

Adopted “Agents Law” Differs from the Original, Foresees Personal Fines – Experts



The banner reads: "No to Russian Law." April 28 protest against the Foreign Agents Law; Photo: Guram Muradov/Civil.ge

It came to light that the final version of the controversial foreign agents' law, which the Parliament adopted in its third and final reading on May 14, was amended and now allows for imposing fines on physical persons for failing to disclose the data on suspected agents under “foreign influence.” The original version of the law, passed in the first reading, only foresaw such penalties against legal persons.

A non-governmental expert who monitors the process made this discovery after a detailed study of the final, adopted version of the law. Previous versions of the law are not currently accessible on the [official website](#) of the Parliament. Still, the lawyers working on previous drafts retrieved the original copies and tracked the changes. These were apparently recorded as adopted in the final protocol of the second hearing. Still, it is unclear whether the amended text was distributed to MPs during the third, final reading. According to the rules of procedure, only editorial changes can be made during the final, third reading.

The changes made in several key areas of the law relate to the types of information that official bodies may request to complete registration or monitor the compliance status of non-state entities acting under “foreign influence.”

The law provides that for that purpose, authorized officials of the Ministry of Justice may request personal data, including most types of confidential data (except secrets as prescribed by law) from “all persons, bodies, organizations, and entities.” Failure to provide such information results in a fine equal to GEL 5,000 (approximately USD 1,800). The previous version of the law foresaw no penalties on individuals.

Saba Brachveli, who noticed the changes, said even though the ruling party claimed numerous times that the law would not target individuals, “in reality [...] has already quietly amended the law in the last minutes of the plenary session of the second reading [so that] effects and sanctions will also apply to physical persons.”

Commenting on the issue today, Parliament Speaker **Shalva Papuashvili** **accused** opposition members, the media and civil society organizations of failing to read the law and only blindly protesting against it. “Can you see how serious the problem is when a person is lazy to read and chooses to bang and shout,” Papuashvili said. He claimed that the amendment apparently discovered today was discussed during the second reading two weeks ago. Papuashvili said that physical persons will not be registered as carriers of foreign influence, but will merely be obliged to provide relevant information upon request.

Speaking to RFE/RL’s Georgian Service, GD MP **Tenzig Sharmanashvili** **claimed** that a word “person” that appeared in the final version of the law does not apply to physical persons and thus does not target them.

*The law must now be signed by President Salome Zurbishvili, who has already **vowed** to veto it. She also said that she would not negotiate the details of the law, stressing that the overall content of the legislation contradicts the country’s European path and must, therefore, be dropped.*

NOTE: This news was updated on May 17 at 18:10 to include the comments of Shalva Papuashvili and Tengiz Sharmanashvili.

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