they were using domestic issues. They do not come out with pro-Russian statements. They come out with disinformation regarding, for instance, the economic conditions in the country and others. Could you give us some examples of that?

Mr. SMITH. Yes. One of the narratives that they try to foster is that Moldova is turning away from a reliance on energy emanating from Russia that gas resources, for example, has caused a raise in prices for Moldovans. It's actually quite the opposite. In most cases, now that Moldova is buying gas on the open market, according to EU norms and rules, most of the prices are cheaper than what Gazprom was offering them earlier.

Mr. KEATING. So, they are able to use that influence even to distort the truth to their advantage?

Mr. SMITH. That's correct, sir.

Mr. KEATING. And they are using these domestic issues because the group behind it, the ultimate goal is to create a government that is pro-Russian. So, they are not using propaganda as we might remember from the cold war. They are much more sophisticated in attacking domestic issues, trying to make the government look weaker, even when those are lies?

Mr. SMITH. The goals that we have seen them articulate, and that we shared in the declassified information that we announced publicly together with the governments of Canada and the U.K., make clear that they are doing this in order to get a pro-Kremlin candidate in office.

Mr. KEATING. And my concerns about Georgia that I addressed in my opening statement are extremely important, but I wanted to drill down as we have on this while we have the opportunity. Because this is important in Moldova. It is important with all the elections in Europe, but it is also important here in the United States, because we will see these same tactics here.

I yield back.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Keating.

I now recognize Mr. Wilson for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank Chairman Tom Kean and, also, Ranking Member Bill Keating in this regard: you can see bipartisan appreciation and support of the people of Georgia and Moldova. And we want the best for both of the countries.

And with that in mind, I have had wonderful visits to Tbilisi, to the Nation of Georgia. What a beautiful city. Tbilisi is just amazing.

And then, I had the opportunity to go to a joint parachute jump that was really interesting. It was troops from the Nation of Georgia with the troops from the State of Georgia, and there is a State partnership program. And the professionalism of the Georgian mili-

tary—two of my sons served in Iraq and, also, Afghanistan with Georgians. And they knew, if Georgians were there, they were safe. And so, we want to build on that relationship.

And I have also seen the negative. I have been to Gori, incredibly, the birthplace of Joseph Stalin. But I have been there to see the fence where the encroachment occupation of South Ossetia, of Caucasus, have taken place, and the violation of territorial integrity of the people of Georgia.

So, sadly, Putin is just trying to recreate the Soviet Union. Georgia and Moldova, sadly, have remained in War Criminal Putin's territorial line of fire since declaring their independence from the failed Soviet empire. It has really become clear, sadly, that War Criminal Putin is trying to recreate the failed Soviet Union empire to benefit the oligarchs.

And he is, first, oppressing the people of Russia. Then, he now is threatening every former Soviet republic at risk, as he seeks to provide for the recreation of the failed empire.

The brave and courageous people of Georgia and Moldova have inspired the world in pursuit of freedom and democracy. That is why I was grateful to introduce the bipartisan MEGOBARI Act to hold the pro-Russian Georgian Dream party accountable for its assault on the will of the Georgian people, while also offering a path to restore Georgia's Euro-Atlantic trajectory.

As we proceed, I want to thank all the witnesses. And I have seen firsthand Mr. Smith and his service overseas and how fortunate we are to have State Department personnel do so well.

Mr. Huck and Dr. Sokolowski, Secretary Blinken has stated that a review of all assistance to the Georgian government is on the table following the decision to proceed with the foreign agents law. And I appreciate the visa sanctions that have been applied, at least for those who came up with the law. And people need to know the foreign agents law means the ability of a government to arrest people for disagreement.

In 2010, that was the law initiated by the Duma to stamp out all opposition in the Russian Federation, a country that should be a great country. It is not.

And also, they followed through in Venezuela with a foreign agents law. And so, dictators see this as a way to expand.

With this, here is the question that I have: given that more than a month has passed and the foreign agents law will come into force in September, can you outline what the Administration plans to take substantive action in response? What action or actions are being considered? And then, what is being done to help the people of the Nation of Georgia to have free and fair elections?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you very much for the question. I will give a few comments, and then, turn to Dr. Sokolowski for some additional.

First, I would like to outline U.S. actions across four lines of effort.

First, clear, high-level, direct messaging to the government of Georgia they are headed in the wrong direction; to make clear what they need to do to return to the path of a Euro-Atlantic trajectory and greater Euro-Atlantic integration, which is what the people of Georgia have so clearly said for so long that they want.

But, in addition to clear messaging and discussions with the Georgian government, we have taken actions as well. On May 23d, Secretary Blinken announced this full review of all of our bilateral relationship, including assistance. The assistance review is ongoing as well.

We have taken steps to issue visa restrictions on dozens of Georgian ruling party officials, parliamentarians, law enforcement, and family members.

We are continuing to look at all the tools available to us for additional steps. I'm not able to preview today what exactly those are because we do not preview sanctions or punitive actions, but we are reviewing the full set of tools at our disposal, whether that is for violations of human rights, corruption, or undermining democracy. Everything is on the table and being reviewed.

In addition, we are continuing to message loud and clear to civil society, to the Georgian people, that any actions that we take are targeted and deliberate and focused on the Georgian Dream ruling party or the individuals responsible, and not to the people of Georgia. The United States for decades has been the clearest, loudest advocate for Georgia's territorial independence, their sovereignty, and their democracy, and we will continue to do that.

I would like to pass to my colleague for a couple of additional thoughts on civil society.

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Sure. Thank you very much, Josh.

And thank you very much for the question.

We agree that this is a critical moment for Georgia and we need to really focus on this electoral process to help Georgia move in the right direction. There are a number of components to what we are trying to do there. There are some that are already in place.

So, there has been a pre-election assessment mission by NDI that was out in February. It was actually right after I was just there. And then, they are going to do another one this summer.

I talked about observation of multiple organizations already in my statement, but, overall, there are going to be about 100 long-term observers and about 2100 short-term observers.

Finally, two quick things. Get-out-the-vote efforts. We are going to try to make sure that a lot of people get out and vote and take advantage of their democratic rights. And then, also, support of the Central Election Commission.

Mr. WILSON. Great. Thank you.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

The chair will now recognize Madeleine Dean from Pennsylvania, 5 minutes for questions.

Ms. DEAN. I thank you, Chairman Kean and Ranking Member Keating, for having this hearing.

I thank you for your testimony, all of you, and more importantly, for your work with the State Department, with USAID. It is extraordinarily important work that you are doing in part of the world that extraordinarily important.

I wanted to focus on what we talked about with the foreign agent law. As we have heard from you, our witnesses, the recently passed foreign influence law, foreign agent law, in Georgia has raised significant concerns—and with good reason. The law, which was previously withdrawn from consideration, in large part due to signifi-

cant public outcry, as you detailed, is reported to mirror the Russian law that has been used in practice to stifle dissent.

In response to the enactment of this law, it has been swift, including the EU halting Georgia's accession and freezing 30 million euros in financial support.

Mr. Huck, thank you for your testimony.

How does the foreign influence law compare to the equivalent legislation in Russia? We talked about what does it look like in comparison to American law. What does it look like as compared with the Russian law?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you very much for the question.

And unfortunately, we do see strong similarities to the Russian law, both in the nature of the law, but also on the intent. What is so worrisome about this law is not just the actual terms of it that we discussed earlier, but it is the intent. It is the fact that the Georgian Dream government has publicly and specifically said it is targeting civil society and independent media with this law, and that it intends to use it to punish critics or those that it sees as threatening its rule—it has said that publicly—which is quite concerning. So, this is, also, how we have seen that law be used in Russia, and we have seen, of course, with devastating impact the way that Moscow has wielded these kinds of tools.

So, these are all the reasons that we are particularly concerned about this, especially given this moment as we head into the election. It is precisely at this moment where Georgia needs a powerful, empowered civil society to perform functions like election observation or policing and oversight of government institutions, to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the Georgian people.

Ms. DEAN. What does that punishment look like? How are they going to use the law and how will they punish folks?

Mr. HUCK. Yes. So, as Dr. Sokolowski mentioned, in October—I'm sorry—in August, the implementing regulations will come out. So, when that comes out, we will have a little more information about the nitty-gritty details of what the registration requirements are and how it will be carried out.

But we already know that the government is threatening steep penalties for non-compliance. And we also know that, under the terms of the law, individual members of that organization—not just the ownership, but the members of any given organization—could be held responsible and could also face fines, penalties, or even additional repercussions.

Ms. DEAN. And connected to that, Dr. Sokolowski, you stated in your testimony that, "USAID is supporting a robust, multifaceted set of programs to try to foster free and fair election. This includes pre-election assessment missions; long-term and short-term international and domestic observation; support for transparent accountable elections Administration; independent media coverage of elections, and efforts." End quote.

Again, the implementation of this law, how will the foreign agent law impact what USAID, what you, will be able to accomplish in protecting free and fair elections?

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Thank you for the question.

I will just echo what we said before. This is a moment of great uncertainty because we do not exactly know the implementing reg-

ulations and what they will look like. So, there is great concern about how this will affect the elections themselves, because, also, the time line for implementation of the law is running up right before the elections themselves.

However, I can say that there is one bit of possibly encouraging news, which is that the International Republican Institute, who we support, has recently met with the prime minister, who at least gave lip service and said that he was interested in seeing free and fair elections.

Our partners are planning to work to provide this oversight. However, I do not want to say that with certainty we know that they will be able to operate in the runup to the elections. That is the plan and we are going to do everything we can at USAID to work flexibly to help them to do that.

Ms. DEAN. Perfect.

And thank you. I see my time is expiring.

But, Mr. Smith, thank you, also, for your extraordinary work, too.

I yield back.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

I now recognize Mrs. Wagner from Missouri for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WAGNER. I thank the chairman for organizing this very important and timely hearing.

And I want to thank our witnesses for their time and service.

I, too, want to focus on Georgia today, which is, obviously, heading into—we have alluded to and discussed here—consequential elections in October. I am gravely concerned that Russian influence over Georgia's government is growing by leaps and bounds in a country, by the way, where nearly 80 percent of the population supports NATO and EU membership. It is pretty astounding.

The West must not leave the Georgian people to the mercy of a corrupt pro-Putin elite. And it would be extremely shortsighted to allow Putin even greater latitude to sow chaos and violence in Europe amid—you know, we have all seen it—mass protests attended by literally hundreds of thousands of Georgians.

The Georgian government kind of rammed through its own version of Russian legislation that Putin has used to silence opposition groups and the media and attack organizations with ties to the West.

Assistant Secretary Huck, the State Department confirmed—and then, you have mentioned it here in the hearing—that travel bans have been issued for some Georgian officials for supporting the Russian law, so to speak, as, frankly, many Georgians are calling it that, and for violence against peaceful protestors.

Will the State Department take additional action, including imposing potentially financial sanctions, to hold these officials accountable, and if so, when?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you very much for the question, and appreciate the concerns, which we definitely share.

In terms of actions, I have detailed some of what we have done already. But I will say that we are actively—this is an active process to look at every tool that we have that we can make available to hold individuals accountable in Georgia for either corruption,

violation of human rights, or undermining democracy. We are looking at all of those. We will—

Mrs. WAGNER. And what will some of those be, besides the travel bans? I'm looking at sanctions—

Mr. HUCK. Yes, sanctions, economic sanctions, which we have done in the past, including on Otar Partskhaladze, a Georgian/Russian oligarch, and visa restrictions on judges as well. We are not afraid to use those. We are actively looking at those. I do not have something to preview for you today because we do not announce them in advance.

But if I could say one other piece that I think is really important that we need to do right now, which is to recognize that the Georgia Dream government is trying to have it both ways. They want to criticize the United States, criticize European partners, and at the same time tell their own people that they are still on track for membership in the EU. It is unconscionable.

And I think it is important for us and the international community to make clear to the Georgian voters, the Georgian people, that there is a clear choice. They have their own decision to make, but that the path that Georgia Dream is leading them is not toward a transatlantic future that the Georgian people have said they want.

Mrs. WAGNER. Let me switch tracks a bit. In May, the Georgian government announced that a Chinese consortium had won a bid for construction of the deep sea port in the city of Anaklia, I think it is called, on Georgia's Black Sea coast. Anaklia's strategic location makes this a crucial project for Xi Jinping.

Assistant Secretary Huck, how concerned are you about this project? Because I am. And what are the ramifications for regional security if China were to gain control over this strategic port?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you very much for the question and completely share your concern.

It is surprising to us that the Georgia Dream government has decided that China, the country that is bankrolling Russia's ongoing brutal invasion of Ukraine, the same country that occupies 20 percent of Georgian territory illegally in violation of international law at this very moment, is an appropriate strategic partner for Georgia. That is surprising to us.

That is something that we have raised very clearly with the Georgian government, something that not only is a strategic risk, but also, as they look at any perceived economic benefits from partnering with China, they need to look at the costs of that as well, the risks—risks of dependence on China, and thereby, opening themselves up to economic coercion.

Mrs. WAGNER. Yes, and I think we have to urge our EU partners to also weigh on this, especially as they look to become members of the EU and NATO.

Given China and Russia's no limits partnership, sir, does Chinese control of Anaklia's deep sea port also entrench Georgia further with Russia's sphere of influence?

Mr. HUCK. Well, it certainly raises concern and questions. Now, Georgia does not have diplomatic relations with Russia. The Georgia public has spoken very clearly that they do not want Russian troops anywhere near the rest of Georgia. They already are bit-

terly—they have bitter, deep, painful memories from the invasion in 2008. And so, they are very clear; the Georgian people have spoken. So, the question is, will the Georgian Dream government listen?

Mrs. WAGNER. My time has expired. I appreciate the chair's indulgence and I yield back.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Representative Wagner.

I now recognize Representative Titus from Nevada for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm very interested in Georgia and Moldova because I'm the ranking member of the House Democracy Partnership, and both of those countries are partners in that arrangement. And so, we are very active working with some of the NGO's, trying to buildup their legislatures, in hopes that that is kind of the key to moving toward more democratic institutions, specifically, and governments, generally. So, I hate to see that it is moving in the wrong direction.

You know, the passage of that foreign agent act just shows not only the political influence that Russia is having in Georgia, but you also see it in economic influence. You see imports increasing, exports increasing. We heard about the port. All of these things are happening at the same time, and it does not bode very well.

You know, there are some attempts that we have heard by some people about stopping their attempted accession into Western organizations. Several EU officials have called for that. I think you said, Mr. Huck, that the State Department supports freezing those accession talks.

Would you give us a little more information about that? And if we were to do that, couldn't that have the opposite effect of what we want and push them more toward Russian influence?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you very much for the question, and it is an important one.

First, of course, we have to say, related to EU accession, this is ultimately a decision for the EU members. But what the EU Council has announced is a de facto freeze. The door is not closed. Georgia remains an EU candidate country, but the process is de facto frozen, based on the actions and rhetoric of the Georgian Dream government.

That is a decision that we certainly understand from the perspective of the EU. Because, as I said earlier, you cannot have it both ways. You cannot be taking these actions as Georgian Dream and making these kinds of really wild accusations, if you listen to some of the speeches by Georgian Dream leadership, and then, expect no repercussions, or even tell your people that everything is on track.

But I think, you know, there has been some discussion of if the EU would take additional steps. I do not want to speculate on hypotheticals, but I can certainly say that the steps that the EU has taken already should be enough of a wake-up call for Georgian Dream to see that they are not moving in the direction that their people have so clearly and so regularly said they want. Something like 80 to 90 percent of the Georgian people support EU membership, and clearly, the Georgian Dream government is not heading in that direction. So, the Georgian people will have a real decision to make come October.

Ms. TITUS. We have talked about the foreign agents act or foreign influence act. They have also passed some pretty repressive LGBT rights acts. Are those playing in the discussion very much?

Mr. HUCK. Yes. So, you are right, there are a number of different pieces of legislation that the Georgian Dream government have taken over the past few months that are concerning. The law you mentioned is not yet into law, but they have introduced it, which is concerning.

And both we and the European Union have looked at it. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission also did a full analysis of that, of that law, and raised very serious concerns; that it would stigmatize one section of the population; that it could promote hate speech; that it would prevent equal protections under Georgian law for human rights of all Georgians.

So, for that reason, it is yet another step that the Georgian Dream is taking where its partners and friends are saying this does not align with the transatlantic trajectory that your people say you want. And so, this is of great concern to us.

Again, that is not yet law, but we will be continuing to track it and raise our concerns with the government.

Ms. TITUS. Do you see things like that in Moldova?

Mr. SMITH. I am happy to report that actually in Moldova the situation is going in the other direction. And that is largely due to the fact that they have done so well in implementing the reforms required for opening accession talks with the EU.

Now, as they move forward beyond talks, they are going to be opening chapters and really integrating their system not only with EU practices, principles, and norms, but functionally integrating it and addressing issues that apply to human rights, but also practical issues dealing with the economy.

So, we are quite encouraged by the progress that Moldova has made in this space, and we will continue to align our engagement and assistance resources to encourage that progress further forward.

Ms. TITUS. What we often hear when we talk to legislators there is how much they are doing to have an independent judiciary and to fight corruption. And that that hopes it will propel them into these western alliances.

And then you go home and then it is not so much.

Do you see—what do you see on that front?

Mr. SMITH. We see tremendous progress when it comes to their commitment. And really, Maia Sandu, when she was elected president back in December 2020, she put judicial reform at the very front and center of her anti-corruption efforts.

We have used our assistance in partnership with the Europeans to help them put in place vetting processes, to make sure that they are recruiting the right people into the judicial branch who are going to approach these types of questions in a free and fair manner.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Representative Titus.

I now recognize Representative Lawler from New York.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As one of the co-chairs of the Moldova Caucus, along with Rep. Ross, it has truly been remarkable to see the Moldovan Government's transformation from a pro-Russian kleptocratic regime to a pro-democracy, pro-Western government under President Sandu. And the work that has been done not only to reform the judiciary but to prosecute and apply sanctions with the cooperation of the U.S. Government on Russian oligarchs has been an important step forward.

And currently Moldova is seeking EU membership, which I think is another important and positive step toward strengthening not only their democracy but strengthening their economy moving forward. But it does not come without its own challenges.

Mr. Smith or Mr. Huck, what is the U.S. doing to prioritize Moldova through programs such as IMET, FMF, and other accounts within the International Security Assistance Program at the State Department?

And how much has Moldova received through these programs in recent years?

Mr. SMITH. Since—thank you very much for the question, Representative Lawler. Since Russia's full-scale invasion our FMF budget for Moldova has increased tenfold. We have used that funding not only to help them improve their combat capability as a military force but also training and education has been a cornerstone of our assistance.

We have focused not only on helping them develop their officer corps, but also the non-commissioned officer corps which is so essential to a strong and resilient military.

Our assistance has extended even beyond the military and, of course, focused on our close cooperation with the border guards to help strengthen their border as they face pressure emanating from the Russians. And, also, we have worked closely with law enforcement in a deep partnership to help Moldova meet the challenge to their security emanating from what the Russians are trying to sponsor inside the country as well.

Mr. LAWLER. Putin and many within his Government have made it clear that certainly if Ukraine were to fall, Moldova would be in their sights. How concerned is the Administration about that?

Mr. SMITH. As President Sandu has stated herself, the defenders of Ukraine are not just defending Ukraine. They are defending Moldova and they are defending Europe.

We take very seriously the threats emanating from Russia both in terms of its illegal invasion of Ukraine, but also the threats it poses for the wider region. And that is why we have aligned our assistance in support of Ukraine to ensure they prevail on the battlefield and can deter future Russian aggression.

Mr. LAWLER. And, given that, has the Administration directed any Europe funding toward Moldova, and are you planning to in this upcoming fiscal year?

Mr. SMITH. We have directed funding from the supplementals for Ukraine to Moldova. Some of that funding has delivered instrumental transformations in Moldova, one of which we talked about a little earlier, which is the energy transformation. Moldova went from being 100 percent reliant on Russian gas, for example, now

to buying it on the open market according to EU norms and EU practices.

Our assistance was essential in meeting that objective. And it has had positive results even at a practical level for the United States. Just last April, for the first time ever in history, Moldova bought LNG exported from the United States.

These are the type of achievements we have been able to reach using those resources.

Mr. LAWLER. Given Moldova's plan and focus on EU ascension, do you see a future where Moldova applies for NATO membership, especially given their relationship with our NATO ally Romania?

Mr. SMITH. It is an interesting question, sir. Thank you.

They are constitutionally, as you know, a neutral country. But they have been a member of the Partnership for Peace for 30 years. And they have actively participated in NATO training, and in some peacekeeping operations as well, including contributing forces to the NATO peacekeeping operation in Kosovo.

This will be a decision for the Moldovan people. But just as with EU accession, if the United States is partnering with Moldova, we will support them on their Euro-Atlantic path should they choose that course. For now, we are focused on the EU.

Mr. LAWLER. The Administration describes corruption in Moldova as endemic. But I do not think that is something that we should accept.

Can you describe why the Administration feels Moldova has endemic corruption?

And what are we doing to help change this narrative?

Mr. SMITH. We assess the situation in terms of corruption in Moldova has improved significantly since Maia Sandu came into office in 2020. But we still face legacy corruption that Russia uses to try to manipulate decisionmaking inside the Moldovan Government and advance its narrative, particularly when it looks to target elections and the upcoming EU referendum.

We see corruption that remains in the rule of law sector and in the judicial sector. And we are working closely to use our assistance and engagement to help the Moldovans tackle it.

Mr. LAWLER. Well, to that end it would be critical to be engaged in election monitoring to ensure that the Russians do not interfere in Moldova's elections.

Mr. SMITH. I fully concur, sir.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, sir.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Lawler.

The chair now recognizes Representative Costa from California for 5 minutes.

Mr. COSTA. I thank the chairman and members of the subcommittee here.

This is, I think, an important topic as it looks at the Eastern Europe and the challenges we see, not only in Ukraine but the ripple effect that is taking place.

I think the conversation, I am told this afternoon, is reflected in part with the backsliding that is taking place in Georgia, and how we can do our best to reverse this trend, but, also, the pattern of that backsliding affecting Moldova and Armenia.

Armenia is a small country that has been impacted by the actions of Azerbaijan. And, frankly, you know, that trend with Russia in the lead. And I begin referring to my colleagues and to my friends in Europe as Russia today being a syndicate masquerading as a country with a mob boss called Putin, because he is a war criminal. That is just the way I see it.

How can we apply what we have learned in the case of the backsliding in Georgia to deal with democratic resilience and other efforts in the region that we are involved with?

And I guess one of you are an expert in Georgia. Josh, is that you? And then—

Mr. HUCK. Yes.

Mr. COSTA [continuing]. Christopher, you are the Moldova guy?

Mr. HUCK. That is it, yes. Thank you for the question and happy to address.

Dr. Sokolowski may have something to add from the civil society—

Mr. COSTA. Quickly, because I have another question.

Mr. HUCK. OK, sure.

So, so briefly, we remain very concerned about Russia's broader malign intentions to the whole South Caucasus region. Clearly it sees this region as an area that it should have preeminence over. And it would like to see weak, divided, isolated countries on its border that it can take advantage of.

And so, for that reason—

Mr. COSTA. And Russia is the original imperialistic country going back 400 years. I mean, I think Putin sees himself as a reincarnation of Peter the Great. I did not think he was so great.

Mr. HUCK. Yes. And so, what, you mentioned Armenia. Two things that we are doing in the Administration: first, strongly supporting every, through every way we can the achievement of a just and durable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Secretary Blinken just met with the foreign ministers of the two countries earlier this, this month. There is no single thing we could do to improve the lives of the people in the South Caucasus region more than achievement of a just and durable peace. So, we are making that effort.

Mr. COSTA. A hundred and 20 thousand Armenians part of Nagorno-Karabakh now in Armenia. The USAID is helpful but we need to do more?

Mr. HUCK. Thank you. On the specifics for those who have fled, I think I can also turn to Dr. Sokolowski, who may have some more.

I just wanted to stress the extensive efforts that the U.S. Government is now taking on behalf of our support to increase Armenia's resilience writ large. We just had a strategic dialog capstone event at which we decided, we announced that we are upgrading the relationship to a strategic partnership.

Mr. COSTA. It is important.

Mr. HUCK. And we are also increasing assistance levels.

I will turn to Dr. Sokolowski for perhaps a little bit more on that.

Mr. COSTA. Quickly.

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Yes, sure.

Just would note that our Administrator Samantha Power was out in Armenia earlier this month with Assistant Administrator Erin McKee.

And then, also, over the last 3 years we have effectively doubled our assistance for Armenia. So, we definitely understand the importance and are working closely with our European colleagues to answer the call on Armenia's needs.

Mr. COSTA. Christopher, you might comment with relationship to Moldova and Georgia. What are our partners doing, our allies, to help us support the effort with bolstering democracy in civil society both in Georgia and Moldova and Eastern Europe?

And I think Poland is an important leader in this effort. And Radek Sikorski is now the foreign minister. He has a keen view on, frankly, what Poland's focus and response should be.

Mr. SMITH. European allies and partners—thank you for the question, sir—European allies and partners have been absolutely essential into maintaining the progress that Moldova has made on its course toward the European Union and the strengthening of its democratic and economic institutions through the provision of assistance, through technical and advisory support, they have helped achieve reforms that have unlocked doors that were previously closed to Moldova on its European path.

We are also working closely with them to sanction and take other measures to disrupt and dismantle the networks of corruption Russia backs to try to hold Moldova back and undermine its progress.

Poland has been an absolutely essential partner in this space. I would also cite the U.K., Canada, France, the European Union itself. Moldova has a lot of partners and friends and they are stepping up to the plate to ensure this progress moves ahead.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired, obviously.

But, I mean, Russia is the modern day version of the Sopranos. And we just ought to be clear-eyed about that.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Costa.

I now recognize Mr. Huizenga for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate it and appreciate your time, as well, to our witnesses.

To both Assistant Secretary Smith and Sokolowski, since the war in Ukraine began in February 2022, the U.S. has provided Moldova with \$774 million in financial aid, with \$300 million of that specifically for energy security.

Can you speak to precisely what that \$300 million has been used for and sort of the efficiency, effectiveness of what those goals and objectives are?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much for the question, Representative Huizenga.

I will speak quickly to the policy implications and then turn to Alex for the details on the assistance.

Our goal with that assistance was to help Moldova break its decades-long dependence on Russia when it comes to the energy assistance. We achieved that and helped the Moldovans achieve that. And have now transitioned them from being totally reliant on Russian gas to buying gas on the open market, including from the

United States. The first LNG shipment in history from the U.S. was purchased by the Moldovans.

It has also been important to ensure Moldova was able to meet the tremendous humanitarian impact from Russia's war on Ukraine. A small country of 2.5 million people, they welcomed a million refugees in the early months of the war from Ukraine. And our assistance was essential in helping them meet that challenge.

Mr. HUIZENGA. OK. I appreciate that.

Let's go back to the first part, though. Isn't Moldova currently relying on a Russian-controlled and Russian-fueled plant in Transnistria?

Mr. SMITH. The Transnistria region continues to rely on Russian gas that is basically coming through Ukraine from Gazprom. We have been working carefully and closely with both the Government of President Sandu in Chisinau, and also the authorities in Transnistria to look, as we approach the question of a broader political settlement, what will be the implications for energy resources.

Mr. HUIZENGA. How about Moldovagaz?

Mr. SMITH. Alex, I do not know if there is more you would like to add on the specifics of our assistance.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Because I am assuming this is to try to unbundle and untangle—

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Right.

Mr. HUIZENGA [continuing]. The necessity of Russian energy. Correct?

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. So, thank you for the question, Rep. Huizenga.

With regard to gas supplies, as my colleague Chris had mentioned, there is major progress with regard to the supply not coming from Russia anymore. It is electricity which continues to be the issue. And depending on the time of the year, that's between 70 and 90 percent of the needs for electricity are still coming from the MGRES plant that is in Transnistria.

USAID is working to try to help Moldova diversify those sources. And it is funding a high voltage electricity interconnection line with Romania that would allow Moldova to import electricity from European market and other markets.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Is this the nuclear electric?

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. I would have to get back to you to check on the specific sources of that. But I know that the key thing that we are looking for is that interconnection with Moldova.

Mr. HUIZENGA. OK.

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. As opposed to getting the electricity from Transnistria.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Can either of you speak to the nuclear situation in the region, nuclear energy specifically?

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. I would have to get back to you with regard to nuclear for Moldova. I know a bit more on what is happening in the Caucasus, but we can get back to you with details.

Mr. HUIZENGA. This is something I have asked in a number of hearings and different settings, just, you know, what role does nuclear play in the pushing of that.

So, I appreciate that if we could continue that conversation.

I have got about a minute left.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Huck, I want to get back to one of the points that Ms. Wagner had touched on and I am concerned about as well. And I am afraid I am probably going to have to followup in writing.

But basically looking at China and their, their influence in that area, the Georgian Government announced a Chinese consortium won the tender for the construction of a deep seaport in Anaklia, if I am pronouncing that right, on Georgia's Black Sea coast, granting PRC a 49 percent share in the port. A strategic location of this port in the middle corridor of the trade route between China and Europe make this a crucial project for Xi Jinping, I am assuming.

And, obviously, we all know that a good 20 percent of the territory of Georgia is controlled by the Russians.

So, talk to me a little bit about that interplay.

Mr. HUCK. Yes. Thank you for the question.

And we share your concern. And this is something we have messaged clearly to the Georgian Government that it is, it seems like a questionable decision to be engaging China as an economic partner when they are bankrolling Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the occupation of 20 percent of Georgia.

Specifically to the port, we also have concerns about the Chinese, some companies involved in that consortium. One of the companies involved has been designated by the United States for ties to China's basically military industrial complex, as well as another of the companies has past concerns with corruption and fraud in previous, in previous projects.

Mr. HUIZENGA. I know my time has expired, but a followup.

Beyond this, I am curious if Georgia feels like it has to choose between the devil they know and the devil they do not. I mean, 20 percent of their land mass is held by Russia. They do not like that, clearly, but what is their other option?

And I would contend, Mr. Chairman, that the U.S. has not been doing enough to support that and push on that. And do they feel like they now have no other place to go but into the open arms of China?

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back. But I would like to continue that conversation offline.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Representative Huizenga.

I now recognize Representative Ross from North Carolina for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the ranking member.

I am the co-chair of the Moldova Caucus with Representative Lawler. And as some of you may know, North Carolina has a decades-long relationship with Moldova. Our National Guard has been working with the Moldovans doing trainings for more than 25 years. And then we, of course, are part of the State Partnership Program for medical issues, education issues.

I think every time I go back to my district there is another Moldovan delegation that comes to visit, which I think is wonderful. And our Secretary of State just received the highest civilian honor in Moldova.

I think that we have touched on a lot of the energy issues. And I am thrilled that Moldova is making this transition. I think it is important to highlight that Moldova is not alone. I mean, Germany

is making these transitions, too. And Germany has so many fewer resources to call on while they are, you know—so many more resources to call on than the Moldovans. And the Moldovans have been mighty in what they have done.

I would like to talk a little bit about additional assistance to Moldova in two areas:

One, Moldova has absorbed more Ukrainian refugees than pretty much anybody else. And we hear in Europe, I just got back from Germany in a delegation, about, oh, all these refugees, you know, in Germany. Well, I love Germany, but Germany is very big and has a fair amount of money.

Moldova is absorbing these refugees that, you know, they, and they barely can take care of some of their own financial issues.

So, I would like to know about plans for further support for Moldova as they mightily support Ukraine in this, in this area.

And then the second is, and I am sorry that Congressman Lawler isn't here, but we have worked on some legislation together to help Moldova transition its military equipment away from Russian and even Soviet equipment, because that is really what they had. And it may be that they are in a situation where they need to be ready to go.

And so, I would like to talk, I know we only have a couple minutes, but any additional assistance in both of those areas?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much for the question, Representative Ross.

And thank you so much for the support the State of North Carolina has provided to Moldova. It is known in the State Department as one of the premier State partnerships. And so, I would be remiss if I did not highlight that, including the role of the National Guard.

We are prioritizing both of the areas that you highlighted. As you said, it was a heroic effort on behalf of the Moldovan people to take in a million Ukrainian refugees in a country that is only 2.5 million in its entire population.

About 100,000 of those refugees remain. And the Moldovans have done a great job, with assistance from the United States and the European Union, in helping to provide a basic security and assurances for those people who are dealing with the tragic outcomes of Putin's invasion.

On the security assistance side, we are focusing together, in partnership with Moldova, on helping them develop the key capabilities they need to meet the security environment in which they are operating. And it is a very challenging environment indeed.

And part of our effort is to not only focus on training and tactics that are western model, but also focus on key weapons systems and equipment. And it will continue to be a priority as we move forward with the Moldovans.

Maybe, Alex, you would like to offer additional points on refugees.

Mr. SOKOLOWSKI. Sure. Thank you very much for that, Chris.

As I said in my statement, I saw firsthand the generosity of the Moldovan people as they welcomed in so many people. I was at the Palanca border crossing.

The one additional point that I wanted to make is that USAID has been helping the Government of Moldova track and understand

the needs of these 100,000 refugees who remain in Moldova. Ninety-five percent of them are women and children. There are a lot of questions at AID. But we have been helping them to understand. There is a program called Data for Impact that helps the Government of Moldova, you know, understand what those needs are.

So, I just was going to mention that. Thank you.

Ms. ROSS. And with the 33 seconds I have left, we have talked about the great job that Moldova has done meeting the requirements for joining the EU.

Just very briefly, how important is it for Moldova to be part of the EU for its future democracy and its security?

Mr. SMITH. It is the absolute critical node on their path to sovereignty, security, and sustained democracy. The accession process with the EU not only charts a course of reforms and changes that they need to make to strengthen their democracy and their economy, it provides a rightful place for Moldova in the European family of nations.

That is why we are aligning our assistance and our engagement to support it. And we will continue to do so.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you.

And I yield back.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

With no further questions from the members, I want to thank our witnesses for their valuable testimony, as well as the members for their questions.

Members of the subcommittee may have some additional written questions for the witnesses. And we will ask you to respond to these promptly and in writing.

Pursuant to committee rules, all members have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous material for the record, subject to the length limitations.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:26 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe
Thomas H. Kean, Jr (R-NJ), Chairman

July 16, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe at 2:00 p.m. in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Tuesday, July 23, 2024

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Rayburn 2200

SUBJECT: A Look at U.S. Policy in Georgia and
Moldova Ahead of Their 2024 Elections

WITNESSES: Mr. Joshua Huck
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Mr. Christopher Smith,
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Dr. Alexander Sokolowski
Deputy Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Europe and Eurasia
U. S. Agency for International Development

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD FROM
REPRESENTATIVE CONNOLLY

A Look at U.S. Policy in Georgia and Moldova Ahead of Their 2024 Elections
Subcommittee on Europe
2:00 PM, Tuesday, July 23, 2024
Rayburn 2200
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for calling today's hearing to examine U.S. policy towards Georgia and Moldova ahead of their 2024 elections. For the past decade, I have served as co-chair of the Georgia Caucus here in the House of Representatives, and it has been from that position that I have advocated for Georgia's territorial integrity and their turn away from Russia and towards the West. It is important now more than ever that we make clear that the United States supports the Georgian people in their Euro-Atlantic aspirations and opposes the drastic democratic backsliding that has hindered Georgia's westward trajectory.

The democratic backsliding in Georgia, which has brought about the passage of a Foreign Agents Law that mimics what Putin used to eviscerate civil society in Russia, is unsustainable. Georgia's democracy is in danger. Boundless investigations of political parties, changes in election systems that violate the Venice Commission and OSCE, and now the Foreign Agents Law, bring Georgia further away from EU membership, not closer. Attacks on the United States Ambassador, against independent judges, civil society members, the political opposition, and the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals only push Georgia closer to the Russian model, and away from the liberal democratic model of the West.

The upcoming elections in October will provide a referendum not just on Georgia's ruling party, but its democracy. The United States must make clear that the government must abstain from using the foreign influence law to limit NGOs' ability to scrutinize government actions during the campaign and to conduct independent election monitoring. The State Department must work closely with civil society in Georgia to ensure that its democratic institutions will remain an essential part of Georgia's future going forward. Following a Hungary-like path to EU membership will not work for Georgia. The United States must continue to stand with the Georgian people, and their Euro-Atlantic aspirations based in democratic institutions, the rule of law, accountability for those who engage in corruption, an independent and impartial judiciary, and opposition to the 'Foreign Agents Law.'

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
DAS Joshua Huck by
Representative Kean (No. 1 to No. 4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
July 23, 2024**

Question 1:

Can you describe the scale of the government's violent response to peaceful protesters?

Answer 1:

Over the course of mass demonstrations in Spring 2024, Georgia's law enforcement response ranged from broadly restrained to disproportionate and violent. The Ministry of Internal Affairs' Special Tasks Department (STD) deployed tear gas, pepper spray, and water cannons against mostly peaceful protesters. At least two persons, including one U.S. citizen, were beaten by police. The Head of STD said on camera that he had identified specific individuals for the riot police to target for violence, though he later claimed the remark was a joke.

Question 2:

Has the State Department raised concerns with the Georgian government about this brutal crackdown on peaceful protests?

Answer 2:

The Department has raised its concerns with the government of Georgia, including in meetings with the heads of the Special Investigative Service (SIS) in charge of investigating police violence and the relevant Prosecution Service department. We are and will continue to urge the government to conduct prompt and impartial investigations into all reports of violence, and to hold accountable those responsible. The Department created a visa restriction policy for undermining democracy in Georgia and has applied it to those engaged in violent attacks on peaceful protesters.

Question 3:

How many protesters are still imprisoned?

Answer 3:

Six individuals were detained under charges based on the Criminal Code of Georgia. The Department has confirmed that two remain in detention, and the status of the other four remain unconfirmed. Over 450 individuals were detained for a shorter period, with most of these individuals charged for violations of the administrative code and fined.

Question 4:

How many of those imprisoned were U.S. citizens, and do any U.S. citizens remain behind bars?

Answer 4:

No U.S. citizens remain detained for charges stemming from participation in the protests. Of the more than 450 individuals initially detained from the protests, the Department confirmed three were U.S. citizens.