

The EU Must Support Georgia's Resistance

As nationwide protests continue in Georgia, marking one of the largest resistance movements against the Georgian Dream's rule since it came to power in 2012, the European Union faces a crucial opportunity to counter Russia's influence in the region. Vladimir Putin's efforts to expand Russia's influence in Europe are multifaceted. In Ukraine, it employs military force to assert its control. In Moldova, it seeks to install a pro-Russian government by undermining the current political establishment. Meanwhile, in Georgia, it aims to maintain an authoritarian regime in power despite strong opposition from the population.

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Since the protests erupted following the rigged 26 October elections, only the [European Parliament](#) and the three [Baltic states](#) have taken a bold

stance, issuing strong statements condemning electoral fraud, supporting the democratic resistance and Georgia's European aspirations, and calling for new elections. While other EU member states and institutions made statements decrying various democratic backsliding episodes, there is a need for a clear and unified message from the EU as a foreign policy actor.

With each passing day, violence intensifies in Georgia, and police responses grow increasingly brutal, suggesting the government is heading toward escalation. The brutal crackdown on the demonstrators has been followed up by the [arrest](#) of the opposition and youth leaders and the assault of the opposition party offices. This is further fueled by strong pro-Russian and anti-EU propaganda spearheaded by government-affiliated TV channels.

These developments coincide with the start of Kaja Kallas's tenure as the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Her first visit



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to Kyiv highlighted Ukraine and developments in the East as top priorities, which could also benefit Georgia. While in Kyiv, Kallas and EU Council President António Costa called Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili to express their support and issued a [statement](#) backing a democratic Georgia and signaling the potential for a “stronger response” against the authorities in the event of further escalation. With a capable new leadership team, the EU has an ideal opportunity to reinforce its credibility in the eastern neighborhood, ensuring unity at a pivotal moment for Ukraine while recognizing the significance of developments in Georgia, which carry profound implications for regional security and EU interests.

This may necessitate a renewed EU assessment of Vladimir Putin’s objectives in the region and the diverse methods Russia employs to achieve them. These range from military invasions to hybrid tactics for regime change—leveraging oligarchs cultivated in Russia who serve its interests—to counter Western influence and prevent regional nations from integrating into Western security and political structures.

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Georgia exemplifies how Russia has effectively decoupled a country from the West within a decade, primarily through the influence of oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili. By sustaining a balancing act and fostering ambiguity, the Georgian Dream government has managed to project an image of alignment with the West and Euro-Atlantic integration while simultaneously steering the country in the opposite direction. Examples of these actions include adopting Kremlin narratives, such as claiming that “West is dragging Georgia into a war with

Russia,” [inviting](#) a Russian legislator to address the Georgian Parliament in 2019 (which sparked protests), suppressing civil society and media, and violating human rights. These violations, including attacks on the LGBTIQ community, culminated in the adoption of Russia-style legislation in spring 2024—ironically after Georgia was granted EU candidate status.

Until 2022, the Georgian Dream-led government successfully maintained a strategic ambiguity, both with the West and within parts of the Georgian administration and society. This approach allowed it to consolidate power and capture state institutions. Thus, liberating a state captured by a Russia-backed oligarch through free and democratic elections became nearly impossible—a reality starkly demonstrated during the 26 October elections. Despite strong popular resistance, because of the institution-embedded [vote-buying](#), massive violence, and intimidation, disinformation propaganda, control of the election commissions, and fraudulent tactics, such as carousels, the Georgian Dream scored over 53% of the votes – a result which was disputed by the exit polls and also assessed as dubious by international and local observers.

To address this institutional and state capture by a Moscow-friendly oligarch and his party, the EU must upgrade its strategy, starting by clearly defining its interests in Georgia and the region.

From a geo-economics perspective, the EU should not undermine the significant attractiveness that Georgia has gained in recent years through its strategic position between Asia and Europe along the Black Sea coast to establishing itself as a key transit hub within the [Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor](#), better known as the Middle Corridor. This route has gained increased importance following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine which disrupted trade through the Northern Route. This corridor is widely seen as the most viable link between

European and Central Asian markets and China. The EU has already [committed](#) EUR 10 billion to infrastructure investments to establish direct transport links with Central Asia through the Black Sea and Caucasus regions, enhancing its geo-economic presence and leveraging influence in the South Caucasus (including Georgia) and Central Asia against competing approaches from Russia and China. However, amidst a shifting geopolitical balance of power and the uncertain outcome of the war in Ukraine, the EU must stay focused and safeguard its transport routes from being attacked or exploited by external actors, including for potential [sanction](#) circumvention. Moreover, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and Association Agreement, strategic pillars of economic and political cooperation between the EU and Georgia, are now hanging by a thread, risking further reducing the EU's leverage over Georgia and its government. Hence, the EU should remain interested in Georgia from an economic point of view.

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Politically, it is in the EU's interest to see Georgia join the bloc as the only long-term guarantee for its security, stability, and transformation into a fully democratic country. The EU should capitalize on Georgia's potential, as it remains the most pro-European nation in the region, with an impressive [81%](#) of its population favoring EU membership. Supporting Georgia's democratic values and those defending them is crucial. Allowing Georgia to drift further toward autocracy will diminish opportunities for meaningful engagement and undermine the EU's leverage to drive positive change. Additionally, the EU's role in safeguarding stability and contributing to conflict resolution

in Georgia could be weakened with potential repercussions for the mandates of the EUSR and the EUMM mission in the occupied territories. The EU must, therefore, continue supporting those forces in Georgia that stand against the authoritarian Georgian Dream government, whether media, civil society, or political groups, as well as academic institutions. Such support will undoubtedly be opposed by the Georgian Dream leadership, which has accused Brussels and European capitals of interfering in Georgia's domestic affairs. However, this propagandistic pushback must be disregarded and actively challenged.

In light of the above and considering the current situation on the ground, the EU must enhance its strategic posture in the region and adopt a more assertive approach to shaping Georgia's future at this critical moment. Given recent developments revealing the true intentions of the Georgian Dream, which contradict the will of the Georgian people, the EU should eliminate any ambiguity regarding the election results and openly call for new elections.

This would be the first step toward de-escalating the situation. Such a call should come in the form of strong, high-level statements and through existing diplomatic channels to pressure the government to de-escalate. Any discussion of an additional inquiry into the conduct of the October elections is, at this stage, futile and counterproductive, as it would reduce pressure on the Georgian Dream. A clearly articulated demand in line with the position of the European Parliament will make the EU's position more powerful and credible.

The EU should urgently condemn all acts of violence against protesters and political opponents and impose sanctions on those responsible, including the Minister of Interior, the Chief of the State Security Service, the leadership of the law-enforcement divisions, and riot police who

terrorize the protesters. Given the urgency due to the situation on the ground, member states should quickly coordinate and join the Baltic countries in imposing national sanctions on individuals responsible for repression and human rights violations, including politicians, government members, and MPs.

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Without strong deterrence from the West, the Georgian Dream government will likely escalate its repression, potentially leading to even more dramatic scenarios. This is an opportunity for the EU and its member states to demonstrate leadership and reaffirm their commitment to defending human rights and democracy. Support for Georgia's democracy can have very concrete pillars – supporting civil society organizations, free media, and academia. With the consolidation of authoritarianism, these institutions will become the next battleground between democracy and oppression. By taking decisive action in Georgia, the EU can strengthen its credibility as a trusted partner for aspiring EU nations in the region and counter any perceptions of weakness ■