

The Doomsday Scenario – Back to the USSR?

Predicting the future is always a risky business, especially when it involves authoritarian leaders with opaque motives and unchecked power. But when autocrats-in-the-making begin repeating recognizable patterns and their actions align neatly with the strategic objectives of an external power, the direction becomes hard to ignore. In the case of Georgia, the path chosen by the Georgian Dream government under Bidzina Ivanishvili is no longer a matter of speculation. It is a matter of evidence. And the evidence points squarely toward Moscow.

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Moscow has already achieved all of its key strategic objectives in Georgia. Yet, there is still room for the country to become even more Russian in its laws, its institutions, its political culture, and its foreign policy. And I argue that this final transformation is not only possible, but likely. Full capitulation, leading to the de-sovereignization of Georgia, is expected to happen, which I will map in the second part of this article. I pray to be wrong, though.

However, historical trajectories tend to follow their internal logic to the end. The evidence today points to a Georgian Dream not merely diverging from Georgia's historic and strategic aspirations, but actively colliding with them, while aligning ever more closely with the Kremlin's agenda. This needs to come to a logical conclusion. Unless this damning trajectory is disrupted by the Georgian people with the support of Western friends, Geor-



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gia might end up where it spent 188 out of the last 225 years, a whopping 84% of time – in the den of the Russian bear.

Russia's Strategic Goals Achieved – Check

The Kremlin's strategic objectives toward Georgia were always to prevent its integration into NATO and the EU, maintain leverage through the continued occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and ensure Georgia remained within Russia's geopolitical orbit. Moscow sought to shape a compliant government in Tbilisi, obstruct democratic consolidation, and promote legal, political, and cultural alignment with Russian interests. It aimed to control regional transit routes, limit Western influence, and use Georgia as a buffer zone to safeguard its southern flank. Most of these goals have been achieved.

For over two decades, Georgia's North Atlantic aspirations were a cornerstone of its foreign and security policy. That is no longer the case. For the first time in over 15 years, Georgia did not even earn a [mention](#) in the NATO Summit Declaration. The 2025 Hague Summit came and went, and Georgia was not invited. What was once unthinkable has become routine. NATO no longer sees Georgia as a credible [partner](#).

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The Georgian Dream has made its position unmistakable, adopting Kremlin-style rhetoric that frames NATO membership as a reason for the war in Ukraine. That narrative has been backed by deliberate institutional dismantling. The NATO-Georgia Information Center, founded in 2005 to build public support for integration, has been [abolished](#). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is being

stripped of its strategic core, with the department responsible for security policy being [eliminated](#). And now, even Georgia's diplomatic presence in NATO is being quietly downgraded: the deputy ambassador post, crucial for daily coordination, has been cut. Georgian Dream leaders rarely discuss NATO, and when they do, it is not within the context of Georgia's aspirations. NATO-Georgia military exercises have come to a standstill, and no new major NATO program has started with Georgia in years. Yes, Georgia has not *de jure* refused NATO membership, but that is to come in due course.

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Georgia's EU trajectory has suffered a similar fate. Virtually every action by the Georgian Dream in the last two years has undercut the political, legal, and value-based reforms that underpin the EU accession process. The most striking example is the adoption of the so-called “foreign agent” legislation—a copy-paste of the Russian playbook to crush civil society. The set of laws directly contradicts multiple provisions of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement ([AA](#)), including commitments to democratic governance, human rights, and the role of civil society.

Moscow is happy to see that traditional Georgian strategic partners are out of the picture. Washington has already walked away from the relationship that once sat at the heart of the South-Caucasus security architecture. In November 2024, the U.S. State Department formally [suspended](#) the 2009 Strategic Partnership Charter, froze all four bilateral working groups, and warned that further cooperation would be “reviewed comprehensively” after the Georgian Dream's decision to halt

EU accession and brutalize protesters. That policy shift has been backed by [sanctions](#) on Bidzina Ivanishvili and senior Interior Ministry [officials](#) for protest-related abuses, and by the indefinite [postponement](#) of the joint Noble Partner exercises. In short, the instruments that once underpinned U.S.-Georgia defense, economic, and democratic cooperation have either been mothballed or weaponized against Tbilisi's rulers.

The diplomatic tone has collapsed just as decisively. Outgoing U.S. Ambassador Robin Dunnigan [revealed](#) on 3 July 2025 that the Georgian Dream had sent a “*threatening, insulting, and unserious*” private letter to the new Trump administration, so abrasive that Washington needed “time to come up with a response.” Dunnigan said that the Georgian Dream had been told to stop its anti-American rhetoric as a precondition for any reset, only to double down three days later with a [public letter](#) and insulting statements. In fact, the last three U.S. Ambassadors, Ian Kelly, Kelly Degan, and the outgoing Robin Dunnigan, have been [publicly](#) insulted, decried, and criticized by the Georgian Dream's leaders—a practice long observed in Moscow.

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The public rhetoric of the Georgian Dream's leaders, [branding](#) congressional sanction bills “absurd” and [accusing](#) the United States-based “deep state” of infringing on Georgian sovereignty, is constant music to Moscow's ears. In the eyes of U.S. policymakers, Georgia has shifted from a frontline ally to a sanctioned outlier, courting Russia and China. In the eyes of the Kremlin, the Georgian Dream achieved something unthinkable – the Yankees are out.

Brussels is out as well, except for frantic attempts by true Georgia friends, [dubbed](#) by the Georgian

Dream as “deep state agents,” to save the relationship. Since late 2024, the EU announced the downgrading of all high-level contacts, a review of financial aid, and the possible suspension of European Peace Facility funds. Member states have since cancelled senior visits, excluded Georgia from informal gatherings of candidate countries, and debated the suspension of visa-free travel. Rather than repair the breach, the Georgian Dream has escalated the situation: Prime Minister Kobakhidze publicly [called](#) EU Ambassador Paweł Herczyński “complicit in violence” and part of a “deep-state” plot. The [German ambassador](#) and [Baltic friends](#) are enemies who are often blamed for promoting and financing violence. At the same time, party heavyweights frequently deride friendly capitals as agents of the “collective UNM” and “deep state.” The EU is poised to continue supporting civil society over the government's head—an unmistakable sign that Tbilisi is no longer treated as a partner but as a problem. Yes, Georgia remains an associated state and still has an Association Agreement, but for how long, that remains to be seen, as [Vano Chkhikvadze](#) explains elsewhere in this issue.

Russian DNA Imported – Check

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The legal environment in Georgia now resembles that of Russia. The Georgian Dream has actively imported the legislative DNA of the Kremlin. From laws targeting civil society to sweeping anti-LGBTQ+ restrictions, the Georgian Dream government has been systematically embedding legal norms that echo the Kremlin's own toolkit of repression. Beyond substance, the pattern of implementation also mirrors Russia's legislative autocracy: speed, opacity, and weaponization.

In May 2025, parliament empowered the Constitutional Court to [outlaw](#) any party whose “activities or party list substantially repeat” those of an

already banned group—the very legal sleight of hand Moscow used to liquidate Alexey Navalny's network. The Georgian Dream is wasting no time: a special investigative commission is [branding](#) the United National Movement and its “satellites” as anti-state actors while courts have started to cage dissent. Within one month, six high-profile opposition figures—Nika Gvaramia, Nika Melia, Zurab Japaridze, Giorgi Vashadze, Badri Japaridze, and Mamuka Khazaradze—were all placed in jail for refusing to legitimize that commission, prompting even the pro-government president to [dangle](#) pardons if they “behave” and agree to participate in elections. Mikheil Saakashvili, former President and a clear leader of the opposition, has been in jail since 2021. The parliamentary investigative commission, once it concludes its work in August, will definitely proceed with banning the United National Movement and other parties. This is as Russian as it gets, save the poisoning and killing of the opposition leaders. But that will come in due course, too.

The protests in Georgia have been [criminalized](#)—Bolotnaya-style. December 2024 amendments imported Russia's protest playbook almost line by line: face coverings, laser pointers, or fireworks now carry four-figure fines, blocking a road can trigger criminal charges, and police may detain people pre-emptively on the mere assumption they might offend in the future. New changes to the law [will allow](#) the police and courts to send to jail those persons who have already been fined for blocking the streets. If yours truly gets another fine (already a proud owner of one), the jail time will be guaranteed.

Russian-style conservative traditional laws have also been [imported](#). A 2024-2025 mega-package bans “LGBT propaganda” across education, media, and business, outlaws Pride events, prohibits all gender-affirming healthcare, and scrubs the word *gender* from the statute book—going further than Russia's own 2023 trans ban and earning Georgia

its [steepest drop](#) ever in ILGA-Europe's equality ranking.

A [revived](#) treason article gives prosecutors a catch-all tool used so effectively in Russia and Georgian Dream propaganda a new line of attack. Parallel laws now let the government [veto](#) foreign grants to NGOs, [dismiss](#) civil servants en masse, and recruit police without competitive exams—mechanisms tailor-made to create the compliant bureaucracy and security apparatus that props up Putin's regime. These laws have been put into practice swiftly. Almost all civil servants who signed pro-European petitions in late 2024 and expressed discontent with the detour from the European path [have been](#) either fired, demoted, or reprimanded. The numbers are in the hundreds, and possibly even in the thousands, when the full picture becomes available at the end of the year.

Just like in Russia, elections have lost their purpose. As [Thornike Gordadze](#) thoughtfully explores elsewhere in this edition, participation in local elections has become increasingly fraught. While he examines both the potential merits and the growing challenges, it is clear that the Georgian Dream—mirroring the Kremlin—ultimately benefits from holding elections with minimal opposition party involvement. The autocrat's dilemma is present—elections are needed to ensure the visibility of legitimacy, but not to the extent that they jeopardize the power of the oligarch. The amendments [rushed through](#) in 2024-2025 allow the Central Election Commission to take binding decisions with nine ruling-party votes, [bar](#) observers from recording voter data, and punish anyone who “obstructs” the movement of polling stations—a carbon copy of the rules that neutered OSCE monitoring in Russia. Combined with party-ban powers and the jailing of opposition leaders, Georgia's next elections risk looking less like a contest than the kind of managed plebiscite staged in Moscow.

The Russian playbook would not be complete

without the limitations on free media. Just like the Kremlin taking over NTV in the early 2000s, the Georgian Dream took over the opposition Rustavi 2 in 2019. However, since then, it has built a propaganda empire, spearheaded by Imedi and POSTV. The remaining opposing free media have been strangled with [biased](#) regulations and decisions by the Communications Commission, run by a multimillionaire businessman. New broadcasting [laws](#) impose “coverage standards,” allowing lawsuits against critical TV stations for using words like “regime,” “oligarch’s parliament,” or “so-called speaker”—criminalizing opinion as “disinformation,” exactly as Russia does. Unlike Russia, however, one can get fined for Facebook posts published even before the law entered into force—a creative retroactivity. The Georgian Dream has also proceeded with [banning](#) foreign funding for broadcasters, directly mirroring Russia’s prohibition on “foreign interference” in domestic journalism. To add insult to injury, surveillance and [fines](#) against journalists covering protests have intensified, with AI-powered tracking and crippling penalties—a tactic honed in Moscow. Critical journalists have been [beaten up](#) in a show of mockery and brute force, something the Kremlin has mastered. Yes, Georgia does not yet have Anna Politkovskaya, but that may come in due course, too.

Russian Style Propaganda in Place – Check

Over the past three years, the transformation of the Georgian Dream’s media empire into a fully operational arm of Russian propaganda has become impossible to deny. Once nominally pro-European, channels like Imedi and POSTV now function as Georgian-language megaphones for the Kremlin’s worldview, not by accident, but by design. Western partners are no longer friends, but meddlers. Civil society became an “agent of chaos.” Protests are not expressions of democracy, but foreign-orchestrated destabilization campaigns.

The Georgian Dream’s media outlets do not just repeat Kremlin talking points—they anticipate them. When protesters flooded Rustaveli Avenue in 2024 to oppose the foreign agent law, Imedi and POSTV aired segments entitled “*Common Signs of a Color Revolution*,” framing the demonstrations as an American-sponsored coup. Shortly thereafter, Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) [issued](#) an official statement warning of a “Tbilisi Maidan.” The language was identical. The sequencing was not coincidental—it was coordinated.

In February 2025, Imedi [ran](#) a breathless investigation questioning EU-funded youth seminars in Georgia, suggesting they were part of a covert regime-change effort. A week later, the SVR [released](#) a statement accusing the EU of paying Georgian demonstrators EUR 120 per day. Within hours, that claim was rebroadcast on Georgian Dream-affiliated media as fact. The same pattern repeated in May when the UK became the next target. A Russian pseudo-documentary [accused](#) British intelligence of embedding agents in Georgian ministries—and days later, first the [Russian SVR](#) and then Imedi and POSTV launched a coordinated smear campaign accusing the UK of financing “extremism and LGBT propaganda.”

It is no longer just narrative alignment. It is a synchronized disinformation warfare—a textbook case of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) with local execution.

A single episode captures this new ecosystem in chilling detail. In April 2025, Russian pranksters [released](#) a doctored video of Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, edited to make it appear as though she confessed to collaborating with Western powers to overthrow the government. Russian media aired it first. Within hours, Imedi repackaged the clip and broadcast it as evidence of Western interference without a single question about its authenticity.

Even fabricated or AI-generated Russian content makes its way seamlessly into the Georgian Dream's media broadcasts: conspiracy theories about Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska's luxury shopping sprees, USAID funding Hollywood to prop up President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, fake mobilization raids, and even a deepfake of Donald Trump Jr. urging support for Russia. Each piece of content passes through the same pipeline: Moscow produces, Imedi rebroadcasts, and Georgian Facebook pages reinforce.

To lend their narratives an air of international legitimacy, Georgian Dream channels are platforming Kremlin-favored Western voices, such as Jeffrey Sachs, Larry Johnson, Glenn Diesen, and fringe European MEPs like Thierry Mariani and Mick Wallace. They appear on Georgian screens to denounce NATO, question Ukraine's sovereignty, or claim that the EU is "imposing its values" on Georgia. In reality, these figures are already staples of Russia's disinformation ecosystem, now repurposed for domestic consumption in Georgia.

What Comes Next?

Some might ask: could it get worse? The signs suggest it not only can, but it will.

In recent weeks, the Georgian Dream's leadership has floated multiple trial balloons designed to test the boundaries of what the public will accept and how the international community will react.

A [public letter](#) from the Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze to Donald Trump sought to appeal directly to the U.S. president, undermining current U.S. policy while aligning Georgia with the MAGA wing's isolationist worldview and implying that Georgia would not hesitate to pivot fully toward illiberal alliances and anti-Western narratives if its overtures to the Trump camp continue to be ignored.

At the same time, [calls](#) to reestablish diplomatic relations with Russia are surfacing from figures linked to Russian intelligence networks in Georgia. Leading the charge is Mamuka Pipia—closely connected to Russia's SVR and known for orchestrating the prank call with Salome Zourabichvili—who is now actively promoting the idea of reopening formal ties between Tbilisi and Moscow.

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None of these are isolated statements. Together, they constitute a roadmap for a doomsday scenario.

Doomsday Scenario

Let us now speak plainly. Bidzina Ivanishvili appears to be preparing the final phase of Georgia's pivot into Russia's sphere of influence.

This pivot might not come as a dramatic announcement. It will unfold as a gradual sequence of "pragmatic" decisions—legal tweaks, diplomatic gestures, and media narratives—each eroding Georgia's Western identity while creating the illusion of sovereignty and stability. The goal is not just geopolitical neutrality—it is submission cloaked in sovereignty.

This total submission strategy will be based on re-writing history. The Georgian Dream-controlled investigative commission is expected to conclude that Georgia started the 2008 war with Russia—echoing the Kremlin’s long-standing narrative. The blame will be laid at Saakashvili’s feet, and criminal liability for former officials will be launched. This fabricated “*mea culpa*” will then serve as the moral and legal groundwork for a normalization process with Moscow. It will likely be followed by a signature of the “non-use of force” agreement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While Georgia has long held a unilateral non-use of force obligation, the signing was overruled because of the issues related to legitimizing the other signatory. But this will likely change. Apologize for the war in 2024, convict the war criminals in 2025, sign the non-aggression pact in 2026, and start with a clean slate. Sounds like a plan.

Russia, predictably, will “accept” Georgia’s contrition. In return, it will undoubtedly offer, as it [has done](#) before, the restoration of diplomatic relations—something already hinted at by Georgian Dream proxies. This normalization will be sold to the public as progress and pragmatism. Talk of “normalization,” “dialogue,” and “realism” will dominate the narrative. Meanwhile, the issues of recognition of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, as well as all related matters concerning status, the return of displaced persons, and other problematic areas, will be set aside for the time being.

Stage Two – Illusion of a Peace Process

Stage two of the doomsday scenario is likely to hinge upon the restoration of diplomatic ties and joining the 3+3 format, as well as demonstrating that trade and commerce across the closed occupation line are mutually beneficial and can alter the status quo on the ground.

Restoring diplomatic relations with Russia would mark a dramatic departure from Georgia’s long-standing position that normalization cannot occur while Russian troops occupy Georgian territory. The re-opening of embassies would be framed as pragmatic diplomacy, but in reality, it would be a defeat for Georgia’s sovereignty. It would allow Russia to claim a major geopolitical victory without making any concessions, particularly regarding Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

Moreover, this would not be a return to the pre-2008 status quo. Russia will most definitely maintain its embassies in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, continuing its recognition of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as “independent states.” Georgia’s acceptance of this arrangement, even tacitly, would severely weaken its own legal and diplomatic claims. It would allow the Kremlin to normalize the abnormal, treating occupation as a bilateral dispute rather than an international violation.

Internally, such a move would also legitimize the growing pro-Russian sentiment being cultivated by the Georgian Dream and its satellite groups. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties would be sold as necessary for trade and peace, while public outrage would be suppressed through propaganda and repression. This move can be done easily by signing the diplomatic relations protocol. The central aspect of such protocols is usually a recognition of each other’s “territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders”. However, if this phrase is not present for any reason, “constructive ambiguity” can allow any party to interpret the protocol as it deems necessary.

Formal accession to the 3+3 platform (Russia, Türkiye, Iran, plus Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) would mark the end of Georgia’s independent foreign policy orientation, but it could also soften the blow of restoring diplomatic ties. Although framed as a “regional cooperation initiative,” the format is explicitly designed to exclude Western actors from

the South Caucasus. Georgia's entry would signal a pivot away from its Euro-Atlantic course toward authoritarian regionalism.

States with poor democratic records and close ties to Moscow dominate the 3+3 platform. Participation would make Georgia complicit in regional agendas that often contradict its own interests. However, proponents will point to previous [protocol](#) language about “territorial integrity” and “inviolability of internationally recognized borders.” While such phrases are strategically vague and do not prevent backroom deals or political erosion of sovereignty, Georgian Dream propaganda can sell it as a “strategic gain.” After all, Georgia will be joining the format in which all states recognize each other's sovereignty within internationally recognized borders. On the protocol paper, but still recognize...

Moscow has long pushed for Tbilisi to enter into direct talks with Sokhumi—and possibly Tskhinvali—as part of a calculated trap. Such negotiations would bypass international mechanisms and elevate the breakaway authorities to equal footing with Georgia, delivering the Kremlin a major strategic win. Even without formal recognition, bilateral talks would effectively legitimize the *de facto* regimes, reframing the conflict from one of foreign occupation to a domestic or intercommunal dispute. This shift would severely weaken Georgia's position in international law and undermine the West's policy of non-recognition.

Crucially, such talks would sideline the Geneva International Discussions—the only forum where Russia is recognized as a party to the conflict. While flawed, Geneva preserves the legal framing that Moscow desperately seeks to escape. Direct formal Tbilisi-Sokhumi dialogue would let Russia off the hook, allowing it to pose as an outsider while cementing the status quo.

Domestically, the consequences would be equally dangerous. These talks would be spun as peace

efforts, but in reality, they would deepen polarization, marginalize IDPs, and demoralize the public. Critics—especially from civil society and the opposition—would be smeared as saboteurs or foreign agents.

Moves like opening the Enguri Bridge for formal trade or restoring railway links to Sokhumi may appear technical, but carry massive political costs. Formalizing trade would legitimize Sokhumi's governance and reframe the occupation line as a border between trade partners, not a ceasefire line imposed by war. Without progress on IDP return or political status, economic engagement becomes not reconciliation but the consolidation of separation. Russia will exploit this to showcase “practical cooperation” and blur the reality of occupation.

Reopening the Abkhazia railway, or even starting the talks about it, would go even further, requiring legal agreements, customs arrangements, and infrastructure coordination with the *de facto* authorities. These steps, even if branded as temporary or technical, would cement recognition in practice. Once running, the railway would be hard to shut down, especially under Russian guarantees. It would serve as a powerful symbol of normalized occupation—masking coercion with connectivity, and burying justice beneath steel rails.

Final Phase – Joint Entity of Some Kind

The final and most perilous phase would be the manipulation of Georgia's political status, which could come at the expense of its sovereignty and independence, without exaggeration. Once diplomatic and economic steps appear to normalize the breakaway regions, Georgian Dream-aligned propagandists may begin floating ideas such as a “loose confederation” or “special arrangement” with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Or, potentially even with Russia. After all, if the confederation is loose, and

it implies restoration of the country's territorial integrity, what is the problem of reestablishing some sort of formal, historically tested ties with Russia? In Abkhazia, at least, many have been [worried](#) over such a prospect.

These ideas are not new—Russia has used them before in Moldova (Transnistria) and Ukraine (Donbas). Their purpose is to grant veto power to pro-Russian regions over national policy, effectively paralyzing the central government and anchoring the country in Moscow's orbit.

Alternatively, Georgia and its occupied territories might be invited to join a broader supranational structure like the Union State (Russia-Belarus) or a rebranded BRICS+ format. While far-fetched, these ideas serve a narrative purpose: to frame the shift as regional integration rather than capitulation.

Such status ambiguity would destroy the constitutional unity of the Georgian state. It would also complicate EU and NATO accession permanently, as both organizations require clear, uncontested borders and centralized authority.

Most dangerously, the public may be sold the illusion of peace and reunification when, in fact, the opposite would be occurring: a finalization of Georgia's fragmentation and absorption into the Russian sphere of influence. This would be packaged by propaganda as a "historic resolution" of the conflict.

The price for this reorientation? Full abandonment of NATO aspirations, de jure suspension of the EU candidacy process, and open hostility toward the United States, the European Union, and its allies. To prepare for this, the Georgian Dream is doing what every aspiring autocracy does: arrest, censor, and destroy.

The price for this reorientation? Full abandonment of NATO aspirations, *de jure* suspension of the EU candidacy process, and open hostility toward the United States, the European Union, and its allies. To prepare for this, the Georgian Dream is doing what every aspiring autocracy does: arrest, censor, and destroy. To make this betrayal sustainable, the Georgian Dream needs to (a) neutralize civil society through legislation, defunding, and public discrediting; (b) silence dissenting voices, especially in media and academia; (c) shift public opinion via propaganda and manufactured crises and (d) legitimize new alliances under the guise of multipolar alignment and multi-vector foreign policy. Each of these steps is already underway ■