

The Georgian Dream's New Social Contract

On November 28, the Georgian Dream ended Georgia's European integration path by [declaring](#) that the accession negotiations would be removed from the political agenda until 2028. This came as a surprise to many, and angry protests continue even as this publication is released. However, this was not unexpected if one carefully listened and analyzed what Bidzina Ivanishvili and his party said before the elections.

Georgian Dream entered this year's pre-election campaign with unprecedented bluntness, shedding its long-maintained veneer of pro-Western, democratic aspirations. For the last two years ruling party openly indulged in an anti-Western narrative, signaling a stark departure from its earlier promises to align with Euro-Atlantic values and fulfill the criteria for European integration. This was a genuine U-turn for Georgia's political trajectory: not only has the ruling party abandoned its pretense of being a democratic, reform-driven force, but it has also [embraced](#) autocratic rhetoric

while openly demonizing the country's Western partners.

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When Ivanishvili first entered Georgian politics, his promises inspired hope for a genuinely democratic state—where the citizens of Georgia would stand at the center of political processes. The party's slogans proclaimed that the primary value was to be a human being. In stark contrast, in the 2024 campaign, those promises have been replaced with an unapologetic vow to finalize the consolidation of power, cementing Georgia's drift toward full-



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Transmutation of the Georgian Dream's Discourse

Bidzina Ivanishvili's entry into Georgian politics in 2011 was marked by a rhetoric of urgency and hope for democratic renewal. Blaming then-President Mikheil Saakashvili for authoritarian governance and presenting himself as the antidote, Ivanishvili framed his mission as a necessary intervention to save Georgia from the dangers of autocratic rule – protecting human rights, defending property

rights, strengthening civil society, ensuring judicial independence, fostering free media, and creating a vibrant opposition.

In his first public [statement](#), Ivanishvili emphasized the need to build a constitutional framework to safeguard Georgia against the concentration of power. *“The good constitution will be the one which is a result of an agreement within the society and not the one written by me,”* he declared, highlighting his commitment to inclusivity and public participation. He stated, *“We should create such a constitution which will rule out any risk [of the concentration of power in a single person] ... But only the constitution won't protect you against authoritarianism. Society should also be ready for it. I am going to strengthen the society. That is my major goal.”*

Ivanishvili also underscored the critical role of opposition in a healthy democracy. He promised

not only to leave power after implementing fundamental reforms but also to bolster the opposition to hold future governments accountable actively. *“I plan fundamental changes, and after that, I will quit... I plan to go into the opposition to the government we will create. I want to create such a precedent,”* he said, framing himself as a steward of democracy, not its ruler.

As Georgia’s Prime Minister, Ivanishvili’s early rhetoric continued to echo these values. In his first New Year’s [address](#), he vowed to center his government’s policies on human rights, liberties, and welfare. *“Our government has shown society key priorities for establishing a socially fair state in this short period. We have set the 2013 state budget to make it oriented completely towards the people,”* he proclaimed, reinforcing his image as a leader dedicated to democratic governance and social justice.

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Yet, the Bidzina Ivanishvili of 2024 seems almost unrecognizable compared to the reformist of 2011. The lofty promises of democratic renewal have been replaced with a starkly different vision: the opposition must be [prosecuted](#), civil society should be [silenced](#), and institutions should be fully [loyal](#) to the ruling party. Ivanishvili’s rhetoric no longer aims to strengthen democracy but openly promotes the consolidation of autocratic rule. The events of December 2024 show that arrest of political opponents, violence against the peaceful demonstrators, and total disregard of the constitutional norms and legal framework have become routine practice.

The transformation was particularly glaring in the

Georgian Dream’s pre-election campaign, during which the party openly adopted an anti-Western platform, accusing Georgia’s Western partners of interference and undermining the country’s sovereignty. The emphasis was no longer on empowering citizens or ensuring democratic safeguards but insulating the ruling party from criticism and accountability. Instead of fostering judicial independence or strengthening the media, Ivanishvili’s government has [weaponized](#) these institutions to maintain control, normalizing the practices he once claimed to oppose.

The shift towards vocally emphasizing new priorities instead of silently continuing to consolidate a grip on power underscored the betrayal of Ivanishvili’s original stance. This brutal openness can only be interpreted as a deliberate effort to impose a new social contract based on loyalty and submission to the ruling elite, replacing freedoms, liberties, and ideals of accountability.

Devolution of Foreign Policy from Balancing to Realignment

Bidzina Ivanishvili’s foreign policy rhetoric mirrors the broader evolution of his domestic political discourse. What began as a commitment to Western integration has gradually transformed into an overt rejection of Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations. While his initial statements aligned with the principles of partnership with NATO, the EU, and the United States, subtle ambivalence toward Russia was always present. Over time, these undertones gave way to explicit pro-Russian tendencies, culminating in an openly anti-Western stance during the Georgian Dream’s most recent campaign.

When Ivanishvili entered politics, his foreign policy statements reflected a clear pro-Western stance. In 2011, he [declared](#), *“NATO has no alternative in terms of Georgia’s security, and I stand where*

the absolute majority of the Georgian people stand.” Following his first meetings with NATO officials, he expressed optimism about Georgia’s chances of joining the alliance and acknowledged the need to address issues such as democratic institutions and judicial reform. Similarly, his [conversations](#) with then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton focused on the “*importance of the strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States*” and praised America’s role in supporting democracy in Georgia.

Yet, even at this early stage, Ivanishvili hinted at a desire for “balance” between the West and Russia. In January 2013, he [pointed](#) to Armenia’s foreign policy as an example for Georgia to follow, arguing that “*having good relations simultaneously with NATO and Russia is possible.*” In a televised interview later that year, he went further, [stating](#), “*I do not believe and cannot imagine that occupation of the territories of its neighbors is in the strategy of the Russian Federation.*” These remarks betrayed a reluctance to acknowledge the reality of Russian aggression, reflecting a softer stance on Moscow compared to his predecessors.

While Ivanishvili’s early foreign policy narrative sought to reconcile Euro-Atlantic aspirations with pragmatism toward Russia, his government’s stance shifted dramatically in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. The 2024 pre-election campaign marked a turning point as the Georgian Dream adopted an explicitly anti-Western platform. This time, the rhetoric did not include assurances of NATO’s indispensability or the importance of US-Georgia cooperation. Instead, Ivanishvili’s government emphasized “pragmatism” in relations with Russia and [accused](#) Georgia’s Western partners of interfering in the country’s sovereignty and threatening its peace and security.

The deliberate narrative about the West wanting to spill over the war from Ukraine to Georgia rejected Western priorities and affirmed Ivanishvili’s

realignment toward Moscow. The Georgian Dream has signaled a departure from the foreign policy consensus that defined Georgia’s post-independence trajectory by normalizing anti-Western sentiment and downplaying Georgia’s aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration.

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As Ivanishvili saw the fulfillment of EU [recommendations](#) as a direct threat to his power, the evolution of his foreign policy stance immediately reflected his broader political strategy: to isolate Georgia from its Western allies and align the country’s geopolitical orientation with Russian interests. In response to Western criticism of Georgia’s lack of progress in fulfilling democratic criteria necessary for further steps on the EU integration path, Ivanishvili’s early rhetoric about shared democratic values and strategic partnerships with the West has been replaced with warnings against “Western meddling.”

Changed Discourse on the Occupied Territories

Bidzina Ivanishvili’s narrative regarding Georgia’s occupied territories has evolved significantly, mirroring the broader shifts in his domestic and foreign policy rhetoric. From his earliest statements in 2011, he adopted an unconventional approach, blaming the 2008 war not on Russia but on the Georgian government under Mikheil Saakashvili. Citing the Tagliavini report in his first press conference, Ivanishvili [described](#) Saakashvili’s response to the shelling of Georgian villages as “ab-

solute recklessness.” By framing the conflict as a failure of Georgian leadership, Ivanishvili undermined the dominant narrative in Georgian politics, which viewed Russia as the clear aggressor and occupier.

This framing has evolved into a discourse that increasingly aligns with Moscow’s perspective. Recently, Ivanishvili’s rhetoric and the Georgian Dream’s broader narrative have gone beyond criticizing Saakashvili’s handling of the conflict to suggest that the 2008 war was instigated at the behest of Western powers. Such a claim damages Georgia’s legal standing in its fight for territorial integrity and mirrors Kremlin talking points.

This shift coincides with [statements](#) made by Sergey Lavrov claiming that Russia acted in compliance with international law to restrain Georgian “aggressors.” Ivanishvili’s remarks now echo this narrative, which has long been central to Moscow’s justification for its actions in Georgia. Prominent Russian propagandists, such as Margarita Simonyan and Grigori Karasin, have [approved](#) the alignment, further solidifying the perception that Ivanishvili’s government is gradually abandoning Georgia’s long-standing non-recognition policy. By implying that Russia’s so-called “peace enforcement” operation was a legitimate response, Ivanishvili’s government risks implicitly acknowledging the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

One of the most damaging implications of this narrative shift is its impact on Georgia’s diplomatic efforts. The non-recognition policy has been a cornerstone of Georgia’s strategy to counter Russian occupation, sustained primarily through solid support from Western allies. By framing the conflict as provoked by Saakashvili under Western influence, Ivanishvili not only undermines Georgia’s moral and legal arguments against Russian aggression but also weakens international solidarity with Georgia’s territorial claims. This shift, combined

with the rise of anti-Western rhetoric, isolates Georgia from its strategic partners, further eroding the foundations of its non-recognition policy. Perhaps most troubling is the focus on reframing the war as a conflict between Georgians and Ossetians rather than one driven by Russian occupation. This narrative downplays Russia’s role as the primary aggressor and occupier while presenting the conflict as an internal issue. The absence of any acknowledgment of Russia’s accountability signals a deeper strategy: to pave the way for normalized ties with Moscow, potentially at the cost of recognizing sovereignty for Abkhazia and Tskhinvali in some form. In the overall context of Ivanishvili’s policy shift, this new stance on the occupied regions might be seen as a necessary step for restoring diplomatic relations with Russia.

Bare Thin Legitimacy of the New Social Contract

As the Georgian Dream campaigned on an openly anti-Western platform for the first time, the contrasting shift in Ivanishvili’s internal and external narrative was the main context of the 2024 pre-election environment in Georgia. A [preliminary](#) report of the observer missions accused the ruling party of utilizing state resources unfairly, intimidating voters, and creating an “uneven playing field” for election. Opposition parties and civil society argue that the Georgian Dream’s dominance in media and funding, along with recent laws targeting civil society and foreign-backed organizations, skewed the election in favor of the incumbents. The OSCE and other observers highlighted concerns over a divisive and polarized campaign environment and reported incidents of hate speech against opposition figures. Observers also noted that the transparency and enforcement of campaign financing laws were inadequate, giving the ruling party vast advantages.

As the whole state apparatus was involved in elec-

tion fraud, there are no hopes for proper investigation and fair court hearings of the reported election manipulation evidence. Authorities have formally launched investigations into reported electoral irregularities, but the response has been heavily criticized. Courts in various districts systematically [dismissed](#) complaints from election watchdog groups and opposition parties, citing insufficient evidence or procedural grounds. The watchdogs had reported numerous issues, from voter intimidation to ballot manipulation, raising significant concerns over the election's fairness. Despite mounting local and international calls for a thorough and impartial investigation, the Georgian authorities have thus far rejected or dismissed all complaints, reinforcing skepticism about the impartiality of the judicial review process. This dismissive approach has only intensified the controversy, with critics alleging that the rulings reflect an unwillingness to address the alleged irregularities transparently.

The lack of responsiveness to election irregularities aligns with broader [patterns](#) of power consolidation by the ruling party. Over recent years, the Georgian Dream has been accused of systematically tightening control over key state institutions, including the Central Election Commission and the judiciary, concluding that these bodies are neither transparent nor independent. This control has enabled the party to influence election administration and the legal system significantly, ensuring that allegations of irregularities or electoral misconduct rarely receive independent scrutiny or thorough investigation. The judiciary's routine dismissal of complaints from watchdogs and opposition parties in the 2024 elections exemplifies this trend, reinforcing perceptions that these institutions serve the interests of the Georgian Dream rather than the national interest or upholding democratic principles.

Bidzina Ivanishvili has laid all his cards on the table. By doubling down on anti-Western rhetoric

and pushing forward legislation that removes any remaining pretenses of democratic governance, he has signaled a decisive departure from Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. No longer constrained by the need to project a pro-Western image, Ivanishvili seeks to legitimize his pro-Russian pivot as a new and permanent course for Georgia.

This is not just a shift in policy Ivanishvili is trying to legitimize through his cascade of tricks; it is a redefinition of the country's social contract he is aiming for. Ivanishvili envisions Georgia as a place where alignment with Russia, rather than integration with the West, becomes the cornerstone of national identity and governance. Under this new social contract, loyalty to the ruling party and its chosen geopolitical orientation replace the democratic ideals of accountability, pluralism, and public participation. It is a bargain that prioritizes the consolidation of power over the aspirations of a society that has long sought freedom and alignment with the democratic world.

Far-Reaching Consequences

The Georgian Dream's pre-election campaign focused on three key points that raised serious concerns about democratic freedoms and the country's future trajectory. First, aimed to hinder civil society and media by imposing restrictive regulations on organizations receiving foreign funding, the ruling party pushed for [adopting](#) a Russian-style law on foreign agents. Second, the party leadership openly [announced](#) the political persecution of opposition groups, mainly through legal proceedings targeting the "collective UNM" (United National Movement). Finally, the Georgian Dream's controversial statements and policy shifts, particularly on the issue of the 2008 Russian aggression against Georgia, suggest an alarming effort to shift blame onto Georgia and the West rather than acknowledging Russia's role in the occupation of Georgian territories. These developments point to a dangerous trend towards authoritarianism, with

the ruling party attempting to neutralize both political opposition and civil society to ensure continued control.

Thus, if the Georgian Dream is to remain in power, the consequences will be far-reaching for Georgia's sovereignty, international relations, and regional stability. The party's actions and rhetoric indicate a desire to align more closely with authoritarian regimes. By shifting the blame for the 2008 aggression away from Russia, the Georgian Dream risks undermining the country's long-standing policy of non-recognition of the occupied regions, thereby compromising Georgia's territorial integrity. This would pave the way for re-establishing diplomatic ties with Russia, which seems to be a key goal for the ruling party. Additionally, Georgia's growing partnership with China, mainly through signing a strategic agreement and [contracting](#) a controversial Chinese company to construct the geopolitically important strategic Anaklia port project, signifies a further shift towards non-democratic alliances. Furthermore, the Georgian Dream's top-level diplomatic [exchanges](#) with Iran and premature international recognition of their electoral victory exclusively from Russia-friendly authoritarian states highlight a broader pivot away from the West and towards a more authoritarian bloc.

The implications of this shift are profound. By abandoning the West, Ivanishvili will isolate Georgia from its allies, undermining the very institutions that have supported the country's progress and jeopardizing the democratic future its citizens have fought to achieve.

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If Georgia fully aligns with authoritarian powers, it will be a serious blow to the West's regional strategic interests. The emergence of two Russian-style regimes, one in Belarus and another in Georgia, would create a significant challenge for NATO and the EU, destabilizing the region further. Not only would this support Russia's war efforts in Ukraine, but it would also strengthen the authoritarian axis, providing Iran and China with more leverage to undermine democratic values and expand their influence, destabilizing global democratic systems and encouraging malign activities against the West.

Mitigating the Post-Election Crisis

The situation in Georgia has escalated rapidly since election day. Georgian Dream faced significant challenges in legitimizing the scale of election manipulation reported on October 26 and has decided to double down on its authoritarian agenda. The [nomination](#) of Mikheil Kavelashvili—widely regarded as one of the least politically and intellectually capable politicians, yet the most vocal anti-Western figure—as the presidential candidate serves as a stark example of Ivanishvili's drive for total control and a pro-Russian shift. Most crucially, Irakli Kobakhidze's [announcement](#) to halt the

EU integration process until 2028 provides undeniable evidence that the Georgian Dream is making a final push to impose its new social contract. This statement has reinvigorated yet another wave of mass protests in Tbilisi and other major Georgian cities.

A significant development in the current protests is the unprecedented action of hundreds of civil servants from various ministries [openly](#) distancing themselves from and [protesting](#) Georgian Dream's foreign policy through a series of joint statements. This represents a substantial challenge to Ivanishvili's pattern of state capture, which heavily relies on maintaining full control over administrative resources and state institutions. The police have responded to peaceful protesters with unprecedented [brutality](#), reminiscent of OMON-style crackdowns in Russia. Despite this, Georgian society is courageously resisting the coordinated pressure from the Russian Federation and its authoritarian allies. However, the people cannot stand alone indefinitely. Whether Ivanishvili succeeds in imposing his new social contract will largely depend on the immediate and strategic engagement of key Western stakeholders. President Zourabichvili, the last remaining legitimate institution in

the country, has urged the authorities to end the violence and has [called](#) on Georgia's Western partners to take clear and decisive actions in defense of Georgia's democracy.

The EU, NATO, and democratic partners must take immediate action and demonstrate the ability to support the pro-democracy movement in Georgia. First, they must unambiguously reject the election results the Central Election Commission announced as ample documented evidence of widespread fraud and irregularities proves their illegitimacy despite the dismissal by Ivanishvili's courts. Second, targeted sanctions should be imposed on Bidzina Ivanishvili, key Georgian Dream leaders, and officials involved in the election manipulation. This would demonstrate unwavering support for Georgia's democracy and will finally disperse the Georgian Dream's deceptive manipulations so that they can restore relations with the West and continue EU integration. Most importantly, these actions would weaken the regime's ability to suppress opposition, signaling to lower-ranking officials that the international community backs the fight for free and fair elections and there will be consequences for implementing illegal and oppressive policies ■