

The Georgian Dream's Isolationist, Damaging, and Minimalist Foreign Policy

Since late 2024, the Georgian Dream (GD) has pursued a foreign policy that can best be described as self-isolationist, damaging, and minimalist. Its primary objective is not to promote Georgia's national interests and ensure its security, stability, and prosperity, as prescribed by the now-defunct Foreign Policy Strategy or National Security Concept, but to preserve the regime and consolidate its foreign legitimacy. Seeking recognition is a new concept that puts Georgia back 30 years. In the early 1990s, in the short period of time from the declaration of independence in 1991 to the joining of the UN in 1992, Georgian foreign policy was all about seeking recognition – but at that time for the newly re-established independent state. This time, it is about the recognition of the regime.

Internal and External Legitimacy Problems

The Georgian Dream regime is grappling with a profound internal legitimacy crisis, highlighted by nearly three months of continuous protests against its derailment of Georgia's European integration. Citizens have persistently mobilized, demanding new elections, the release of political prisoners, and a long-term transition to an accountable and transparent coalition government rooted in European values. Instead of addressing these demands, the government has responded with escalating repression, further widening the divide between the ruling elite and the Georgian people.



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Externally, Georgia's legitimacy is just as precarious. Key partnerships with Western allies have been suspended or severely strained, leaving the country increasingly isolated. No Western government has acknowledged the Georgian Dream's election victory, nor has any leader sent a congratulatory message to Mikheil Kavelashvili, the former footballer handpicked by Ivanishvili as Georgia's next president. His inauguration occurred without foreign dignitaries, including ambassadors—a stark sign of diplomatic disengagement. In a desperate attempt to fabricate legitimacy, the Georgian Dream touted a routine “holiday greetings” [letter](#) from NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte as a sign of recognition. However, NATO swiftly [clarified](#) that the message was a standard bureaucratic courtesy with no political significance, further exposing the government's growing isolation on the international stage.

The Georgian Dream also attempted to use the January visit of Council of Europe Secretary

General Alain Berset as a stamp of legitimacy. A high-ranking party official even [declared](#) that “talks on legitimacy will not continue any longer since the Secretary General of the Council of Europe is meeting with the Georgian Prime Minister.” However, Berset swiftly [clarified](#) that his visit had nothing to do with recognizing the legitimacy of Georgia's parliamentary elections. Similarly, the ruling party sought to exploit the planned visit of OSCE PA Chairwoman Pia Kauma, hoping to use it as another diplomatic endorsement. Instead, Kauma postponed her trip, [stating](#) that she would visit Georgia “at a time when OSCE PA engagement would be most effective”—a clear rebuke signaling concern over the country's political trajectory.

The scale of electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections led several Western European nations to openly question the legitimacy of the Georgian Dream's rule. Nordic and Baltic Foreign Ministers urged the government to “consider the possibility of new elections,” while their counterparts from

France, Germany, and Poland echoed similar concerns, emphasizing the need to address the “possibility of new elections.” These statements marked an unprecedented diplomatic challenge to the Georgian Dream’s authority, further isolating the regime on the international stage and reinforcing the growing perception that its grip on power lacks democratic legitimacy.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) took an even stronger stance, directly challenging the Georgian Dream’s legitimacy. In a resolution [adopted](#) on 29 January 2025, by an overwhelming vote of 114-13, PACE conditionally ratified the credentials of the Georgian Dream delegation while demanding an end to police brutality and human rights abuses, the release of political prisoners, and the creation of an electoral environment conducive to genuinely democratic new parliamentary elections “to be announced in the coming months.” The resolution dealt a serious blow to the Georgian Dream’s international standing, so much so that the Georgian delegation [withdrew](#) from PACE altogether—aligning Georgia with the likes of Belarus, Russia, and Azerbaijan, all of which, at various times, lost their place in the Assembly due to authoritarian practices.

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The Georgian Dream’s external legitimacy crisis is further underscored by its exclusion from key international forums. Party leaders were not invited to the Munich Security Conference and absent from the Davos International Forum—events where global leaders shape diplomatic and eco-

nomic strategies. Meanwhile, ambassadors from EU member states and the United States have refrained from holding official meetings with Georgian Dream government representatives, signaling a diplomatic freeze. Additionally, no high-level bilateral visits have taken place between Georgia and Western nations, further isolating the regime and reinforcing its growing detachment from the international democratic community.

At the presidential level, diplomatic engagement has been non-existent. Mikheil Kavelashvili has neither met nor engaged with any foreign dignitaries, and it is unlikely he would have much to contribute if he did. The international response to his inauguration further illustrates Georgia’s diplomatic isolation. No Western leader extended congratulations while Lithuania’s President [explicitly backed](#) Salome Zourabichvili as the only legitimate head of state, stating that Kavelashvili was “only elected and acknowledged by his own party.” Similarly, the Chairman of the German Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee [warned](#) that “no one should recognize the so-called new ‘President’ of Georgia or legitimize him through invitations or visits,” reinforcing the growing consensus that Kavelashvili’s presidency lacks international credibility.

Nonetheless, Kavelashvili was not entirely without recognition. Hungarian President Tamás Sulyok and Russian Duma Foreign Committee Chairman Leonid Slutsky were among the few who extended their congratulations. Slutsky, in particular, took to Telegram to insist that Kavelashvili had lawfully assumed office, ridiculing Salome Zourabichvili’s defiance. In a dismissive remark, he [quipped](#) that legitimacy “is not a lady’s handbag you can carry,” a crude attempt to diminish the international rejection of Georgia’s new leadership while echoing Moscow’s narrative of the Georgian Dream’s uninterrupted rule.

Low Hanging Diplomacy

To counter its growing isolation from the West, the Georgian Dream has ramped up “handshake diplomacy” with regional states that place little emphasis on human rights and democratic values.

Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili has met with ambassadors from Azerbaijan, China, the UAE, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. She has also held calls and meetings with her counterparts from Hungary, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Kazakhstan. During her participation in the OSCE Ministerial on 4-5 December 2024, she managed to have bilateral meetings only with officials from Armenia, Slovakia, Austria, Finland (the OSCE Chair), and Azerbaijan—highlighting the limited diplomatic space available to the Georgian government.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has similarly prioritized visits to Azerbaijan, the UAE, Armenia, and Kazakhstan, implicitly showing that high-level engagements with Western leaders remain out of reach.

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We must mention that Botchorishvili did actually manage to meet some European ambassadors, but they were either from Georgian Dream’s allies—

Slovakia and Hungary—or from EU states with right-leaning governments. The only notable exceptions were the UK and EU ambassadors. However, the EU envoy [clarified](#) that his meeting with Botchorishvili was purely “diplomatic dialogue” and “not linked to recognition,” emphasizing that the detention of protesters was a key topic of discussion.

The question of the non-recognition of the Georgian government is becoming increasingly significant in Brussels and across the EU capitals. Some EU officials remain hesitant to take definitive action against Kavelashvili or Georgian authorities, instead opting to delay and sidestep the issue. According to Rikard Jozwiak, [the prevailing attitude](#) is a “classic EU limbo” where most member states maintain only technical engagement with Tbilisi, avoiding any move that could be interpreted as legitimizing the government.

The Georgian MFA’s dwindling presence on social media reflects this diplomatic stagnation. Its official X account posted only four tweets in February, 17 in January, and 18 in December—almost all documenting meetings with foreign dignitaries, while offering no statements, foreign policy positions, or assessments.

Perhaps the most significant blow to the Georgian Dream’s recognition is to be expected from the US Congress. On 9 January 2025, US Helsinki Commission Chairman Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Ranking Member Steve Cohen (D-TN) introduced the *Georgian Nightmare Non-Recognition Act*. This legislation would prohibit the United States from recognizing Ivanishvili’s regime and affirm Salome Zourabichvili as Georgia’s legitimate president until free and fair elections take place.

Strategic Partnerships in Ruins

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The United States has effectively [halted](#) its Strategic Partnership Charter with Georgia—a framework established in January 2009 as a bipartisan commitment to strengthening ties following the 2008 Russian invasion. The charter facilitated regular high-level Strategic Partnership Commission meetings alongside four bilateral working groups focused on democracy, defense and security, economic and energy issues, and cultural exchanges. While these meetings had already become irregular since 2020—an early sign of deteriorating relations—now, the partnership is all but defunct.

The United Kingdom preemptively [suspended](#) the Wardrop Dialogue in October 2024—two weeks before Georgia's parliamentary elections—citing concerns over “democratic backsliding and anti-Western rhetoric.” Sweden followed suit in January by [severing](#) ties with its Parliamentary Friendship Group with Georgia while Baltic, Nordic, and Eastern European EU members have similarly frozen inter-parliamentary relations. The EU-Georgia parliamentary dialogue had already been suspended long before, rendering the European Integration Committee of Georgia's Parliament functionally irrelevant.

Overall, the Georgian Dream's parliamentary diplomacy has hit its lowest point since independence. Its withdrawal from PACE, expulsion from the Party of European Socialists in 2022, and relentless European Parliament resolutions condemning its authoritarian drift have left the Georgian Parliament politically isolated and diplomatically irrelevant.

In addition, the imposition of targeted sanctions, as outlined in detail elsewhere in this issue, leave Georgian authorities completely ostracized. If before the bilateral agenda with the US, UK, the EU, and other partners was about strengthening bilateral ties and promoting Georgia's strategic goals, now it is all about arguing that the sanctions must be removed. In such circumstances, room for pushing Georgia's national interests has shrunk to the minimum.

Institutional Collapse of Georgia's Foreign Service

While the Parliament formally sets Georgia's foreign policy, its execution falls to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which is now facing one of its most severe institutional crises. The November-December protests against Georgia's foreign policy shift triggered an unprecedented backlash within the diplomatic corps—over 160 diplomats voiced their dissent, and four ambassadors resigned.

The Georgian Dream's response was a crackdown on the foreign service. Order № 01-74, issued by Maka Botchorishvili, effectively placed the diplomatic corps under direct political control. The decree, which contradicts the Law on Diplomatic Service, extended administrative contracts to high-ranking diplomats, allowing their dismissal based on political criteria and making their tenure dependent on the minister's term. This politicization of diplomacy was [criticized](#) by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) as a tool for purging dissenting voices from state institutions, particularly after Georgia's EU accession process was suspended. Watchdogs have linked this move to a broader wave of repression against civil servants, with dozens reportedly dismissed for pro-EU views. The order also violates past Constitutional Court rulings by allowing contract ter-

minations with just one month's notice, undermining the professional stability and impartiality of Georgia's foreign service. Several diplomats have been fired, or their postings have been suspended, in a demonstration to sow fear among those who oppose Georgia's foreign policy shift.

Beyond legal and institutional damage, the MFA is also paralyzed by unfilled ambassadorial posts in key Western capitals, including Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, the UK, and the United States. These vacancies are expected to be filled by party loyalists—a practice already evident in recent appointments where ambassadors to the UK, the Council of Europe, the US, Mexico, and other key postings were handed to Georgian Dream insiders, party figures, or affiliated businessmen. With the MFA now a politicized extension of the ruling party, Georgia's diplomatic credibility and ability to engage internationally are rapidly deteriorating.

Even if these ambassadorial posts are eventually packed by Kavelashvili, the larger question remains—will Western countries grant *agrément* to these appointees? While outright rejection of diplomatic credentials is an exceptionally rare and hostile act, delaying the process is a well-established diplomatic practice used to signal disapproval. Ironically, the Georgian Dream has played this card before—in 2018, the party blocked Trump's nominee, Bridget Brink (now the US Ambassador to Ukraine), citing her alleged pro-Saakashvili stance, as [reported](#) by *Foreign Policy*.

If the US and European states decide to return the favor by stalling *agrément*s for the Georgian Dream's envoys, the country's diplomatic service will be left in further disarray. With key Western capitals already lacking Georgian ambassadors, such a move would reinforce Georgia's diplomatic isolation, leaving its embassies in critical locations either leaderless or represented by acting officials

with limited authority. If Western nations take this route, the damage to Georgia's foreign policy influence and international credibility will be profound, further reducing the Georgian Dream's ability to engage with its traditional allies.

A Paralyzed Foreign Policy Agenda

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The consequence of the Georgian Dream's minimalist and self-sabotaging diplomacy is a total disregard for national security interests and a failure to seize the strategic opportunities arising from the rapidly shifting global order. Instead of positioning Georgia as a proactive player, the regime has effectively sidelined the country from critical international discussions, weakening its geopolitical standing at a pivotal moment. Ivanishvili has indeed delivered on one of his pre-2012 promises – Georgia is no longer a part of the “disagreement” between Russia and the West.

European Integration: A Betrayed Goal

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Georgia has squandered its chance for fast-track European integration, a historic opportunity that emerged from the war in Ukraine. This journal

has extensively covered how the EU opened the door for Eastern Partnership countries to accelerate their accession process. However, by failing to meet EU conditions, prioritizing party interests over national ones, and dismantling institutional foreign policymaking in favor of party-controlled diplomacy, Georgia has reversed its European trajectory. The 28 November decision to suspend EU integration efforts marks the official betrayal of its longstanding pro-European aspirations. Rather than focusing on negotiating the opening and closing of EU accession treaty chapters, Georgia's diplomatic corps will now likely be tasked with lobbying for the removal of targeted sanctions against Georgian Dream leaders and disseminating government propaganda in Brussels and other Western capitals. This might be good for the party interests, but has nothing to do with Georgian peoples' aspirations.

NATO: A Fading Priority

Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration has also vanished from the diplomatic agenda. No meaningful efforts are being made to advance NATO accession nor is the government engaging in defense cooperation that would strengthen ties with the Alliance. Participation in NATO exercises and forums has drastically diminished and invitations to high-profile NATO events—including summits—have either been rescinded or never extended in the first place. The statements by Georgian Dream leaders that the war in Ukraine started because of NATO and that Georgia should seek permission from Moscow before it joins NATO effectively killed Georgia's chances of achieving NATO membership. However, as the Ukrainian membership of NATO spirals back into the international agenda, Georgia's absence at the table can be a severe blow to the long-standing goal of joining NATO.

European Security: Missing from Critical Talks

As discussions on a US-led Ukraine-Russia peace

framework gain momentum, Georgia is absent from the equation. A durable European security architecture cannot exclude Georgia and Moldova as leaving Russian influence unchecked in the region will create a dangerous power vacuum that Moscow will exploit immediately. Any credible security guarantees for Ukraine—whether through NATO membership, bilateral security assurances, or other defense arrangements—should logically include Georgia. However, the Georgian Dream is making no effort to position Georgia within this framework.

The days when Euro-Atlantic security and arms control talks were deadlocked over Georgia's unresolved territorial conflicts are over. When these discussions resume (as they inevitably will), Georgia will have lost its rightful place at the table, sidelined by a regime that has willingly abandoned the country's strategic interests.

Russia: A One-Sided Relationship with No Returns

Despite adopting a pro-Russian foreign policy, importing Russian repressive laws, amplifying Kremlin-backed anti-Western narratives, and even turning Russian foreign information manipulation (FIMI) into a domestic disinformation tool (DIMI), the Georgian Dream has gained nothing of substance from Moscow. While Tbilisi has severed ties with Ukraine, assisted Russia in sanction circumvention, and alienated Western partners, Moscow's only reciprocation has been the resumption of direct flights and the removal of visa requirements for Georgian citizens. No progress has been made on de-occupation or territorial integrity, proving that Georgia's loyalty to Russia is a one-way street. Yet, Tbilisi still has more to offer Moscow, including potentially joining the 3+3 format, a Russia-Türkiye-Iran initiative designed to exclude Western influence from South Caucasus affairs. This would be a geopolitical win for Moscow and a further step toward Georgia's strategic isolation.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia: No Gains, Just Losses

Most strikingly, the Georgian Dream has failed to achieve even the smallest progress with the de facto authorities in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali. If Georgia were indeed transitioning into a full-fledged Russian client state, one might expect at least some benefits in these breakaway regions—such as restoring partial freedom of movement, expanding trade, or reviving dormant mechanisms like the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs). However, none of this has materialized, and without Western backing, no progress is likely. The rational strategic approach to Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be to activate the “European magnet”—offering local residents access to EU education, free movement, and economic benefits—but this requires Georgia to remain committed to European integration. By abandoning its EU path, the Georgian Dream has lost its strongest “leverage” over these regions.

Furthermore, Georgia’s longstanding non-recognition policy regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia relied heavily on personal relationships between Georgian and Western leaders, ensuring that third-world countries under Russian influence would resist diplomatic pressure to recognize the breakaway regions. Now that Georgia has severed these ties, who will continue the diplomatic fight to prevent further recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

Geneva International Discussions: A Long-Standing Standstill

The Geneva International Discussions (GID)—a format established after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war—will soon hold its 63rd round. No progress has been made in years, as Russia’s stance on Georgia’s territorial integrity remains unchanged. However, the Georgian Dream’s own legitimacy crisis raises an additional complication: Will the US and EU

representatives still engage with Georgian Dream diplomats in Geneva?

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Moreover, when the Georgian representative speaks in Geneva on the topics of occupation, illegal Russian military presence, and the violation of the 12 August cease-fire agreement (if he still does, of course), do other participants feel that he is really representing the Georgian Dream whose talking points are exactly opposite? And if the Georgian delegation repeats the same narrative that the ruling party is pursuing (the West is evil, it wants to drag Georgia into a war with Russia, it was Ukraine and NATO’s fault that the 2022 invasion happened), then what is there to even debate in Geneva? Effectively, the Georgian delegation will have to subscribe to the Russian message box, sign a non-use of force agreement, and abandon any effort to push its national interests.

Since 2022, Western reluctance to interact with Russian diplomats has already limited engagement in Geneva. Now, with the Georgian Dream facing Western non-recognition, the same dilemma could apply to Georgian representatives. If the EU’s co-chair visits Georgia, will she have a mandate to meet with the GD Prime Minister Kobakhidze, or will he be treated as a political outcast? As the Georgian Dream’s isolation deepens, even the last remaining international forums where Georgia had influence may become dysfunctional. If we add to these questions perennial GID dilemmas, like, when and where to hold the next meeting and what should be the status of the participants, the Geneva stalemate will become even harder to break.

2008 War: Hijacked Narrative Favoring Russia

The establishment of a parliamentary investigative commission to study alleged crimes of the former United National Movement (UNM) government, particularly its handling of the 2008 war, represents a dangerous shift in Georgia's official stance on its own history and international law. The commission's expected conclusion—that the Georgian government was responsible for starting the 2008 war—will fundamentally weaken Georgia's legal and diplomatic position regarding its territorial integrity. If the ruling Georgian Dream party formally adopts this narrative, it will directly contradict the internationally recognized view that Russia bears primary responsibility for the conflict. Such an admission would serve Moscow's interests, providing Russia with ammunition to justify its continued occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia while legitimizing its claims that Georgia forfeited its sovereignty over these regions by initiating aggression.

The consequences of this shift will be severe and Georgian diplomacy, even if attempting to reverse it, will fail. Georgia has spent the past 15 years carefully building an international legal argument that Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not qualify as independent states under international law. By reframing the 2008 war as an act of Georgian aggression rather than a Russian invasion, this commission risks undoing the legal and diplomatic groundwork that has prevented broader recognition of the occupied regions. The implications will extend beyond historical interpretation—this narrative will likely be used in international courts, diplomatic discussions, and future peace negotiations to argue that Georgia itself created the conditions for the territories' separation. Countries previously reluctant to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia may now find themselves with a more convenient justification for doing so, shifting the burden of responsibility onto Tbilisi. Additionally, Georgia's

credibility within international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and the Council of Europe will be eroded, making it significantly harder to advocate for its territorial integrity in multilateral forums. Effectively, this investigation will serve as a geopolitical gift to Russia, reinforcing its occupation of Georgian territories while stripping Tbilisi of its most powerful legal defense.

China: The Dangerous Option

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As Western support fades and sanctions loom, the Georgian Dream will increasingly turn to China for economic survival—a decision that could have devastating consequences on two fronts. This will have far-reaching repercussions for Georgian diplomacy.

First, deepening ties with China will lock Georgia into dependence on another authoritarian power, much like its growing reliance on Russia. With Western financial aid suspended and access to EU and US markets at risk, Georgia will be forced to seek Chinese investment. Beijing's state-backed financial institutions will likely become a key source of capital, particularly for large-scale projects like the Anaklia deep-sea port. While this may provide short-term relief, history has shown that China's economic partnerships often lead to debt dependency. Countries like Montenegro and Sri Lanka have found themselves unable to repay massive Chinese loans, forcing them to cede critical infrastructure to Beijing. If Georgia follows the same path, it could lose control over strategic assets like ports, energy infrastructure, and key industries, undermining its economic sovereignty.

Second, this shift will severely damage Georgia's international reputation. Historically, Georgia has been seen as a rare pro-Western stronghold in an authoritarian neighborhood. Moving closer to China will erode this image, alienating US and EU policymakers who once championed Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The 2019 Georgia-China strategic partnership declaration was an early sign of growing ties, but today, the relationship is no longer about balanced cooperation—it is about survival.

Georgia will soon find itself neither fully embraced by the West nor entirely trusted by its new authoritarian patrons. Beijing, like Moscow, does not offer partnerships without strings attached. As Tbilisi distances itself from Brussels and Washington, it risks becoming an international outcast—caught between two spheres of influence, yet fully belonging to neither.

Alternative Safeguards for Georgia's Foreign Policy

As Georgia faces diplomatic isolation under the Georgian Dream, alternative actors are stepping in to preserve the country's foreign policy priorities. President Salome Zourabichvili, widely respected abroad and viewed as the legitimate voice of the Georgian people, plays a key role in keeping Geor-

gia's national interests on the international agenda. Alongside her, pro-Western opposition parties and civil society groups, including a network of former diplomats, are actively engaging with foreign partners to counterbalance the government's anti-Western trajectory.

Zourabichvili's participation in high-level conferences and events, like the Munich Security Conference, provides a crucial platform to reaffirm Georgia's commitment to Western integration, advocate for stronger security ties, and ensure that any Ukraine peace settlement does not sideline Georgia's territorial and security concerns. Meanwhile, opposition parties have already taken diplomatic initiatives that the Georgian Dream has avoided, such as [reaching out](#) to Syria's new leadership to push for a reversal of its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia - efforts the ruling party has neglected to avoid provoking Moscow.

Beyond these diplomatic moves, these alternative actors can also help shape EU engagement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and, in general, contribute to European and American understanding of how new security architecture should also include Georgia. In the absence of foreign policy leadership from the ruling party and stifled institutional diplomatic service, this unconventional approach may be the only way to protect Georgia's long-term national interests ■