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Our Mission

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At the **Research Institute Gnomon Wise**, we believe that disseminating knowledge and analysis conducted with integrity and impartiality can advance national interests and strengthen democratic institutions. Our think tank fosters a culture of intellectual exchange, nurturing a communal space where each person can contribute meaningfully to the broader geopolitical discourse.

In alignment with our ethos, our journal is firmly committed to promoting the idea of Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration and democratization. *GEOPolitics* will echo the Georgian people's strategic orientation toward the Western world, democracy, and Europeanization. Our vision is that Georgia can and must contribute to disseminating universal democratic values and contribute to regional and international security. We aim to support these goals through our analytical and intellectual contributions.

We have assembled a team of experts and contributors with deep knowledge and policy experience who will enrich the conversation about Georgia's foreign and security policy, unveiling and scrutinizing Georgia's relations with the EU, NATO, Russia, and other important geopolitical actors and international institutions. We will also investigate the ramifications of internal developments for Georgia's geopolitical role and foreign relations. By doing so, we will facilitate informed and substantial dialogue from, about and in Georgia.



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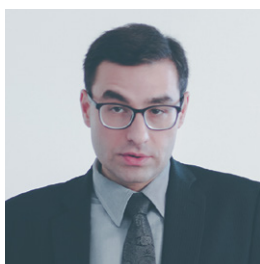
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Russian Matryoshka of Lies Undermines the European Resilience

Russian propaganda narratives are like matryoshkas, one disinformation narrative stemming from another. Just as the matryoshka dolls conceal multiple layers within their wooden shells, Russian disinformation narratives often hide layers of manipulation and propaganda, undermining the resilience of the societies they target. Both employ a facade of simplicity and tradition to mask the complexity of their contents, enticing audiences with their outward charm. Just as each layer of a matryoshka doll reveals a smaller one nested within, Russian disinformation narratives often reveal deeper agendas and motives upon closer inspection – precisely what this volume intends to achieve.

Thornike Gordadze opens the volume by exploring how authoritarian regimes manipulate peace narratives to serve their political agendas, drawing parallels between historical and contemporary contexts. The article also examines the Georgian government's use of peace narratives to deflect criticism, emphasizing the need for a counter-narrative to challenge manipulative disinformation tactics employed by propaganda-utilizing regimes.

Khatia Kikalishvili then provides a comprehensive analysis of multifaceted ways in which Russian propaganda has infiltrated German society and politics, particularly in the context of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. By elucidating the means and methods employed by Russian propaganda, such as state-controlled media outlets, fake accounts, and manipulation of crisis

topics, the article sheds light on the influence wielded by Kremlin-affiliated actors. The article also examines the institutional response to combatting disinformation at the governmental level, emphasizing the importance of proactive measures and the need for concerted efforts from political, civil society, and media actors.

Sergi Kapanadze switches to the Georgian context again, examining the pervasive influence of (other than peace-related) Russian narratives within Georgian politics, particularly focusing on the Georgian Dream's adoption of Kremlin-inspired messages regarding anti-LGBT propaganda, anti-NGO rhetoric, the narrative of sovereign democracy, and the conspiracy of foreign subversion. These rhetorical storylines are also pervasive in Georgia's occupied regions, again showing how similar Russian propaganda is in various places. The article underscores the dilemma faced by the EU in responding to Georgia's anti-European turn, emphasizing the need for a more vocal stance to safeguard European values and Georgia's aspiration for EU integration.

Jaba Devdariani takes a historical dive into the early days of the Soviet Union when Georgian independence was abolished due to Russia's annexation in 1921. The article provides a unique analysis of how the Bolsheviks distorted narratives to maintain power, from portraying themselves as defenders of Georgian interests to vilifying and ridiculing their opponents. Amazingly, once these polished and refurbished narratives were

unfrozen in the 1980s, they again shaped modern perceptions of history through the prism of Soviet propaganda. Ultimately, the article warns against the danger of relying on Soviet historiography and emphasizes the need to confront and counteract Russia's manipulation of memory.

Vano Chkhikvadze explores the Georgian Dream's narrative regarding Georgia's significant migrant population and argues that they are treated as ATMs without the right to representation. Their consequential lack of political activism paints a picture of systemic disenfranchisement despite the migrants' vital role in bolstering Georgia's economy through remittances. The article reveals the government's reluctance to facilitate migrant voting, reflecting a narrative of entrenched power dynamics and self-preservation within the ruling party.

Shota Gvineria continues with the investigation of Georgia's limping NATO ambitions against the backdrop of geopolitical tensions in the Black Sea region. Through a detailed analysis of Finland and Sweden's NATO accession processes, the article uncovers essential lessons and strategic considerations for Georgia's integration path

and explores the narrative surrounding NATO enlargement, highlighting the interplay between perception-driven narratives and geopolitical realities that shape the Alliance's expansion. The article underscores Georgia's need to address political and security concerns while navigating the delicate balance between bolstering democratic reforms and mitigating potential Russian aggression.

Temuri Yakobashvili concludes this volume with a semi-philosophical stance on what it means to be Georgian by analyzing Georgian identity and politics and drawing parallels between contemporary Georgian governance and the world of contemporary art. The article looks at Georgian governance and perspective through a unique lens of art criticism, likening the current state of Georgian politics to "fake art," characterized by dogmatism, subjectiveness, and the dominance of a curator. The article underscores the need for Georgia to break free from such constraints, embracing true democracy and fostering a brighter future ■

With Respect,
Editorial Team

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When Peace is War: Authoritarian Instrumentalization of Peace

“It was a pleasure to visit President Donald Trump today. We need leaders in the world who are respected and can bring peace. He is one of them! Come back and bring us peace, Mr President!” tweeted Hungary’s Prime Minister Victor Orbán on 9 March 2024, immediately after meeting the probable Republican nominee for the US presidential [elections](#). A few days later, Pope Francis made a controversial comment calling for Ukraine to have the courage to raise the “white flag” and negotiate an end to the war with Russia.

The idea that peace is preferable to war is an axiom everyone shares. Much more than others, the Ukrainians, who feel on their flesh all the horrors of Russian aggression, desire it to the utmost. But those who, numbed by the strange fog of Stockholm syndrome, reproach Ukraine for not wanting peace, make a profound moral, political, and strategic error. By this peculiar alchemy, one blames the victim for his determination to defend himself while shrugging shoulders at the aggressor,

sighing that such would be his nature. Concluding peace with Putin without a clear Ukrainian victory means more war in coming years on the territories of more countries, with more casualties and destruction and more damage to the rules-based international order.

Concluding peace with Putin without a clear Ukrainian victory means more war in coming years on the territories of more countries, with more casualties and destruction and more damage to the rules-based international order.

Leaders as diverse as Trump, Orbán, and Pope Francis, to name but a few, support the idea of peace negotiations with Putin. One can try to explain the Pope’s words and his constant kindness towards Russia through Christian pacifism and charity. However, populist leaders with authoritarian tendencies deliberately use peace with the



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Kremlin as a weapon in their war against liberalism and democracy. In this war, Putin's Russia is their potential ally.

Populist leaders with authoritarian tendencies deliberately use peace with the Kremlin as a weapon in their war against liberalism and democracy. In this war, Putin's Russia is their potential ally.

Putin often talks of peace while continuing to pour out the most despicable propaganda on the Russian population via totally controlled television and media outlets. This propaganda goes so far as to call for the murder of Ukrainians, the destruction of their state, and the invasion of the Baltic states, Poland, Germany, and even the United Kingdom and America. These actions are hardly compatible with a genuine desire for peace, and one must be overly gullible not to suspect Vladimir Putin of using peaceful rhetoric as a tactical tool without ever abandoning his strategic objective: the destruction of Ukraine and the territorial expansion of Russia at the expense of its neighbors. The noble aim of peace has become a formidable propaganda weapon in the hands of its worst enemies.

When Dictatorships Call Democracies Warmongers

There is a consensus that democracies do not go to war with each other and are less prone to war than authoritarian states. Most solid democracies are also the most peaceful. Immanuel Kant, in his Perpetual Peace essay, claimed that the division of the world into "constitutional republics," in today's words - democracies, was one of the necessary conditions for global peace. Other classical authors of democracy, such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Thomas Paine, also discussed the peaceful nature of democratic/republican regimes. The

project of a United Europe, which began at the end of the Second World War, aimed to achieve lasting peace on the European continent. For the founders of the European Community and later of the European Union, war was to be banished forever, and it is all the more curious that Russian propaganda and its Georgian offshoots consider the EU to be at the forefront of the "Global War Party."

Since Putin came to power, Russia has been at war almost non-stop.

On the other side, authoritarian regimes often need external wars, or at least the constant agitation of external threats, to keep their populations docile. They may confront other authoritarian countries, playing the nationalist or irredentist card, or attack a democratic neighbor for fear of contagion from its political system. Since Putin came to power, Russia has been at war almost non-stop: the second Chechen war was followed by the invasion of Georgia (2008), the occupation of Crimea and part of the Donbas region (2014), followed by intervention in Syria (2015) and finally by the full-scale war in Ukraine since February 2022. The aims of these wars vary, as do the justifications (from anti-terrorism to the defense of traditional values and Christianity, denazification, the right to be called Mom and Dad, etc.). Still, the wars were necessary to strengthen the regime, keep the power, and project imperial ambitions in the neighborhood and beyond.

Democratic systems are natural enemies of authoritarian and totalitarian states.

Democratic systems are natural enemies of authoritarian and totalitarian states. By the example of their mere existence and the freedom they project, they are naturally subversive of unfree regimes. Democracies remain constant targets of authoritarian powers and thus need to protect

themselves or help each other, including militarily. The wars are, in general, started by dictators. However, once a democratic state is involved in the war, some domestic forces coalesce against it, allowing authoritarian regimes to influence their domestic politics and affect public opinion.

Genuine pacifist movements do exist, but for the authoritarian enemy, strengthening them under the guise of promoting peace serves its interest and makes pacifists “useful idiots.”

One must not think that all pacifist trends in a democratic society are prompted and fueled by an authoritarian or totalitarian enemy. Genuine pacifist movements do exist, but for the authoritarian enemy, strengthening them under the guise of promoting peace serves its interest and makes pacifists “useful idiots.” Authoritarian regimes prefer pacifism to strive abroad, while patriotism, nationalism, and militarism should dominate at home.

By way of comparison, pacifists in the autocracy are non-existent, as they are repressed and, in the best case, expelled from the country. This is illustrated by the fate of war critics and peace advocates in Russia, arrested and sentenced to long prison terms since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Peace as a Diversion

Long before Putin’s Russia, peace was already one of the Soviet Union’s favorite propaganda tools. Those who lived in the USSR remember “Miru Mir” (Peace to the World) and “SSSR Oplot Mira” (USSR Is a Stronghold of Peace) written in large letters on almost every other building. The country that invaded half of Europe, Afghanistan, quelled Eastern German, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak uprisings

in blood, led dozens of conflicts on every continent through its proxies, engaged in a frantic global arms race, and turned its entire industry into military manufacturing, shamelessly presented itself as a white dove of peace at home. Soviet citizens were convinced that America and its allies wanted war at any price, while Moscow was spearheading the global Peace Camp together with the other socialist nations. The USSR maintained dozens of organizations abroad whose declared aim was to defend world peace. These organizations protested against military spending in Western countries, demanded disarmament, and fiercely criticized the actions of NATO, American imperialism, and the “arms race.”

One of the most prominent organizations aimed at achieving Soviet foreign policy objectives was the World Peace Council, founded in 1948. This and a few dozen smaller organizations based in Western countries took the line that the world was divided between the peace-loving Soviet Union and the warmongering United States. From the 1950s until the late 1980s, the Soviet Union used numerous organizations associated with the WPC to spread its view of peace. In 1979, the World Peace Council explained the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an act of solidarity with the Afghan People, while it fiercely opposed America’s war in Vietnam. GRU defector Stanislav Lunev wrote in his [autobiography](#) that “the GRU and the KGB helped to fund just about every anti-war movement and organization in America and abroad” and that the Soviet Union spent more money between 1965 and 1975 in financing the peace movements in the West and particularly in the US than helping the Viet-Cong.

Soviet efforts to weaken the West through peace propaganda were dubbed the “Soviet Peace Offensive” by some Cold War specialists. The climax of this process was reached at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s when the US deployed cruise missiles in the countries of Western Europe in the face of previously installed Soviet

SS-20s in Warsaw pact countries. The most apt rejoinder to the mass peace rallies in Germany, France, and the UK [came](#) from the socialist (!) French President François Mitterrand - “The pacifists are in the West, the missiles are in the East.”

Peace is also a favorite propaganda tool of collaborationist or proxy regimes.

Peace is also a favorite propaganda tool of collaborationist or proxy regimes. The Vichy government in France (1940-1944), the pinnacle of collaboration with the enemy, put the theme of peace with Germany at the center of its ideology: While Europe was at war, France had chosen the path of peace to safeguard its population and its economic potential and had entered into collaboration with Nazi Germany. Numerous Vichy posters, such as the famous [“Laissez nous tranquilles”](#) (Let Us Be Peaceful), showed peaceful France, represented by a man planting a tree with a shovel, harassed by the “enemies of peace” - the Global War Party of the period: the Anglo-Saxons, the Jews, the Free Masons and La Résistance under the leadership of Charles De Gaulle.

Use and Misuse of Peace in Georgian Politics

The theme of peace is one of the central tools of the Georgian government’s pro-Russian narrative. The Georgian Dream (GD) manipulated it masterfully, presenting its loyal policy toward Russia as a success in the eyes of public opinion.

Peace with Russia is not a new narrative in Georgian politics, just as the GD’s political campaign argument is not new. It has been used continuously since 2012 and more intensively over the last few years. From the very first day of ascending to power, the GD boasted of being the only Georgian government since independence that has not had a war with Russia. For the GD, the

war of 2008 was provoked by Georgia’s “reckless previous government” - the GD’s archenemy, the United National Movement (UNM), and its leader, ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili. The GD’s reading of the war in Ukraine is essentially the same: Zelensky did not manage to avoid the war; on the contrary, he precipitated it, undoubtedly by his imprudent rapprochement with NATO. This was notably the meaning of the [statement](#) made by former PM Gharibashvili at the GLOBSEC conference in 2023.

However, with the large-scale war in Ukraine, the theme of peace took on a new dimension. It has become Georgia’s ruling party’s favorite subject and main asset, allowing it to respond to several challenges.

For the internal public, it allows a contrast to be drawn with the war-torn Ukraine. The government wants to demonstrate that while Ukraine is being destroyed and bleeding, Georgia is living peacefully. It has a record economic growth rate thanks to its “intelligent” and “prudent” policy towards Russia. Playing on the fear of war is particularly effective in a society traumatized by the memory of the wars of the 1990s and 2008. “Support us and our wise foreign policy; otherwise, you will have Mariupol” - is the government’s message in a nutshell.

The GD claims that in the event of a change of power, war would be guaranteed because Moscow will not accept a Western-friendly government.

The same message condemns the opposition and all forces that demand greater support for Ukraine, more measures to move closer to NATO, and an end to the submissive posture towards Moscow. The GD claims that in the event of a change of power, war would be guaranteed because Moscow will not accept a Western-friendly government.



The Georgian Dream also wants to convince Georgian citizens that there is a [“Global War Party”](#) that would like to distract Georgia from its peaceful path. The United States, the EU, NATO, and all countries and governments that support Ukraine are in this ephemeral alliance, while the Georgian Dream’s political opposition, civil society organizations, and the free media are the “Global War Party’s” local proxies and agents of influence. The alleged global objective of this force is the destruction of Russia, and just like Ukraine is used for this purpose, Georgia too has its function – to open a [second front](#) against Moscow.

The peace narrative is also used by the Georgian Dream to [cover](#) its authoritarian tendencies. All the criticism from the West towards the Georgian government, its participation in circumventing the sanctions against Russia, and every condemnation of the absence of the rule of law or the lack of independence of the judiciary are presented by the government as, in fact, the West’s dissatisfaction with Georgia’s “neutrality” in the Russia-Ukraine war. The same applies to the concerns from Brussels about the non-compliance with the conditions set by the EU to begin accession negotiations with Tbilisi. The Georgian Dream explains that, in reality, this is an external pressure to drag Tbilisi into the war against Russia. More amusingly, we cannot exclude that even this very article will be presented by their propaganda as proof of the “Global War Party” conspiracy against peace in Georgia.

Many of these propaganda narratives seem inspired by Hungarian, Serbian, or other historical Vichy or Soviet playbooks. But there are additional local colors and personal touches. For example, throughout 2022, the government explained to Georgian citizens that the private commercial dispute between Credit Suisse and the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili (who at that time did not hold

any public office) was, in reality, the American and Western policy of punishing Georgia for its pacifist [position](#).

These statements by Georgian officials about Western pressure for the country’s involvement in the war against Russia were described as “delusion” by Josep [Borrell](#), but the propaganda continued unabated.

In this context, the Georgian government wants to appear as wanting to heroically defend the interests of the Georgian people and their aspiration for peace against the warmonger West, represented on the spot by the opposition parties, NGOs, and the media. In the medium term, this propaganda is supposed to undermine the still high popularity of the EU, NATO, and Ukraine among the population and to prepare the ground for a more frank and explicit rapprochement with Russia.

As implausible as it may seem, these manipulations of peace enjoy some success among the population. Even if the images broadcast by the PRO-GD TV channels of crowds thanking the Georgian PM “for peace” and “the absence of corpses” in Georgia seem exaggerated and staged, polls show that the population is afraid of the extension of the Ukrainian conflict on its soil and as a whole is not dissatisfied with the government’s “pro-peace policy.”

Moscow never forgets to publicly encourage Georgian “moderation,” especially in comparison with the governments of the region, e.g., Moldova and even Armenia, more “submitted to the diktat of the “Global War Party.”

As for its external dimension, through criticism of the West and denunciation of its “aggressive

plans,” Georgia further demonstrates its loyalty to the Kremlin. Moscow never forgets to publicly encourage Georgian “moderation,” especially in comparison with the governments of the region, e.g., Moldova and even Armenia, more “submitted to the *diktat* of the ‘Global War Party.’” Sergey Lavrov, Russia’s top diplomat, recently [praised](#) Georgian authorities for their “responsible approach” and resistance to Western pressure to open a second front.

In regions such as the Caucasus, which have experienced periods of instability and recent violence, peace resonates with the fears and desires of the people. It is, therefore, not surprising that it is the object of all manipulations, especially from actors who quickly learn proven practices from Russia. It is paradoxical to note that while all the wars in the region were led or at least instigated by Russia (two Chechen wars, Karabakh,

the wars in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region in the 1990s, the 2008 invasion, etc.), the peace narrative presented by Moscow and its proxies completely ignores the role of Moscow and blames its rival forces for being war propagators. One should also remember that these wars were often followed by Russian “peacekeeping” (nicknamed at the time “piece-keeping”) and Russian “peace enforcement” operations, while the local populations still enjoy all the “delights” of Pax Russica. Those who oppose Russian narratives should build a counter-narrative based on these facts.

One can define propaganda by reversing Clausewitz’s famous definition of war as a continuation of policy by other means and describing it as a continuation of war by other means. Consequently, it is a matter of principle and mental sanity to prevent the continuation of war by using peace as one of the main propaganda tools ■

Impact of Russian Disinformation in Germany

It is no secret that disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) pose long-term threats to liberal democracies. Since the start of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, Russian propaganda in the West and in Germany has taken on a different dimension. It aims to undermine Western democracy, stir up fear, and weaken the support for Ukraine.

In the past, the dangers of Russian propaganda have not been taken seriously enough in Germany, both among the population and in politics.

There is no question that an institutional defense mechanism against propaganda should be strengthened to boost the resilience of societies and the state. Unfortunately, in the past, the dangers of Russian propaganda have not been taken seriously enough in Germany, both among the population and in politics. This article describes the main instruments of Russian propaganda in Germany, their impact on society and politics, and the strategies Berlin is pursuing to combat disinformation and FIMI.

Means and Methods of Russian Propaganda in Germany

Russian propaganda has various methods and instruments to influence public opinion in Germany. Russian propaganda has been systematically pursued in Germany, particularly since the start of the war of aggression against Ukraine.

Russia relies on a complex network of state or state-controlled actors to spread disinformation, including the German-language Russian state media, official diplomatic and Kremlin-affiliated social media accounts, political organizations, cultural associations, oligarchs, foundations, and think tanks.

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Far-right AfD makes big gains in German regional elections

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FALSE
MISINFORMATION



AFD
NACH BERLIN:
22./23. April in
FAKE FAKE
PROPAGANDA

Far-right AfD makes big gains in German regional elections

co-leader of the AfD, said the gains were a breakthrough moment, showing that "AfD is no longer an exceptional phenomenon, but has become a major all-German party, so we have arrived."
The three parties that make up the coalition government of the state of Saxony-Anhalt - the CDU, the Greens and the SPD - all received a crushing defeat in the 14 regional elections.



cultural associations, oligarchs, foundations, and think tanks. The narratives and disinformation mainly focus on allegations, stereotypes, texts, and videos with content in line with Russia's propaganda message box, which aims to convince, scare, and alarm the German public.

The Russian state's foreign television channel, [Russia Today \(RT\)](#), has proven to be a particularly successful player since the start of the Russian invasion in 2014. In March 2022, the European Union [decided](#) to ban RT across Europe for distorting facts and attempts at destabilization. Nevertheless, the broadcaster can still be accessed as RT DE provided its users with detailed information on how to circumvent the restrictions. In February 2023, the online content was [available](#) on six pages with different URLs. Interview guests and guest authors who regularly published on RT DE can still be found on "alternative media," such as the YouTube channel *InfraRot Medien - Sicht ins Dunkel* and the blog *Anti-Spiegel*, as well as Alina Lipp's *Neues aus Russland*. All of these actors are Putin supporters who justify the war in Ukraine.

Crisis topics are also trendy: refugees, energy, and inflation. The German government is notoriously portrayed as incompetent, and a lot of attention is [given](#) to anti-NATO and anti-American narratives. According to the [study](#) conducted in 2022, almost one in five people surveyed in Germany agreed with the statement that the Russian war of aggression was a reaction by Russia to a provocation by NATO, while 21% partially agreed. In total, almost 40% of those surveyed agreed with the Russian version either fully or partially.

Another influential instrument of Russian propaganda in Germany is "fake accounts," which deliberately [spread](#) false information about Ukraine and attempt to influence domestic politics. Fake links often [use](#) the logos of German and international online magazines (Spiegel, Welt, Bild, and Daily Mail) while spreading pro-Russian propa-

ganda. With such coordinated influence campaigns, Russia is attempting to manipulate German society's opinion and influence political decisions in the Kremlin's interests.

In January 2024, the German Foreign Ministry [uncovered](#) a massive Russian campaign of lies on the X platform. In September 2023, a [tweet](#) was allegedly spread by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock that "the war in Ukraine will be over in three months." It is estimated that over 50,000 fake accounts and one million tweets in the German language are used by Russian propaganda channels to manipulate public opinion. There is also evidence of the use of artificial intelligence. With the European elections and three state elections in eastern Germany coming up, where the pro-Putin and right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) is expected to receive a significant number of votes (according to the latest polls, around 30%), there is a high risk that Russia could intervene in the election campaigns to distort the electoral results.

German Domestic Politics and Russian Propaganda

Russian propaganda often relies on open letters, petitions, and calls for peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, which the West allegedly prevents. The left-wing politician Sahra Wagenknecht often uses the distorted statements of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, or Western politicians, which are usually taken out of context and proliferated by Russian propaganda media. Wagenknecht has repeatedly claimed that the Ukrainian president is against peace negotiations and publicly [advocated](#) stopping all arms exports to Ukraine to push it to the negotiation table. Her party - *Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance - Reason and Justice*, founded in January 2024, already has 6% nationwide, which indicates that it could be [elected](#) to the Bundestag in 2025 and the Europe-

an Parliament in June 2024. The European elections manifesto of Wagenknecht's party rejects Ukraine's accession to the EU and emphasizes that the war in Ukraine is a bloody proxy war between NATO and Russia.

It is clear that anti-Western narratives and the message that the West is to blame for the war, spearheaded by the Russian propaganda machine, are finding fertile ground among the radical right and left electorate in Germany.

The Manifesto for Peace in Ukraine, [written](#) by Wagenknecht and supported by one of the leaders of the right-wing populist AfD, also advocates for suspending military support to Ukraine. On 25 February 2023, the manifesto drew over 13,000 persons near the Brandenburg Gate, causing intense debates in the German media and political spectrum. Such manifestos and similar undertakings are successfully used by the alternative press against Ukraine and the West to scare the population with the possibility of a nuclear war with Russia. It is clear that anti-Western narratives and the message that the West is to blame for the war, spearheaded by the Russian propaganda machine, are finding fertile ground among the radical right and left electorate in Germany.

Following Chancellor Olaf Scholz's public rejection of the delivery of Taurus missiles to Ukraine, the Russian media [published](#) a wiretapped recording of a Webex conversation of German military officers. Among other topics, the conversation discussed whether Taurus missiles would be technically capable of destroying the bridge built by Russia connecting the Russian mainland with the Crimean Peninsula. They also discussed whether Ukraine could manage the shelling without the involvement of the Bundeswehr, for example, in target programming. The recording also [revealed](#) that there is no green light at the polit-

ical level for the delivery of the cruise missiles to Ukraine.

It is clear that the Taurus affair demonstrated the Kremlin's power by showing that the FSB could listen to the German generals and their communication system. The question remains about where else and how deeply the FSB carries out such surveillance operations in Germany. Furthermore, it is certainly no coincidence that the recording was published a day after Navalny's funeral and the [revelations](#) about the Wirecard scandal. However, a major goal of this leak was to ensure that Taurus missiles would not be sent to Ukraine.

The Kremlin has thus created an atmosphere in which the majority of the German population is even more opposed to the delivery of the Taurus missiles to Ukraine.

The Kremlin has thus created an atmosphere in which the majority of the German population is even more opposed to the delivery of the Taurus missiles to Ukraine; according to recent [surveys](#), 59% of Germans are against it, and only 34% are in favor. In addition, the Taurus affair ensured that the Chancellor continued to categorically rule out the Taurus delivery despite increasing opposing opinions in the governing coalition and the CDU-CSU faction. The affair also reinforces Chancellor Scholz's fears that the missiles could be fired at targets in Russia without German control and that Germany would thus be drawn into the war. In doing so, he is, above all, signaling mistrust towards his Ukrainian partners. And sowing distrust between Ukraine and Germany is clearly a goal Russian propaganda aspires to achieve.

The Taurus affair demonstrated how pro-Russian forces in Germany embraced the Russian narrative that the German military was preparing for

a war of aggression against Russia. Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW), Dietmar Bartsch (Linke), and Tino Chrupalla (AfD), despite different political platforms, gladly [embraced](#) this spin, which originated in Moscow from the Russian propaganda media. Russian propagandists, like Dmitrii Kiseliov, [threatened](#) to retaliate against Germany and hit such targets as the Fehmarnbelt Bridge, the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne, the Rugen Bridge, and the Magdeburg Water Bridge. When German politicians start repeating Russian propaganda's talking points, the disinformation proliferates and is a lot harder to counter.

Institutional Response to Russian Propaganda

Since the beginning of 2022, the German government has expanded its efforts to combat disinformation at the institutional level. The Federal Foreign Office [plays](#) an important role in this, focusing on disinformation and FIMI originating from foreign states. The Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) coordinates the detection of and defense against hybrid threats, particularly disinformation, across the departments. The BMI's activities include the Link to Factchecker on the federal government's website, regular press briefings on the topic, and outreach to the Parliament. The Minister of the Interior presented a strategy against right-wing extremism in February 2024, which, among other things, includes the establishment of an early detection unit of the federal government to identify foreign disinformation campaigns well in advance.

In February 2024, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock took a further step against Russian cyber propaganda with her French and Polish colleagues, Stéphane Séjourné and Radoslaw Sikorski. The three countries agreed on a joint early warning mechanism against Russian troll attacks.

During the European elections, the French government expects a massive increase in Russian activities aimed at disinformation and influencing popular opinions in multiple European countries. [According](#) to the French Ministry of Defense, we are “only at the beginning of a major wave of fake news.” Given the tense relationship between France and Germany over the Taurus issue, the public received the revival of the so-called “Weimar Triangle” positively.

There are encouraging signs at the state and civil society level, especially after 22 February 2022, that the threat of Russian propaganda is taken seriously in Germany. According to March 2024 [data](#), 82% of the German population considers Russia's attempts to influence politics in Germany with false information and intelligence activities to be very dangerous or dangerous. In addition to creating new strategies and coordination centers, increasing attention is paid to education in schools and universities aimed at strengthening media literacy. Prebunking is one of the most successful means of defusing disinformation. It provides an opportunity to take proactive action against false information before it is spread and to sensitize people and strengthen their resilience to propaganda content.

Nevertheless, more vigilance and political will from the democratic center would be desirable to educate people about the danger of Russian disinformation, objectively describe how the Kremlin is endangering the European security architecture, and explain what it would mean for Germany if Putin won the war in Ukraine.

More courage is now required in politics, civil society, and the media to jointly combat Russia's hybrid war against the West and with long-term results.

More courage is now required in politics, civil society, and the media to jointly combat Russia's hybrid war against the West and with long-term results. The campaign for the 2025 federal elections has already unofficially begun. The Taurus missile affair and the analysis of Russian propa-

ganda during the last two years show that the fear of being dragged into the war affects political decision-making and discourse in Germany. The German public appears just as vulnerable to Russian foreign information manipulation and interference as any other European nation ■

Russian Propaganda Narratives in Georgia

On March 26, Georgia qualified for the Euro 2024 Football Finals for the first time in its history, and the nation went ecstatic. The bitter polarization that had plagued the country for the last decade seemed to be gone - at least during the brief period of joy.

But in just a matter of days, the Georgian Dream returned to the disciplined message box, straight from the Kremlin playbook: protecting family values, targeting NGOs, and claiming that Georgians must be ruled by Georgia and not the West.

The mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, a former AC Milan star, [snuck](#) in the well-known line - the sport's success is the result of the peace that the government of Georgia has managed to maintain, despite the attempts of the global war party to drag Georgia into the war with Russia. The line of peaceful Georgia, being the credit of the ruling party, is a major propaganda instrument, as Thornike Gordadze explained elsewhere in this volume.

The peace narrative is not the only Russian narrative dominating Georgian politics. Other narratives, also straight from the Kremlin playbook, are used, too.

However, the peace narrative is not the only Russian narrative dominating Georgian politics. Other narratives, also straight from the Kremlin playbook, are used, too.

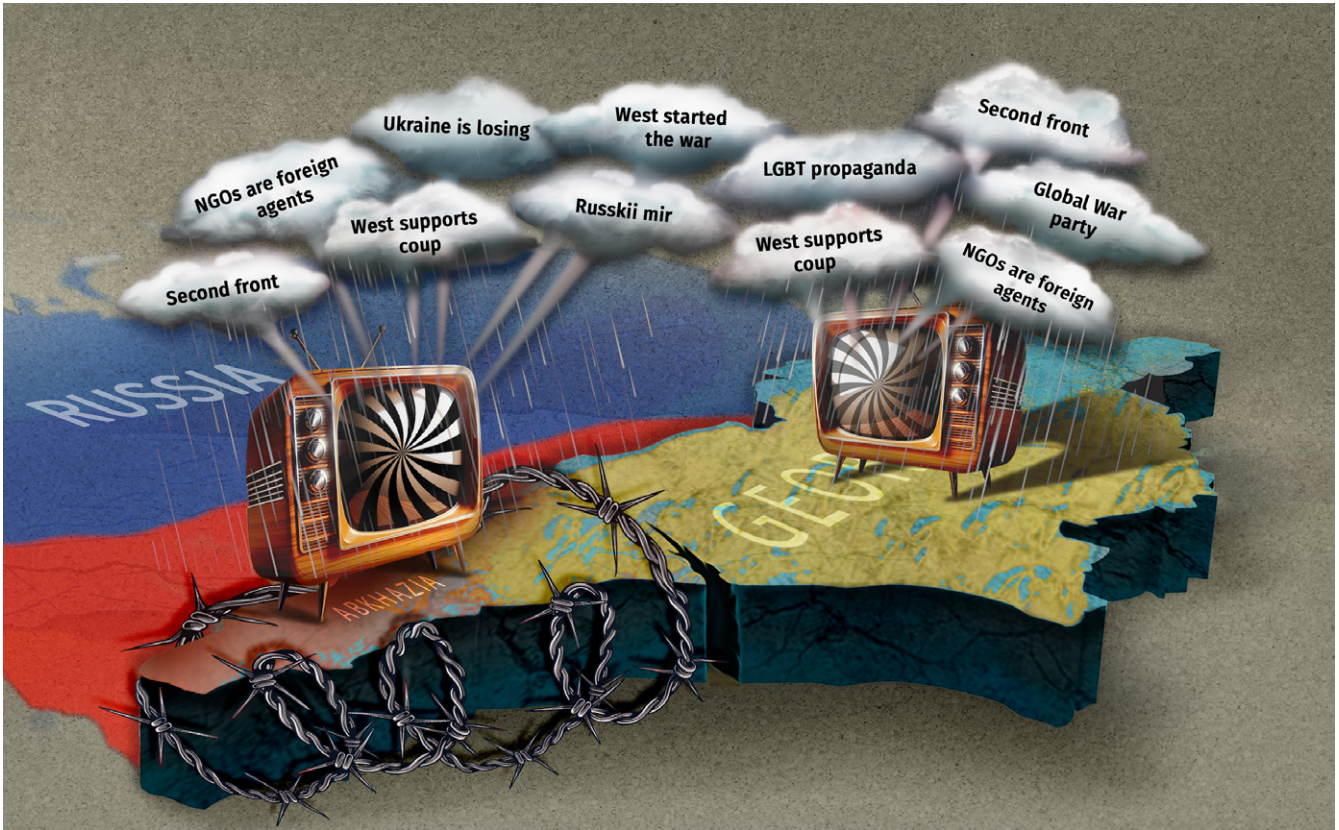
According to these simple, efficient, and debilitating propaganda lines, Western integration is incompatible with and dangerous for Christian identity, history, religion, and traditions. The cornerstone of this account is the fight against "LGBT propaganda" to prevent "Gayropa" from forcing same-sex marriage on "normal people."

The Kremlin also promotes the narrative that the West uses various agents of influence subservient to US and EU interests. NGOs and media organi-



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zations are among such agents. They do not serve the interests of the people, government, or society in general but their foreign masters, who finance them and give them instructions to destabilize the domestic institutions.

Another propaganda line pushed by the Kremlin concerns the West's intervention in domestic affairs, imposing its rules without considering local traditions, institutions, and the principle of sovereignty. This is rooted in Russia's sovereign democracy concept, articulated in 2006, which rests on two tenets: that the country employing it is a democracy and that no one from outside should question it.

The Kremlin also pushes the narrative that the West is trying to subvert the governments that are friendly to Moscow. The foreign-instigated "color revolutions" conspiracy is already 24 years old, starting when Serbs dethroned Slobodan Milošević in 2000, Georgians ousted Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003, and Ukrainians removed Viktor Yanukovich in 2004. Ukrainian Euro-Maidan and

the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2024 gave a new life to the foreign interference storyline.

Kremlin narratives and instruments are similar, targeting the conflict-split Georgian society, relying on the usual proliferators and the local authorities, not just in Tbilisi, but also in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali.

All of these typical Kremlin narratives are used in Georgia. The ruling Georgian Dream party and smaller but loud pro-Russian forces and propagandists advocate these messages in a coordinated and organized manner. Conversely, exactly the same propaganda is also observable in the Russian-occupied Georgian regions - Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These regions are almost impermeable to Western attention. However, a close look at the political developments in these regions and social media makes it clear that the Kremlin narratives and instruments are similar, targeting the conflict-split Georgian society, relying on the usu-

al proliferators and the local authorities, not just in Tbilisi, but also in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali.

Anti-LGBT Propaganda

The anti-LGBT narrative is a pinnacle of Kremlin propaganda. The most vulnerable sexual minority groups are the easy targets for the Kremlin in those countries, where conservative ideology, Orthodoxy, and Soviet mentality create fertile ground for demonizing sexual minorities.

Historically, in both the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, sexual identity and sexual minorities have faced persecution. Under Soviet rule, the state sought to eradicate any form of sexual expression that deviated from heterosexual norms, viewing it as a threat to the stability of the socialist society. Homosexuality was deemed a bourgeois perversion and a symptom of Western decadence, with the government employing a range of tactics to suppress it. Soviet authorities subjected LGBTQI+ individuals to imprisonment, forced psychiatric treatment, and even execution under laws criminalizing “sodomy” and “propaganda of homosexuality.” This repression fostered a climate of fear and forced many LGBTQI+ people to conceal their identities to avoid persecution, contributing to a culture of silence and invisibility.

Russia continued Soviet hostility towards sexual minorities, and the Kremlin has implemented legislation that further marginalized and stigmatized LGBTQI+ individuals, such as the infamous “LGBT propaganda law” enacted in 2013, which, among others, prohibits the dissemination of information on LGBTQI+ issues. This legislation has emboldened discrimination and violence against sexual minorities, perpetuating a culture of intolerance and discrimination. Furthermore, state-sponsored rhetoric and media portrayals often depict LGBTQI+ individuals as morally corrupt and a threat to traditional Russian values, exacerbat-

ing social prejudice and hindering efforts toward equality and acceptance.

In Georgia, the LGBTQI+ community started to actively advocate for its rights in the early 2010s, with several civil society organizations and political parties finding the strength to publicly support the LGBTQI+ rights to expression and assembly. This awakening gave the Georgian authorities room to instrumentalize the issue to their political benefit.

On 17 May 2013, when gay rights activists held the rally in the center of Tbilisi, thousands of protesters, organized by the Orthodox priests and condoned by the government, [broke through](#) a police cordon and violently pursued them, beating and throwing stones. On 5 July 2021, Tbilisi Pride was [prevented](#) from holding the March for Dignity by a mob of violent activists convened by the Georgian Orthodox Church and again condoned by the government. Then Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili effectively gave the green light to the violence when he called on Pride to reconsider the march, citing potential disorder as a reason. Far-right activists took this as a sign of *carte blanche* and assaulted the offices of LGBTQI+ and other civil society organizations, beating up dozens of journalists, as a result of which over 30 journalists were injured, and one died several days later. In July 2023, Tbilisi Pride only [held](#) a private event, unwilling to further polarize the society with the contentious issue; however, the radical far-right groups once again invaded them, forcing the evacuation. The footage of the police allowing the violent mob through the police cordon and even showing them around the facilities, explaining that no gays were hiding anywhere, were the highlights of this shameful act of vandalism.

The lesson that the Georgian Dream learned from these episodes was that LGBT demonization could bring political benefits. The 2024 election year is marked by a clear [campaign](#) strategy that prop-

agates that protecting family values (from LGBT) and limiting gay propaganda (or, as the GD calls it, pseudo-liberal propaganda) are the most important issues in today's Georgia.

On 25 March 2024, Mamuka Mdinardze, leader of the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority, [unveiled](#) plans for two draft constitutional laws aimed at safeguarding family values and minors. These initiatives include an amendment to Article 30 of the Georgian Constitution, focusing on marriage rights and maternal-child relations, with proposed provisions restricting same-sex unions and gender-related medical interventions. Additionally, Mdinardze outlined stringent regulations targeting gatherings, distribution of materials, and educational content promoting non-heterosexual relationships or gender reassignment. This announcement followed a prior public declaration to draft an “anti-LGBT propaganda” law aiming at stirring the discussion in society, putting liberal groups, CSOs, and opposition parties on the defensive.

The proposed amendments are tailored to change the constitution for prosaic reasons - if they were simple law, the GD would pass them easily, as they hold the majority in the Parliament. However, if the changes are constitutional, they will have to be supported by the opposition. Thus, if they fail because of the lack of opposition votes, the label of “LGBT supporters” will be easily hung on the opposition.

Georgian Dream leaders [claim](#) that the initiated law against “LGBT propaganda” is a common national cause and must be urgently addressed. According to Papuashvili, the issue should be tackled immediately, as no one thought five to ten years ago that the Prime Minister of the UK would need to clarify “that a man is a man and a woman is a woman.”

Shielding Georgian society from the “malign in-

fluence of LGBT” and protecting children from “LGBT propaganda” is explained by the necessity to protect the “interests of the majority.” Former Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili [used](#) this line of argument at the 2023 Budapest CPAC forum, also known as the ‘anti-LGBT forum.’ “We are protecting the rights of the majority, for whom the family is a union of man and woman, for whom the woman is a mother and a man is a father,” – asserted Gharibashvili. Protecting the majority from the minority is also an often-used argument by Moscow.

If the Georgian Dream directly juxtaposes itself vis-à-vis European integration, it stands no chance of winning. But if the positioning is about protecting family values from gay propaganda, then they can further polarize society and maintain power.

The intention of the ruling party is clear – making the 2024 elections not about the economy, EU integration, and relations with Russia but about conservative values, family, and LGBT propaganda. The rationale behind this is also clear – if the Georgian Dream directly juxtaposes itself vis-à-vis European integration, it stands no chance of winning. But if the positioning is about protecting family values from gay propaganda, then they can further polarize society and maintain power.

Anti-NGO Propaganda

Another prominent Kremlin narrative is the subversive nature of the non-governmental organizations and their activities against the state institutions. Over the past two decades, Russia has increasingly targeted civil society organizations through various legal and administrative measures, constraining their activities and limiting their ability to operate independently. Since the

early 2000s, the Russian government has implemented laws and regulations that subject NGOs to extensive scrutiny, bureaucratic hurdles, and surveillance. The 2012 “foreign agents” law, for instance, requires NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in broadly defined “political activities” to register as “foreign agents,” a term laden with negative connotations from the Soviet era. This label not only tarnishes the reputation of NGOs but also imposes burdensome reporting requirements and exposes them to potential harassment and intimidation from state authorities.

Moreover, the Russian government has utilized various tactics to suppress NGOs deemed critical or oppositional. Raids, inspections, and legal proceedings have been employed to intimidate activists and organizations, often under the guise of combating extremism or protecting national security. High-profile cases, such as the dissolution of the prominent human rights group Memorial in 2021 and the arrest of activists from organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, illustrate the extent of state interference in civil society.

The Georgian Dream has been utilizing the same approach against the Georgian CSOs for almost two years now. Last March, the attempt to pass the “foreign agents law,” in the best Russian traditions, was prevented by the protest of local civil society and youth; however, the campaign against the NGOs has not stopped. NGOs are continuously called foreign agents. Since the start of 2024, there has not been a single week during which GD leaders have not slammed, attacked, or slandered civil society organizations. The Chairperson of the Parliament most frequently leads the attacks.

The leader of the Parliamentary Majority, Mamuka Mdinardze, [called](#) last year’s protests against the Foreign Agents Law the “farce of the century.” Mayor of Tbilisi and Secretary General of the Georgian Dream, Kakha Kaladze, recently [stated](#) that

CSOs have transformed into political parties that operate against the government. Georgian Dream leaders most frequently attack the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), and USAID, which are blamed for supporting the NGOs and which are critical of the government. When the news broke in March 2024 that the US was decreasing Georgia’s financing, the GD leaders, including the Prime Minister, welcomed the news and expressed the hope that the funding of the “rich NGOs” would be cut. The Parliament’s Chairperson even [stated](#) that there is a whole scheme set up to fund Georgian politicians through fake CSOs, which directly interferes with electoral processes.

After all, last year, they almost passed the law obliging CSOs to register as foreign agents, and Georgia still received EU candidate status.

These attacks against Georgian CSOs contradict the EU’s request to see more active engagement with Georgian CSOs when implementing the nine steps necessary for opening the accession talks. However, the Georgian Dream leaders feel comfortable with this contradiction. After all, last year, they almost passed the law obliging CSOs to register as foreign agents, and Georgia still received EU candidate status.

Narrative of Sovereign Democracy

The concept of sovereign democracy emerged in Russia in the early 2000s, championed by Vladimir Putin and his supporters as a response to the perceived failures of Western-style liberal democracy. Sovereign democracy emphasizes the primacy of state sovereignty and national interests while prioritizing stability and order over Western-driven individual rights and freedoms. The concept has

evolved over time, becoming increasingly synonymous with centralized control and authoritarian tendencies and also acquiring a central role in Russian propaganda against the West.

The Georgian Dream embraces this narrative just as eagerly as other prominent Kremlin narratives. Statements about the unacceptability of foreign intervention in domestic affairs, particularly from the EU, are abundant, especially after the EU granted Georgia candidate status. The concept of sovereign democracy, in essence, rejects any criticism of democracy from outside powers. For Georgia, whose EU candidate status envisages numerous scrutinies of democracy, such an approach is incredibly dangerous and places risks on the European integration path. However, to alleviate this contradiction, the Georgian Dream has devised the slogan – “with honor to Europe,” emphasizing that they would enter the EU on their terms without undertaking the reforms they consider degrading (read ‘challenging their grip on power’). “Georgia should be governed by the Georgian people, not foreigners,” is the [position](#) of the Parliament’s Chairperson when he responds to the European criticism of the lack of reforms.

On 13 March 2024, prominent Georgian CSOs – Transparency International – Georgia, the Georgian Democracy Initiative, Courtwatch, Democracy Defenders, and the Civil Society Foundation released a joint [statement](#) calling for the vetting and integrity check of Georgian judges. The coalition of the Georgian CSOs, which is monitoring the implementation of the nine conditions necessary for starting the accession talks, also [believes](#) that vetting of judges is important for achieving judicial independence. Problems in the Georgian judiciary are widely known and reported by credible international partners. The US government even [put](#) several influential judges on the visa ban list who are believed to be part of a judiciary clan that projects the political interests of the ruling party in the court system. “By refusing to check the integrity of

the members of the clan in the Georgian justice system, the government is hindering the European integration process” – was the assessment of Georgian CSOs. In response, the Chairperson of the Parliament [accused](#) the CSOs of undermining the Georgian justice system and [attacking](#) Georgia’s sovereignty. “This is the malign influence of foreign funding,” Papuashvili responded.

The Georgian Dream is now shielding any call for significant reforms from the EU by using the argument of sovereignty and preventing foreign interference. “This is Georgia; this is not a place where you can conduct experiments; this is not a country that some losers can direct,” [claimed](#) one spokesman of the Georgian Dream. The parliamentary leader of the GD, Mamuka Mdinardze, even [pledged](#) that the ruling party would not take into account any recommendations from the Venice Commission or any other institution that was directed against Georgia, its democratic elections, and its sovereignty. Mdinardze also [said](#) that it was unacceptable for the ruling party to let foreign countries, “no matter friends or foes,” conduct vetting of the judiciary.

According to the “sovereign democracy” narrative, foreign influence determines all actions of the political oppositions and even President Salome Zourabichvili, who has fallen out of the Georgian Dream’s favor. For example, when the President pardoned opposition politicians and a media manager, the government could only explain it with the foreign *diktat*. The Parliament’s Chairperson directly [claimed](#) that the pardoning of Nika Gvaramia in 2023 and Nika Melia in 2021 (who now jointly created a new opposition party – Ahali) was due to the interference of “foreign political groups.” Every time European politicians express interest in pardoning or releasing former President Saakashvili, this concept of sovereign democracy and non-intervention in domestic affairs is used as a shield by the Georgian Dream.

Foreign Subversion Conspiracy

Russia has long asserted that the West, particularly the United States, is actively engaged in efforts to destabilize the Russian government by supporting what it terms “color revolutions” across the globe. These assertions gained traction, particularly in the aftermath of the 2014 Euromaidan in Kyiv and the 2020 protests in Belarus, events that Russia viewed as orchestrated attempts by Western powers to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Moscow often portrays these uprisings as part of a broader strategy aimed at encroaching upon Russian spheres of influence and promoting Western interests at the expense of Russian stability.

A similar narrative has been adopted by the Georgian Dream. For the Georgian authorities, opposition parties are preparing a revolution or a coup d'état and are, therefore, radical. In September 2023, the Georgian State Security Service “exposed” three Serbian civil activists who allegedly came to Georgia to train civil society organizations with the intent of orchestrating the violent overthrow of Georgia’s government. Russian propaganda channels in Georgia, like *Sezoni TV*, regularly [pursue](#) the same line. The resignation of the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs of the United States, Victoria Nuland, gave another spark to this narrative. Nuland, who is blamed for orchestrating the Euromaidan, was [attacked](#) by the pro-Russian media in Georgia.

The Georgian Dream almost never uses the term “opposition” without linking the adjective “radical” to it. This “radical opposition” is portrayed as violent, “revengeful,” and non-democratic – a standard message box by the Kremlin. Throughout the last 12 years of the Georgian Dream’s power, numerous investigations have been launched, targeting opposition politicians for attempting to overthrow the government. None of them led to

any arrests since the goal of this propaganda line is not to detain the politicians (they can be arrested for other wrongdoings) but to grow the seed of resentment towards the “radical opposition.”

Similarities with the Narratives in Abkhazia

It is remarkable that the local authorities in Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia also use similar narratives as the government of Georgia. Abkhazia is under increased pressure from Moscow to “Russianize” its “legislation,” allowing Russia to all but annex this occupied region. Recently, the Russian-grown de facto foreign minister, Inal Ardzinba, launched a campaign against the local Abkhaz NGOs, pressing them to stop any contact with Georgian counterparts or engage in any confidence-building activities. The draft law on foreign agents is ready and will be heard by the local parliament at any moment. Despite having resisted the pressure to pass the law, which was passed in South Ossetia in 2014, now it [seems](#) that the Abkhaz parliament will succumb, too.

The local authorities in Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia also use similar narratives as the government of Georgia. Abkhazia is under increased pressure from Moscow to “Russianize” its “legislation,” allowing Russia to all but annex this occupied region.

Abkhazian civil society strongly opposes the foreign agents’ bill, with approximately 400 activists and non-governmental organizations [urging](#) its rejection in an open letter to the de facto authorities. They argued that the bill’s designation of organizations as “foreign agents” discriminated against civil society and infringed upon citizens’ fundamental rights. Inal Ardzinba warned of po-

tential repercussions on international organizations and local NGOs receiving EU funding, hinting at possible expulsions. In 2024, Russian border guards started to stop dissenting Abkhaz activists at the border, making them know that Moscow was discontent with their resistance.

Abkhaz de facto authorities are also attacking foreign donors. Mr. Ardzinba even restricted US-AID-funded UNDP projects and [declared](#) the head of the USAID program in Georgia *persona non grata*. Other international NGOs, such as the Berghof Foundation of Germany and Action Against Hunger, have also been attacked. The Abkhaz de facto ministry of foreign affairs often posts Russian propaganda narratives through its Telegram Channel, copying Moscow's talking points on Western interference in the domestic affairs of European states, including Georgia.

LGBT propaganda is also actively used to discredit the West. In 2023, the de facto Abkhaz Ministry of Foreign Affairs decried the cooperation of several Abkhaz citizens with one of the media outlets that was banned in Russia because of LGBT propaganda. The Abkhaz MFA spokesperson said that cooperation with the media agency, propagating the LGBT culture and contradicting the national identity, culture, and historical values of the Abkhaz nation, was unacceptable.

The Dilemma for the EU

The usage of Russian propaganda narratives by the Georgian Dream has one peculiarity – these steps are still justified by arguing that the EU (and the US) have similar policies. This, known generally as a policy of “whataboutism,” illustrates that Georgian authorities cannot fully make an anti-European shift, aware that the majority of the population is staunchly supporting European integration. For instance, when the “foreign agents” draft bill was introduced, GD leaders referred to “similar” laws

in the US and lobbying legislation in the EU. When the Georgian NGOs' transparency is questioned, the statements by the MEPs about the necessity to regulate the funding of the European NGOs are quoted. When the suggestions of the EU on judicial and other reforms are denied, the usual rhetorical question is asked – does the EU have similar laws? When LGBT propaganda was introduced, examples limiting the rights of sexual minorities were brought from Italy, Lithuania, and Hungary.

The EU, therefore, faces a dilemma: how to respond to the Georgian government's anti-European turn. On the one hand, it is clear that such narratives by the Georgian government undermine European values and jeopardize the Georgian population's aspiration to join the EU. Qualification for Euro 2024 probably increased further the already 80%+ support for European integration. On the other hand, if the EU starts to contradict every anti-European statement and step that the Georgian Dream makes or takes, it risks falling into the GD's propaganda trap. Indeed, if the EU makes it clear that passing the discriminatory LGBT propaganda law is a red line for the EU, the GD will argue that this is exactly what they wanted to prove – that they will resist European pressure to impose gay marriage. On the other hand, if the EU mutes its response, those pro-European forces in Georgia, who want to make sure that the country does not stumble on the accession path, will be weakened. And their weakness might open doors for more anti-European legislation and increased Russian control.

There is no easy way out of this dilemma, especially since the EU, in contrast with the Kremlin propaganda narrative, does not want or plan to intervene in Georgia's domestic affairs. Many European politicians believe that if they continue openly decrying the steps and narratives of the Georgian Dream, they will reinforce the opposition parties. And doing so in an election year is considered unethical.

In a similar vein, if the EU continues viewing Georgia's progress towards the EU through only a "merit-based more for more" prism, it risks leaving Georgia behind Ukraine and Moldova in Russia's den. This is precisely why Georgia was granted the EU candidate status - geopolitics trumped merit-based consideration.

The EU needs to become more vocal in 2024, despite its own elections in June. The only way the EU can help reverse this anti-European narrative in Georgia is by making it clear that there are red lines which, once crossed, will make it impossible for Georgia to join the EU.

But, maybe, for a change, the EU needs to become more vocal in 2024, despite its own elections in June. The only way the EU can help reverse this

anti-European narrative in Georgia is by making it clear that there are red lines which, once crossed, will make it impossible for Georgia to join the EU.

Maybe explaining to the Georgian public, in advance of the October 2024 elections, that the anti-European actions of the Georgian government are jeopardizing the country's European integration prospects could be an answer. Maybe, for once, the EU actually needs to "interfere" in Georgian domestic politics, not in the way Russia or the Georgian government blames it, through covert operations and alleged coups, but through a democratic, transparent process - clear statements, assessments, and verdicts. After all, the Georgian people deserve and probably want to know whether the current embrace of Russian propaganda narratives by the government of Georgia is distancing Georgia from the EU or bringing it closer ■

Erase, Rewind, Repeat: Russia's Habit of Planting Fake Memories

In May 1921, the Bolshevik Soviet administration of Georgia was preparing to celebrate Independence Day. You read that right: the Kremlin stooges that invaded an independent country with the full force of the Red Army, the country whose sovereignty and borders they solemnly pledged and recognized only a year earlier, were readying to celebrate its independence. Cynicism? Certainly. Political calculation – definitely. But importantly, a habit of twisting the truth and falsifying memory would be perfected in the putrid corridors of the Cheka and the KGB and become a political instrument of domination and whitewashing. The machine is still going strong in Putin's Russia – and the web of lies that it weaves sometimes ends up conjuring images so absurd as to confuse its staunchest detractors.

A habit of twisting the truth and falsifying memory would be perfected in the putrid corridors of the Cheka and the KGB and become a political instrument of domination and whitewashing.

The lessons from the fall of the short-lived but vibrant Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921) are not a simple historical curiosity. They may serve as a case study in Russia, combining the crimes of aggression, persecution, and purges with subtler but no less damaging instruments of memory politics – something that can be instructive as we all grapple with Moscow's ongoing aggression against Ukraine.

So, let us get back to that gloomy Tbilisi spring of 1921. The Red Army invaded in February 1921 on the pretext of a “workers’ uprising” in the region bordering already Sovietized Armenia and Azerbaijan – which it barely took an effort to window-dress as genuine. There were two good reasons for the nakedness of that aggression.

One was internal: we can have it from the words of Filipe Makharadze, the leader of the Georgian Communists and the head of the “Revolutionary Committee” right after the invasion. He wrote at the end of 1921 in an internal report that the situation of the Georgian Communist Party at the



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beginning of 1921 [was “hopeless.”](#) In exchange for Bolshevik Russia recognizing the country’s independence in 1920, the government in Tbilisi agreed to “legalize” the Communist Party but Makharadze says that the legalization “was a trap.” Soon, most Communist leaders were behind bars for illicit activities. Others were tracked by counterintelligence. By the beginning of 1921, “the Communist Party of Georgia was beheaded entirely,” writes Makharadze, to the extent that “when the Red Army attacked, no [Communist] party cell, no party member had any idea about its purpose or objectives.”

Another reason was external: in December 1920, the League of Nations turned down Georgia’s application to join this international body, a precursor of the United Nations. The reason? *Le Temps* [reported](#) on that debate, something which is quite curious from today’s perspective. Paris named the “Russian issue” as the reason for its opposition. Namely, the French representative argued that since Article 10 of the League of Nations obliged its members to defend other members should they be threatened, protecting Georgia against Bolshevik Russia “would be quite complicated.” When the British and Norwegian representatives (none other than Fridtjof Nansen) objected, the German representative asked rhetorically: “Which of you is ready to send an expedition force?” Historian Beka Kobakhidze says that Georgia lost its geopolitical significance once the Bolsheviks captured Baku with its oilfields. The League of Nations’ decision was only the formalization of that fact. The message was heard loud and clear in Moscow.

So, the invasion it was. After initial confusion and disarray, the Georgian Army regained its spirit and [took a stand](#) at the entrance of Tbilisi, even briefly routing the invaders on 18-19 February. Close to ten thousand Georgians were defending the city, including 166 young military academy cadets (remember them; it would be useful for our story), and some 40 thousand militaries were resisting

country-wide. But the invasion force was too large. When the Kemalist Turkey’s troops invaded from the south, the situation became untenable. The high military command decided to leave Tbilisi on 24 February. Military resistance to the Bolsheviks formally ended in March. The Constituent Assembly convened one last time to transfer full powers to the government and ordered some ministers to leave the country and seek support abroad.

The Social Democratic Party congress that the occupiers allowed on 10 April 1921 erupted into bitter criticism of the regime and affirmation of the will to fight for independence. The country had inhaled the air of independence with full lungs and did not want to let it go.

But even though the Bolsheviks took the capital, their situation was precarious. To start with, they had few local supporters. If in other (re)conquered lands, they were flying the red banner of workers’ liberation from the nationalist governments, the Social Democrats were in power in Georgia and were by far more popular than the Bolsheviks. The Social Democratic Party congress that the occupiers allowed on 10 April 1921 erupted into [bitter criticism](#) of the regime and affirmation of the [will to fight](#) for independence. The country had inhaled the air of independence with full lungs and did not want to let it go.

“We have to admit,” [wrote](#) Makharadze to the Kremlin, “that in the past three or four years, Georgian masses have gotten used to Georgia’s independence [...] I have to say, this development was unexpected for me, too, but it was impossible not to take it into account.” Here you have the reason for the Bolshevik’s “softly-softly” approach at the beginning of the occupation and the attempt to keep the pretense of the country’s independence. But Silibistro Jibladze, a veteran Social Democrat with years spent evading the Tsarist gendarmerie,

was not fooled. He [wrote](#) to his émigré colleagues in June 1921: “The main issue is not in [so far the absence of] physical terror, but in the moral terror that has already started and which will be necessarily followed by arrests and other kinds of trouble...”

But the majority were not so foresightful. Arch-priest at one Tbilisi church, a “citizen priest” as he called himself, Nikita Talakvadze, [confided](#) in his diary: “For several days, after the Red Army entered Tbilisi, inhabitants were fearfully awaiting executions, but when none came, life returned to its usual old pace.” Even if they persecuted the intelligence, army, and national guard officials, the new overlords left political opponents and ordinary people alone. A mere “change of government” took place; the new masters signaled that life goes on, and so does the independent Georgia.

Not only did the Communists allow the fallen Georgian soldiers (including cadets) to be buried with honors and accompanied by large mourning crowds on the grounds of the central Tbilisi church, they also took steps toward symbolic reconciliation. Forty-two Georgian and Russian soldiers who fell in one of the last battles on 4 March were buried together in the capital. Georgian Bolsheviks and the Russian military spoke of “the last victims of Menshevism.” And in May, they were trying to hijack Independence Day.

26 May 1921 was a public relations disaster for the Bolshevik invaders. People boycotted the official celebrations in Tbilisi. In the provinces, counter-demonstrations were held, flags of independent Georgia were flown, and speakers decried occupation.

But Georgians would not have it. 26 May 1921 was a public relations disaster for the Bolshevik invaders. People boycotted the official celebrations in Tbilisi.

si. In the provinces, counter-demonstrations were held, flags of independent Georgia were flown, and speakers decried occupation. The Red Army had to disband these gatherings by force. Many were wounded, several were killed, and mass arrests were made. The “soft” phase started to wane and marking 26 May was forbidden beginning in 1922. Georgia’s independence had to be forgotten.

Drawing the Veil of Forgetting

One should resist the temptation to paint Russia’s every trick of information warfare as part of a grand design, an intentional move of a chess grandmaster. Much of it is improvisation, sometimes borne out of bitter internal political contests. Over the years, adaptations were made due to historical circumstances. However, the intent to obfuscate and modify historical memory was always there. After all, as the popular saying goes, the Soviet Union was a “country with an unpredictable past.”

One should resist the temptation to paint Russia’s every trick of information warfare as part of a grand design, an intentional move of a chess grandmaster. Much of it is improvisation, sometimes borne out of bitter internal political contests.

The components of the disinformation policy that the Bolsheviks and then the USSR mounted are still familiar. Their first task was to preempt mass rebellion and thus split the Social Democrats from their support base. They accused the former government of:

- “Selling the country to the Western capitalists” - when Soviet Russia invaded it;
- “Attempting to give Adjara to Turkey” - when the fleeing troops of the Georgian Democratic Republic kept control of Adjara and ceded it to

the Bolshevik government while Soviet Russia signed off two districts under Georgian control to Turkey under the Treaty of Moscow and then the Treaty of Kars;

- “Starting the war with (Soviet) Russia and unnecessarily sacrificing ‘Georgian boys’” - when it was Bolshevik Russia that initiated the aggression;
- “Trying to bring foreign (Western) troops to Georgia” - which was not even an option available at that time;
- “Stealing the National Treasure” - which was indeed taken by the government-in-exile but then returned with an itemized list of cultural artifacts. Only limited treasury funds were indeed (and quite logically) used to finance the government-in-exile’s representation.

Obviously, some of these messages were directed at the “workers and peasants” - a core base for all parties at that time, whom the Bolsheviks desperately tried to wrestle away from Social Democrats (in vain). But interestingly, the Communists also nurtured nationalist sentiment, trying to position themselves, and not their predecessors, as the true defenders of Georgian interests.

“We had to show to the masses that we are truly standing on the pro-independence platform; it was impossible to speak about independence and to deny or destroy it by actions,” wrote Makharadze. “Yes, this was a concession to the nationalist feeling of the masses, but not an essential one,” he continued, saying that the concession was necessary so the Bolsheviks could “take away the trump card” from their opponents.

A combination of both messages was used to cajole and corrupt the few remaining elements of the erstwhile democratic system - left-wing political parties that opposed Social Democrats. Social-Federalists and Socialist-Revolutionaries, relatively marginal during the previous government,

sided with the new masters early on and helped publicize and proliferate the Bolshevik talking points.

Protestations of the Georgian Bolsheviks were not forgotten – in the late 1920s, most of them were accused of “nationalist leanings,” pushed out of the top positions, and then executed during the 1937-38 Stalinist purges.

While the defection of these parties helped create confusion in the first year of occupation, their services were soon no longer required. Russia is keen on killing such circumstantial allies first. The 26 May 1921 fiasco led to the regime’s hardening. Holdover political parties and their newspapers were closed down. Despite the objections of veteran Georgian communists – Makharadze, Budu Mdivani, and others – the Kremlin ordered the formal trappings of independence to be eradicated. By 1922, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic became a part of the Transcaucasian Federal Soviet Socialist Republic and, in that form, joined the newly founded USSR. Protestations of the Georgian Bolsheviks were not forgotten – in the late 1920s, most of them were accused of “nationalist leanings,” pushed out of the top positions, and then executed during the 1937-38 Stalinist purges.

From Vilification to Ridicule

As they were just settling in, [writes](#) historian David Khvadagiani, the Bolsheviks in Tbilisi feared insurrection led by the ousted Social Democrats. Many of them still remained in the country and had loyal followers. Early propaganda portrayed them as vicious, murderous people bent on unleashing the imperialist war. The propaganda movie [Their Kingdom](#), which hit the screens in 1928, manipulated archive footage and peppered it with quotes from the Communist Party pantheon to push this message.

However, the armed insurrection against the Bolsheviks, which started at the end of August 1924 under the political leadership of the inter-party committee of the Georgian Democratic Republic, failed. Cruel repression followed, and hundreds were killed, both during and after the insurrection. Political prisoners and Georgian army officers were executed. The reign of terror, it turned out, was only deferred in 1921 and not averted.

With the enemy decimated, the tone of propaganda changed from vilification to ridicule. The 1934 film, *The Last Masquerade*, [portrays](#) the Social Democrats as hapless buffoons. The mutual recriminations followed the failed insurrection among the émigré party rivals, notably the Social Democrats and the National Democrats. The Cheka was there to exploit the vitriol.

In 1925, curiously, Soviet censorship allowed the publication of the memoir by Zurab Avalishvili, former diplomat of the GDR and one of the founders of the National Democratic party. He was particularly scathing towards the Social Democratic government, saying their rule was “a preparatory period for the triumph of the Soviet dictatorship... oriented towards Moscow and not towards the West.” The censors went through the 1927 memoirs of General Giorgi Mazniashvili, who returned to Soviet Georgia and even enrolled in the army. These are full of factual mistakes but deeply critical of the Social Democratic government. The party felt it could handle and even use the latent nationalist tendencies for control.

But the most tragic development came afterward. Enter the 1930s with their purges and the decimation of the whole political class. People who had personal memories and experiences with the Democratic Republic were gone. Importantly, so were their opponents, the Georgian Bolsheviks, who fell victim to Stalin's ire. What was propaganda in the 1920s became proscribed heresy by the late 1930s. Then followed the catastrophe of the

Great Patriotic War (World War II), death and destruction. Even though Georgia was largely spared military action on its soil, Georgian recruits (in the opening year of the war, there still were “national” Army divisions) took particularly heavy losses, sent to a desperate rescue as the Red Army was routed in Ukraine. The heavy curtain of forgetting fell on already adulterated memories.

“Discovering”

Fast-forward to the late 1970s and 1980s. The awakening of independence-oriented movements and thinking in Georgia sought to uncover the truths and reclaim the memory of the Republic. What did they find? What could still be accessed with some effort? Well, those Soviet publications from the 1920s, which, as we saw, had already been infected by propaganda messages.

The fresh-faced, anti-Soviet activists in Georgia discovered an adulterated memory. Because it was forbidden, it must be true – they thought. And then the confirmation bias kicked in: the new nationalist movement of the 1980s was strongly nationalistic. They found emotional and intellectual kinship with the National Democrats and not the Social Democratic government of 1918-1921. As for the Social Democrats, the hatred of all things socialist had deeply penetrated the dissident movement – and for a good reason. It was hard for the new nationalist movement to treat the writings of the Georgian socialist thinkers of the 1910s and 1920s as genuine, and it was even harder to consider that popular adhesion to these ideas was widespread and genuine.

Thus, in the 1980s, those propaganda narratives – that Mensheviks fled the country without fighting, the cynical ridicule and denigration of the political class in 1930s films, and that the GDR's government stole the national treasure – resurfaced again.

Thus, in the 1980s, those propaganda narratives - that Mensheviks fled the country without fighting, the cynical ridicule and denigration of the political class in 1930s films, and that the GDR's government stole the national treasure - resurfaced again. Moreover, these narratives gained even greater credibility because many of their authors were purged in 1937, which somehow "rehabilitated" them from their old sins against truth and reason.

Remember those cadets who fell defending Tbilisi?! There were 166 of them who fought heroically against the Russian invaders in the villages of Kojori and Tabakhmela. Nine fell on the battlefield. In a surprising distortion of scale and proportion, it is their sacrifice that is remembered every year in February, while politicians even forget to name the other fallen. Why? For one, indeed, the death of these youths in the prime of their life made its mark even then. But in a more sinister fashion, the Bolshevik propaganda wanted only the cadets to

be remembered as victims of the unreasonable resistance of the Social Democrats as "children sent to their deaths." Obviously, Georgia having a regular army that resisted occupation was a far more dangerous memory to keep.

Russia kills, but not only people. It kills memories, and worse – it adulterates them in a way that can poison our present.

And so it continues. Any Western researcher or current politician touches Soviet historiography at their peril. For it is not history that is recorded there, but a sedentation of propaganda narratives, glued together like the charred scrolls of Heracleum. And it will remain so until the doors of the KGB archives are thrown open. In the meantime, we must remember: Russia kills, but not only people. It kills memories, and worse – it adulterates them in a way that can poison our present ■

The author wishes to thank David Khvadagiani, Irakli Iremadze, Beka Kobakhidze and Dimitri Silakadze for their groundbreaking research and unrelenting effort to revive the memory of the Georgian Democratic Republic. Without their work, this article would have been impossible.

Taxation Without Representation: Georgian Migrants as ATMs

In 2014, the National Statistics Office of Georgia [stated](#) that the Georgian population was 3.7 million, of which 920,000 were under 17 and ineligible to vote. Hence, 2.8 million voters were residing in Georgia who could cast their vote. In 2021, however, 3.5 million voters were registered. This means that 700,000 voters—a staggering 20% of the voting population - are not residing in Georgia.

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In 2012-2022, 244,966 Georgians permanently [left](#) the country. The March 2023 [survey](#) conducted by the NDI showed that every sixth citizen of Georgia is also planning to leave. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of Georgians with at least one family member abroad increased from 12% to 16%.

According to the European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) [report](#), there were approximately 180,000 Georgian international migrants in EU and Schen-

gen zone countries in mid-2020, with the EU+ hosting an estimated 21% of Georgian global migrants. The EU+ countries with the highest number of Georgian migrants were Greece (85,065, accounting for 10% of the Georgian international migrant stock), Germany (25,387, 3%), Italy (15,813, 2%), Cyprus (15,201, 2%), Spain (11,824, 1%) and France (8,673, 1%).

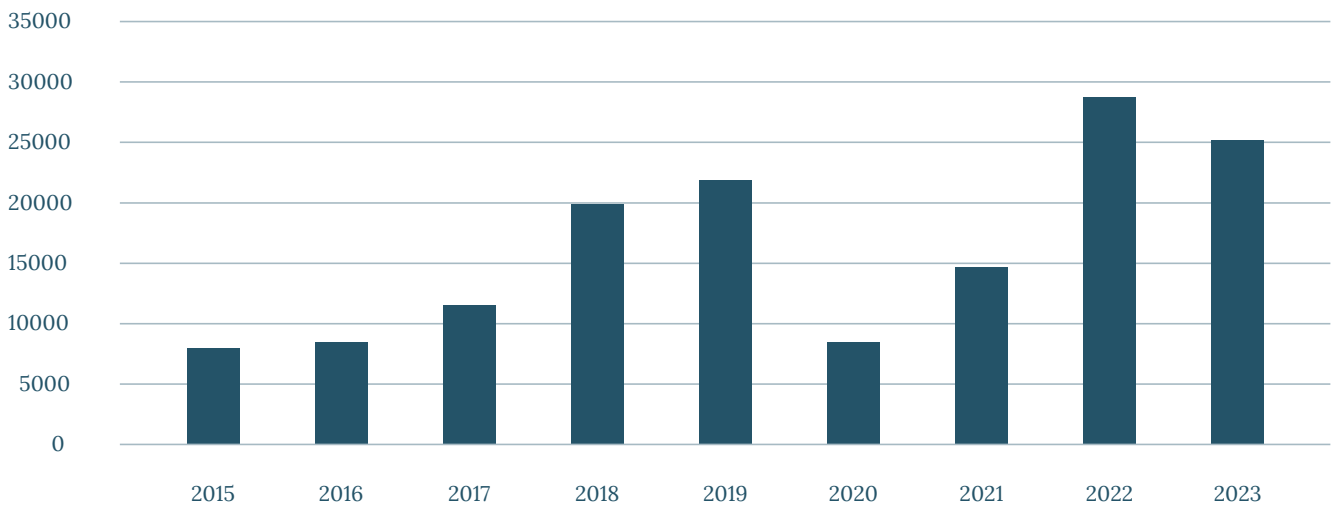
According to the official [statistics](#), 54,509 people left Georgia in 2022. Per the EUAA, [25,209](#) Georgian citizens applied for asylum in EU and Schengen zone countries in 2023. France, Germany, and Italy are the leading destinations for Georgian asylum seekers. In 2022, Georgia was in eighth place after Syria, Afghanistan, Türkiye, Venezuela, Colombia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, with 26,640 first-time asylum seekers in the EU and Schengen zone. According to the Eurostat [data](#) of 2021, 22% of asylum seekers were under the age of 18 years, 35% of applicants were between the ages of 18 and 24 years, 41% were between the ages of 25 and 64 years, and 1% was over the age of 65.



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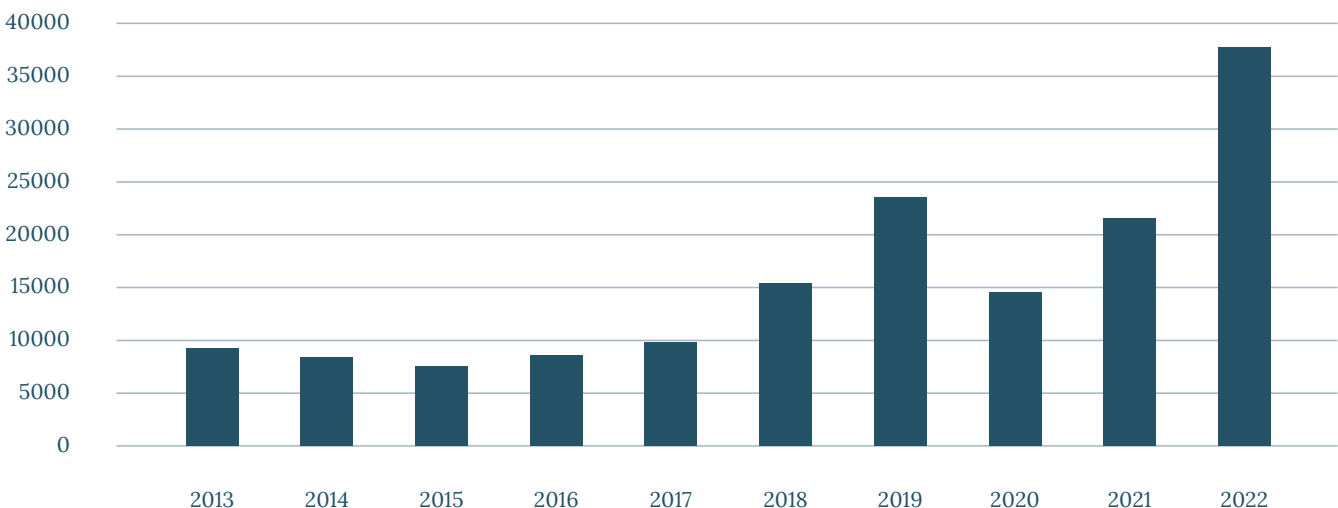
Georgian Applications for Asylum in the EU+



A recent study by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) [unveiled](#) that from 2010 to 2020, the number of stock emigrants from Georgia increased by 7% and amounted to 861 thousand – (23% of the country’s population). According to the US State Department, the number of US Green Card lottery applicants increased from 31 thousand in 2010 to 112 thousand in 2021. The number of Georgian citizens legally [residing](#) in Italy has more than doubled in the last

six years, reaching 29,222 in 2023 from 14,603 in 2017 and 7,083 in 2012. The number of legal residents of Poland increased from 500 persons in 2015 to 27,400 in 2022. The statistics of the first-time residence permits issued to the citizens of Georgia in the EU/Schengen zone countries also show a dramatic picture: from 2013 to 2022, 156,371 first-time residence permits were [issued](#) to citizens of Georgia.

First-time Residence Permits Issued to Georgian Citizens in EU/Schengen States



Fleeing Poverty and Unemployment

Despite Georgia's double-digit economic growth in 2021 (10.6%) and 2022 (11%), Georgians still face financial hardship, lack jobs, and are poor—the main reason they migrate. Officially, overall unemployment stands at 16.3%, while among the youth (aged 20-24 years), it is 37.3%. Every sixth Georgian (overall 15.6%) lives in absolute poverty, and around 600,000 citizens are receiving social assistance.

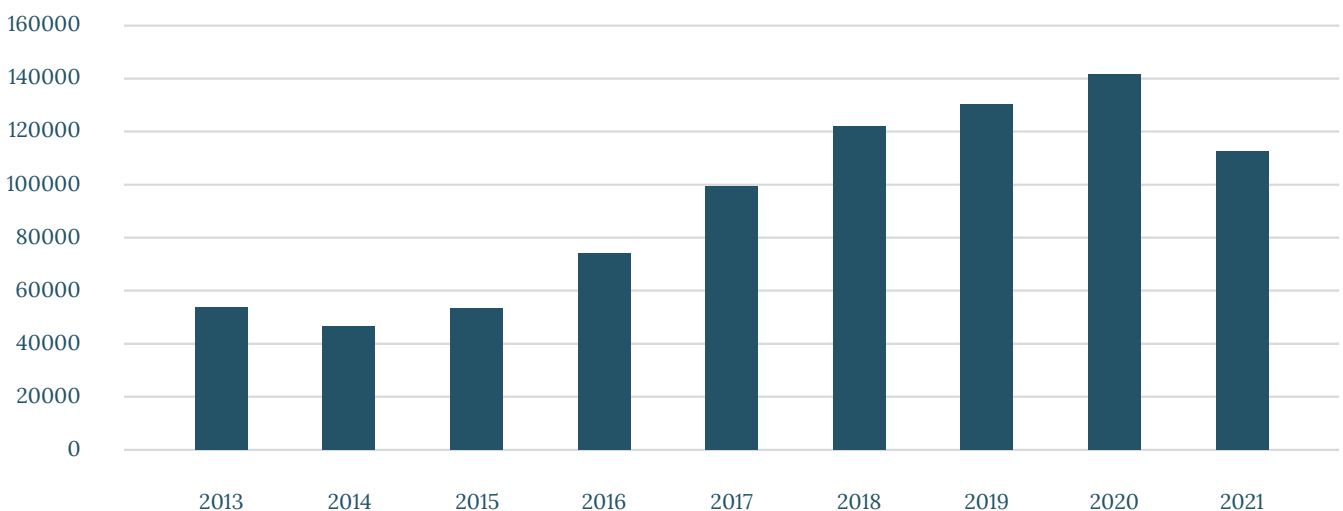
When the circular migration scheme between Georgia and Germany began operation in 2021, up to 100,000 Georgian citizens applied for 500 vacancies (mainly in the agricultural field) offered by German employers. In 2019, the chair of the ruling Georgian Dream party and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili expressed his surprise that Georgians were expecting him to create jobs. Instead, he recommended his fellow citizens to seek jobs in Europe since, according to [him](#), “no economy can create 2 million jobs in Georgia within 10-20 years.”

Georgian citizens go abroad to earn just enough to support their families back home. The remittanc-

es increased from USD 1.48 billion in 2013 to 4.4 billion in 2022. The Policy Management and Consulting Group (PMCG) [study](#) showed that Georgia's economic dependence on remittances increased notably over the last decade. From 2013 to 2022, the percentage of remittance inflows as a share of the GDP has grown from 11% to 16%. The [report](#) of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) puts Georgia as one of the top 20 countries in the world by share of remittances in its GDP. Since 2020, remittance inflow revenues have become the second largest source of foreign currency entering Georgia after export. Remittances are also the second largest contributor to the GDP, just below the manufacturing sector (20%). Georgian emigrants contribute more to the Georgian economy than wholesale and retail trade (13.4%), construction (11.7%), transport and storage (7.1%), real estate (6.1%), or agriculture, forestry, and fishing (6%) ([Geostat](#), 2023).

The December 2022 NDI [poll](#) demonstrated that one in three young Georgians wants to emigrate. This shows the lack of hope for the future and deeply rooted political nihilism. According to the NDI, 62% of the surveyed population believe that no single political party in the country represents their interests.

Number of US Green Card Lottery Applicants from Georgia





This illustration is drawn in the style peculiar to an early 20th century renowned Georgian painter Niko Pirosmani.

Taxation Without Representation

While Georgian migrants actively contribute to the country's economic growth, their contribution to political life remains minuscule. According to the Central Election Commission (CEC) [data](#), in the 2012 general elections, only 7,814 Georgian citizens living abroad showed up to vote. In 2016, the number of voters fell to 4,816; in 2020, it increased to 12,247. This represents less than 2% of the total number of immigrants eligible to vote.

The main reason for the limited political activism of Georgians abroad is that most illegal Georgian migrants are afraid to be detained and returned home.

The main reason for the limited political activism of Georgians abroad is that most illegal Georgian migrants are afraid to be detained and returned home. Many of them are employed without con-

tracts that require them to work long hours, including weekends, leaving almost no free time for rest, not to mention going to elections.

Since the Georgian legislation does not envisage electronic voting, migrants must travel hundreds of kilometers to voting stations opened in Georgian embassies and consulates in order to cast their votes.

Considering the growing migration trend, providing better opportunities for migrants to vote would be logical. However, the current Georgian authorities are not very enthusiastic about such steps. This skepticism is understandable since the analysis of migrant voter turnout shows that they consistently vote for opposition political parties. In 2012, 53.4% of Georgians living abroad voted for the opposition Georgian Dream party; in 2016 – 60.3% of Georgian migrants voted for opposition parties; in 2020, the figure reached 70.51%.

A growing number of migrants and the experience

of Moldova, where migrant votes played a crucial role in the victory of pro-European President Maia Sandu, inspired Georgian political parties to push the government to enable more migrants to vote. In November 2023, several opposition parties [launched](#) a campaign called “Ballot Box in Your City,” which requested the opening of polling stations in cities without Georgian consulates or embassies.

The European Union also indirectly supports more engagement of Georgian migrants. The fourth [step](#) outlined by the EU Commission when granting EU candidate status to Georgia requires Georgian authorities to “finalize electoral reforms, including ensuring adequate representation of the electorate, well before election day.” In November 2023, the local NGO Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy (EECMD) and political parties drafted and [submitted](#) a bill to the Parliament of Georgia to streamline the ability of Georgian emigrants to vote. If passed, it would allow Georgian citizens living abroad to vote remotely through online systems. However, the Parliament of Georgia has not followed up on this initiative.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia was summoned to the Parliament of Georgia on 22 March 2024 to respond to the interpellation of several opposition MPs about Georgian migrants voting abroad. The Minister’s written and oral responses were not surprising: Georgian citizens abroad need to register in consulates, and elections can only be held in the consulates; thus, no changes are to be expected.

As explained above, this approach makes Georgian migrants vulnerable to the migration authorities of the host country. No one wants to be caught and deported on election day—an easy target for those who are after illegal migrants. Further, even if they register, traveling to a far-away consulate on election day involves several logistical hurdles.

A person in the south of France or Florida must travel a few hundred kilometers to Paris or New York and back to cast a vote. Most of the Georgian migrants living in Greece work on Saturday, the very day when a general election is scheduled on 26 October 2024.

Unsurprisingly, the current status quo – opposition-minded Georgians leaving the country and unwilling to vote – suits the ruling party.

Unsurprisingly, the current status quo – opposition-minded Georgians leaving the country and unwilling to vote – suits the ruling party. As Levan Tsutskiridze, Executive Director of the Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy (EECMD), [put](#) it: “Every Georgian government has seen the emigrant vote as a threat to their position, preferring to treat them as ATMs that give cash and ask no questions.” The exodus of the active and critical parts of civil society, which can no longer speak up on the acute democratic and social problems, suits the government.

Strikingly, however, the family members of opposition-minded Georgian voters who flee the country often still vote for the government. As the NDI [poll](#) of October 2023 demonstrated, a higher number of Georgians who have a money-sending family member abroad would rather vote for the ruling Georgian Dream party (16%) than the largest opposition United National Movement party (5%).

If the situation remains unchanged, it is to be expected that a minimal number of Georgian migrants will vote in the upcoming 2024 Parliamentary elections, something that will benefit the Georgian Dream.

If the situation remains unchanged, it is to be expected that a minimal number of Georgian migrants will vote in the upcoming 2024 Parliamentary elections, something that will benefit the Georgian Dream. Therefore, it is doubtful that the government will take tangible steps to engage more opposition-minded Georgian migrants, even if it does not fit the EU conditions outlined in the nine steps. On the other hand, if the EU and the opposition parties were to succeed in pushing

or persuading the government to allow Georgian migrants to vote electronically, or at least to ease the consular registration condition and open additional polling stations in a larger number of cities, the “representation” of Georgian migrants would increase, albeit to the detriment of the Georgian Dream’s support. Therefore, since every percentage point will count in the 2024 elections, we can safely assume that the Georgian Dream will not budge ■

Nordic Lessons for Georgia's NATO Quest

Amidst the complex security dynamics of the Black Sea region and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, Georgia's quest to join NATO inevitably begs the question: can Georgia's accession strengthen the security of the North Atlantic area? The core concern is Georgia's military defensibility in the case of Russia's aggression and the potential ramifications for the Alliance.

The recent NATO enlargement showed how hard it is to gain consensus among all NATO members. Analyzing Finland and Sweden's NATO accession process offers valuable insights into the substantial challenges facing Georgia's integration path. It also sheds light on the interplay between these challenges and the perception-driven narratives that frequently hinder progress without robust justification.

Georgia's NATO Integration Challenge

For NATO members to reach a consensus on Georgia's membership, it is crucial to address the outstanding political and security concerns. Two primary lines of skeptical arguments have emerged during the past 22 years since Georgia voiced its desire to join NATO at the 2002 Prague Summit.

Some members believe Georgia should undertake a more comprehensive and rigorous democratic reform process as part of its integration efforts. In contrast, others perceive potential risks associated with escalating Russian aggression in response to Georgia's progress on the integration path. The core question of whether Georgia could enhance the security of the North Atlantic area has consistently been accompanied by a series of subsequent skeptical questions:



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1. Can Georgia defend itself militarily in the event of renewed Russian aggression?
2. Will Georgia's membership in NATO increase or decrease the likelihood of armed conflict with Russia?
3. Will Georgia's accelerated membership in NATO result in Russia's formal annexation of Georgia's occupied territories, and how should the Allies respond to such a scenario?
4. Can Georgia be considered a reliable ally with substantial democratic credentials, or might its membership further exacerbate the challenges of consensus-building?

Georgia's ability to provide solid and convincing answers to these questions will broadly define its chances of achieving progress on the NATO integration path. In this context, offering compelling answers entails Georgia's capacity to demonstrate

its maturity and readiness to enhance the world's most robust political-military alliance. This involves more than merely crafting persuasive narratives or winning arguments in diplomatic exchanges.

The historic decision of Sweden and Finland to abandon their non-alignment tradition underscores the pressing necessity for innovative approaches to defense and security on NATO's entire eastern flank. Examining the underlying factors of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region and drawing lessons from the integration process could assist Georgia in gaining a new perspective on its aspirations for membership.

Lesson 1: NATO Membership is the Only Security Guarantee

The seismic shift post-Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reshaped geopolitical considerations in

the Euro-Atlantic area. Influenced by their robust defense capabilities and democratic excellence, Finland and Sweden remained outside the NATO alliance and enjoyed the image of self-sustainable states for decades. Both countries [score](#) 9.3 out of 10 in the democracy index and hold the prestigious third position worldwide. As strong members of the EU, they demonstrate a steadfast commitment to safeguarding civil liberties, contributing significantly to the European democratic landscape. On the [military front](#), Finland and Sweden boast robust armed forces equipped with cutting-edge technology and industrial complexes supporting advanced military production lines.

As Finland and Sweden recognized the importance of collective defense, NATO also demonstrated readiness to welcome them into its fold seamlessly. NATO's traditional caution in extending alliance to nations bordering Russia has been promptly overweighted. Notably, with Sweden and Finland's membership, the NATO-Russia border almost doubled. While the inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO increased the potential threats from Russia, these nations met NATO's core integration criteria, demonstrating strong defense capabilities and stable political systems.

The extension of NATO's collective defense umbrella provides the only genuine security guarantee, even for solid and self-sustaining countries.

This lesson highlights two critical factors relevant to Georgia's NATO integration. On the one hand, as demonstrated by Finland and Sweden's prompt journey towards NATO, defensibility, and democracy are essential prerequisites for integration into the Alliance. Accordingly, Georgia needs to prioritize strengthening its democratic institutions and defense capacities as proof of its commitment to pursue aspirations for NATO membership. On the other hand, as the Russian invasion of

Ukraine prompted Finland and Sweden to reassess their security postures amidst heightened regional tensions, it became evident that the extension of NATO's collective defense umbrella provides the only genuine security guarantee, even for solid and self-sustaining countries.

Lesson 2: Russia Reverses Hostile Rhetoric when NATO Enlargement Becomes Irreversible

Russia's game of geopolitical chess involves strategic moves and well-timed warnings. Linking Russia's [blackmail strategy](#) with its actions both before and after NATO's expansion to the Nordic region demonstrates that its threats often lack substance and are more bark than bite.

Initially, when the intentions of Finland and Sweden to join NATO were voiced, Russia's rhetoric was notably aggressive. Dmitry Medvedev warned of an "increased likelihood of a direct and open conflict between NATO and Russia," [noting](#) the risks of the conflict "turning into a full-fledged nuclear war." However, as the reality of Finland and Sweden's NATO membership materialized and Russia realized the irreversibility of the Alliance's engagement, Putin [struck](#) a less confrontational tone, expressing neutrality towards Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, declaring: "If Finland and Sweden wish to, they can join. That's up to them." This evolution in Russia's rhetoric, from aggressive warnings to a more measured response, highlights the blackmailing nature of its strategy.

Russia's aggressive stance is more about shaping perceptions and deterring NATO enlargement than a genuine intent to engage in conflict.

Russia's apprehension towards NATO enlargement is not rooted in fear of a direct military threat but in recognizing that it cannot disrupt or assert influence within Article 5 coverage. This lesson should

be heeded, especially in the case of Georgia, where Russia's blackmail strategy must not hinder Georgia's prospects of NATO membership. As Finland and Sweden's NATO membership unfolded with less dramatic consequences than initially warned, it became evident that Russia's aggressive stance is more about shaping perceptions and deterring NATO enlargement than a genuine intent to engage in conflict.

Lesson 3: Lack of NATO's Resolve and Weakness Provokes Russia

NATO's decision to expand into the Nordic region intended to reduce the likelihood of Russia escalating and attacking Sweden or Finland. A specific example of Russia's potential attack against Sweden stems from Russia's periodic military exercise, [Zapad](#), which aims to isolate the Baltic Sea region from the rest of Europe. Swedish intelligence agencies [identified](#) scenarios that could involve occupying the small Swedish island of [Gotland](#) and testing Western resolve to defend the territory of a non-NATO partner. If the NATO response mirrors the limited reactions to the invasions of Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014, respectively, the occupation of the island would result in the isolation of the Baltic States from Allied support and reinforcements, granting significant military superiority to Russia's forces in naval and air domains. Even in the unlikely event of a robust military response from NATO, the occupation of Gotland would directly facilitate the materialization of Russia's intention of joining Kaliningrad to Belarus by closing the Suwalki gap. However, this scenario became irrelevant after Finland and Sweden, including Gotland Island, were covered by Article 5, making severing of the Baltics from Europe neither feasible nor possible.

Deferring NATO membership prospects for Georgia and Ukraine, ostensibly to prevent provoking Russia, has historically yielded contrary results. Rather than mitigating Russian concerns, as was

the intent, it led to significant security crises between Russia and the West and seriously undermined the security of NATO's strategic partners.

Specifically, while Georgia was not offered a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, primarily in reverence to Moscow's objections, Russia launched a war against Georgia. Persuading themselves that Russia's conflict with Georgia was a one-off case, the allies swiftly returned to a "business as usual" a few months after the invasion. They opted to shelve the MAP and NATO membership issues for Georgia and Ukraine to appease Moscow. Having thus de-emphasized NATO's role in shared neighborhoods with Russia, the West prioritized the region's economic integration with Europe as a vehicle for pushing for reforms there — a move designed to be seen as less provocative to Russia. The failure to understand that even this soft approach reinforced Russia's 19th-century "spheres of influence" thinking was the prime reason for the West's sleepwalking into the annexation of Crimea and the Russian intrusion into Donbas in 2014. At the time, MAP, or NATO accession, was not even a part of Kyiv's political agenda, although this did not shield Ukraine from Russian aggression.

Russian aggression is not triggered by NATO enlargement. Instead, NATO enlargement is a response to Russia's aggression, aiming to forestall and deter potential attacks.

The cases of Finland and Sweden, in contrast to Georgia and Ukraine, exemplify that, contrary to the Kremlin's propaganda, Russian aggression is not triggered by NATO enlargement. Instead, NATO enlargement is a response to Russia's aggression, aiming to forestall and deter potential attacks. This lesson emphasizes that extending the NATO umbrella stabilizes and discourages Russia from aggressive actions.

A MAP Dilemma

Many of those who oppose Georgia's progress towards NATO start from a larger argument that the membership prospects for post-Soviet states in Russia's immediate neighborhood are intolerable to Moscow and, therefore, are bound to provoke Russia into undertaking preemptive actions, thus destabilizing the security of the whole of Europe. With that argument, granting the Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia has become a source of divisions within the Alliance and created undue tensions. The underlying skeptical argument is that granting MAP can increase insecurity as it does not provide security guarantees; thus, if provoked, Russia might reciprocate with more aggressive actions. The forms of new aggression might include the formal annexation of Georgia's occupied regions or advancing 'borderization,' leading to the blockage of the East-West highway - the only road connecting Georgia's eastern and western regions.

This argument, however, appears to be outdated and irrelevant after Russia's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. Russian propaganda created a myth that it was provoked by threats from NATO - a useful propaganda tool for achieving objectives through blackmail and the fear of escalation. The chronology of Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine clearly shows that the Kremlin follows its long-term strategy based on its calculus. Russia is reverting to aggression not when provoked but when it sees the opportunity to achieve its interests. Nothing suggests that Russia's aggression could be avoided by making concessions, while Ukraine's example shows the opposite. After digesting concessions on Crimea in 2014, Russia started the war in Donbas and later launched a full-scale war on Ukraine. Similarly, if Russia was interested in taking its aggression against Georgia to a new level, it would find a pretext for attack with or without MAP.

Russia has used the practice of stirring up and maintaining conflicts to blackmail neighboring states. Each time, it used the West's turning a blind eye to its blatant violations of international norms of behavior as a validation of its aggression and an opportunity to further test Western resolve.

As the lessons from NATO's recent enlargements show, demonstrating the irreversibility of Georgia's path toward NATO will stabilize the security of the entire region.

In Georgia's case, it is crucial to reinvigorate the discussion on the NATO enlargement process based on new realities and lessons learned. Granting MAP to Georgia could be the first step in this direction. As the lessons from NATO's recent enlargements show, demonstrating the irreversibility of Georgia's path toward NATO will stabilize the security of the entire region. In addition, as [argued](#) in this journal's previous issue, MAP would regain its initial function and serve as a practical tool to help Georgia prepare for its eventual membership.

A Way Ahead

While lessons from Finland and Sweden help better understand the bigger picture about NATO's enlargement, the central concern lies in understanding how the Alliance's collective defense commitment could align with Georgia's unique circumstances, notably concerning its occupied territories. A strategic solution to ensure Georgia's NATO membership does not lead to conflict with Russia could involve temporary exclusion of the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions from the military component of Article 5, thus alleviating concerns of triggering a confrontation with Russia upon Georgia's entry into the alliance. This

could involve [amending Article 6](#) of the North Atlantic Treaty to explicitly specify the exclusion of these regions from Article 5 coverage in Georgia's accession protocol. By framing this exclusion as a temporary measure contingent upon the peaceful restoration of Georgia's complete territorial integrity, NATO can extend security guarantees to Georgia while mitigating the risk of conflict escalation.

In contrast to the Nordic states, in Georgia's case, efficient ways must be found to identify how Article 5 of the Washington Treaty can be applied while fully respecting its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders. A historical precedent exists for Germany [joining](#) the alliance in 1955 with the occupied territories. Undertaking to "refrain from any action inconsistent with the strictly defensive character of that Treaty," the Federal Republic of Germany and the Allies took a joint commitment to work towards peaceful reunification while temporarily excluding Soviet-Occupied East Germany from Article 5 coverage. Differences between Germany's and Georgia's cases are stark; however, this example once again highlights that if the Allies see a clear benefit of the enlargement, political solutions can be found even to the monumental obstacles such as occupation.

To show the clear benefit of Georgia's NATO accession, there is a need to demonstrate the country's commitment and progress in strengthening democracy and defense capabilities. At this point, for some Allies, Georgia's integration process does not appear to enhance Euro-Atlantic security in the light of the non-stable political, economic, and security environment. Türkiye and Hungary's bargain with the enlargement process added salt to the existing wound, highlighting the risks of adding more Allies with fragile democratic resilience and vulnerabilities in foreign policy alignment with NATO's common priorities. Another problematic area is the insufficient development of self-defense capabilities, which should be an es-

sential deterrent against foreign aggression and could provide an initial response in case of aggression until the Allies come to aid.

To demonstrate Georgia's readiness to revive its dormant NATO integration process after more than a decade of "strategic patience," a visible shift is necessary for several vital components of state building as well as foreign and security policy, namely:

- Further aligning foreign and security policy with NATO's priorities;
- Ensuring political support from the Alliance by bolstering the internal reform agenda and democratic practices in line with the EU's nine recommendations;
- Consolidating the national security architecture by strengthening state institutions and coordination tools;
- Strengthening defense and security reforms to further enhance interoperability with NATO;
- Deepening military and security cooperation with NATO and the Allies;
- Encouraging and supporting NATO's deterrence posture in the Black Sea region;
- Investing in strengthening the resilience of the state and society against hybrid threats and malign foreign influences;
- Improving the conceptual and strategic documents on defense and security;
- Effective planning, implementing, and coordinating the NATO integration process;
- Undertaking closer coordination of the strategic communication strategy with NATO and key allies;
- Enhancing dialogue with the Allies on political aspects of Georgia's membership in NATO;
- Coordinating the NATO integration agenda more closely with other aspirant countries.

NATO also needs to review its policy and strategy of enlargement in the Black Sea region and start taking decisive, bold steps toward extending the security umbrella to the most exposed and vulnerable edge of the Alliance.

On the other hand, NATO also needs to review its policy and strategy of enlargement in the Black Sea region and start taking decisive, bold steps toward extending the security umbrella to the most

exposed and vulnerable edge of the Alliance. Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO is a real-life example of the Kremlin employing various tactics and blackmail to impede the NATO integration of aspiring countries. Yet, post-accession, there is very little Russia can do. There will never be a blessing from Russia to move Georgia's NATO integration forward. Russia always was and always will be hostile to every NATO enlargement. Thus, an ultimate lesson for both Georgia and NATO is that the window of opportunity to accelerate the integration process should not be missed ■

The Art of Being Georgia

Foreign policy aficionados have slowly adjusted to the fact that the word “Georgia” may refer not only to the American state but also to the state located between Russia and Turkey. If Georgia were to feature prominently on a colored political world map, what lies behind the contour and color determines its role and function beyond geographic canvases.

The “Curse” of History

Georgians pride themselves on being one of the ancient nations that has survived until present times. When talking about the history of Georgia, we can go as far as it gets - how about 1.8 million years? That is what the discovered remains of early humanoids in Dmanisi, Georgia, tell us. Ancient Hellenistic narratives include the story of Jason and the Argonauts, who traveled as far as modern-day western Georgia, called Kolhida for the Golden Fleece, and Princess Medea, allegedly the mother of medicine, pharmacy, and cosmetics. Georgian historians argue that Georgian statehood existed from as early as the fourth century BC. The same can be said about the Georgian al-

phabet, one of the oldest and most unique among phonetic alphabets, even used by North Caucasus nations until the 17th century.

Georgia is one of the earliest adopters of Christianity as a state religion. The year 326 AD is when the Georgian king, following Armenia, decreed Christianity as the religion of his realm. No talks about Georgia can avoid an eventual conversation about wine. Apparently, 8000(!) years ago, proto-Georgians found ways to ferment locally grown grapes into a divine drink, hence - a noble name - the Cradle of Wine. All the above indicates that Georgians have been around for many centuries, and self-identification as “Georgian” is firmly rooted in the national psyche. It also means that people calling themselves “Georgians” have experienced every form of societal development, including social, cultural, religious, political, or technological. Georgian history bears the marks of multiple empires, crisscrossing its land - Persian, Byzantine, Seljuk, Arab, Mongol, Ottoman, Russian, and Soviet. This kind of “busy” legacy obviously weighs on current Georgian political thinking, obfuscating and not simplifying it.



TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI
Contributor

Ambassador Temuri Yakobashvili distinguishes himself as an accomplished leader in government, crisis management, and diplomacy. As the founder of TY Strategies LLC, he extends advisory services globally. A pivotal figure in co-founding the Revival Foundation, aiding Ukraine, and leading the New International Leadership Institute, Yakobashvili held key roles, including Georgia’s Ambassador to the U.S. and Deputy Prime Minister. With the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, he is a Yale World Fellow, trained at Oxford and Harvard. As a co-founder and chair of the Governing Board of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, he actively contributes to global media discussions on regional security. His significant contributions have merited the Presidential Medal of Excellence.

For many Georgians, a passive “we survived so far and will survive this crisis too” stand often outweighs the necessity to act

A similar “disease” can be found among other ancient nations, like Jews and Armenians. The common denominator can be confusion between “the land” and “the state.” Some Jews can be perfectly patriotic to the “Land of Israel” but not to the “State of Israel.” Similarly, Georgians also confuse the two terms, making it more difficult (as in the cases of Israel and Armenia) to convince the absolute majority of its population (diaspora aside) of the urgency of state matters. A passive “we survived so far and will survive this crisis too” stand often outweighs the necessity to act. Stories of the “glorious past” give false confidence that the future will be glorious as well without any significant efforts from the current generations.

Critics of Contemporary Art and Contemporary Georgia

In her 2022 [book](#), entitled *Fraud of Contemporary Art*, Mexican art critic Avelina Lesper [formulated](#) a whole set of arguments on how mechanisms, instruments, proponents, and participants of creating “contemporary art” are, in fact, eroding the very notion of “art” and “artist” and make contemporary art a fraud. Interestingly, her arguments offer striking parallels with contemporary Georgian political thought, offering a refreshing view on the question: what is exactly “the art of being Georgia?” Some of the concepts that Lesper uses and applies to substantiate her argument could just as effectively be used in Georgian reality, casting more light on Georgia’s current geopolitical state.

“Transubstantiation” of art happens when something ordinary is transformed into art merely by categorizing it as such. This term was coined by

Arthur Danto, a prominent philosopher and art critic. According to Lesper, “in this change of substance, the word plays a fundamental role: the change is not visible, but it is declared.” According to her, this is the idea of “ready-made” art, which takes us to the “most elemental and irrational state of human thought, to magical thinking.”

There are ready-made states, too, that have, as a result of historical magic – decolonization or self-determination, acquired independence and statehood largely due to the political and economic arrangements of that particular era in history. The notion of a state believed to be the best vehicle to address the needs of inhabitants of a particular geographic region and/or ethnic entity is thus often bestowed on these new entities. Georgia, also recognized by the international community as a sovereign state, assumed not only the flag, the coat of arms, and the anthem but a whole set of functioning state institutions dedicated to the well-being of its population. However, such “ready-made” states are not always real states, just like “ready-made” art is not real art. Such states often fail. Georgia, too, was a “failed state” until the 2003 Rose Revolution. A quick look around the globe is enough to discover that the failing status applies to many modern “states,” with the most recent example being Haiti. Nonetheless, statehood remains the only viable way to be part of the international community and a subject of international law. The better and more functional a state becomes, the better chances it has of fitting and benefiting from the current international system, even if most of today’s states were not even around when the current international system was designed and enabled.

The “infallibility of meaning” is another tenet of Lesper’s criticism of current fake art. This concept means that today, anything presented as art automatically acquires uncontested meaning. Through this infallibility, an “artwork” can lack any aesthetic value but will qualify as art through the

attributed “philosophical value.” Lesper writes that because the artist has a good intention when creating a piece of art, it is assumed that the creation becomes art. In other words, the artwork’s value becomes “synonymous with the artist’s intent,” which is in itself “presumed to be necessarily good in the moral sense.”

This framework can also be applied to the states, including Georgia. Presumably, anything the Georgian state or government does has a good intention for its citizens simply because this is how states function and what governments usually do. Unfortunately, this notion becomes challenged once a state is “captured” by one super-rich individual whose personal goals and state interests do not always coincide. The same can be said about Russia, although there the “state capture” was conducted by a group of individuals (with similar former institutional affiliations), not a single person, or rather under the leadership of a single person. In such cases, the whole intent or the *raison d’être* of the state is subjugated to personal interests, caring less about the population and their aspirations. Moldova and, to a certain extent, Ukraine also went through this “state capture” cycle.

“Benevolence of meaning” is the underlying belief, according to Lesper, that conceptual art is morally good and has “great moral intentions” while “the artist is a messianic preacher, a Savonarola who tells us from the white cube of the gallery what is good and what is bad.” This art, Lesper argues, is “empty of aesthetics but wrapped in great intentions” and usually follows the political agenda of the day, often mimicking the television TV schedules. However, even if this “rebellious” art defends the environment, argues for gender rights, and denounces consumerism, capitalism, and pollution, its form is meek, and the level “does not exceed that of a secondary school newspaper.” Therefore, such art “does not displease the power or the oligarchy that sponsors them.”

Disguised with “highest moral intentions,” Georgian ruling party talking heads undermine Georgian statehood, its chosen pro-Western development vector, and rapidly isolate Georgia from its friends and allies in the West.

This cannot be truer for Georgia and many other states in the contemporary global system. Any Georgia watcher who has taken enough time and tolerance to follow statements and activities of the ruling Georgian Dream party can quickly draw parallels with the above words of the art critic. Disguised with “highest moral intentions,” Georgian ruling party talking heads undermine Georgian statehood, its chosen pro-Western development vector, and rapidly isolate Georgia from its friends and allies in the West. But the declared intentions are moral and messianic. Borrowing from the Kremlin propaganda playbook, these “defenders of Georgian purity,” in fact, mimic Putin’s regime by introducing legislation on “the foreign agents,” portraying the West as the power that “wants to drag Georgia into the war with Russia,” which “undermines Georgian identity by proliferating LGBTQ+ rights” and “corrupts Georgia’s domestic policies through NGOs.” Such a “concept” of Georgia is not only a mockery of statehood but also erodes whatever existing state institutions remain.

Dogmatic Art, Dogmatic Georgia, and Bidzina Ivanishvili

Lesper writes that contemporary fake art has become dogmatic. It is based on the dogma of context, the dogma of the curator, and the dogma of the curator’s omnipotence.

The “Dogma of Context,” according to Lesper, presupposes that contemporary art becomes art only in the context of a museum or gallery and that the

art object ceases to be what it is “the moment it crosses the threshold of the museum.” It is, therefore, effectively a museum, which turns an object into the art. In that artificial setting, “everything is coordinated so that an object without beauty or intelligence is art.” In real, greater art, according to Lesper, “the work is what creates the context” and not the context creating art.

Another aspect of dogmatism in contemporary art can be seen in the “Dogma of the Curator.” Lesper argues that the curator is ultimately a salesman and the person who is relied upon to give meaning to otherwise meaningless art. Thus, “in the brochures of the exhibitions, the artists are no longer mentioned.” Now, the curator’s name is put first and it is specified that the project will be under the guidance of a particular mogul, expert, or personality.

Furthermore, the curators are usually very influential and rich people or renowned experts in the field, and their status is close to almighty. This leads to the “Dogma of the Omnipotence of the Curator,” which suggests that the curators “are more important than the artist, the work itself, and therefore the art.” Contemporary art, Lesper argues, has a symbiotic relationship with curatorial dominion because “it is practically nothing” in itself.

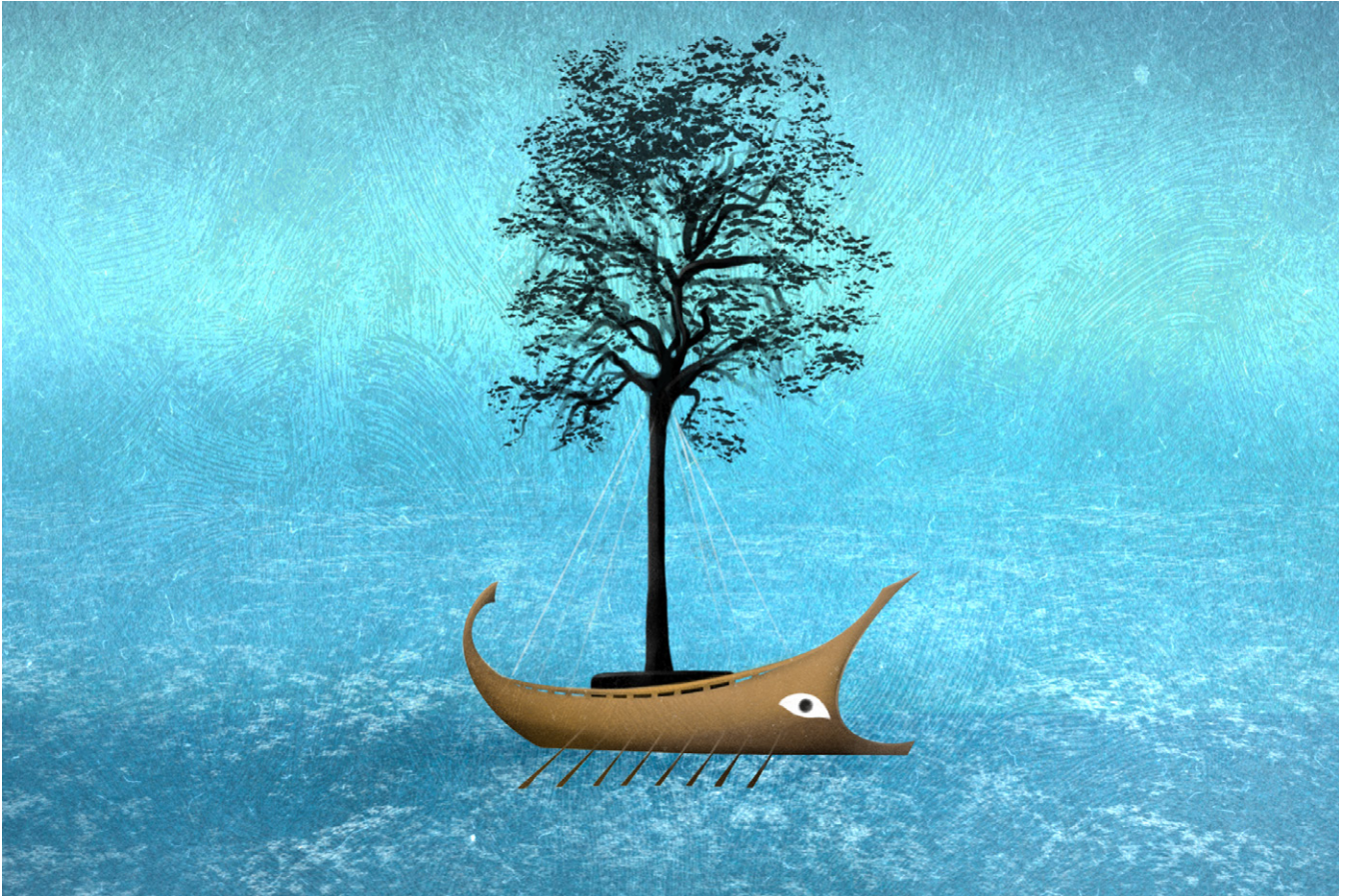
Politics, too, especially in modern Georgia, is all about the dogmas. The narratives of the ruling party in Georgia can be explained by the context of political dogmas, either domestic or international. Domestic context provides that because of the fear of Mikheil Saakashvili’s return, the government needs to be forgiven for any misstep. In other words, the return of the “Saakashvili’s regime” is such a big threat and tragedy that anything can be justified in that context. So what if the opposition leaders get arrested, the media is attacked, minorities are degraded, and the right to peaceful assembly is limited? All this needs to be viewed only

through the prism of context – nothing is worse than Saakashvili and his *natsis* returning to power. Hence, the acts themselves need not be judged but only in the context of the framework. Georgian Dream leaders even tried explaining this to their European and American colleagues and, unfortunately, with relative success.

The dogma of context also has an international aspect to it. Not supporting Ukraine openly – is hard to understand if you are European, American, or Georgian. But the Georgian Dream puts it in the context – if Georgia supports Ukraine, war with Russia will start; hence, the act of non-support, itself an immoral and even impractical foreign policy step, can be justified by the international context – avoiding war with Russia. Not following the EU’s recommendations about democratic institutions or aligning with the EU’s foreign policy is also explained through the same context – all that risks the war with Russia.

Georgian politics also has a curator, in fact, a billionaire, a philanthropist, and even an avid art collector. He is also a master at [collecting](#) trees and transporting them from Africa and other parts of the world to Georgia. From the beginning of Ivanishvili’s rule, he always emphasized that Georgia should be an object of the foreign policy of other states and not an active subject or actor. The justification of the “curator’s” motive was linked to the international environment, as well as his personal outlook. Thus, “the curator” stripped Georgia of its intrinsic value for the global system and defined its value through an arbitrary personal decision.

The state capture in the Georgian context indeed elevated Bidzina Ivanishvili into the role of “curator” of Georgia, who is also quite “omnipotent.”



The state capture in the Georgian context indeed elevated Bidzina Ivanishvili into the role of “curator” of Georgia, who is also quite “omnipotent.” Today, whatever happens in the state, by the state, or with the state carries his name. He is the ultimate arbiter of Georgian politics, and external players understand this “phenomenon well.” This is why the senior foreign dignitaries visiting Georgia, besides protocol-determined meetings, often seek an audience with the “curator.” That the meetings are not always held can be explained by “the curator’s” reclusive nature.

For Ivanishvili’s regime, anything or anyone that radiates an alternative to his rule is considered “blasphemy” and hence subject to ex-communication and punishment. Any meaningful opposition party or entity in Georgia has experienced this bitter lesson. To paraphrase Lord Ismay’s famous maxim on the purposes of NATO, for the self-imposed “curator” Ivanishvili, the purpose of the Georgian State is to keep the West out, alternative leaders in (prison), and the opposition down.

Allegedly, Mr. Ivanishvili’s wealth is greater than Georgia’s annual budget, a major source of his omnipotence, together with the ubiquitous state security apparatus resources. This almightiness makes him “always right” for his followers and servants. Such arrangements leave no room for discussion, be it political, economic, security, or other. Consequently, the real debates between government and opposition are long gone from the media coverage. Unfortunately for the Georgian state, Ivanishvili’s personal life experience does not leave much room for optimism. He became an oligarch in Russia through predatory actions, far apart from modern business ethics and practices. Mr. Ivanishvili’s claim that he “decoded the true meanings of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche” is a very scary proposition. His knowledge of international relations is embryonic at best, and his love of art is not good enough to make him a successful and desired statesman and curator.

From the dogmas governing contemporary art (and contemporary Georgian politics), the “dogma

of ‘everyone is an artist’” is the most pernicious. Through this approach, “democratized mediocrity” becomes the standard. This dogma stands on the premise that it is no longer required to dedicate oneself and spend thousands of hours “learning and forming one’s talent.” Lesper argues that “this dogma started from the destructive idea of ending the figure of genius and has a certain logic because, as we have seen, geniuses – or at least talented artists with real creativity – do not need curators.”

Anyone could become a politician, a member of parliament, or a talking head of the party – knowledge, experience, and public trust were replaced with loyalty to Mr. Ivanishvili and dependence on Ivanishvili.

This is just as true of Georgian politics as of contemporary “fake” art. Georgians remember what the Soviet schools taught them – that, according to Vladimir Lenin, “every cook has to learn how to govern the state.” Among those who govern today’s Georgia, one may find more crooks than cooks. Personal doctors, bankers, bodyguards, and assistants of Bidzina Ivanishvili and his family found themselves in ministerial jobs in Georgia after 2012. Anyone could become a politician, a member of parliament, or a talking head of the party – knowledge, experience, and public trust were replaced with loyalty to and dependence on Ivanishvili. In such a model, indeed, anyone can become a politician, but only if the blessing is given by “the curator.”

Such a system, by default, is a rigid vertical of subordination where any deviance from the ‘supreme wish’ is punishable, hence zero chance for any creative or competitive ideas. Such a mechanism is

deadly for any modern state that wants to achieve rapid growth and prosperity. Even the Chinese system allows degrees of freedom and competition among internal regions and their governors. The rigidity of power vertical is at the mercy of the flexibility of the man on top, whose loyalty often leans toward the goal of self-preservation, even at the expense of the Georgian state.

Beauty and the Beast

At the beginning of this article, I described the manifold merits of Georgia, reflecting merely on the intrinsic potential that the Georgian state has for its population, for the region, and for the wider world. If we compare Georgia with the well-established art piece of an old master, any museum or gallery would be happy to have it. In its current form, Georgia looks more like a dusted, cobwebbed, frameless art piece stored in the attics that requires proper care to shine. Ultimately, it is up to the Georgians themselves to get rid of the moldy stain and exhort the beast from within. At the same time, as we know from fairy tales, the enchanted beast needs the unconditional love of beauty – the West, to revert to its handsome form.

Meanwhile, Avelina Lesper reminds us that “this misnamed art is a defect of our time and, as such, it means a setback in human intelligence. The endemic contempt for beauty, the persecution that has been mounted against talent, the contempt for techniques and manual work, are reducing art to a deficiency of our civilization.”

It is probably time for Georgians to get rid of defective politics, recall true aesthetics, and build a better state not only as a tribute to great ancestors but also for the better future of upcoming generations ■

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