

GEO POLITICS

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Our Mission

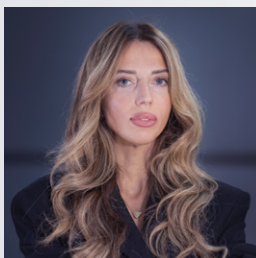
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At the **Research Institute Gnomon Wise**, we believe that disseminating knowledge and analysis conducted with integrity and impartiality can advance national interests and strengthen democratic institutions. Our think tank fosters a culture of intellectual 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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Contributors



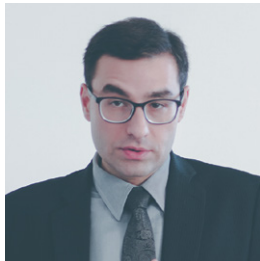
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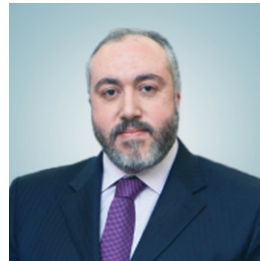
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Jaba Devdariani Contributor

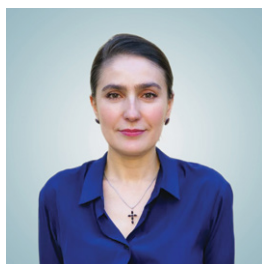
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Guest Contributors



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Guest Contributor

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The Need for Greater Western Unity to Counter Russia's Geopolitical Offense

The recently concluded Euro 2024 brought not only the excitement of football but also a moment of unity and reflection for many European nations, including Georgia. Russia's absence from the football fields was just and deserved, but its presence in Ukrainian fields and cities remains the biggest geopolitical and human injustice of the 21st century.

This volume highlights Ukraine and Georgia's ongoing struggle for sovereignty and democracy amidst the persistent pressures and influences from Russia. The common thread across our pieces is the urgent need for a cohesive and robust Western strategy to counteract Russian aggression and influence, as well as the critical role of Western support in safeguarding democratic aspirations and security.

In this context, several common themes emerge - the historical and ongoing Russian imperialism, the strategic importance of Georgia as a transit and logistical hub, and the fluctuating dynamics of Western engagement and support. From the strategic pivot away from Western partnerships, such as the Anaklia port project now under the threat of Chinese control, to the EU and NATO's dilemmas in responding to Georgia's democratic backsliding, the articles underscore the complexities Georgia faces. The writings emphasize the necessity of a united and decisive Western front, reminiscent of Noe Jordania's calls for European solidarity against Russian imperialism.

Volodymyr Yermolenko opens the current edition with the parallels between the 2008

Russian invasion of Georgia and the current war against Ukraine. Yermolenko argues that Western Europe's policy of appeasement towards Russia has only emboldened Russian aggression, leading to a cycle of violence in Eastern Europe and beyond. He contrasts the West's desire for predictability and stability with Russia's strategy of creating uncertainty and increasing risks. The author emphasizes the need for the West to adapt to faster, more decisive actions to counteract authoritarian threats from Russia and China. The article concludes by framing Ukraine's struggle as part of a broader fight for global freedom and against new forms of imperialism.

Shota Gvineria switches to the dynamics of Georgia's relationship with NATO, emphasizing the setbacks since the 2008 Bucharest summit, culminating in a nearly empty summit declaration on Georgia. The Georgian Dream government, in power since 2012, has prioritized improving relations with Russia over pursuing NATO membership, resulting in a decline in Georgia's active participation in NATO missions and exercises. The article highlights key NATO summits—Bucharest (2008), Warsaw (2016), Vilnius (2023), and Washington (2024)—and their varying levels of support for Georgia's NATO aspirations, noting a troubling decline in engagement and support in the most recent summit. This shift reflects a broader trend of NATO-Georgia relations moving from active political engagement and integration efforts towards a focus on practical defense cooperation and, more recently, a stark silence on Georgia's future within NATO.

Temuri Yakobashvili argues that Georgia's political elite, particularly the ruling Georgian

Dream party, should remain neutral and unbiased regarding the US presidential elections. The author emphasizes that the outcome of the US presidential elections has a butterfly effect on global and regional politics, including US-Georgia relations. The article critiques the Georgian Dream's narrative that Donald Trump's potential presidency will rectify US-Georgia relations and urges caution, highlighting the dangers of aligning too closely with any candidate. The article discusses the practical implications of different US administrations' foreign policies and stresses that Georgia's political elite should focus on maintaining and repairing relations with the US, irrespective of the election outcome, by adhering to democratic principles and re-aligning with Western values.

Thornike Gordadze then switches to France and explores how Russia attempts to influence French politics by supporting extreme political parties on both the right and left. In France, parties like the far-right Rassemblement National (RN) and the far-left La France Insoumise (LFI) fit Russia's criteria for destabilizing forces. Despite their ideological differences, these parties' rise contributes to increased polarization and instability, serving Moscow's broader geopolitical interests. The article argues that recent efforts by these parties to distance themselves from overt pro-Russian positions are superficial, motivated by electoral considerations rather than genuine changes in stance. The piece concludes that the continued rise of extreme parties in France aligns with Russia's goal of destabilizing Western unity and governance, highlighting the limits and persistence of Russian influence in European politics.

Sergi Kapanadze continues the topic of Western unity through the analysis of the developments around the Anaklia deep-sea port. Georgia's realignment away from Western alliances towards

closer ties with Russia and China is exemplified by the saga of the Anaklia port, initially a Western-backed project aimed at transforming Georgia into a strategic transport hub but now poised to be constructed by the Chinese state-owned company. The author argues that this realignment threatens Georgia's strategic position and calls for the West to recognize and counteract the growing influence of Russia and China in the Black Sea region.

Vano Chkhikvadze stays with the topic of Georgia's drift away from the West by exploring the strained relationship with the European Union following the adoption of the Russian-type "transparency of foreign influence" law by the ruling Georgian Dream party. The EU has responded by freezing EUR 30 million in assistance and considering a range of short-term, mid-term, and long-term measures to address the democratic backsliding. These measures include scaling down engagement with Georgian authorities, halting EU funds, imposing visa bans, and asset freezes under the EU's Global Human Rights Regime. The upcoming parliamentary elections in October 2024 are seen as a critical juncture for Georgia's democratic path and its EU accession process. The article stresses the importance of a calibrated and coordinated EU response, highlighting the need for more decisive action to align with the pro-European sentiment of the Georgian population and counter the influence of the ruling party's anti-democratic measures.

Teona Giuashvili takes a critical look at the recent European Political Community (EPC) summit hosted by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Despite initial success in fostering unity and strategic convergence among European nations, the EPC faces challenges due to internal EU political shifts, regional conflicts, and potential impacts of the US presidential elections. Giuashvili argues that the EPC must define its role by focusing on redefining European security and tackling unresolved conflicts, as well as addressing hybrid

threats, thereby complementing the EU and NATO. The EPC's future hinges on increased ownership, leadership, and clearer direction to effectively foster political convergence and cooperation among European countries.

Jaba Devdariani closes the volume with a retrospective view of the century-old writings of Noe Jordania, the exiled leader of the Georgian Democratic Republic, who advocated for Georgia's independence and democracy while criticizing Soviet Russia's imperialistic nature. Jordania, living in France after the Soviet occupation of

Georgia, sought European support against the Soviet regime by emphasizing the anti-democratic and imperialist continuation of Tsarist policies under the Bolsheviks. He saw a united Europe, particularly Franco-German unity, as essential for creating a rules-based international order that could isolate and challenge Soviet imperialism, which remains relevant in understanding Georgia's enduring geopolitical interests and the nature of Russian foreign policy even today ■

With Respect,
Editorial Team

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Ukraine's Universal Struggle Against a Geopolitical Prison

On 8 August 2008, I was on holiday with my wife near the Shatsky lakes in Western Ukraine. My wife was pregnant with our first daughter, Daryna (now we have three, and Daryna is 15); both of us were carefully swimming in the lake waters; she was careful because of her pregnancy; I was gradually recovering from light leg surgery. At that time, four years had passed since Ukraine's Orange Revolution and five years since Georgia's Rose Revolution.

I received a call from my friend Andriy saying that Russia had invaded Georgia. The tanks were just a few dozen kilometers from Tbilisi. I remember my legs going weak as my body reacted to events 2,000 kilometers away because we all knew this directly concerned us. Imperial history had come back in its ugliest forms. I was worried for Georgia, and I knew Ukraine would be next.

In a few days, we watched Nicolas Sarkozy, the then-French President and the President of the EU Council, saying that his mediation achieved “la

fin de guerre” – the end of a war. He could not have been more wrong. August 2008 was not the end, but a beginning. Ukraine and Syria, as places for massive Russian war crimes against civilians, and dozens of other countries suffering from Russian hybrid attacks would come next.

The conditions for this long Russian war of reconquest can be found earlier in 2008 when the NATO summit in Bucharest failed to give Ukraine and Georgia clear membership action plans. Countries that blocked this prospect, mainly Germany and France, misread history. They thought they would stop the next Russian war through appeasement. But by showing their fear of provoking Russia, they, in fact, provoked Russia. They opened the doors for new wars in Europe.

In 2008, many Eastern Europeans said Russia would not stop in Georgia. In 2014, we said it would not stop in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. Now, we say it will not stop in Ukraine.



VOLODYMYR YERMOLENKO
Guest Contributor

Dr. Volodymyr Yermolenko is a Ukrainian philosopher, journalist, and writer. He is the President of PEN Ukraine and holds a Doctorate in political studies (France) and a PhD in philosophy (Ukraine). Yermolenko is the Analytics Director at Internews Ukraine and Chief Editor of UkraineWorld.org. An associate professor at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, he has authored several award-winning books. He is Head of board of International Renaissance Foundation (OSI Network) and is an expert in media literacy. Yermolenko co-founded podcasts Kult and Explaining Ukraine and hosted TV programs at Hromadske.ua. He has published articles in The Economist, Le Monde, Financial Times, New York Times, and Newsweek and has contributed to BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, France 24, and more. His work is available in multiple languages. Father of three daughters.



In 2008, many Eastern Europeans said Russia would not stop in Georgia. In 2014, we said it would not stop in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. Now, we say it will not stop in Ukraine. In all these cases, the voices from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus should have been heard. They were not.

Russia justified its acts of aggression by claiming that it was defending itself against NATO expansion. The truth is, however, that NATO enlarged in the 1990s and the 2000s, not because it wanted to attack Russia but because countries in Eastern Europe did not want to be attacked by Russia. NATO was a fortress, not a tank, for them. They were thinking about defense, not offense.

Paradoxically, this gave NATO an anti-imperial dimension. In their histories, Central and Eastern European countries were primarily colonies, not empires. Their 20th-century histories had much more in common with decolonization movements in Africa, Asia, or Latin America than with the colonial history of France, Britain, or Spain. The presence of these nations was making NATO look more like a bloc of nations cooperating against a new possible imperial conquest. Those who criticize (rightly or not) America or Europe for their imperialisms often fail to notice how much the enlargements to Central and Eastern Europe have transformed the West.

In the past decades, the West has been thinking of its imperial past mostly with remorse, while Russia has been thinking of it mostly with nostalgia. While the West is searching for ways of decolonization — and is blamed for hypocrisy for not doing enough — Russia is searching for ways of recolonization. Russia's stance is probably more coherent but also more immoral and cynical. The West can be blamed for not following its own good principles, but Russia should be blamed for following intrinsically bad principles.

NATO's "expansion" was moving to the empty

space—people were welcoming it—while Russia's "enlargement" was happening against the will of those it invades. Therefore, it uses wars, not "accession negotiations," to expand.

The West is thinking in terms of decreasing risks; Russia is thinking in terms of increasing risks.

There is another difference. The West is thinking in terms of decreasing risks; Russia is thinking in terms of increasing risks. Russian rulers are good students of Carl Schmitt, a German Nazi philosopher and lawyer. As Schmitt believed, a sovereign is a ruler who is not afraid of increasing risks for himself and his opponents. By increasing risks, he creates the space of uncertainty, the Machiavellian space of *Fortuna* - the unpredictable twists of destiny when you can be a ruler today and a jailed criminal tomorrow. In this world of created uncertainty, a sovereign has to become a Machiavellian *il principe* - a man or a woman who conquers the unpredictability of time, navigates through it and is able to react fast and make unexpected moves. A Schmittian-Putinist sovereign is someone who aspires to win in an unpredictable and risky environment. He seeks power during the accelerated time. He creates storms in the sea.

The West today is different. Its key value is predictability. Its role model is an insurance company. It wants to make life predictable and wants risks to be mitigated. It cherishes a future that will be the same as the present in 30 years - when you are finally ready to pay off your debt. Its institutions are well behind the flow of history. It does not see history as a sea with potential storms but only as a smooth river imprisoned by stone banks.

Facing *il principe*, the West is doomed to fail unless it creates an antidote.

However, there is another element: technology. Today, technologies produce storm after storm.

They accelerate time. They are much faster than institutions. And they are faster than dictators. The West is schizophrenic: its technologies are fast, but its institutions are slow.

The third element is China. China is trying to control technologies. It wants to predict the unpredictable. If the power of a sovereign is to create unpredictable risks for its enemies, then China wants to conquer the unpredictable and take control over it. By predicting the unpredictable for itself and unleashing the unpredictable for others – that is, by being ahead of technological revolutions that will change the lives of others – China wants to rule the world. It hopes to rule the world by ruling time, controlling both the long-term horizon and the short-term technological twists.

Here is the danger: while Russian communism attempted to eradicate natural difference between people, Chinese communism is trying to eliminate natural freedom. It wants to produce the unpredictable for others and control this unpredictable for itself.

The current Russian invasion of Ukraine is a part of a much bigger process. It can possibly end with eradicating freedom and the unpredictability of human will – because dictators are willing to keep the unpredictable only in their hands.

Therefore, the current Russian invasion of Ukraine is a part of a much bigger process. It can possibly end with eradicating freedom and the unpredictability of human will – because dictators are willing to keep the unpredictable only in their hands.

The West is fast in technology but slow in decision-making. It is afraid of taking risks and of producing risks for its enemies. But if you fail to create

risks for your enemies, your enemies will be faster than you, and they will destroy you. Insurance companies will never win against a killer startup.

Technologies are fast, and during war, they become even faster. Technological solutions are like insects: they live a very short life – sometimes three months, sometimes one day. They are remarkably mortal.

Therefore, war technology is a race of speed. You take a field that is fast by itself and try to accelerate it even more. This is the game.

And the problem is that war accelerates time. During a war, time does not wait. Events happen to you before you start to understand what is happening. You are always late.

In this game, the West has to learn how to play fast. Or, rather, it needs to help Ukraine play fast. Ukraine is a player who takes risks and plays fast, but it needs sufficient backup and support.

If the West does not want to lose the war for freedom to Russia and China, it has to learn again how to be fast and unpredictable for its enemies.

If the West does not want to lose the war for freedom to Russia and China, it has to learn again how to be fast and unpredictable for its enemies. It needs to go back to the state of unexpected decisions and risky moves. It needs to show that it is ready to attack – and attack first. It needs to keep its “insurance company” role model for its citizens but engage in a new risky play outside with its enemies. It needs to learn to perform massive cyber-attacks. It needs to make its military production sector flexible and fast and match the Ukrainian needs on the frontline. It needs to use the tools of economic warfare. It should try the moves that can create unpredictable consequenc-

es for the markets - primarily of its enemies.

Last but not least, the West needs to engage in the game of predicting the unpredictable - that is, be dominant in technologies that can unexpectedly disrupt the functioning of the enemies.

But behind this unpredictable tactical play, there should be something bigger. This something bigger is the flow of history, which can express itself in fast moves back and forth in the waves on the sea but for which, finally, these waves are just a surface and where the key question is whether or not the sea will dry up or, on the contrary, be full of water.

The key question, as always, is the question about the future. What will the 21st century look like? Will it be a century of freedom or slavery? A century of decolonization or recolonization?

Which model will the majority of societies on Earth in the 21st century choose? A model in which citizens will be treated as adults who participate in the formation and development of their policies? Or, alternatively, a model in which they will be considered minors who should be ruled by their governors in the same way small children are ruled by their parents-that is, by a mixture of manipulation, punishment, and control-and perhaps a bit of love, too?

The key thing about the Western idea of politics, from Aristotle to John Locke, through even such cynical personalities as Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, was to say that polity is not a family. In other words, polity is an association of subjects who are initially not linked by hierarchical power relations and engage with each other to produce a common thing, *res publica*.

The alternative view - from Western absolutism to religious communities or Chinese Confucianism - claims that the ruler is the father (or mother) of

people and, therefore, should control their will.

The battle today - whether technological or the increasing number of conflicts, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine - is about which model will win: a paternalistic model in which the ruler is the father of kids - millions of kids - who have to be controlled and supervised, or a republican model in which the ruler is the first among equals and aims to develop the capacities of his fellow citizens rather than control them.

Russia stands for a paternalistic model. Its citizens, however, are not children of their parents but orphans in the orphanage.

Russia stands for a paternalistic model. Its citizens, however, are not children of their parents but orphans in the orphanage. Citizens are ruled here by the indifference of the system, which can sacrifice them without much remorse because it knows that the more miserable these citizens are, the easier it is to do with them whatever you want.

So, the true question is whether the 21st century will be a century of decolonization or recolonization, whether the demise of Western imperialism will actually lead to less imperialism in the world or be replaced by new power structures from new economic powers (BRICS or others), perhaps more violent than the previous ones. What we see now in the Middle East or Africa confirms the second concern. And this is bad for all of us.

One important element of the liberal order is that it always falls short of what it wants to achieve. Its ideals are so high that they always remain ideals, and the reality is so remote from these ideals that liberalism is blamed for hypocrisy. The idea of liberty for all will always mean that the scope of this particular liberty is too narrow and applied to a limited number of subjects. Therefore, liberalism

is inevitably hypocritical, or idealistic, if you prefer this term.

But what is the alternative? The Russian alternative is “domostroy,” a conservative concept in which the ruler is seen as a father whose authority cannot be denied. In this world, people are only means and not goals in themselves. They are atoms of a big collective body and do not have value on their own. Do we want such a world?

In the Ukrainian tradition, from the 19th century onwards, the word “moskal” meant both a Muscovite - that is, a Russian - and a soldier of the imperial army. To “be turned into a moskal” meant to “be taken, against your will, to the army.” The army service was ten years full of hardships, and most

often, people did not come back, even if they were not killed on the battlefield.

Thus, Muscovy-Russia was perceived not as a state or civil society but as an army and a prison.

The Ukrainian battle today is a battle against the spillover of this geopolitical prison to other nations.

The Ukrainian battle today is a battle against the spillover of this geopolitical prison to other nations. Against turning our future into the future of new slavery. Against turning us all into “moskali” that is slaves without rights and future.

Doesn't it make our fight universal ?

NATO-Georgia Relations Through the Summit Declarations

The Georgian Dream government has displayed a cautious approach toward NATO membership, prioritizing the stabilization of relations with Russia since it came to power in 2012. This strategic shift has slowed down NATO-Georgia relations despite strong public support for NATO membership. Georgia has historically played an active role in NATO-led operations, showcasing its commitment through troop contributions. However, recent years have seen a decline in Georgia's participation not only in NATO missions, particularly after the end of Western involvement in Afghanistan, but also in multinational exercises.

Recent years have seen a decline in Georgia's participation not only in NATO missions, particularly after the end of Western involvement in Afghanistan, but also in multinational exercises.

The continued postponement of granting Georgia the Membership Action Plan (MAP) has jeopardized the future of NATO-Georgia relations. Russian propaganda has constantly capitalized on the absence of a clear path to membership, facilitating frustration in Georgian political discourse and public sentiments. NATO's insistence on democratic reforms as prerequisites for membership added another layer of complexity, especially since the Georgian Dream openly turned to authoritarian practices and started to echo Russian anti-NATO narratives directly.

NATO-Georgia relations have dramatically evolved since the 2008 Bucharest summit, which marked the first official commitment to Georgia's NATO membership. The journey from the political statement that Georgia "will become a member" to concrete integration-related steps has faced several challenges, mainly due to Russian aggression and turbulences in Georgia's domestic politics. Still, the unprecedented promise of membership granted in



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NATO SUMMIT'S
VISUAL ACUITY TEST



NATO EYE TEST

2008	GEORGIA	100 FT. 30.5 M	1
2014	GEORGIA	70 FT. 21.3 M	2
2016	GEORGIA	50 FT. 15.2 M	3
2023	GEORGIA	40 FT. 12.2 M	4
2024	G E O R G I A	30 FT. 9.14M	5
2026		25 FT. 7.62 M	6

Bucharest has been reiterated at all subsequent NATO summits until the 2024 Washington summit. The Washington summit declaration, which mentioned Georgia in only one sentence, without any reference to the Bucharest summit decisions, marks a new era in NATO-Georgia relations.

Georgia-NATO relations have three vitally essential aspects: practical cooperation, political integration, and support for territorial integrity.

Georgia-NATO relations have three vitally essential aspects: practical cooperation, political integration, and support for territorial integrity. As [detailed](#) earlier this year in this journal, practical cooperation focuses on military capacity-building and is critical in achieving acceptable levels of defensibility. The integration process involves strategic decisions facilitating Georgia's accession, eventually leading to NATO's security guarantee. Strengthening Georgia's defensibility and attaining security guarantees from NATO is directly linked to and could be the only feasible way to restore Georgia's territorial integrity peacefully.

The 2024 Washington summit does not report any progress in any of the three vital dimensions of NATO-Georgia relations, signifying the startling halt of the partnership.

Summit declarations can be useful instruments for evaluating progress in essential dimensions of NATO's work. Sadly, unlike any other summit declaration since 2008, the 2024 Washington summit does not report any progress in any of the three vital dimensions of NATO-Georgia relations, signifying the startling halt of the partnership.

Declarations from various NATO summits have consistently indicated positive dynamics in at

least one of the key dimensions of NATO-Georgia relations. The Washington summit is a stark exception; Georgia, previously one of NATO's closest partners, was mentioned only once in the summit declaration. This mention, however, was neither in the context of cooperation, integration, or support for its territorial integrity. It was merely a reminder to Russia of its international commitment to withdraw forces from countries where it maintains a military presence without consent.

Dynamics of NATO-Georgia Relations through the Summit Declarations

Previous summits, shaped by the specific contexts in which they were held, have reflected the evolving status quo in NATO-Georgia relations. In this article, we examine the Bucharest, Warsaw, and Vilnius summits and compare the status of Georgia-NATO relations as viewed through the prism of the summit declarations.

The Bucharest summit (2008), guided by the difficulties of digesting the new Eastern NATO members and enlargement fatigue, struggled with forging political consensus for advancing Georgia's NATO membership. However, NATO registered a clear commitment to Georgia's eventual integration into the Alliance and strongly emphasized support for its territorial integrity.

The Warsaw Summit (2016) occurred amid heightened security concerns following Russia's annexation of Crimea. The summit focused on increasing the defensibility of NATO's Eastern Flank and, in this context, on strengthening Georgia's defense capabilities. It emphasized practical cooperation and reaffirmed NATO's commitment to Georgia's membership and territorial integrity.

The Vilnius summit (2023), contextually dominated by the topic of Russia's full-scale war against

Ukraine, still maintained a secondary focus on Georgia. The summit reaffirmed support for Georgia's territorial integrity and recognized progress in practical cooperation, but the primary attention was on the regional security dynamics related to Ukraine.

The Washington summit (2024) took place against the background of the Georgian government's authoritarian drift. Unlike the previous declarations, the Allies were deafeningly silent on Georgia. The 2024 Declaration indicated a pause in NATO-Georgia relations and a lack of new initiatives or commitments. This suggests a halt in Georgia's active pursuit of membership and an apparent decline in support within NATO.

Bucharest Summit

The 2008 Bucharest summit marked a pivotal moment for Georgia's NATO aspirations. NATO clearly articulated its support for Georgia's membership, asserting that Georgia will become a member of the Alliance. This summit focused on fostering political consensus and advancing Georgia's integration into NATO. It highlighted the importance of democratic reforms in Georgia, underscored Georgia's significant contributions to NATO operations, and initiated a period of intensive political engagement to address outstanding issues related to Georgia's Membership Action Plan. NATO also reaffirmed its commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity, emphasizing support for its sovereignty within internationally recognized borders. More specifically, the summit [declaration](#) emphasized progress in the following areas:

Practical Cooperation

NATO acknowledged and appreciated Georgia's valuable contributions to Alliance operations. The summit declaration emphasized the commencement of an intensive engagement period at a high political level to address outstanding questions

about Georgia's defensibility. This engagement was designed to facilitate Georgia's progress towards membership. Practical cooperation with NATO was focused on Georgia's interoperability and capacity to contribute to NATO-led missions, while Georgia's defense capabilities were channeled through US-Georgia bilateral formats.

Political Integration

NATO supported Georgia's aspirations for membership in the Alliance, affirming that Georgia would become a member. The summit recognized the importance of Georgia's democratic reforms and anticipated the conduct of free and fair parliamentary elections in May 2008. The MAP has been identified as the next critical step in Georgia's path to NATO membership. A significant milestone was set for December 2008 when NATO Foreign Ministers were to assess Georgia's progress and make decisions regarding the MAP application. This was a bitter-sweet outcome.

On the one hand, NATO made an unprecedented decision by giving Georgia a membership perspective. Still, on the other hand, the Allies failed to provide Georgia with a necessary tool to prepare for membership — the MAP. Russia interpreted NATO's hesitation in making Georgia's membership irreversible as the last chance to obstruct further NATO enlargement by invading the country in August 2008. A possible decision on granting MAP at the December ministerial contributed to the Kremlin's sense of urgency.

Territorial Integrity

NATO expressed deep concern over the ongoing regional conflicts in the South Caucasus, including those affecting Georgia. The summit reaffirmed NATO's unwavering support for Georgia's territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty and pledged continued support for efforts to achieve peaceful settlements of the regional conflicts, upholding the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Warsaw Summit

The Warsaw summit in 2016 took place in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea which significantly altered the security dynamics in Eastern Europe. The summit's focus shifted towards enhancing the defensibility of NATO's Eastern Flank, reflecting the heightened security concerns. For Georgia, the Warsaw summit reiterated NATO's commitment to its eventual membership and emphasized practical cooperation through initiatives like the Defense Capacity Building Initiative and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package. This summit also reinforced NATO's support for Georgia's territorial integrity and called on Russia to reverse its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In contrast to the Bucharest summit's stress on political aspects of Georgia's NATO integration, the emphasis was on strengthening Georgia's defense capabilities and enhancing its resilience in the face of regional security threats.

The Warsaw summit reiterated NATO's commitment to its eventual membership and emphasized practical cooperation through initiatives like the Defense Capacity Building Initiative and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package.

It is important to note that at the time of the Warsaw summit, domestic political discourse in Georgia was still pro-Western, and despite some caution and indirect indications of the foreign policy alterations, the Georgian Dream's foreign and defense policy team was still firmly committed to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. More specifically, the summit declaration emphasized progress in the following areas:

Practical Cooperation

NATO emphasized the importance of strengthening dialogue and cooperation with Georgia, par-

ticularly in ensuring security and stability in the Black Sea region. The Defense Capacity Building Initiative, adopted at the 2014 Wales summit, was acknowledged as an effective instrument for supporting Georgia's preparations for the membership. The summit acknowledged Georgia's significant contributions to NATO's common security challenges, recognizing it as an enhanced opportunities partner. NATO also highlighted the importance of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, initiated at the Wales summit, with over 30 experts from Allied and partner countries supporting Georgia in various areas of cooperation. The Joint Training and Evaluation Center in Georgia was assessed as operational, strengthening the country's self-defense and resilience capabilities. The summit was clearly among the most successful regarding the Alliance's practical support for building Georgia's defense capabilities.

Political Integration

The summit reaffirmed NATO's commitment to Georgia's eventual membership, first declared at the 2008 Bucharest summit. NATO recognized Georgia's significant progress since 2008 and asserted that Georgia possessed all the practical tools needed for eventual membership. The upcoming 2016 parliamentary elections were considered a crucial step towards consolidating democratic institutions. NATO encouraged Georgia to utilize opportunities provided by the NATO-Georgia Commission, the Annual National Program, and other initiatives to move closer to the Alliance. Although Georgia advocated the wording that would remove mandatory criteria for the MAP application, the summit reiterated that the MAP remained an integral part of Georgia's path to NATO membership.

Territorial Integrity

NATO remained steadfast in its support for Georgia's territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. The summit welcomed Georgia's com-

mitment not to use force and called on Russia to reciprocate. NATO urged Russia to reverse its recognition of the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, cease constructing border-like obstacles, and withdraw its forces from Georgia. The summit denounced the so-called treaties between Russia and the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as they violated Georgia's sovereignty and international law. NATO encouraged all parties involved in the Geneva talks to play constructive roles and collaborate closely with the OSCE, the UN, and the EU for peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia.

Vilnius Summit

By the time of the Vilnius summit in 2023, the context had shifted dramatically due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Georgian Dream's clear anti-Western stance and actions. The summit's focus was predominantly on responding to the Russian invasion of Ukraine; however, Georgia failed to comply with the Allies' stance and support for Ukraine. Nonetheless, NATO reaffirmed its support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, continued to call on Russia to withdraw its forces and reverse the recognition of Georgia's separatist regions. The summit acknowledged the progress in implementing the enhanced Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and highlighted new initiatives in various areas of cooperation. However, the primary emphasis remained on the broader regional security dynamics and responding to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. More specifically, the summit declaration emphasized progress in the following areas:

Practical Cooperation

NATO stated that it valued ongoing engagement with Georgia, particularly through tailored support measures and close consultations with Georgia's Foreign Minister. The summit underscored the importance of the NATO-Georgia Commission

and the ANP in enhancing political dialogue and practical cooperation. Significant progress was noted in the implementation of the enhanced Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, which included initiatives in Crisis Management, Cyber Security, Military Engineering, and Secure Communications, along with new projects in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Defense and Training Facilities.

Political Integration

Despite mounting anti-NATO rhetoric of the Georgian Dream leadership, the summit still reaffirmed NATO's commitment to Georgia's eventual membership in the Alliance, reiterating the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest summit. Once again, NATO emphasized that the MAP remained a critical part of Georgia's path to membership. The summit acknowledged Georgia's substantial contributions to NATO operations, which reflected its commitment and capability to contribute to Euro-Atlantic security. NATO encouraged Georgia to advance its Euro-Atlantic aspirations by progressing on critical democratic reforms and effectively utilizing the ANP.

Territorial Integrity

In Vilnius, as during the previous summits, NATO strongly supported Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders and advocated for Georgia's right to determine its own future and foreign policy without external interference.

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called on Russia to withdraw its forces from Georgia, reverse its recognition of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and cease the militarization and forced separation efforts in these regions. NATO also condemned human rights violations by Russia, including arbitrary detentions and harassment of Georgian citizens. The summit reinforced NATO's support for Georgia's territorial integrity and committed to ongoing efforts to strengthen Georgia's security and sovereignty.

Washington Summit and Uncertain Future

Compared to Bucharest, Warsaw, and Vilnius, the Washington summit [lacked](#) substantial content regarding NATO-Georgia relations. There were no new commitments or discussions about practical cooperation similar to Warsaw and Vilnius or an emphasis on political integration like in Bucharest. The progression from Bucharest to Warsaw shows a shift from active political engagement and integration efforts towards a focus on practical defense cooperation. In the period from the Warsaw to Vilnius summits, there was visible downplay from prioritizing practical cooperation to formally maintaining partner relations. The Washington summit's silence in Georgia signifies a troubling acceleration of the downward trend in NATO-Georgia relations.

Compared to Bucharest, Warsaw, and Vilnius, the Washington summit lacked substantial content regarding NATO-Georgia relations.

Even NATO's consistent and steadfast support for Georgia's territorial integrity is absent from the Washington summit's declaration. This absence of content marks a significant shift and indicates

a halt in the previous dynamics of NATO-Georgia relations. The lack of engagement on these critical issues highlights a pause in NATO's active support and strategic planning for Georgia's future within the Alliance.

The 2008 Bucharest summit's compromise language, which did not grant Georgia a MAP, was [interpreted](#) by many as a sign of NATO's weakness and indecision. This perceived vulnerability may have emboldened Russia to invade Georgia later that year, exploiting the ambiguity in NATO's stance. The Washington summit's language could be interpreted as an even more apparent abandonment of NATO's commitments toward Georgia. Depending on the dynamics of the war in Ukraine, such a signal might lead Russia to see this as an opportunity to claim a final victory over Georgia and a green light to destabilize the country and the entire region further.

By abandoning NATO integration instead of normalizing relations with Russia, the Georgian Dream incentivizes Russian aggression against Georgia.

By abandoning NATO integration instead of normalizing relations with Russia, the Georgian Dream incentivizes Russian aggression against Georgia. Georgia's anti-Western policy shift jeopardizes the development of its defense capabilities and deprives itself of the chance for the long-term peaceful restoration of its territorial integrity. Georgia built relationships with NATO to the point where it was considered one of its closest partners. The Georgian Dream's reckless authoritarian push risks erasing this progress. If the current trend in NATO-Georgia relations continues, it will take decades for Georgia to reappear on NATO's agenda ■

Why the Georgian Political Elite Should Be Color-Blind for the Presidential Elections in the USA

Is it Georgia's "damned business" who will be the next president of the USA? Technically, NO, but practically YES. Obviously, Georgians have no say in the electoral process, and it is up to the American people to determine the name of their next leader. At the same time, given the power and influence of an American president on global or regional affairs, the consequences can be excessively significant for a country, a region, or the globe. From this point of view, discussion among foreign policy and security experts or political elites is legitimate, but betting on a particular candidate's win can be a self-defeating and delusional exercise for politicians. The ruling Georgian elite, headed by the Georgian Dream party and its leadership, is actively promoting the narrative that Donald Trump's victory will end the domination of the mythical "global war party," sympathize with anti-liberal sentiments worldwide, and automatically fix all problems amassed in US-Georgia relations. This is childish, to say

the least. The smartest thing the Georgian political elite can do is to remain color-blind to the US Presidential elections.

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Spillover of American Electoral Rhetoric

One should be very careful in differentiating pre-electoral rhetoric from practical politics. Be-



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fore the elections, both camps will proactively attempt to coin a negative image or narrative about the opponent by amplifying their previous real or perceived failures. Both parties' talking heads, experts, and supporting media are offering inaccurate predictions about what may happen if the opponent wins. Doomsday scenarios, primarily targeting the local electorate, often scare audiences abroad. Heated debates prevail about what will happen if Trump or Harris win and what spill-over or, if you may, butterfly effect this will have on world politics. Just three months from the election date, American political pundits have more questions than answers. Putting aside domestic issues, speculations about the foreign policy priorities of competing candidates increasingly resemble reading tea leaves or coffee grounds in a cup. There is a reason for this. Trump is, by default, considered "unpredictable," and Harris has a very limited story to tell on foreign policy.

Trump's presidency was largely defined by an "unorthodox" and "revisionist" approach to foreign policy, dominated by less regard for traditional diplomacy (including diplomatic language), international institutions, or treaties. Unpleasant and undiplomatic rhetoric aside, such a shock therapy, in some cases, shook up stagnating and outdated institutions and arrangements. Trump took credit for pushing NATO allies to step up their contribution to the alliance's financing, re-negotiated NAFTA, and achieved the historic Abraham Accords between Israel and major Arab states, among other things. Several of his actions were supposed to trigger larger conflicts, but at the end of the day, nothing of that sort happened. A good example is Iran – Trump withdrew from the Iran Deal, killed top Iranian general Soleimani, moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem, and boosted cooperation with Saudi Arabia. No "predicted" catastrophe followed. Trump can claim largely ending ISIS in Syria (including the elimination of their leader,

Al Baghdadi), attempted normalization of relations with North Korea, bombed Tora Bora in Afghanistan, and negotiated with the Taliban. Trump's presidency was also marked by America's withdrawal from a number of institutions and treaties, namely the Paris Climate Agreement, the UN Human Rights Council, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and stopping funding of the UNRWA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and reducing funding of the WHO, among others. All the above indicates Trump's willingness to take bold steps, employ America's might, and act decisively when it comes to foreign policy. If he wins, most likely, the same traits will continue.

We can only talk about Kamala Harris's foreign policy in association with President Biden's policy, where she did not play a leading role, ranking behind the National Security Council, the Department of State, and the CIA. Her international travels and appearances were largely symbolic and delivered messages from her boss. Hence, it is hard to judge if an independent Harris foreign policy exists. We can only speculate that, most likely, it will be determined by various influence groups serving under the Obama and Biden administrations. If that is the case, unlike Trump, both presidents were in a less aggressive foreign policy mode, leaving an aftertaste that America was disengaging from world affairs, also known as "leading from behind."

The list of America's adversaries and enemies has not changed, and mere association with them puts any country on the "blacklist" for any administration. That is a lesson that the Georgian leadership has somehow missed or misinterpreted.

Only the war in Ukraine and pressure from domestic groups pushed Biden's administration to re-en-

gage with traditional allies, be it on arming and supporting Ukraine or addressing climate change. The chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and the re-erupted conflict in the Middle East further increased the necessity to focus on foreign policy. While Biden brought back "traditional" American diplomacy and predictability, fundamental American interests did not alter, and, in many cases, we have seen a continuation of legacy policies with different toolboxes and means. The list of America's adversaries and enemies has not changed, and mere association with them puts any country on the "blacklist" for any administration. That is a lesson that the Georgian leadership has somehow missed or misinterpreted.

In many regards, the current turbulent world will surely require America's leadership, and no new president can distance themselves from being dragged into the vortex of world affairs.

Who Will Implement American Foreign Policy?

After every presidential election, approximately 4,000 political appointees should fill senior government positions across executive agencies to advance the political agenda underlined by the winning party. About 1,200 of them will require congressional approval.

During the first term of Trump's presidency, some politically moderate policy professionals associated with the Republican Party shied away from working with the Trump administration. This time, many "Never Trumpers" are eager to join Donald Trump if he wins the election. Trump's running mate, JD Vance, is an excellent example. Hence, Trump will not have a problem staffing agencies with qualified people.

It is much easier for Kamala Harris, as an incumbent Vice President. She can dive into a large pool

of current foreign policy professionals who have already coined major priorities in world affairs for America. No visible signs indicate that her attitude toward the world will fundamentally differ from what we see now. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing certain professionals who may be in charge of affairs encompassing Georgia. I will mention just a couple of names.

Stephen Biegun, former Deputy Secretary of State during George W. Bush's tenure, Trump's special envoy, and a trusted foreign policy professional may rejoin Trump's foreign policy team. Mr. Biegun commands ample knowledge of Georgia and its developments. He remains an adamant supporter of democratic Georgia and is aware of obstacles in this process.

Philip H. Gordon, the current National Security Advisor to Kamala Harris, served as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Special Assistant to the President, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf Region. Mr. Gordon oversaw President Saakashvili's official visit to Washington in 2012 during the Obama administration and is intimately familiar with Georgian politics.

Despite who leads the White House, the people in charge of foreign affairs that will ultimately include Georgia will not differ in their attitude about friends and foes and which of these two current Georgia represents.

Naming just two names is an attempt to indicate that despite who leads the White House, the people in charge of foreign affairs that will ultimately include Georgia will not differ in their attitude about friends and foes and which of these two current Georgia represents.

Can Changing Geopolitics Change American Attitude Towards Georgia?

American attention towards Georgia used to have two phases: active and passive. Active phases were visible during major events, such as the development of energy corridors from the Caspian to the West, Georgia's phenomenal transition from a "failed state" to the "beacon of freedom," and the war with Russia. Passive phases have entailed less attention but have continued support of Georgia's independence, development, and democratization. Unfortunately, currently, we are experiencing a third and unprecedented phase – a hostile one. At the same time, hostility is targeted towards the ruling elite of Georgia and not towards the people or the country of Georgia. The hostile attitude is the result of the incomprehensible political games, the rhetoric, and the actions of the Georgian Dream and its leadership, allegedly avoiding dragging Georgia into military conflict or protecting "Georgia's sovereignty" from Western encroachment. Both are very questionable propositions since the country is being deliberately pushed into the Russian/Chinese orbit, one which cares much less about sovereignty, peace, or independence.

It should be noted that the above-mentioned hostility is definitely not the result of the actions and decisions of either one specific agency (e.g., the Department of State), administration (Biden's administration), or group of disenchanted NGOs, think tanks, and academia. Critical voices from the administration merely reflect the bipartisan mood in Congress, criticism from major media outlets, unfavorable assessments of think tanks, negative conclusions of international NGOs, and similar sentiments from European allies, be it from Brussels or individual member countries.

Warnings and stern statements by US and European officials are already followed by concrete punitive actions. On 23 May 2024, Secretary Blinken [announced](#) a comprehensive review of all US-Georgia relations and introduced a visa restriction policy towards Georgian officials for “undermining democracy in Georgia.” On 3 June 2024, the US Congress [adopted](#) the “Megobari Act,” introduced and supported by representatives of both political parties, obliging the administration to take punitive actions against the government of Georgia. On 5 July 2024, the Department of Defense indefinitely [postponed](#) the Noble Partner joint military exercises, apparently finding the Georgian partner as not so noble. On 31 July 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken also [announced](#) a freeze of around USD 95 million in support, whose direct beneficiary was the government of Georgia.

Further punitive measures are in the pipeline and can be enacted as soon as necessary. All of this is happening in parallel with the EU halting Georgia's EU membership talks while other countries, like Ukraine and Moldova, are significantly advancing. The EU and several member countries [froze](#) significant assistance to Georgia, whether in direct financial aid, development projects, or bilateral cooperation in various spheres, including the military.

Has America Abandoned Georgia?

The simple answer to that question is – no! The myth of American isolationism, even if it can somehow be practically implemented, may only extend to regions where American interests are less prevalent or negligible. Georgia surely does not fit into that category.

All of the above punitive measures are supplemented by [statements](#) or policies that as soon as

Georgia returns to the democratic path, relationships can return to normality, and the US pledges to enact an “active” phase in the relationship. The geopolitical legacy that the upcoming administration will inherit, the war in Ukraine, the explosive Middle East, and an assertive China make a democratic and Western-oriented Georgia even more relevant and attractive. The relationship with Georgia was fostered during various US administrations, whether Democratic or Republican. Billions of US dollars have been invested in this process, and Ivanishvili's political “geopolitical maneuvers” are considered a temporary hiccup. US officials, starting from the Ambassador to Georgia, repeatedly [indicate](#) that relations can quickly be fixed once anti-democratic steps are reversed and anti-Western policies are altered.

Georgian domestic politics aside, new realities in the region, namely, increasingly pro-Western Armenia, challenging Iran, and Central Asia squeezed between Russia and China, require Georgia to be in the family of Western nations.

Georgian domestic politics aside, new realities in the region, namely, increasingly pro-Western Armenia, challenging Iran, and Central Asia squeezed between Russia and China, require Georgia to be in the family of Western nations. It overlaps with the wishes of the people of Georgia, whose majority still aspires to join the EU and NATO. Any obstacles to that process automatically become a blood clot that will require “medical” intervention to remove. If the current Ukrainian affairs absorb most of the American attention in the region, stabilization of the Ukrainian issue in any form (ceasefire, agreement, etc.) will allow the American bureaucracy to re-zoom attention back on Georgia and remedy the current shortfalls.

My Way or the Highway?

The question remains if the hopes of the Georgian Dream that they can have it their way without practically and verifiably changing course are realistic. They believe that they can, hoping that if Donald Trump is re-elected and if he ends the war in Ukraine and gets in cahoots with Russia — too many “ifs” and too little reality. Anyone familiar with the US bureaucracy and policy-making procedures can testify that accumulated sanctions, congressional resolutions, adverse media, critical academia, and hurt businesses do not change their minds overnight toward accumulated negativity. The time factor remains even more relevant — depending on the configuration of the new Congress and Senate, the approval, placement, and functionality of 1,200 newly appointed senior officials will take at least six months from the inauguration of the newly elected president. After that, new policies will require formulation, fine-tuning, calibration, and testing unless things can be reversed into already functional previous policies. Any new appointees will inherit the damage inflicted by the Georgian Dream on bilateral relations and negligible (if any) trust in the current Georgian political regime. Add to that the well-established factor that Donald Trump considers Eastern Europe primarily a European responsibility. Hence, Europe has to be

convinced to repair relations with Georgia in parallel with similar American wishes. Therefore, the Georgian Dream ruling elite cannot seriously hope to reset relations with the US without fundamentally U-turning their domestic and foreign policy, even if that U-turn is practically feasible.

Georgians have a saying: “You better bruise your head than bruise your good name.” Relations are built on trust, and it looks like trust in the current Georgian leadership is not only bruised but irreparably shattered.

Georgians have a saying: “You better bruise your head than bruise your good name.” Relations are built on trust, and it looks like trust in the current Georgian leadership is not only bruised but irreparably shattered. Under normal circumstances, speculations about the possible results of the American presidential elections would mean an active or passive phase for Georgia. Given today's realities, whoever leads the new US administration, Georgia's task is not to adjust to active or passive phases but to fix and avert the negative. That can happen not with a change in the US administration or geopolitics but only with a change in Georgia's political leadership ■

When Blame Means Confession: Unrevealing Tactics of Russian Influence in French Elections

“**O**ur task is to support these politicians and their parties in the West in every possible way, helping them *apertum* and *secretum* to achieve good election results,” [wrote](#) Dmitry Medvedev, former President of Russia and now Deputy Head of the country’s National Security Council, in a lengthy message posted on Telegram on 3 February 2024. Specifically, Medvedev called for support for Western “anti-system parties, both right and left,” which would be more “decent” and “reasonable” than European governments that “want the death of their homelands.” A quaint Russian proverb says, “What comes out of a drunk man’s mouth is what the sober man has in his mind.” This rant by the former Russian President illustrates this popular wisdom well.

In this context, in France, it is hard not to think of the Rassemblement National (RN) and La France Insoumise (LFI), two parties set at the extremes

of the political spectrum, one on the right and the other on the left. Together, these forces have garnered significant votes, fluctuating between 30 and 40% at each election for the past decade. While there is still much to distinguish these two political parties, and while a political alliance or any kind of coalition seems impossible between them, they do meet the Russian criteria of parties that “stand up today against all the vices of liberal globalism” and whose coming to power in Moscow’s eyes “could radically improve the political landscape of the West.”

A destabilized and weak West could be even more profitable to Russia than a strong, albeit authoritarian one.

The fact that the far left and the far right cannot join forces to form a government is firmly anchored in French political culture. For the time being, this



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The illustration is inspired by French artist Minch's cartoon, 1934.

saves democracy and causes the Kremlin's disappointment, but Moscow benefits in other ways: the rise of the extremes is a self-perpetuating phenomenon, the political debate becomes radicalized, polarization increases, and moderate and classical political forces are either overwhelmed or forced to follow the extremes in radicalization which, in retrospect, leads to further polarization and ultimately to instability and chaos. A destabilized and weak West could be even more profitable to Russia than a strong, albeit authoritarian one. Destabilization not only weakens the Kremlin's potential geopolitical rivals but also discredits the democratic form of government, a constant internal threat to Putin's regime.

Why is France important?

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union aimed to divide the Western enemy. There was division within the Western camp, firstly between the

shores of the Atlantic Ocean, then within Europe itself between different states, and finally within individual countries between various social groups. With the emancipation of Eastern European countries from the Communist yoke and their accession to NATO and the EU, the goal of pitting Central and Eastern Europeans against Western Europeans was added.

In Western Europe, France has always been an essential country in terms of Soviet and later Russian strategy. A former empire, a former world power relegated to the ranks of the middle power but retaining its nostalgia and ambition for greatness virtually intact, could be an interesting partner for Moscow if taken intelligently. The key to dialogue could be Paris's age-old rivalry with the Anglo-Saxons, now dominant in the Western world. De Gaulle's policy of national independence, a certain flirtation with the non-aligned movement, and a critical and wary attitude towards the po-

litical and cultural hegemony of the United States were all branches to which Moscow could cling.

The supposedly Russophile attitude of France's cultural elites and intellectuals, yesterday of the left and today of the right, who admired Russian culture with its ballets and operas and its classical literature, could also appeal to the public. De Gaulle, Giscard, Mitterrand, Chirac, Sarkozy, and Macron, each in his own way, had a specific vision of France in the world and an ambition to play in the big league and stand up, if need be, to the biggest player among all, Washington.

France is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a very select club of nuclear powers, and one of only two European countries, along with the United Kingdom, with an army capable of projecting itself beyond its borders. Even though France's economy is smaller than Germany's, it has always tried to play a more significant political role than the latter in the post-World War II period. Having France on its side or, better still, under its influence would mean a severe setback for the West and a victory for Moscow, capable of leading to other victories through the domino effect.

The existence of relatively strong anti-system parties and a sharply divided political class gave Moscow the impression of a situation that could be more easily exploited to its advantage.

The French political system has always been highly polarized, and anti-system parties have always enjoyed the support of a significant proportion of the electorate. In the post-war decades, this role was fulfilled by the French Communist Party, peaking at 30-35% in each election, without ever being able to take power at the national level. With the decline and virtual disappearance of the Communist Party, it was the far right of the Front National,

later the Rassemblement National, that absorbed opponents of the system as well as a constellation of small far-left parties, eventually reunited in Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Insoumise. The existence of relatively strong anti-system parties and a sharply divided political class gave Moscow the impression of a situation that could be more easily exploited to its advantage.

Emmanuel Macron: the Enemy Who Tried to Be the Friend

In the 2017 elections, among the four leading contenders, Emmanuel Macron appeared to be the least pro-Russian of all. In addition to Marine Le Pen, the only presidential candidate Putin met personally in March 2017, and the leftist Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Sarkozy's Prime Minister, François Fillon, the center-right candidate, was also adopting quite a clear pro-Kremlin posture as he was referring to Putin as "my friend Vladimir." Later, Fillon went under investigation by the special Foreign Interference Commission of the French Parliament after becoming a member of the board of directors of two Russian petroleum companies.

So naturally, Russia tried to sink candidate Macron with its usual interference and dissemination of false information. Operation "Macron Leaks" was triggered on 5 May 2017 at 7:59 pm, one minute before the start of the electoral propaganda-free period. The objective was to spread false information about candidate Macron, who could not deny the accusations because of the restrictions on electoral campaigns imposed by the law.

Despite this attempt, Macron won the elections and remained a fair player as he attempted to restore relations with Moscow. For several years, Macron thought he could find a way out of the impasse in relations with Russia by favoring direct dialogue with Putin. He even harshly criticized diplomats who warned him about the Russian President's manipulations, [calling](#) them "deep

state” and obstructers of the President’s policy of détente with Russia.

France goes further than its German ally in asserting the necessity of Ukrainian victory and now considers that there are no red lines in military support for Kyiv, not even in sending Western troops on the ground.

After several unsuccessful attempts by Macron to establish an entente with Moscow, things changed. The French President still believed for several months after the invasion of Ukraine, if not in friendship, at least in the possibility of stopping the war, as he was the only Western leader to call Putin almost every other day. Finally, during his summer visit to Ukraine (June 2022), the rupture became total, and Macron mourned the loss of his Russian policy. His Bratislava [speech](#) at Globsec 2023 is considered a turning point. Macron’s second term in office no longer has the Gaullo-Mitterrandian accents, and Paris now appears as Ukraine’s most fervent supporter. France goes further than its German ally in asserting the necessity of Ukrainian victory and now considers that there are no red lines in military support for Kyiv, not even in sending Western troops on the ground.

Kremlin’s Objectives in the French Parliamentary Elections

On 12 March 2024, the French National Assembly voted in favor of the Ukraine Aid Strategy, which, in addition to military aid, includes support for the country’s accession to the EU. With 372 votes in favor and 99 against, the favorable vote went beyond the parties supporting the President. In addition to the presidential majority, the Socialist Party, the Greens, and the vast majority of the Republican Party (center-right) approved the text, while the RN largely abstained and the LFI [voted](#)

against it. This vote thus set the course for the Kremlin’s actions on the French political scene.

The dissolution of the Assembly by the President on the evening of 9 June and the calling of early elections just three weeks after the dissolution might have led one to believe that Russian interference would be less forceful. However, the Kremlin’s disinformation agents have quickly adapted, stepping up their efforts to influence our public debate. A research study conducted by Florent Lefebvre, who analyzed data from Visibrain, a social network monitoring platform, revealed an army of 8,000 fake X communities accounts created mainly between 9 and 13 June, which supported the RN and spammed the Nouveau Front Populaire (the coalition of the left parties) and Macron’s Renaissance/Ensemble X communities with content [hostile](#) to the government. On 30 June, the Swedish media outlet SVT Nyheter identified 108 pro-Kremlin disinformation articles spread by 1,000 bots from the time of the dissolution. These articles mentioned Emmanuel Macron (63 times), Marine Le Pen, and Jordan Bardella (62 times). Macron was portrayed negatively, while Le Pen and Bardella were [not](#).

Several reports have documented the influence of the Kremlin’s digital disinformation networks since 9 June. The Doppelgänger network promoted pro-Russian political positions on a [dozen fake news sites](#) and sites impersonating authentic French media whose articles were promoted by Facebook ads and widely relayed by bots.

The CopyCop network, which uses generative AI, has created two new websites [plagiarizing](#) and using the content of French media and two in-authentic websites publishing false content and deep-fakes. On 26 June, this network distributed a disinformation article linking to a clone of the Ensemble coalition website, which featured the false information item that President Macron had promised to pay a EUR 100 bonus to citizens who

would give their voting proxies to supporters of the presidential party.

Social networks were also [invaded](#) by the false advertisement announcements of the French army calling for youngsters to join the military operation of the French Armed Forces in Ukraine.

Gaza War: a Boon for Moscow

To influence elections effectively, it is first necessary to impose the framework within which voters will reason when casting their ballots. Winning an election always takes place on a terrain that is favorable to you. Thus, election campaigns are the first and foremost battles over the media's agenda to shape voters' preoccupations: the economy, jobs, global warming, immigration, external or internal security, etc.

To influence elections effectively, it is first necessary to impose the framework within which voters will reason when casting their ballots.

To provide the best framework for extremist parties, one needs to exacerbate society's internal divisions, emphasizing problems of identity, culture, and race, and insist on the looming demographic changes that are supposed to be at the root of this all. The conflict in Gaza and the internal tensions within French society on this subject offered Moscow a godsend.

France is home to Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish communities. On top of this, the French left and far left have a long tradition of support for Palestine and the Palestinians in the face of Israeli occupation, while the far right and part of the classical right are characterized by mistrust, if not outright hostility, to the development of Islam in the country.

An in-depth study by the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), a public organization overseeing state-sponsored scientific research, [analyzed](#) millions of X accounts and the content of their Tweets and revealed that users with links to Russia were behind the worsening of the dissemination of the most violent images of civilian deaths in Gaza, accompanied by anti-Semitic messages and violent attacks against the government's double standards: support for Ukraine and conscious blindness on Gaza.

These digital storms combined with specific active physical measures, such as the appearance of graffiti in the streets of Paris in the form of the Star of David, just like bloody hand stains on the Holocaust memorial, are proven to have [links](#) with Russia. The [CNRS study](#) also demonstrated that even the concept of Islamo-leftism, an alliance between the left and Islam, something ubiquitous and very controversial in the French public debate, was in reality promoted by an employee of the troll factory based in Novosibirsk, Russia. This concept, which was very fashionable among the right, was even adopted by the Minister of Higher Education, undoubtedly without any idea of its origin. The most insidious, long-term, low-intensity interference is the most effective.

Could the RN and the LFI's Criticism of Russia be Trusted?

During the European and Parliamentary election campaigns, Marine Le Pen's party put a lot of effort into shedding the image of a pro-Moscow party. Jordan Bardella, the party's new rising star, made relatively decent statements on the war in Ukraine, strongly condemning Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity and its right to defend itself, including by sending in French weapons. The main criticism of Macron's policy in this area concerned the possibility of sending French troops to the region and

delivering Kyiv weapons capable of striking Russian territory. “I will not let Russian imperialism absorb an allied state like Ukraine,” Bardella said in a televised debate, [pledging](#) both “support for Ukraine and avoiding an escalation with Russia in the interest of France and the French people.”

Bardella's statements are in line with the official position of the RN since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Marine Le Pen, still the president of the party and its true leader, was forced to admit shortly after the invasion that it was “an aggression” and support Ukraine's territorial integrity.

The French media were quick to point out with amusement that during the 2022 presidential election campaign, the RN had to destroy millions of election leaflets showing Marine Le Pen shaking hands with Vladimir Putin. Two years later, during the early parliamentary elections, Ms. Le Pen continued to distance herself from Russia.

Nonetheless, electoral concerns likely dictated this distancing. In 2022, by not supporting the Russian invasion, the RN was able to keep its voters and even increase its number, while another populist far-right party, Eric Zemmour's *La Reconquête*, sought to justify Putin's war in Ukraine by blaming the West, saw its scores halved before and after the invasion. Aware of the danger, Le Pen's team contented themselves with a brief and swift condemnation of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, preached the virtues of negotiations, and went to great lengths to focus the campaign on the themes of French purchasing power and rising insecurity and criminality in French cities and their suburbs.

Two years on, the same trend persists, but we have reason to believe that it remains rather superficial and that the RN has not fundamentally changed by concealing its pro-Kremlin ties and sympathies.

For a start, the party's criticism of Russia remains milder than that expressed by the mainstream parties. Bardella's condemnations of the invasion were immediately followed by his own statements on the necessity of not putting French troops on Ukrainian soil and his opposition to the delivery of missiles capable of reaching Russian territory. Yet France is already delivering SCALP missiles, with a range of almost 300 km, and French military personnel, instructors, and some intelligence officers are already present in Ukraine. This would be a significant change in policy if the RN came to power.

Later, just a few days after the French parliamentary elections in which the French far-right party, despite its historic first-round score (33.2%), won only a quarter of the seats in the National Assembly and found it had no chance of governing, the party's leadership announced its alliance in the European Parliament with Victor Orbán's *Fidesz* whose geopolitical alignment with Moscow [remains](#) solid and unchanged. This announcement also came immediately after the return of the Hungarian Prime Minister from his trip to Moscow, a visit severely criticized by European politicians.

Moreover, despite the RN's pledges not to be on Moscow's payroll, it continues to back this party in France. In a [message](#) on the social network X, the Russian Foreign Ministry lent its support to the RN with a smiling photo of Ms. Le Pen and the following text: “The French people are looking for a sovereign foreign policy that serves their national interests and a break with the diktat of Washington and Brussels.” This tweet published by the Russian MFA only a few days before the decisive vote embarrassed the RN's leadership; some even considered it a sort of Kremlin “kiss of death.”

Unlike the RN, the LFI did not nominate its only MP who visited Russia-occupied Crimea. Neither

did it have financial and business interests in Russia. The LFI's pro-Russian bias, however, has deep ideological roots. It is the heir to the traditions of the French radical left for whom the cornerstone of foreign policy is anti-Americanism. Unlike right-wing anti-Americanism, based on the glorification of national sovereignty, left-wing anti-Americanism is internationalist, Third Worldist, and anti-capitalist. It denounces American imperialism and views the entire spectrum of international politics through this analytical prism.

Although today's Russia is in no way socialist or progressive, particularly in view of its oligarchs' crony capitalism, the ultra-conservative official ideology with its Orthodox overtones, and the treatment reserved for minorities, the LFI and especially its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon remain Moscow admirers. A visceral hatred of the United States and its policies and basic contempt for liberal democracy are the main explanations for this admiration.

Mélenchon never utters the word "America" or the "United States of America," which he stubbornly continues to call "North America." As a consequence, the LFI supports Maduro's regime in Venezuela and Castro's Cuba (at least on paper, their regimes remain socialist), finds extenuating circumstances for Bashar El Assad, and often shies away from criticizing Iranian regime.

The LFI, like the RN, after years of complacency towards Putin's Russia, including when the regime was murdering and poisoning its opponents, annexing Crimea, and waging a proxy war in the Donbas, finally condemned the invasion of Ukraine, but only by paying lip service. Despite calling Putin a "dangerous leader," Mélenchon continued in 2024 to declare that Putin acted "according to what he thought was useful for his country, just as we act according to what we think is useful for our countries," a surprising analogy

to say the least. Although not as loud as before, the LFI still considers that Westerners are at least partly responsible for the war in Ukraine through their neglect of "Russia's geopolitical interests" and the waves of NATO enlargement.

Today, the LFI claims to be the party of peace and negotiations and that France "must take the lead in the peace camp" and "dare to create peace." Mélenchon's "pacifist" position would be tantamount to de facto doing Putin's bidding and accepting a ceasefire while 20% of Ukraine's territory remains occupied. Emmanuel Macron recently described the LFI's attitude as [follows](#): "Those who place limits on our commitment to support Ukraine in defending itself against Russian aggression are not choosing peace but defeat."

In March 2024, Jean-Luc Mélenchon [declared](#): "We are in no condition to confront Russia... no one can defeat a country that spans seven time zones and that has already defeated both Napoleon and Hitler." With such a stance on the Russian regime, the LFI would be a case of useful idiots par excellence to use Leninist terminology. Moscow is not seriously considering the LFI governing France. Still, they are certainly of interest as an anti-system party that could play an essential role in the rise of political polarization and, in turn, strengthen the far right and its arguments.

The dynamics of Russian influence in French politics highlight the strategic use of support for extreme political parties to further Moscow's geopolitical aims.

In conclusion, the dynamics of Russian influence in French politics highlight the strategic use of support for extreme political parties to further Moscow's geopolitical aims. To some extent, this shows the limits of Russian influence. If 20 years

ago Putin's friends were Schröder, Chirac, and Berlusconi, the mainstream global world leaders, now Moscow has to seek the support of radicals. These are clearly not the first-choice allies, and even these radical parties quite often shy away from showing their alignment with the Kremlin.

By promoting and manipulating both far-left and far-right factions, Russia seeks to destabilize and weaken Western democracies.

By promoting and manipulating both far-left and far-right factions, Russia seeks to destabilize and weaken Western democracies. Despite recent efforts by parties like the Rassemblement National (RN) to distance themselves from overt pro-Russian positions, the underlying sympathies and historical ties suggest a superficial shift motivated by electoral considerations rather than a

genuine change in stance. Similarly, La France Insoumise (LFI) maintains a critical stance toward Western policies, indirectly aligning with Moscow's objectives through their anti-American and anti-NATO rhetoric.

The Kremlin's tactics capitalize on France's deeply polarized political landscape, leveraging the presence of anti-system solid parties to fuel division and radicalization. This strategy, rooted in a historical context of Soviet attempts to divide the West, remains relevant as Russia aims to discredit democratic governance and strengthen its influence in Europe. Ultimately, while the current political culture in France prevents an alliance between far-left and far-right forces, the rise and sustained presence of these extremes serve Moscow's broader goal of destabilizing Western unity and governance ■

Georgia's Anti-Western Drift, Anaklia Port, and Lessons for the West

Georgia's shift from the West to the Russian axis is clearly visible in the Georgian Dream's anti-democratic steps, the adoption of Russian-inspired legislation, anti-Western rhetoric, disregard for NATO, severing of relations with the EU, frequent anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, blaming the West for wanting to drag Georgia into the war with Russia, constant reference to a mythical "[global war party](#)" and recent high-level visits to Iran.

However, the most notable illustration of the anti-Western drift is in the unfolding story of the Anaklia deep-sea port, which, eight years ago, was poised as the single most significant infrastructure project with Western participation. Today, however, the development of the Anaklia port is in the [hands](#) of the Chinese state-owned company - China Communication Construction Company Limited (CCCC), symbolically marking the substitution of Western presence with Chinese.

Strategically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia has long been attempting to leverage its geographic position by developing a deep-sea port in Anaklia. This project envisioned transforming Georgia into a major transport hub bypassing Russia and was considered a cornerstone for the country's economic development and security. Thus, the idea of the port was not only about economic growth, exploring transit potential, and creating new jobs but also a geopolitical choice – a significant port backed by Western financial institutions and economic actors on the Black Sea would have created a substantial point of political interest for the US and the EU.

Anaklia stands out among all possible port locations in Georgia because it is the only site suitable for a deep-water port. It can accommodate 10,000 TEU container ships with 16-meter depths, facilitating efficient cargo transit through the region. Additionally, Anaklia is the only location in Georgia



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that can support a large Special Economic Zone, boosting the port's value by enabling manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, and other activities, thereby addressing the country's balance of payments and unemployment issues. This makes the port extremely important not only for Georgia's national interests but also for the collective West.

Anaklia is the only location in Georgia that can support a large Special Economic Zone, boosting the port's value by enabling manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, and other activities, thereby addressing the country's balance of payments and unemployment issues.

In this context, the Anaklia deep-sea port project could be compared to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Both illustrate the alignment

of Georgian and Western interests in enhancing regional connectivity and economic independence from Russia. The BTC pipeline, completed in 2006 with solid Western support, successfully bypassed Russian-controlled routes, demonstrating a strategic commitment to diversifying energy supplies and strengthening the South Caucasus' geopolitical importance. However, unlike Shevardnadze, who put all his geopolitical weight behind the BTC pipeline, Ivanishvili chose to accommodate Russia's interests.

The idea of building a port in Anaklia has existed since the late 1960s. The first attempt saw the construction of a pier, but it did not progress further. In the last two decades of the Soviet Union, scientific argumentation was developed, and the first ideas for the project were drafted. In the 1990s, the Georgian government attempted to build an oil terminal. In the early 2000s, another project was designed, but the government never had the audacity, finances, or the capacity to implement

the idea. Finally, in 2010, Mikheil Saakashvili [declared](#) that he planned to build the Lazika port and a free city in the place of Anaklia. Lazika became a central talking point before the 2012 elections, exemplifying Saakashvili's grand vision for Georgia's economic potential. Lazika was even [mentioned](#) in the changed Constitution of Georgia.

After the Georgian Dream came to power in 2012, the idea of Lazika was [demonized](#) as absurd, exemplifying Saakashvili's loony ideas. But after the electoral debris settled, during Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili's tenure, the shelved idea was dusted off. In 2013-2014, the Georgian Dream conducted a [feasibility study](#) of the project and decided to call for a tender to construct the port. Moreover, Anaklia once again became a major pre-election talking point, this time for the Georgian Dream before the 2016 Parliamentary elections.

First Attempt: Western Engagement and the ADC

In 2016, the Anaklia Development Consortium (ADC), led by Mamuka Khazaradze, founder of TBC Bank in collaboration with the American Conti Group, [was awarded](#) the project. The consortium managed to mobilize USD 620 million for the first phase of construction, with substantial financing commitments from international financial institutions, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The project, estimated to cost around USD 2.5 billion, was expected to bolster Georgia's role in the alternative transit route known as the "middle corridor," which would facilitate trade between Asia and Europe while bypassing Russian and Iranian territories.

After being awarded the project in 2016, the Anaklia Development Consortium (ADC) forged strate-

gic partnerships with key ports along the Middle Corridor, integrated into the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, and secured commitments for new bulk cargo from Central Asia. The ADC [established](#) links with the port of Constantza in Romania to enhance connectivity with the European Union and signed mandate letters with four international financial institutions for a USD 400 million debt funding.

The ADC [selected](#) Eiffage, a major European construction company, as the general contractor for the first construction phase, alongside partners Dutch ABB and Georgian CRP. SSA Marine, a leading US-based port operator, was appointed as the terminal operator. The project also [involved](#) equipment suppliers ZPMC of China and Hyundai Samho Heavy Industries of South Korea. Additionally, the ADC engaged in extensive cooperation with the Japanese government and business sector, focusing on developing the Anaklia Special Enterprise Zone.

Site development at Anaklia included dredging 5 million cubic meters of sand, constructing drainage systems, a 2.5 km irrigation channel, inner roads, transferring communication lines, geodetic surveying, and waste removal. Van Oord Dredging and Marine Contractors BV of The Netherlands carried out these efforts.

From 2016 to 2019, the ADC actively sought additional Western investors who showed considerable interest. However, most investors were looking for guarantees from the Georgian state, which the Georgian Dream government [did not provide](#). Because of the high-risk investment, major Western companies, which primarily think in terms of material gain rather than geopolitics, did not risk investing without proper insurance.

By 2018, however, the Georgian Dream government, which was no longer led by Kvirikashvili, who had fallen out of Ivanishvili's favor, made it

clear that it would not insure the commercial risks associated with cargo turnover, a common practice in strategic infrastructure projects. In January 2020, the Georgian government [terminated](#) its investment agreement with the ADC, citing the consortium's failure to meet financial obligations. This decision effectively halted the Anaklia port project. The consortium, which had already invested USD 75 million in preparatory work, filed for international arbitration, seeking that the government reimburse the damages. However, in July 2024, international arbitration [ruled](#) that the government's severing the contract with the ADC happened legally and not in breach of its legal obligations.

As predicted, the Georgian Dream leaders [jubilated](#) over the international arbitration's decision. However, the court's finding that the termination of the contract was legal does not contradict the fact that the Georgian government did not proactively seek the continuation of the Western-backed Anaklia port and did everything to hamper new investors' interests.

The success of any large-scale infrastructure project hinges on the active support of the host government, a principle especially true for port projects. In Georgia, harbors are constitutionally state-owned, and the necessary land and infrastructure connections, such as roads and railroads, are also under state jurisdiction. Thus, the government's backing was crucial for securing additional investors, financing, and project permitting. The mere perception of government opposition can be enough to derail such endeavors. This is precisely what the Georgian Dream government did, even if its actions were not illegal per se.

Shift to China

With the termination of the ADC's contract, Georgia turned towards China to revive the Anaklia port project. But this turn happened against the

background of geopolitical shifts. In 2022, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development announced a new international tender to find a private partner, with the state [retaining](#) a 51% controlling stake. This move was justified as a measure to protect Georgia's interests and prevent any single state from dominating the project.

In 2023, China Communication Construction Company Limited (CCCC), a state-owned conglomerate, [emerged](#) as the frontrunner in this new phase. The CCCC, through its subsidiary China Harbor Investment Ltd., was the only company to submit a viable proposal, effectively making it the winner by default, even though another company was also shortlisted. Despite concerns over the CCCC's involvement in corruption and environmental violations globally, as highlighted by the US Department of State and the World Bank, Georgia proceeded with the partnership.

Since June 2021, China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC) has been under US [restrictions](#) due to its inclusion in the Chinese military-industrial complex. Although not wholly barred from financial transactions, the CCCC is subject to specific limitations. American companies must obtain government permission for certain exports and technology transfers involving the CCCC. This means Georgia does not violate US sanctions by working with the CCCC, but the Chinese company cannot purchase US components without permission.

The CCCC, one of China's largest state-owned companies, focuses on large infrastructure projects like ports and airports. It has [faced](#) multiple corruption allegations. In 2009, the World Bank [banned](#) the CCCC from projects for eight years due to corruption in a Philippines tender. The company also [faced](#) accusations of bribery in Equatorial Guinea and structural failures in an Ecuador project. In 2018, the CCCC's subsidiaries were banned

or suspended in Bangladesh and Malaysia for corruption. The CCCC has been active in Georgia since 2018 and is involved in major construction projects funded by international banks.

The US Embassy in Georgia and the US Department of State have [criticized](#) the CCCC for sub-standard construction, labor abuses, environmental harm, and unsustainable debt in developing countries. They emphasized the importance of ensuring Georgia's security and sovereignty are not compromised. Bringing a US-sanctioned Chinese company into the Anaklia port project aligns with Georgia's shift in external orientation and raises corruption risks. This is especially concerning given the Georgian government's repressive actions against NGOs, which are crucial in preventing corruption.

The Anaklia port project, initially seen as a means to strengthen ties with the West and reduce dependency on Russia, now potentially serves to increase Chinese and, effectively, Russian influence in the region.

Georgia's pivot towards China significantly departed from its previously Western-aligned geopolitical stance. The Anaklia port project, initially seen as a means to strengthen ties with the West and reduce dependency on Russia, now potentially serves to increase Chinese and, effectively, Russian influence in the region.

By partnering with China, Georgia risks increasing its dependency on a major global power known for leveraging infrastructure projects to extend its geopolitical influence. The Anaklia port, part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), could become a strategic asset for Beijing, potentially aligning Georgia more closely with Chinese economic and political interests. The involvement of a Chinese state-owned company in such a significant proj-

ect will also inevitably deter Western investors and financial institutions, which are wary of the risks associated with Chinese state influence and potential corruption. Moreover, US sanctions over the CCCC will also serve as a chilling factor for possible Western engagement.

What Business Do Americans Have in the Black Sea?

This is not a rhetorical question. [According to](#) Mamuka Khazaradze, this is exactly what Bidzina Ivanishvili, an oligarch who informally runs the ruling party and, hence, the country, asked him in a private meeting in 2017. During that encounter, Ivanishvili, as Khazaradze claims, stated that geopolitics was important and that instead of the Anaklia port, Georgia should have focused on a Poti port. The problem was, however, that the tender had already been won, and the work had started. And Ivanishvili, at that time, held no official position to make decisions on such issues. In January 2020, Roman Kakulia, then Chair of the Economic Committee of Parliament and a Georgian Dream Party MP, [confirmed](#) that Ivanishvili indeed saw the project as threatening relations with Russia.

Russia opposed Georgia's Anaklia deep-sea port project because of economic and strategic considerations. The proposal threatened to become a significant competitor to Russia's Novorossiysk port on the Black Sea.

It is unsurprising that Russia opposed Georgia's Anaklia deep-sea port project because of economic and strategic considerations. The proposal threatened to become a significant competitor to Russia's Novorossiysk port on the Black Sea. Novorossiysk has long been a vital maritime hub for Russia, facilitating substantial cargo traffic between Asia and Europe. The development of Anak-

lia would have provided an alternative route for this traffic, potentially diverting trade away from Russian ports and thereby diminishing their economic importance and revenue.

Strategically, the Anaklia port, backed by Western interests, would have represented a further alignment of Georgia with NATO and the European Union.

Strategically, the Anaklia port, backed by Western interests, would have represented a further alignment of Georgia with NATO and the European Union. This was particularly concerning for Russia, which has viewed the expansion of Western influence in the region as a direct threat to its own geopolitical interests. The potential for the Anaklia port to host NATO exercises and Western warships would have curbed Russia's dominance in the Black Sea.

However, the geopolitical landscape changed dramatically after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Western sanctions severely restricted Russia's ability to utilize its ports for international trade, particularly those routes that depended on European markets. Novorossiysk, a key port for Russian exports, became less viable under the pressure of these sanctions. This shift seemed to have forced Russia to reassess its strategy regarding the Black Sea's maritime logistics.

As Western sanctions isolated Russia, China emerged as a crucial economic partner willing to bypass these restrictions. Georgia's renewed interest in developing the Anaklia port, this time with Chinese involvement, aligned well with Russia's strategic interests under the new geopolitical reality. Thus, the Georgian government seems to have received Moscow's green light for building the deep sea port after the Russian invasion of Ukraine but without significant Western involvement.

Strategic Lesson for the West

The geopolitical maneuvering surrounding the Anaklia deep-sea port project serves as a stark illustration of the contrasting approaches between Western powers and Eastern giants, specifically Russia and China. Moscow and Beijing's strategic imperatives often override financial calculations and rational planning, whereas Washington and its Western allies tend to prioritize economic viability over geopolitical gains.

Moscow and Beijing's strategic imperatives often override financial calculations and rational planning, whereas Washington and its Western allies tend to prioritize economic viability over geopolitical gains.

For Russia and China, the pursuit of geopolitical influence frequently supersedes financial prudence. These nations are willing to absorb significant economic costs if the strategic benefits justify such investments. The Anaklia port project exemplifies this approach. Initially, Russia staunchly opposed the project, viewing it as a potential threat to its own Novorossiysk port and as a gateway for NATO presence in the Black Sea region. The strategic location of Anaklia, close to the Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia, added to Moscow's concerns about Western military and economic encroachment.

However, following the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Moscow's stance evolved. The sanctions severely hampered Russia's ability to utilize Novorossiysk for international trade, forcing a strategic pivot. Supporting a Chinese-led development of the Anaklia port became a pragmatic choice. This alignment with China ensures that the port remains outside direct Western influence while bol-

stering an ally's strategic infrastructure under the BRI. For Russia, the partnership with China mitigates some of the economic losses incurred due to sanctions and maintains a semblance of influence in the region.

China's approach to Anaklia reflects its broader BRI strategy, where geopolitical gains often justify substantial investments and financial risks. Beijing's interest in Anaklia lies in its potential to enhance connectivity between Asia and Europe, bypassing Russia and Iran. The port fits into China's larger ambition of securing trade routes and extending its influence across Eurasia, often referred to as "debt trap diplomacy," where infrastructure investments are leveraged to gain strategic footholds.

In contrast, the Western approach, particularly that of the United States, places significant weight on financial viability and risk management. While strategic interests are acknowledged, they are frequently secondary to economic considerations. This pragmatism can undermine long-term strategic objectives, as demonstrated by the Anaklia port project.

Despite recognizing the strategic importance of Anaklia, Western financial institutions and companies were hesitant to fully commit without robust guarantees from the Georgian government. The US did advocate for the port's construction with then-Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, [emphasizing](#) its significance in June 2019. Pompeo's support came too late as the Georgian government had already decided to halt the project by then. The lack

of early and decisive financial backing from Western entities allowed room for Moscow and Beijing to maneuver and fill the void.

The Anaklia port project offers a crucial lesson for Western powers: strategic interests should not be overshadowed by financial pragmatism. To effectively counterbalance Russia and China's geopolitical maneuvers, the West must be willing to embrace higher risks and make long-term investments in strategically significant projects.

The Anaklia port project offers a crucial lesson for Western powers: strategic interests should not be overshadowed by financial pragmatism. To effectively counterbalance Russia and China's geopolitical maneuvers, the West must be willing to embrace higher risks and make long-term investments in strategically significant projects. This entails not only providing rhetorical support but also ensuring substantial financial backing and guarantees to secure such ventures.

There is also a particular lesson for the West regarding Georgia. Currently, the US and the EU tandem face a Russia and China tandem, not only in Georgia but also in the wider Black Sea region. If the West does not take a strategic approach to this region and does not counter the increasing engagement of its rivals, its power of attraction, projection of interests, and role in the Black Sea region will inevitably be challenged to a greater extent, no matter how and when the war in Ukraine ends ■

To Punish or Not: The EU's Dilemma in Responding to Georgia's Democratic Backsliding

Adopting the “Transparency of Foreign Influence” law by the ruling Georgian Dream party has significantly strained Georgia-EU relations. This action crossed critical red lines, causing bilateral ties to reach a low point. This shift is evident in EU policy making, with numerous warnings and statements leading to discussions in the EU Foreign Affairs Council and later in the European Council regarding the EU's response to Georgia's democratic backsliding. According to the European Council's [conclusions](#) on 27 June 2024, Georgian authorities are urged to “clarify their intentions by reversing the current course of action which jeopardizes Georgia's EU path,” de facto leading to a halt of the accession process. Despite opposition from Hungary, this stern statement was included in the final text. This development is particularly concerning ahead of the October 2024 parliamentary elections. Additionally, the European Union

has prepared an options paper for Georgia, outlining short, medium, and long-term remedies in the event of further deterioration and democratic backsliding. Given that the EU requires unanimity on some topics, some of the proposed actions are designed to require the consent of only some member states.

The European Union seems to be prepared to initially implement short-term measures that do not require unanimity. These measures include (1) scaling down engagement with the Georgian authorities, (2) halting the disbursement of EU funds to Georgia, and (3) suspending funding for the European Peace Facility (EPF), which provides non-lethal aid to the country. Since 2021, Georgia has benefited from the EPF, receiving over EUR 62 million to strengthen its defense forces through medical equipment, engineering equipment, logistics support, and cyber defense enhancements.



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The EU has already decided to [freeze](#) EUR 30 million in assistance to the Georgian army this year, with further measures under consideration if the situation in the country continues to deteriorate.

The EU also envisages mid-term measures that might be triggered in the case of violence and intimidation during the election process. These measures include (1) introducing temporary Schengen zone visa requirements for holders of Georgian diplomatic passports and (2) imposing visa bans and asset freezes under the EU's [Global Human Rights Regime](#). These sanctions would likely target low or mid-level representatives of Georgia's law enforcement or judiciary structures.

The most severe yet less likely option is for the EU to introduce visa requirements for Georgian citizens who have enjoyed visa-free travel to the EU and Schengen zone countries since 2017.

The most severe yet less likely option is for the EU to introduce visa requirements for Georgian citizens who have enjoyed visa-free travel to the EU and Schengen zone countries since 2017. If this clause is triggered, its repercussions will bear not only heavy political costs to the government but also to the citizens of Georgia.

Despite being discussed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council, none of these measures has been triggered yet, except for freezing EUR 30 million and effectively halting the accession process. As the outgoing High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, [stated](#), all of these measures “can be implemented immediately, but the EU will continue monitoring the situation and take more measures if further deterioration occurs.” This stance is also reflected in the Council [conclusions](#): “The Council discussed possible courses of action in the case of a deterioration of the situation and will continue monitoring the situation

and adapting EU measures as necessary.”

All Eyes on the Elections

The European Union outlines the framework for understanding sanctions in three key documents: (1) [Guidelines](#) on Implementation and Evaluation of Restrictive Measures (Sanctions) in the Framework of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, (2) [Basic Principles](#) on the Use of Restrictive Measures (Sanctions), and (3) Best Practices for the Effective Implementation of [Restrictive Measures](#).

Additionally, the Council [Regulation \(EU\) 2020/1998](#) of 7 December 2020 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses should be consulted in order to find the list of individuals and entities sanctioned by the EU under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, also known as the Magnitsky sanctions. As of July 2024, 105 natural persons and 23 legal entities are on the sanctions list. None of these sanctioned entities comes from EU candidate countries. However, in April 2023, at the request of Moldova, a [framework](#) for targeted restrictive measures was established against persons responsible for actions that undermine or threaten the sovereignty, independence, democracy, rule of law, stability, or security of the Republic of Moldova.

As defined by the guidelines on implementing and evaluating restrictive measures (sanctions) within the framework of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, the objective of sanctions is to impose restrictive measures as incentives to encourage the required change in policy or activity. The European Union also emphasizes the importance of effectively communicating this message. The guidelines state: “The EU and its Member States should actively and systematically communicate on EU sanctions, including with the targeted country and its population.”

The EU’s response to the actions of the Georgian authorities has hitherto been delayed and occasionally lacks proper calibration.

The EU’s response to the actions of the Georgian authorities has hitherto been delayed and occasionally lacks proper calibration. The EU is now awaiting the general elections scheduled for 26 October 2024 which have effectively become a referendum on Georgia’s democratic trajectory, EU path, and foreign policy alignment. The EU has called on the Georgian authorities to ensure that the autumn parliamentary elections are free and fair; otherwise, this could lead to a de jure halting of the accession process. However, this might be difficult to achieve because EU integration enjoys widespread public support in Georgia, and halting this process without proper communication and explanation could lead to disappointment on the part of society. De jure halting of the accession process requires unanimity, and Hungary is expected to oppose such a move staunchly.

The EU must recognize that halting the accession process would not punish the Georgian Dream party and its supporters. Instead, the Georgian Dream would likely welcome an end to the process and the accompanying commitments, and they would entirely blame this failure on the European Union.

Similarly, from a geopolitical perspective, the EU would find it challenging to de jure halt the accession process. The EU would need to repeat the approach taken with Türkiye in June 2018 when the Council [decided](#) that “Turkey has been moving further away from the European Union. Therefore, key accession negotiations have selectively reached a standstill, and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing.” The EU must recognize

that halting the accession process would not punish the Georgian Dream party and its supporters. Instead, the Georgian Dream would likely welcome an end to the process and the accompanying commitments, and they would entirely blame this failure on the European Union.

Saying this, there is a wait-and-see policy — on the one hand, from the EU's side and, on the other, from a large part of the Georgian population. The EU is waiting to see whether or not the ruling Georgian Dream party gets reelected on 26 October 2024 through free and fair elections for the fourth consecutive term despite derailing Georgia from the EU path. In this case, the EU will probably consider that the majority of the Georgians are okay with the fact that EU-Georgia relations are frozen and might not even think to apply harsh sets of sanctions to Georgian Dream representatives. Georgian society expects the EU to apply the sanction mechanism now since the ruling party has already stopped Georgia's EU accession process, and this is something for which it has to pay a price. With this move, the EU might be killing two birds with one stone — namely, making sure that the Georgian Dream pays the price for its wrongdoings as well as sending yet another clear signal to the pro-government electorate ahead of the general elections that having the Georgian Dream and its anti-European actions is not compatible with going down the EU path, and they will have to make a choice.

Calibration Matters

The Georgian Dream keeps the European Union in a reactive stance. The proposed options to respond to its moves undermining Georgia's democracy are either weak or unlikely to achieve the goal of changing its policy or activity. The Georgian Dream is indifferent to the declining engagement at the highest political level vis-à-vis the EU, and this is something it can tolerate. Experience shows that scaling down engagement with the Georgian

authorities might not push them to change their policies. For the Georgian Dream, this would not deter its efforts to distance itself from the EU. A recent example is Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. In response, the EU suspended high-level political and human rights dialogues with Moscow, but this did not stop Putin from launching a full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022.

The Georgian Dream also argues that the EU will not maintain coherence and persistence in its policies and principles, and the ruling party's leaders will still have opportunities to engage with EU member state leaders in various multilateral formats. Recent experiences suggest that this calculation might be accurate. Despite adopting a Russian-style law on foreign agents in May 2024 and beating and threatening peaceful demonstrators, opposition politicians, civil activists, and media representatives, as well as making harsh statements on Ukraine, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze was still invited to the Ukraine Recovery Conference held in Berlin on 11-12 June 2024. Additionally, Foreign Minister Darchiashvili attended the NATO Washington Summit on 9-11 July 2024, and PM Kobakhidze was present at the European Political Community meeting on 18 July 2024 and was invited to the opening of the Olympic Games in Paris 2024.

International partners explain these invitations as a demonstration of their readiness to engage with the Georgian Dream if it changes its stance and does not push it toward the Russian orbit. In contrast, the ruling party uses these forums for internal consumption, attempting to show its voters that its leadership is still accepted at international forums.

The proposed set of possible sanctions discussed by the EU Foreign Ministers has left a bitter taste and caused dissatisfaction among a significant part of civil society.

The proposed set of possible sanctions discussed by the EU Foreign Ministers has left a bitter taste and caused dissatisfaction among a significant part of civil society. Georgian authorities have experience dealing with suspended EU financial support. In 2021, the EU refused to provide a second tranche of micro-financial assistance of EUR 75 million to Georgia, which was [conditioned](#) on carrying out substantial reforms in the judiciary. However, the Georgian Dream's leadership managed to act preemptively and efficiently sell this move to the public as if the Georgian authorities refused the funds to reduce the foreign debt due to the country's high economic growth.

The Georgian Dream's authorities might apply the same approach now, given that, according to the official [data](#) of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the average real GDP growth for January-May 2024 equaled 9.3 percent. Additionally, the Georgian authorities expect Chinese investments, with a Chinese consortium expected to invest in the Anaklia Deep Seaport. Former Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili has also proposed building a new international [airport](#) in Tbilisi instead of a military base, which would ensure the hard security of the capital to the local Chinese business community.

When considering the possible introduction of temporary Schengen zone visa requirements for the holders of Georgian diplomatic passports, it is important to keep in mind that the diplomats also possess regular passports. Given that Georgian citizens can travel visa-free to EU and Schengen zone countries, diplomatic passport holders will not face any difficulties traveling. Therefore, introducing temporary Schengen zone visa requirements for Georgian diplomatic passport holders

will not have a significant impact, if any at all.

Coordination also Matters

While the EU remains hesitant to apply sanctions to Georgian Dream members who are derailing Georgia's European future and acting against the Georgian Constitution and the wishes of its people, the US State Department has already sanctioned dozens of Georgian individuals in its first tranche of sanctions. However, due to personal data protection, the names of those sanctioned remain private, undermining the punitive effect of such sanctions.

The European Union can enhance coordination on sanctions targeting the Georgian authorities with the USA and potentially with like-minded partners like Australia, Canada, and the UK. This coordinated effort would help ensure that, in the absence of a justice and accountability mechanism in Georgia, the sanctions are accurate and well-calibrated. It would also demonstrate the support of Georgia's friends toward the Georgian public's desire to pursue the EU path.

The EU only has a short period before the elections to walk the walk instead of talking the talk.

The EU only has a short period before the elections to walk the walk instead of talking the talk. Either it develops credible sanctions mechanisms towards the Georgian Dream before the elections and shows its consistency and force, or the currently proposed half-measures will only embolden the Georgian Dream and further derail Georgia's democratic trajectory ■

The EPC and the Future of the European Order

On 18 July 2024, the newly elected British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, hosted 46 European leaders at the majestic Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of Winston Churchill, for the fourth summit of the European Political Community (EPC). The European leaders' commitment to [stand](#) with Ukraine was at the heart of the gathering. As part of their continuing support for Kyiv, the Heads of State and Government discussed how to assist Ukraine in meeting its energy needs ahead of winter following Russia's brutal bombing campaign targeting energy infrastructure and the necessity to tighten the enforcement of the energy sanctions imposed on Russia. Prime Minister Starmer stressed that "Europe's security starts in Ukraine." On the summit's sidelines, Ukrainian President Zelensky signed agreements on security cooperation and long-term support with the Czech Prime Minister, Fiala, and the Slovenian Prime Minister, Golob. For the first time, NATO, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Council of Europe were invited to attend an EPC summit.

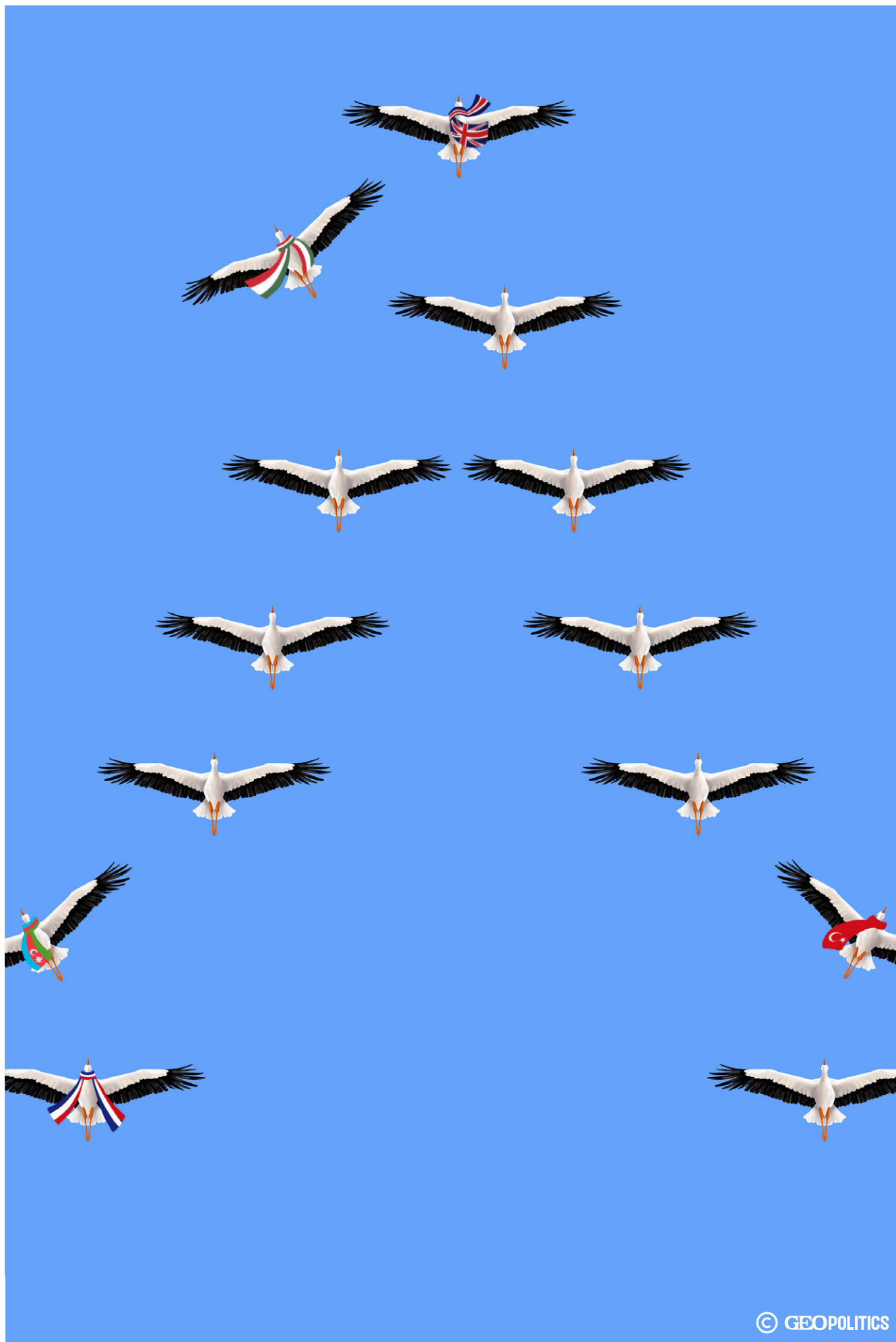
Following Labour's landslide victory in the national elections on 4 July, the Blenheim EPC summit proved well-timed for the new British government. For one, it presented a high-profile platform for the government to reiterate its drive to "reset relations with Europe as a reliable partner, a dependable ally and a good neighbor," in the [words](#) of Foreign Secretary Lammy. For another, Prime Minister Starmer [maintained](#) that the meeting left European partners "with a sense of renewed confidence in their relationship with the UK." In short, the summit helped set the stage for a new phase in the UK's partnership with the rest of Europe, which is expected to lead to an EU-UK summit, the first after Brexit, and to a wide-ranging security pact between the two sides.

Europe is simultaneously facing a security crisis, a crisis of values, and a credibility crisis. In many ways, the EPC was set up precisely to help Europe deal with unprecedented challenges. So far, its impact has been underwhelming.



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Guest Contributor

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Despite the message of unity sent by the leaders gathered at Blenheim Palace, the summit took place at a critical time for the continent. Russia is piling up pressure on Ukraine, recent elections have weakened key governments within the EU, and the outcome of the presidential elections in the US could carry far-reaching consequences for transatlantic affairs and Europe's security and defense, in particular. Europe is simultaneously facing a security crisis, a crisis of values, and a credibility crisis. In many ways, the EPC was set up precisely to help Europe deal with unprecedented challenges. So far, its impact has been underwhelming.

A Mixed Record

In the two years since its launch, the EPC has shown its potential for helping participating countries coalesce around shared goals. The success of the first EPC summit in Prague in October 2022 rested on its symbolic value, as it displayed unity in the face of Russia's war in Ukraine and demonstrated the willingness to foster strategic convergence among European countries. Informal, unscripted meetings took place at the summit's margins - a quadrilateral meeting involving the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, France, and the European Council, and an informal dialogue between the leaders of Armenia and Türkiye. These side meetings suggested that the EPC could provide a valuable platform for de-confliction and confidence-building among its members. The inclusiveness of the summit, where all participants, whether part of the EU or not, were placed on an equal footing, was also seen as a plus.

The second summit in Moldova in June 2023 sent a strong message of support and solidarity to Ukraine and to the host country, which is highly exposed to Russia's hybrid campaigns. The Moldovan leadership leveraged the summit to gain diplomatic dividends, project their European aspirations, and informally advance the country's

European integration, using bilateral exchanges with EU leaders to press this message. Thematic discussions at the summit addressed joint efforts for peace and security, energy resilience, and connectivity and mobility in Europe. As at the Prague summit, the second EPC gathering managed to convene political dialogues between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Serbia and Kosovo.

The third EPC summit in Granada in October 2023 was overshadowed by the resumption of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh a few weeks before the gathering and by an escalation of tensions between Serbia and Kosovo. The decision of Azerbaijan's President Aliyev to cancel his participation at the last minute and the choice of Turkish President Erdoğan not to take part in the summit after skipping the meeting in Moldova was a setback for the EPC's convening power. Thematic discussions were organized around policy areas such as digitalization, energy, environment and a green transition, and multilateralism and geostrategy. However, no meeting addressed regional disputes between Armenia-Azerbaijan and Kosovo-Serbia, weakening the case for the EPC as a confidence-building venue. Furthermore, disagreement between Spain and the UK over including migration in the agenda [added](#) to a sense of disappointment.

Strengths and Weaknesses of a Format in the Making

Launched as part of Europe's collective response to Russia's war against Ukraine, the EPC got off to a difficult start. Even if French President Macron's innovative proposal for a new European political forum surmounted initially skeptical reactions and gained momentum, the EPC's deliverables remain ephemeral, and its added value debated.

The EPC has been framed as a unique opportunity for wide-ranging debates among European leaders around topical issues on the continental agenda - the Ukraine war and its implications being, of

course, at the center of the proceedings. There is value in the process of [“deliberation taking precedence over decision-making”](#) on more specific policy issues. Still, there are doubts that informal discussions constitute a strong enough foundation to ensure the sustainability of the new format. Proposals have been put forward to harness the EPC to deliver more concrete policy outcomes and [enhance](#) sectoral integration among participating countries, but there is limited progress in this direction.

The distinctive features of the EPC are both an asset and a liability. For some [authors](#), “informal summitry, norms of equality, and the importance of trust” are the real strengths of the EPC. According to the current practice, the host countries, which alternate between EU members and non-members, take organizational responsibility and shape the summits’ agendas, reflecting their priorities. The agility of agenda-setting is appreciated since it allows for adapting the proceedings to a rapidly changing reality. However, a minimum degree of institutionalization could help host countries with summit preparations since not all have the same resources to provide continuity to the proceedings and enable the EPC to take charge of concrete dossiers if and when tasked. Additionally, mainly delegating agenda-setting to the host countries makes it vulnerable to being instrumentalized for narrow national purposes. From this standpoint, the fifth EPC summit, which will take place in Budapest next November, will be an essential test of the EPC’s resilience to Hungary’s Prime Minister Orbán’s illiberal agenda.

If the EPC aspires to advance strategic dialogue at the continental level, Türkiye is one of the central actors.

Besides the risk of instrumentalization, there is a question of commitment. The EPC depends on the participants’ goodwill and engagement. Not

everyone is equally motivated. If the UK, Norway, Switzerland, and others see value in participating in the forum, this is not true for Türkiye. President Erdoğan’s no-show at three EPC summits out of four, save the inaugural Prague meeting, casts a shadow over the EPC’s role as a pan-European platform, barring Russia and Belarus. If the EPC aspires to advance strategic dialogue at the continental level, Türkiye is one of the central actors. On balance, however, the EPC seems to have generated more political interest among non-EU states, which either hosted the summit or valued the opportunity to engage with their EU partners in an informal context than among EU members, except France.

This finding raises the question of the deficit of ownership and leadership that the EPC has suffered since its successful launch in Prague. France’s President Macron can take credit for proposing the EPC in the first place and has a high stake in its sustainability. The French leader has sought to keep some distance from the new format to avoid the EPC from being perceived as a French project. Still, Paris has delivered political support to the forum throughout successive summits. With political turbulence engulfing France following the recent snap parliamentary elections, there is a question of whether or not the French government will have the space to focus on the EPC file. A connected question is if, after the Blenheim Summit and as part of its *rapprochement* to Europe, the UK could take a more significant stake in the future of the EPC, leading perhaps to [Franco-British cooperation](#) in bringing the format forward.

Defining the Role

In the EPC’s short history, questions of form have often prevailed over issues of substance. This was understandable while the new platform took shape, but it cannot last indefinitely. Form and substance cannot be disconnected and must come

together in the debate about the EPC's role in Europe's crowded institutional landscape. Since the first summit in Prague, the EPC has been searching for a clear purpose — a role. Two years and four summits later, its mission and focus are still vague.

Since the first summit in Prague, the EPC has been searching for a clear purpose—a role. Two years and four summits later, its mission and focus are still vague.

To put it differently, this is a matter of the EPC's comparative advantage. Given the broader strategic context and the experience of the EPC so far, it appears that the unique selling point of this platform is contributing to the redefinition of the European security order during and after the Ukraine war. In doing so, the EPC can play a complementary role to those of the EU and NATO as a forum for pan-European consultation on how to deal with Russia's aggression. The EPC can bring added value by fostering convergence and addressing differences among the wider community of European countries.

As such, the EPC would favor the emergence of a common strategic culture, or '[strategic intimacy](#),' rallying European leaders around a joint assessment of the threats and challenges they face. Due to the prevalence of geopolitical considerations, the EPC is supposed to be, at its core, a 'community of shared interests.' Yet, even the homogeneity of interests is in question, considering, for example, the open cleavages between Hungary and the other EU member states on the issue of Ukraine.

EPC should continue to focus on the other conflicts affecting peace on the continent, even if the last two summits made no progress on this agenda.

Despite these tensions, the EPC could focus on creating a shared sense of belonging and purpose among those opposed to Russia's aggression and aspiring to create conditions for security and stability in Europe. That means that the EPC should continue to focus on the other conflicts affecting peace on the continent, even if the last two summits made no progress on this agenda. The violence in Nagorno-Karabakh and Northern Kosovo in 2023 exposed the volatility of respective regions. However, the countries participating in the EPC should, at a minimum, share a commitment to [non-aggression](#) and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The EPC can also offer a suitable platform for discussing the larger security agenda in response to hybrid challenges, including cyber and disinformation, to share threat assessments and best practices in preparing for and responding to these threats. Discussing the challenges of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) at the Blenheim Summit offered a good starting point. Flexible networks could be developed between experts from participating countries, which would complement cooperation in the context of the EU and NATO partnerships with several European countries. This agenda would also accompany the ongoing debate within the EU on developing a civil crisis preparedness strategy, drawing on the experiences of Finland and Sweden.

The potential connection between the EPC and the EU's envisaged expansion to several new members is another critical question for the EPC's role and future in Europe's emerging order.

The potential connection between the EPC and the EU's envisaged expansion to several new members is another critical question for the EPC's role and future in Europe's emerging order. There is

an overwhelming consensus that the EPC is not and should not be a substitute for EU enlargement and that the two processes follow separate tracks. However, the EPC could serve as an ‘[accelerator](#)’ for those countries seeking to join the EU and sustain ‘structured cooperation’ with those not aspiring to do so. The Franco-German group of experts on EU institutional reform [identified](#) the EPC as an important venue of ‘external differentiation’ for political cooperation. The EPC could also act as a [safety net](#) and provide a space for dialogue and cooperation in case the accession process runs into complications.

The Way Forward

While not delivering significant results, the Blenheim Summit in the UK provided a much-needed injection of political confidence in the future of the EPC as a pan-European forum for strategic debates. It remains to be seen whether or not this will be enough for the EPC to [navigate](#) “a pe-

riod of deep anxiety and uncertainty” in Europe, as Commission President von der Leyen recently described it. Becoming a vector of the broader *rapprochement* between the UK and the rest of Europe, alongside the deepening of the EU-UK partnership, would add a critical dimension to future EPC proceedings.

Beyond specific agendas, the EPC’s structural and political problems have to be addressed. Without greater ownership by participating countries and more sustained leadership, the same features that allowed the forum to emerge – its informality and flexibility – might determine its hollowing out. There is no prospect at this stage for the EPC to emerge as a new security actor within the larger European security architecture. However, EPC can deliver added value as a platform that creates political conditions for convergence, confidence-building, and further cooperation among its members. This would be a worthy output for a process that needs more direction ■

Georgia in Europe: 1925

As the Georgian Democratic Republic was occupied by the Soviet Russian Army in 1921, the Parliament asked the government's leading figures and the army to emigrate and seek assistance abroad. Most chose to move to France. From there, the government chair and an undisputed leader of Georgian Social Democrats, Noe Jordania, used his knowledge and influence to mobilize the European nations to support his occupied country. More than ever, this seemed possible as the Socialists gained respectability in Europe and even entered government, notably in Germany and the United Kingdom.

But just as their influence grew, the European Socialists were divided: should they treat Soviet Russia (and the newly formed Soviet Union) as a socialist state? Or is the government in the Kremlin a profoundly anti-democratic one, a mere continuation of the imperialist policies of the Tsarist Empire under a different ideological guise? Jordania, an influential figure in the Socialist International, argued the latter. Leafing through his publicist papers written in 1924 and 1925 reveals a vision of

Europe – and Russia's place in it – that strikingly echoes the political dynamic and eventual configuration that emerged after World War II. Writings of the exiled leader also shed light on the permanence of Georgia's interests.

A Particular Moment in History

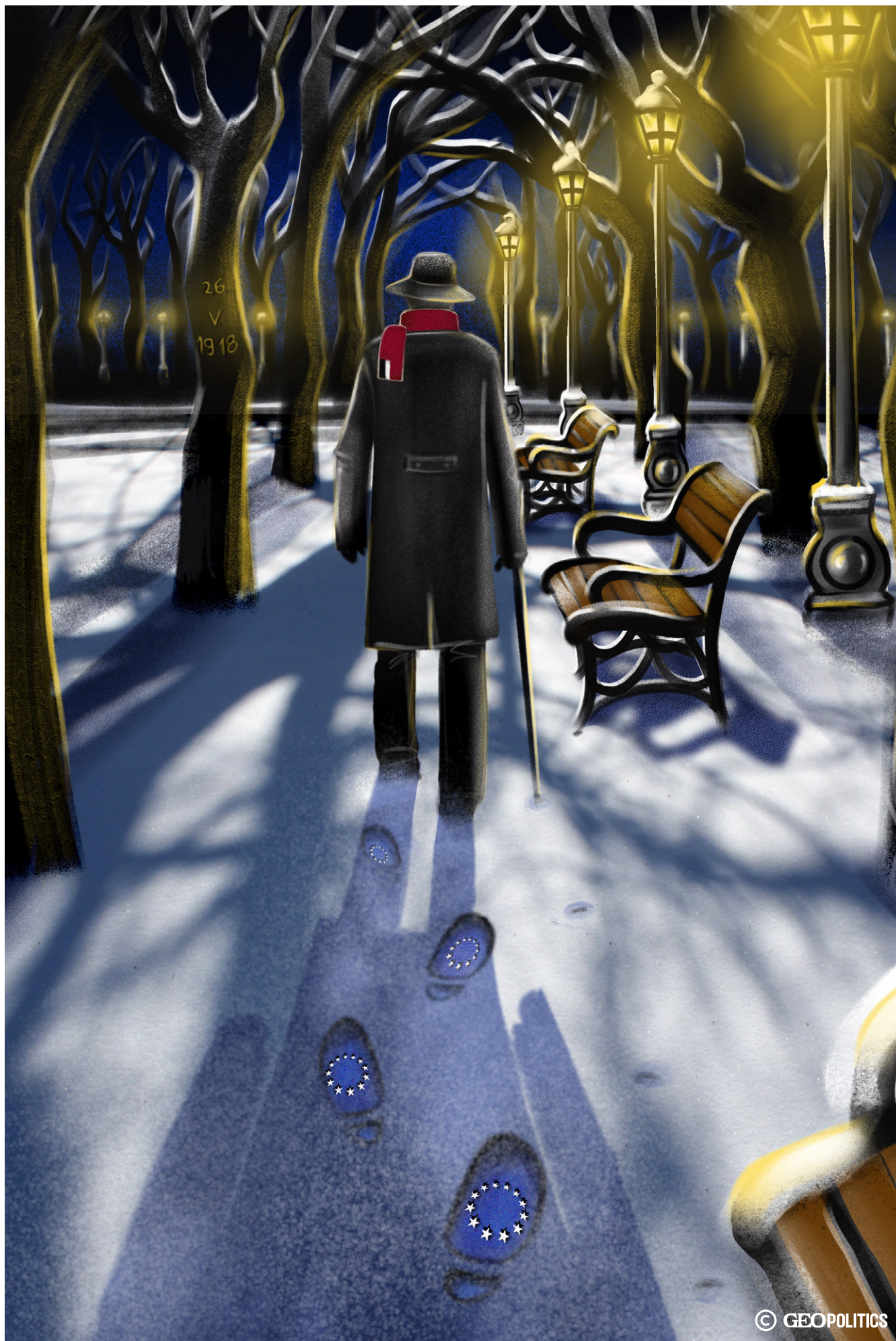
The year 1925 was a particular moment in European history with some very contemporary echoes: Russia's role was questioned, and Europe stood divided after a major war, yet hopes existed that a rules-based international system could resolve the pre-existing conflicts.

From the 1917 revolution, Bolshevik Russia was treated as an international pariah, not only because it betrayed its allies by stepping out of World War I through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk but also because it refused to honor the Tsarist government's debts at the 1922 Genoa Conference and nationalized foreign-owned industries. Still, the Kremlin tried to breach the unity of Europe and – unsurprisingly – found a situational ally in another pariah – a defeated Germany, signing the Treaty



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of Rapallo in 1922 to normalize relations, establish diplomatic relations, and expand economic cooperation.

In the UK, an event that we would now call a “hybrid operation” brought down the Labor government in October 1924 after the so-called “Zinoviev Letter,” purporting the spread of the Communist revolution in the UK, was published on the eve of elections. Although [we now know](#) it was an elaborate forgery (most likely by Russian emigres aided by the UK Tories), this was not known then; thus, the UK significantly hardened its position towards the USSR. Diplomatic relations established in February 1924 deteriorated and would be broken off in 1927.

As for Germany, the realization was dawning in victorious capitals of Europe that crippling reparation and the occupation of the Ruhr region may have been good revenge but not good politics. Hyperinflation and political instability in Berlin – shaken by several high-profile political assassinations – were becoming a headache, especially because they were creating an opening for the newly assertive Moscow and its vehicle for subversion – the Communist International (Comintern).

The Reparations Commission, created by the Allied Powers, put together an eminent committee in 1923 to resolve this conundrum. It was headed by Charles G. Dawes, a former army general, banker, and politician. The Dawes Commission came up with an economic model for reparations that could have been manageable without tearing Germany into pieces. Despite the acute resistance from the Nazi and Communist parties, the Reichstag voted for the plan. And economically, it worked: Germany's economy recovered, production increased 50% in five years, and unemployment fell sharply. The years 1924-1929 became known in Germany as the “Golden Twenties.” The humiliating occupa-

tion of Germany's Ruhr region by the allies ended in August 1925 and Dawes received the Nobel Peace Prize for his troubles.

Georgia Connection

Jordania was residing in France at the moment and reeling under the pain of the failed 1924 uprising in Georgia, which cost the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of his party comrades and other Georgian patriots. Despite this tragic setback, the Social Democratic Party of Georgia persisted in its demand for the liberation of Georgia and its full independence.

“The demand for Georgian independence is not a utopia, is not a dream, it is a realistic demand, which lays on the highway of history as a necessary, unavoidable step.”

“The demand for Georgian independence is not a utopia, is not a dream, it is a realistic demand, which lays on the highway of history as a necessary, unavoidable step,” wrote Jordania in an article entitled “Our Tactics” published by the party organ Brdzola (Combat) in May 1925. Marxist to the core and committed to the dialectic view of history, Jordania argued that the “national moment is just as natural for humankind as a democratic moment [...] A democracy naturally becomes a nation, and a nation inevitably becomes a democracy. If you reject this, you are an orthodox Bolshevik; if you admit both – you remain within the framework of history.”

Based on this assertion, he argued that socialism had the development of a democratic, independent nation-state as its precondition and that the Bolshevik attempt to leapfrog that stage was leading Russia to economic catastrophe at home and conflict abroad.

Economic Plight of the Soviets and Its Foreign Policy Implications

“Georgia’s liberation is possible as a result of Russia’s internal and external conflicts,” Jordania argued. Looking at Soviet Russia, he was concluding – quite ahead of his time – that the Communist “super-structure” was trying to force its will on economic reality. By countering the fundamentally deterministic rules of economic relations, Bolsheviks, in Jordania’s mind, were engendering multiple explosive contradictions, conflicts, and aberrations in economic politics.

“Georgia’s liberation is possible as a result of Russia’s internal and external conflicts.”

His analysis was that the Communist party, through exercising naked force, was managing to keep control of the state, but this control was substantively and constantly undermined by the underlying economic forces. As an example, he presented the fundamental modification of the Bolshevik economic policy – “the crusade against the bourgeoisie and the ‘kulaks’ (rich peasantry) ended by the creation of the new bourgeoisie and the legislation that favors the ‘kulaks’” under the [New Economic Policy \(NEP\)](#), Jordania observed.

Such political opportunism by a single party conceals “its combat with itself, its beliefs and its own program.” If it wants to allow individual economic relations, the Communist government would have to sooner or later concede to the democratic political form and “recognize the sovereign power of people,” Jordania forecasted. He saw the attempt to impose a state economy as a dead end but as a process with strong foreign policy implications: “In the private economy, the expansion of industry leads to an inevitable expansion of wealth,” Jordania argued, “but in the Soviet economy, this

rule does not hold – on the contrary, the growth of industry may be accompanied by impoverishment.” This is because instead of people generating and re-investing wealth, the Soviet state economy takes wealth from people and inserts it into inefficient, state-directed production, which cannot possibly identify, let alone meet, the needs of consumption, Jordania wrote.

This breakdown of fundamental economic logic makes Soviet Russia extremely exploitative and necessarily repressive at home to control the backlash from the disgruntled masses. But its foreign policy is inevitably aggressive, too, so that “it can compensate for the fundamental internal weakness by external resources.” By incessant intervention in affairs of the foreign states, the Kremlin is trying “to exert influence, covert or overt, so that they can be forced to sustain the Soviets by money or goods.”

Europe United

This is why an overture of the Allied Powers to Germany and the Dawes Plan was filling Jordania with the hope that Soviet Russia, exposed to its internal contradictions and facing a potentially united front of Europe, would transform or shed the Bolshevik regime – through evolution or revolution – and that Georgia’s “moment” of liberation would come again.

Jordania saw that “the disappointment is forcing Germany to look for allies and help in Europe.” However, beset by a chronic economic crisis, the Soviet Union failed Germany’s hopes of building an axis with Moscow against the Allied Powers. If Berlin (re)joined Europe, Russia would have to either mobilize against a united Europe and ultimately lose or join the League of Nations and, by doing so, recognize the principle of democracy and national self-determination. Jordania hoped this “means that the Georgian question will be raised and have to be resolved through arbitration” (Noe Jordania,

“Ongoing Political Moment,” Brdzola, 1925).

While this hope has proven naïve in retrospect, the analysis of the sources of Moscow’s conduct remains quite astute. Jordania argued that the “clearing up of the atmosphere in Europe demands first and foremost the elimination or, at the least, the pacification of the conflict [between Germany and France], the establishment of concord and good-neighborly relations between them.” The existence of what we now call the “European motor” would, in Jordania’s mind, isolate Russia and prevent it from playing the role of either an “international gendarme” or an “international spoiler” – the dominant foreign policy that Tsarist Russia pursued and the one that Bolshevik Russia is now “fully copying.”

In Europe, based on the understanding between Paris and Berlin, Jordania sees a “complete stabilization of international affairs” as the essential hope for small nations because the value and rules-based order becomes possible. He sees the system of “international arbitration of disputes” expand beyond the initial propositions of the Socialist party and become a generally accepted aspiration, while Russia “remains within the barbarian international rights of Tsarism.” For Jordania, this is “Europe’s fundamental political question: strengthening of the West’s moral unity which would leave its Eastern [despotic] enemy sidelined.”

While a united Europe was Jordania’s hope for the rights of oppressed nations, he was not naïve – he saw many socialist comrades flirt with Moscow and fretted about them denying Soviet Russia’s imperialism simply because it claimed to be socialist.

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he saw many socialist comrades flirt with Moscow and fretted about them denying Soviet Russia’s imperialism simply because it claimed to be socialist.

“There are two political societies in Europe,” he wrote in his commentary about the Second Congress of the Labor and Socialist International held in Marseille in 1925, “the one of the West and the one of the East, which exist in two different realities. The first is threatened by capitalist imperialism and the second – by communist imperialism.” He argues that socialist principles reject war based on the values of solidarity and mutual understanding. These values are expressed through understanding and domestic compromise between classes within the democratic system and practiced internationally through common rules and arbitration. Communists, on the other hand, “are disciples of militarism and bloodshed.”

Jordania argues that the Western socialists “worry about their own troubles and often fail to adequately assess the ones beyond Western Europe” where “the national states are newly established, some like Georgia lost their independence again and are threatened by newly resurgent Bolshevik imperialism – not only threatening their economy, or some private parties, but their very existence, sovereignty, and independence.”

Jordania worries that the Marseille summit was ambiguous in stating that the parties reject “aggressive policies against Soviet Russia” – he thinks some may interpret it as a call to support the USSR in its conflict with “Western imperialism.” An early warning about the “Russia-understanders,” which still resonates today.

Permanence of Interests

This overview of only a small part of the infinite works and articles of only one—even if the most important-Georgian political émigré reveals the

permanence of Georgia's interests in relation to Europe and Russia.

Support for both the rules-based world order and European solidarity is thus a foreign policy condition sine qua non for Georgia.

Whatever ideological preferences, any party governing Georgia may only hope to retain independence in conditions of a rules-based international order underpinned by European — in Georgia's case, Franco-German — unity. Support for both

the rules-based world order and European solidarity is thus a foreign policy condition sine qua non for Georgia.

Telling is also the analysis of the Western weaknesses when confronted by the Russian ideological “smokescreens” — such as the formal adoption of the socialist doctrine following the October Revolution. The Soviet Union was always imperialistic, Georgia tells us, because its internal political logic of repression and economic logic of exploitation are mutually reinforcing. This is the lesson that still applies today ■

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