

GEO POLITICS

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GEO POLITICS

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Our Mission

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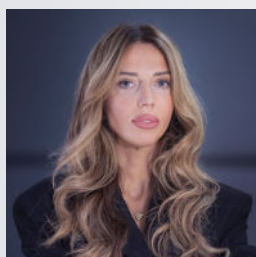
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At the **Research Institute Gnomon Wise**, we believe that disseminating knowledge and analysis conducted with integrity and impartiality can advance national interests and strengthen democratic institutions. Our think tank fosters a culture of intellectual 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* echoes the Georgian people's strategic orientation toward the Western world, democracy, and Europeanization. Our vision is that Georgia can and must advance the dissemination of universal democratic values and contribute to regional and international security. We 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 enrich the conversation about Georgia's foreign and security policy, unveiling and scrutinizing Georgia's relations with the EU, NATO, the U.S., and other important geopolitical actors and international institutions. We also investigate the ramifications of internal developments for Georgia's geopolitical role and foreign relations. By doing so, we facilitate informed and substantial dialogue from, about and in Georgia.



Ana Khurtsidze

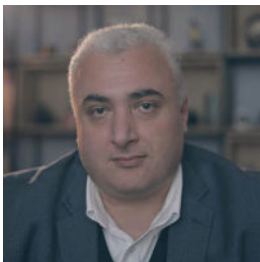
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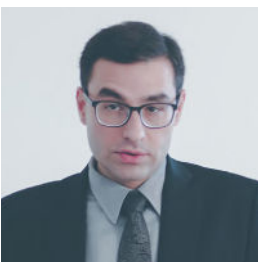
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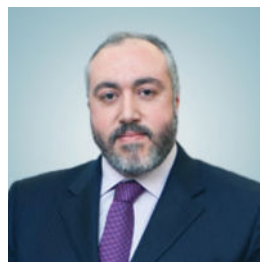
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The Peril of Multipolarity: New Spheres of Influence Threaten Sovereignty and Stability

Multipolarity is often praised as a more balanced and modern alternative to the unipolarity of American dominance or the bipolarity of the Cold War. But not all multipolarity is created equal. When the term becomes a euphemism for regional hegemony, “civilizational” blocs, and spheres of influence, it ceases to be a safeguard for peace — and becomes a gateway to instability, coercion, subjugation of smaller countries, and war.

If the world slips into a multipolarity defined not by equitable cooperation among powers but by the return of imperial thinking, the strongmen, like Putin, will divide up zones of control, rewrite the rules and international law, and treat small states not as sovereign actors but as bargaining chips. In this new disorder, sovereignty will inevitably be conditional; alliances will become transactional, and the foundational norms of the post-Cold War order will be up for grabs. This is a nightmare for the small states in Europe’s east.

This issue of *GEOpolitics* unpacks this looming dangerous transformation. Multipolarity, as practiced by today’s revisionist regimes, is not a pluralist ideal — it is a power grab dressed up in multilateral robes.

Natalie Sabanadze opens this edition with a conceptual dissection of multipolarity as authoritarian powers currently weaponize it. Tracing its theoretical roots and Russia’s adaptation of the

Primakov Doctrine, she shows how the South Caucasus has become a microcosm of the emerging order. Her article reveals how “spheres of influence” are being rebranded as “civilizational zones,” where sovereignty is conditional and hierarchies are entrenched. Once a poster child of Western alignment, Georgia is now dabbling in multi-alignment, wagering its geopolitical fate on a balancing act offering short-term maneuverability but long-term strategic vulnerability. As Russia, Türkiye, Iran, and China expand their footprints, and as Western influence wanes, Georgia risks being left unaligned and unprotected.

Thornike Gordadze then takes us to the heart of the transatlantic fracture, arguing that multipolarity’s greatest casualty may be Europe itself. In a world where Trump’s United States regards its oldest allies as freeloaders rather than partners, and Russia and China openly court populist forces to splinter European unity, the EU faces an existential dilemma: become a pole in its own right—or be relegated to a buffer zone. Gordadze outlines how Europe’s historical dependence on U.S. security has become a liability and why a coherent European defense and economic strategy is now imperative. With NATO under strain and EU cohesion eroded by Hungary, Slovakia and rising illiberalism, he warns that Europe must become a “porcupine” to survive—not just a market, but a power. The implications for Georgia are profound: if Europe fails to assert itself geopolitically, it may no longer be able—or willing—to anchor Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic future.

Shota Gvineria zeroes in on the Russian model – a multipolarity rooted in spheres of influence, territorial revisionism, and zero-sum negotiations, a multipolarity as a smokescreen for revanchism and Russia's ambition to dominate European and global politics. The article exposes how the Kremlin is repackaging the empire as balance, arguing for “peace” in Ukraine while demanding regime change, territorial concessions, and NATO's rollback. With Washington increasingly receptive to these demands under Trump and European voices sidelined, Russia's goal is clear: to enshrine its spheres of influence as a new global norm. For Gvineria, the risk is not just a lousy peace in Ukraine—but a precedent that validates using force to redraw borders and undermine sovereignty. Georgia, long portrayed by Moscow as a backyard province, would be next in line to be claimed, not debated. Only a decisive Ukrainian victory, backed by unambiguous Western support and viable security guarantees, can stop this domino effect. Anything less cements Russia's vision of multipolarity as legalized subjugation.

Vano Chkhikvadze brings the focus back to Georgia's internal collapse—and how Ivanishvili's regime is weaponizing the language of sovereignty to extinguish dissent. In a chilling chronicle of legal authoritarianism, he documents how the Georgian Dream has deployed a copy-paste version of the U.S. FARA law to criminalize NGOs, censored independent media, and launched a campaign of legal, financial, and digital persecution against civil society. The result is a slow-motion brain drain as the country's most educated, civic-minded, and pro-European professionals will inevitably flee repression. His article is both a warning and a call: unless the EU prepares asylum channels, institutional support, and diaspora engagement plans, it will lose not just a strategic partner—but the very people who could one day help restore it.

Sergi Kapanadze continues the topic of the Georgian Dream's authoritarianism by exposing the great deception: how the Georgian Dream is mimicking Trumpian rhetoric—“deep state,” “fake news,” “foreign agents”—to win favor with Washington, all while enacting the opposite of conservative principles. Instead of draining the swamp, the party has built a deep state of judges, cronies, and propagandists. Instead of protecting sovereignty, it is selling off ports to China and appeasing Russia. Instead of defending free speech, it is jailing journalists and civil society activists. This imitation strategy is not ideological—it is tactical. The hope is to distract Trump's team with familiar slogans while consolidating power at home and escaping Western sanctions. But the stakes go far beyond spin. If this ruse succeeds, Georgia could slip into authoritarianism with a red-white-and-blue smile—and become a case study in how autocrats co-opt the Western language to undermine Western interests.

Jaba Devdariani concludes the issue with a deeply introspective piece on what this all means for Georgia's liberal identity. For decades, Georgia's pro-democracy forces found their moral compass in the United States. American ideals of liberty, justice, and constitutional governance shaped the country's political imagination. But with Trumpism distorting those ideals, and the U.S. increasingly resembling the populist regimes Georgians seek to resist, a crisis of faith has emerged. Devdariani argues that Georgia's democracy must now draw not only from external models but from its own republican traditions—from 1918, from civic nationalism, from the resilience of its protest movements. In this sense, Multipolarity is not just a geopolitical condition—it is an ideological test. Can Georgia find its democratic voice in a world where democracy itself is contested ?

With Respect,

Editorial Team

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Captive of the Caucasus: Can Georgia Navigate the Multipolar World?

Multipolarity is the buzzword of the day. Like most fashionable terms, however, it is ill-defined and contested. In fact, the very existence of such a contestation is a sign that the parameters of a multipolar world are yet to be established, with various hegemonic powers vying to make their mark on the shape of the future global order. This year's Munich Security Conference (MSC) chose multipolarity as its central theme, posing a fundamental question: What does multipolarity really mean in practice? Who stands to benefit from the shifting order, and who risks being on the losing side? Are we moving to a new bipolar world dominated by U.S.-China competition or a tripolar world with Russia, China, and the U.S. carving the world into respective spheres of influence? Where is Europe in this new division? Alternatively, rather than neatly divided, the future

global order may be much more fragmented and messy – perhaps best described not as multipolarity but as non-polarity.

The world is changing. The erosion of the liberal international order that characterized the post-Cold War era began some time ago, but Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked its definitive unraveling, ushering in a period of transition.

In whichever way it is defined, one thing is clear: the world is changing. The erosion of the liberal international order that characterized the post-Cold War era began some time ago, but Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked its definitive unraveling, ushering in a period of transition.



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Putin's Russia has been one of the most vocal and consistent critics of post-Cold War liberal internationalism. Its wars against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2014 were direct efforts to push back against Western influence, defend its regional hegemony, and reclaim what it saw as its rightful place at the high table of great powers. Moscow viewed itself as sidelined in a Western-dominated world and was willing to fight to change that reality. China, too, challenges Western hegemony—albeit through economic and diplomatic means rather than outright military confrontation. Beijing has aligned itself with Russia in an effort to reshape the global order, promoting an alternative vision of multipolarity.

Perhaps most paradoxically, the United States under the Trump presidency also emerged as a challenger to liberal internationalism. For Trump, the U.S. had been shortchanged by the post-Cold War order, taken advantage of by allies, and too easily challenged by rivals, leading to its relative decline. In response, the Trump administration is championing a highly competitive, transactional foreign policy focused on narrowly defined national interests rather than global leadership.

States like Georgia are particularly vulnerable in an increasingly competitive regional and global environment—where international norms that protect small states from the predatory instincts of great powers are neglected, and survival as sovereign actors is far from guaranteed.

What is the fate of small states like Georgia in this evolving global order? How do global and regional dynamics intersect, and what risks and opportunities do they create for smaller actors? Shifting regional dynamics of the South Caucasus serve as a microcosm of emerging multipolarity, offer-

ing insight into its defining characteristics. States like Georgia are particularly vulnerable in an increasingly competitive regional and global environment—where international norms that protect small states from the predatory instincts of great powers are neglected, and survival as sovereign actors is far from guaranteed.

Multipolarity, per Russia

The concept of multipolarity has become a central theme of Putin's foreign policy, serving as a conceptual basis for Russia's expanding global agenda. The idea is most closely associated with the [Primakov doctrine](#) which proposed the Russia-China-India strategic alignment as a counterweight to the Western hegemony. The doctrine's key pillars include preserving Russia's sphere of influence, challenging U.S. unipolarity, mainly through deepened ties with China, and ensuring the non-expansion of NATO. Russia under Putin has upgraded the doctrine, enhancing it with messianic messages about turning the world into a better place for those who have been exploited, colonized, and marginalized because of Western dominance. As aptly summarized by Ican Klyszc, Russia pursues '[messianic multipolarity](#)' to generate support for its vision of the global order, particularly among the countries of the Global South.

While pursuing an imperialist agenda and advocating for a world divided into civilizational centers of power, Putin presents a benign vision of a multipolar order based on the principle of sovereign equality.

While pursuing an imperialist agenda and advocating for a world divided into civilizational centers of power, Putin presents a benign vision of a multipolar order based on the principle of sovereign equality. He promises a more democratic and inclusive

system that claims to treat all forms of governance as equally legitimate and morally equivalent. In practice, however, this means equating democracy with autocracy and reviving the principle that domestic affairs are beyond external scrutiny. It also means a differentiated interpretation of sovereign equality whereby a state's level of sovereignty is determined by its proximity to great powers, size, and geopolitical weight – effectively making some states more equal and sovereign than others.

Central to this vision is the order fragmented into spheres of influence, each clustered around hegemonic powers and governed by multilateral institutions such as BRICS and the CSO – explicitly designed to exclude Western states. Many states, particularly the Global South's so-called middle powers, find multipolarity inherently more appealing than the Western-led rules-based international order (RBIO). They see it as offering greater autonomy at home and more strategic flexibility abroad, allowing them to effectively balance competing powers to advance their interests. Their foreign policy posture is often characterized by multi-alignment, a strategy that avoids taking sides and remains neither explicitly pro- nor anti-Western.

For Russia, however, multipolarity is not a neutral concept—it is fundamentally an anti-Western project designed to challenge Western dominance and reshape the global order in its favor.

For Russia, however, multipolarity is not a neutral concept—it is fundamentally an anti-Western project designed to challenge Western dominance and reshape the global order in its favor. While Moscow harbors global ambitions, it cannot achieve them alone. As a result, it seeks partners and has demonstrated a willingness to accommodate their interests, provided they align with the overarching goal of diminishing the West. This dynamic has

contributed to geopolitical shifts in regions such as the South Caucasus and Central Asia, where other actors, including Türkiye, Iran, and China, are increasingly challenging Russia's previously uncontested hegemony. However, rather than leading to greater Western influence, the relative decline of Russia's dominance in the South Caucasus has instead resulted in a diminishing Western presence as regional players assert themselves in the evolving balance of power.

Multipolarity in the South Caucasus

Two wars have reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus in recent years: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and Azerbaijan's successful offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh. These conflicts are closely interrelated as Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine stretched its strategic bandwidth, forcing Moscow to prioritize its partnerships with regional actors such as Türkiye and Iran. Taking advantage of Russia's shifting focus, Baku—backed by Türkiye—launched a successful military campaign, restoring Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and effectively altering the balance of power in the region.

Moscow determined that aligning with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, particularly to secure access to connectivity and trade routes, was more valuable than continued support for Armenia, which had limited maneuvering space.

In a stark reversal of its long-standing policy of underpinning Armenian security and leveraging unresolved conflicts as tools of influence, Moscow watched from the sidelines as Nagorno-Karabakh collapsed, triggering the exodus of its Armenian population. Moscow determined that aligning with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, particularly to secure ac-

cess to connectivity and trade routes, was more valuable than continued support for Armenia, which had limited maneuvering space.

Moreover, Russia was unlikely to sustain military operations on two fronts simultaneously, especially against a well-equipped Azerbaijani army, while also risking antagonizing Türkiye. Consequently, Ankara considerably strengthened its position in the South Caucasus, further bolstered by its success in Syria – both coming at Russia's expense. Meanwhile, Iran, wary of Türkiye's growing influence, has intensified its engagement in the region, seeking to capitalize on its close ties with Moscow to counterbalance Ankara's expanding role.

Georgia's ruling party seeks partners that align with its authoritarian tendencies, offering engagement without obstructing its efforts to consolidate power and dismantle democratic institutions.

Armenia, disillusioned by what it perceives as Russia's betrayal, has declared a pivot toward the EU, seeking to diversify its foreign partnerships and reduce its long-standing dependency on Moscow. Georgia, in contrast, appears to have stepped back from its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, joining instead the growing trend of multi-alignment, attempting to balance between competing global and regional powers rather than committing fully to the West. Georgia's ruling party seeks partners that align with its authoritarian tendencies, offering engagement without obstructing its efforts to consolidate power and dismantle democratic institutions.

For years, Georgia was the West's primary pillar in the South Caucasus, pursuing a dual track of democratization and Euro-Atlantic integration. However, despite formally holding EU candidate status, both objectives have effectively been aban-

doned. In contrast, Armenia's outreach to Europe, backed strongly by France, can be seen as a partial counterbalance to Georgia's geopolitical drift. Nevertheless, Armenia cannot fully replace Georgia in this role. Its strategic maneuverability remains constrained by Russia's economic and military leverage. Moreover, without Georgia's European integration, Armenia's own path toward the West remains uncertain. This explains why Yerevan is treading carefully, diversifying its partnerships without making a sharp pivot toward the West—unlike Georgia in previous years.

The geopolitical order in the South Caucasus is evolving into a microcosm of regional multipolarity, with an increasing number of actors competing to shift the balance of power and advance their own interests. The outcome of the war in Ukraine will determine how quickly Russia will be able to reassert its influence in the South Caucasus. To do so, it must keep the West out, manage relations with Türkiye (and, to a certain degree, Iran), and, in the long run, prepare for the potential competition with China.

Furthermore, two additional trends are emerging at the intersection of foreign and domestic dynamics in the South Caucasus. On the foreign policy level, the relative decline of both Russia and the West has led to growing inter-regional connections between the South Caucasus and the Middle East. As Türkiye and Iran maintain strategic interests in both regions—and Russia continues to exert influence, particularly through its military presence in Syria—developments in the Middle East are increasingly shaping the balance of power in the South Caucasus.

On the domestic level, the weakening of external democratization pressures fosters the consolidation of authoritarian or hybrid authoritarian governance across the region. This shift risks deepening domestic polarization, as seen in Georgia, where social resistance to “autocratization” re-

mains strong. The key question is whether or not Georgia can successfully navigate the evolving multipolar landscape—and what risks and opportunities it will face while doing so.

Georgia's Diminishing Returns

Georgia has long had a complicated relationship with its geographic region, often exhibiting characteristics of what is known as a displaced state—one that has a dissonant relationship with its geography, physically located in one place while culturally and geopolitically identifying with another. At the policy level, Georgia's sense of displacement has been reflected in its relentless pursuit of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. This strategy was driven by an effort to distance itself from the Russian-dominated South Caucasus and reclaim what it sees as its rightful place in Europe, regarded as its political destiny. However, this aspiration has always required external recognition of Georgia's Europeanness—a validation that has not been guaranteed, given Georgia's geographic position on Europe's eastern periphery.

After 30 years of trying (and with some help from Putin himself), Georgia succeeded in moving the mental frontiers of European policy-makers. Initially, not even considered a part of the European neighborhood, Georgia secured EU candidate status, albeit thanks to the evolving geopolitical circumstances. Yet, as this milestone was reached, Georgia's ruling regime abandoned the European project and embraced the regional multipolarity which the country's rulers believed better served their economic and political interests. It enables them to consolidate authoritarian rule with minimal accountability while extracting economic advantages by balancing and bargaining among competing regional powers—all while leveraging Georgia's geostrategic position.

While multi-alignment has emerged as a prevailing trend in fragmenting regional order, it carries sig-

nificant risks for a state like Georgia. Azerbaijan, endowed with natural resources and backed by a robust alliance with Türkiye, has been far more successful in leveraging regional competition to position itself as a rising middle power. Georgia, by contrast, lacks comparable resources and enters this shifting environment with few—if any—reliable allies. While Armenia's traditionally strong relations with Russia have deteriorated, it maintains close ties with Iran and has doubled down on forging strong partnerships with France and India. Meanwhile, Georgia's spectacular dramatic democratic backsliding has eroded the strategic relationships it had painstakingly built with the EU and the United States over the past three decades. These lost alliances cannot be replaced—nor adequately balanced—by Tbilisi's growing engagement with China or its conciliatory approach toward Russia. As a result, Georgia risks being exposed to the predatory instincts of larger powers without the protective buffer of either international norms or trusted partnerships.

This raises a critical question about Georgia's strategic value in the evolving regional and global landscape. Geographically, Georgia possesses significant transit potential and is well-positioned to serve as a key transport and energy corridor. However, its comparative advantage has, in part, stemmed from Armenia's relative isolation. A potential peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the normalization of Armenia-Türkiye relations could open up alternative transit routes—thereby diminishing Georgia's unique role in regional connectivity. At the same time, the policies of Georgia's ruling party have undermined the country's strategic value as a successful, EU-oriented democracy and a reliable multiplier of Western influence in the region.

The ruling Georgian Dream has placed high hopes in resetting relations with the United States under the Trump administration. Despite its earlier deployment of widespread anti-U.S. and anti-West-

ern rhetoric, the party now seeks to mend ties by appealing to perceived ideological affinities and proposing avenues for economic cooperation. Yet Georgia is far from alone in this recalibration—regional actors, such as Russia and Türkiye, are also adjusting to the new U.S. posture, aiming to advance their respective interests in national security and regime stability. There is a growing risk that the new U.S. administration, particularly one that embraces a multipolar world order grounded in spheres of influence, may choose to effectively cede Georgia to Russia's orbit. This may well be the outcome Georgia's ruling party is preparing for—and perhaps even welcoming. But it is not the will of a substantial portion of the Georgian population. Recent civic mobilization has demonstrated a clear societal resistance to the country's authoritarian drift and anti-Western orientation. As a result, domestic instability is likely to persist, with the Georgian Dream confronting an intensifying legitimacy crisis.

While it is true that the West has often been slow to fully reciprocate Georgia's aspirations—leaving the country vulnerable to Russian pressure—Euro-Atlantic integration still remains Georgia's most viable path forward.

Georgia's earlier efforts to anchor itself within Western institutions were motivated not only by identity and values but also by pragmatism. Western integration was seen as a strategic response to growing threats from Russia and a critical component of Georgia's national security. While it is true that the West has often been slow to fully reciprocate Georgia's aspirations—leaving the country vulnerable to Russian pressure—Euro-Atlantic integration still remains Georgia's most viable path forward. As a small state in a volatile region, Georgia needs reliable allies and institutional anchoring. Only with such support can it credibly pursue a balanced foreign policy and engage with other regional actors from a position of strength and stability ■

Being Around the Table, Rather Than on the Menu

The European Challenge in the Multipolar World

“**T**he European Union was formed to screw the United States, and they have done a good job of it,” [declared](#) Donald Trump to journalists on 26 February. A month later, the U.S. president [imposed](#) tariffs, including on European countries, and declared a full-blown trade war with the EU. Europe and the United States, through the ages, have experienced many tensions within the alliance.

There have been the *Suez Crisis* in 1956, concerns over Afghanistan and the global financial crisis, and the substantial divergence of views at the time of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 when overbearing America treated Europeans in highly offensive terms.

Since the new Trump administration took office,

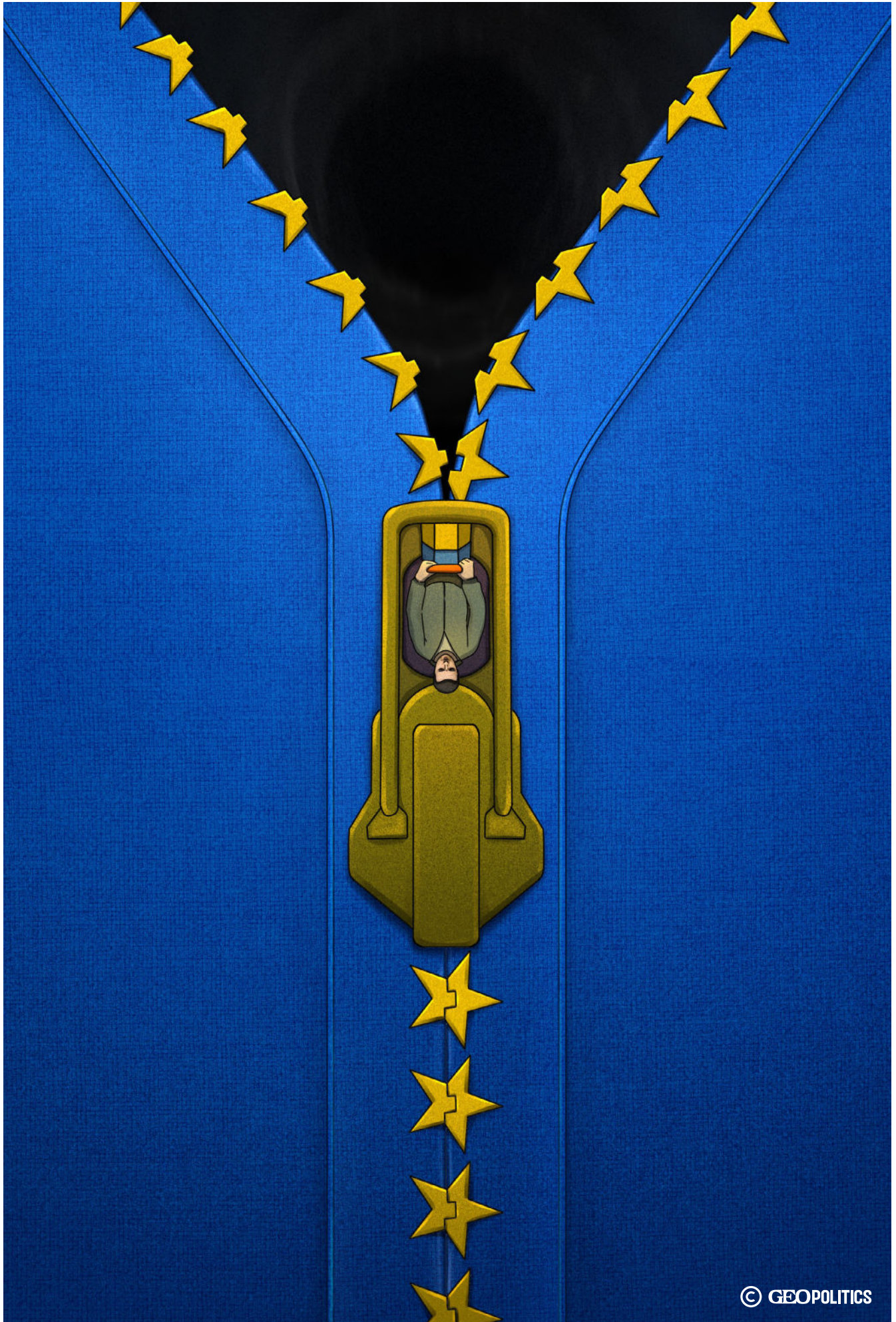
something unprecedented appears to be unfolding. For the first time, it seems that in both strategic calculations and emotional disposition, American leadership no longer sees Europe as an ally—though not necessarily as an outright enemy either. This shift in perception is starkly illustrated by the now-infamous leaked Houthi PC signal chat among senior U.S. officials. In one striking comment, Vice President Vance [wrote](#), “I just hate bailing out Europeans once more,” reflecting the deep disdain with which parts of the American leadership now regard their transatlantic partners.

Some may argue that Trump is harsher with allies like Mexico, Canada, Japan, or South Korea than with Europe. But what’s clearer is that we are witnessing the end of an era—from Roosevelt to Biden—when the U.S. acted as the West’s be-



THORNIKE GORDADZE
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Thornike Gordadze, a Franco-Georgian academic and former State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in Georgia (2010-12), served as the Chief Negotiator for Georgia on the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU. From 2014 to 2020, he led the Research and Studies Department at the Institute for Higher National Defense Studies in Paris. A Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) from 2021 to 2022, he currently teaches at SciencesPo in Paris and is an Eastern Neighbourhood and Black Sea program fellow at the Jacques Delors Institute. Gordadze, also a Senior Researcher at the research institute Gnomon Wise, holds a PhD in Political Science from Paris SciencesPo (2005).



nevolent guarantor, rooted in Wilsonian idealism. Announced tariffs, talk of annexing Greenland or absorbing Canada, the abandonment of Ukraine, and threats to leave NATO mark a turning point. Whether it is a calculated gambit or “madman theory,” the damage is done. Even the most cautious allies now grasp that the U.S. may no longer be a dependable partner—and could even become a rival, a once unthinkable possibility.

From a Generous Empire to Demanding One

Trump's fiery rhetoric about Europe is more than emotional bluster—it reflects a deep-seated belief that Europe is not a true ally but a freeloader living off American power. This view isn't new; it dates back to the 1970s and 1980s, when Trump, as a businessman, saw countries like Germany and Japan as threats to the U.S. economy. Unlike his first term, he is now surrounded by ideologically driven advisers with a strategic agenda—and a determination not to squander the second chance they believe they've been given. A sense of urgency, driven by the ticking clock to the 2026 midterms, is pushing them to act quickly and forcefully. At the heart of Trump's foreign policy is the trade deficit, and in his eyes, Europe is the worst offender—reaping the greatest gains economically and in terms of security at America's expense.

There is a real basis for this thinking: at the end of the Second World War, the Europeans asked the United States to stay on the European continent to help rebuild it and protect it from the new threat – communism. We must not forget Truman's decisive role in the U.S. commitment to NATO, while the Senate was much more circumspect. Europe benefited from American military involvement and the Marshall Plan, behaving like a free rider, especially West Germany, which saved a lot on its security and developed an export-oriented economy. But for the sake of honesty, it should be recalled

that it was a codependency characterized, like in all codependency relations, by both mutual benefits and rebukes. Each time European protégés tried to break it (several unsuccessful attempts to launch “European Defense” initiatives), they were discreetly but firmly discouraged by Washington.

The American Empire, now in a state of uncertainty, is turning to its allies and dependents with demands for accountability. But this shift is not a display of strength—it is a symptom of decline.

The American Empire was once generous, willing to overlook strict profit calculations in exchange for the responsibilities of global leadership—a pattern seen in all great empires since Alexander. Such generosity tends to accompany dominance and unchallenged strength. But today, Trump's ledger-like approach to foreign policy signals leaner times for the Empire. U.S. supremacy is no longer assured, and for the first time since the Cold War, a credible rival—China—is abandoning Deng Xiaoping's cautious strategy and openly pursuing global leadership. The American Empire, now in a state of uncertainty, is turning to its allies and dependents with demands for accountability. But this shift is not a display of strength—it is a symptom of decline.

The rupture with Europe—or at least the transformation of the transatlantic alliance into a purely transactional relationship—has deep structural roots and is likely to endure. Trumpism, at its core, is a reaction to globalization, which many in the American working and lower-middle classes perceive as having eroded their economic security. On a cultural level, it is also a backlash against what is seen as the “excesses” of progressivism, often labeled as “wokeism” or “socialism.” Fairly or not, both globalization and progressive norms are partly attributed to European influence and its sprawling bureaucracy.

Adding momentum to this hardline stance is the growing influence of digital platforms and the tech “broligarchs”—a powerful bloc of Trump’s supporters who, despite their ideological differences, have formed a tactical alliance with Judeo-Christian conservatives. These tech elites view the EU’s expansive and restrictive regulatory framework as a barrier to their growth and profits. Their opposition to Brussels is not merely rooted in libertarian ideals about “absolute free speech” but also in tangible economic interests. This alignment of cultural, political, and financial motives is reinforcing a harsher, more confrontational U.S. policy toward Europe.

European Pole in a Multipolar World?

In the last five years, Europe has undergone two tectonic shocks. The first was the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This shock reawakened NATO and instilled geopolitics into the EU’s actions, notably by reformulating its energy policy and reviving the enlargement issue. Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine also finally convinced a vast majority of Europeans, after decades of denial, that Russia was the main threat to their security and Europe’s top enemy. The second shock, equally, if not even more significant, was Trump’s entry into the White House in January 2025 and the measures he has been adopting during the last two months.

In the immediate aftermath of the initial shock, there was hope for a united democratic front and strengthened transatlantic ties in response to Russian imperialism. Yet, less than three years later, the very core of the Western world—the axis around which the liberal, rules-based order revolved—has fractured dramatically. Washington, once the anchor of Western unity, is now actively unraveling it, leaving its European partners unprepared—both politically and intellectually—to face this new reality.

The current crisis surpasses that of 2022, as it touches every facet of life—economy, security, global alliances, and the very structure of the international fiscal and monetary system. The pressing question is whether Europe can rise to form a pole of its own or whether it risks becoming a passive continent, akin to Africa or Asia in the 19th century. The United States, Russia, and, to a lesser extent, China doubt Europe’s ability to achieve this and actively challenge the idea. Often, this skepticism is rhetorical and performative—statements made not just to express belief but to shape reality by undermining confidence and willing failure into existence. Putin and his circle have long portrayed Europe as subordinate to Washington. “*They stand at their master’s feet and gently wag their tails,*” Putin [said](#) recently, while his foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov went further, [calling](#) European leaders “affectionate puppies.”

While Washington has not (yet) gone so far publicly in its verbal excesses, the current administration does not recognize Europe as one of the poles in the multipolar world. China, Russia, and maybe India could be the poles, but not Europe.

While Washington has not (yet) gone so far publicly in its verbal excesses, the current administration does not recognize Europe as one of the poles in the multipolar world. China, Russia, and maybe India could be the poles, but not Europe. Trump’s contempt for the Transatlantic friends was evident when the U.S. launched negotiations with Moscow on Ukraine without Ukraine and Europe while the security of the whole continent was at stake. The same applies to the disdain shown by the U.S. administration for the Old Continent while openly [claiming](#) the territory of Greenland under Danish jurisdiction according to international law.

Washington cannot ignore that Russia’s GDP equates to the GDP of Spain and Portugal com-

bined and that the country's population is inferior to those of Germany and Italy, but the reason why Trump despises Europe and respects Russia is found in the belief that Europe is too weak, too divided, too dependent and needs to go through complex decision-making processes. At the same time, Russia is ruled by a strongman who is not embarrassed by constraints such as the rule of law, public opinion, human rights, or democracy.

Hubert Vedrine, France's former Minister of Foreign Affairs and once President Mitterrand's foreign policy aid, who is also a self-qualified realist and long-time critic of Europe's "supra-nationalism" and its naive "human rights-based foreign policy," [describe](#) Europeans as "Care Bears lost in the world of Jurassic Park." The diagnosis was harsh but not entirely devoid of common sense. Now that the rule-based order is being shattered and brutal strength is becoming a determining factor in international relations, complacent and fragmented Europe is awakening in a nightmare.

Europeans, seeing the NATO carpet being pulled out from under them and, at the same time, being subjected to a trade war with their primary partner (U.S.) and engaged in a kinetic (by proxy) and hybrid war with Russia, must act quickly and address simultaneously the many problems left unresolved for years.

The repeated summits, the announcement of historic rearmament decisions ("[Rearm Europe](#)," the German "[fiscal bazooka](#)," etc.), and the commitment to send "reassurance forces" to Ukraine to prevent a new Russian invasion once a comprehensive ceasefire enters into force, are all strong measures waiting to take shape. Europeans, seeing the NATO carpet being pulled out from under them and, at the same time, being subjected to a trade

war with their primary partner (U.S.) and engaged in a kinetic (by proxy) and hybrid war with Russia, must act quickly and address simultaneously the many problems left unresolved for years.

Challenges and Capabilities

The first challenge is unity—always difficult to achieve, even as fear and external threats are pushing Europe together in unprecedented ways. The problem lies in the fact that the two most powerful instruments of European unity, the EU and NATO, are marked by the presence of hostile members—currently two: Viktor Orbán's Hungary and Robert Fico's Slovakia. In matters of foreign and security policy, where unanimity is required, the only viable paths are either seeking alternative formats or changing the rules through deeper integration. Neither is off the table, but both present serious obstacles.

A more realistic option is the formation of coalitions of the willing—bringing together states that are ready and able to defend themselves. Operating outside the EU framework makes these coalitions more flexible and opens the door to key non-member states like the United Kingdom, Norway, and Türkiye.

A more realistic option is the formation of coalitions of the willing—bringing together states that are ready and able to defend themselves. Operating outside the EU framework makes these coalitions more flexible and opens the door to key non-member states like the United Kingdom, Norway, and Türkiye. Ukraine, though still outside both NATO and the EU, is expected to play a leading role in the continent's defense.

The question of unity also touches on a particularly sensitive issue: leadership. While the Franco-Brit-

ish tandem seems functional for now, Germany has ambitions of its own—not to mention Italy, whose current government, until recently, boasted of having the closest ties with Trump and Elon Musk. Despite a broad consensus among European governments on the need for closer cooperation and building European defense, sharp differences remain over how to handle relations with the United States. Rome favors caution and conciliation, while Paris and Berlin appear more willing to “turn the page” and explore autonomy.

In the trade arena, the EU is far better equipped to defend itself. Here, the European Commission has a leading role and unanimity is not required—only a qualified majority of member states is needed. The EU is a formidable trading power with robust tools for retaliation. Over decades, it has built a strong and well-defended trade policy, something we in Georgia [experienced](#) directly during the DCFTA negotiations. DG Trade felt more like an impregnable fortress than, for instance, the EEAS. This is hardly surprising, as the EU was primarily a single market long before it aspired to geopolitical weight.

Since 2023, the EU has also [implemented](#) anti-coercion instruments that allow it, within a short period, to restrict access to the European market—not only targeting entire countries but also specific companies and individuals. These tools can include blocking access to public procurement, suspending IP rights, or freezing entry to European capital markets.

But the unity and strength of the European pole are also challenged from within. Eurosceptic parties—on both the far right and radical left—command significant portions of the electorate. In France, Marine Le Pen’s National Rally, Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s LFI, and smaller sovereigntist groups together make up more than 40% of the vote. In Germany, the far-right AfD and far-left parties together hold over a third. The trend is similar, if not

worse, in countries like Austria, the Netherlands, and Romania.

These forces have long had external ties to powers hostile to the EU, especially Russia. Now, the situation is deteriorating further with open support from Trump’s administration. JD Vance, after delivering a scathing speech in Munich, [met](#) ostentatiously with AfD leader Alice Weidel while snubbing Chancellor Olaf Scholz and CDU leader Friedrich Merz. Elon Musk, whose influence in the White House is no secret, has publicly [endorsed](#) the AfD and [criticized](#) the French legal system over Marine Le Pen’s trial.

It is unlikely to end there. We can expect that in addition to Russia, the United States will increasingly interfere in European political life through social media platforms and in support of extremist parties whose goal is the fragmentation or destruction of the EU. When U.S. officials talk about reviving Nord Stream with Moscow, it suggests they are preparing for the AfD to take power in Germany—the only party that supports such a move. While some pro-Trump voices argue that this is meant to “wake up” Europe, it is clear that if Europe is waking up, it is doing so despite Trump, not because of him.

A fragmented Europe—made up of small and medium states—will be far easier to manipulate and far less capable of resisting, whether economically or militarily.

A fragmented Europe—made up of small and medium states—will be far easier to manipulate and far less capable of resisting, whether economically or militarily. The early signs from the Trump administration indicate that it sees Europe not as a partner but, at best, as a buffer zone around Russia. This is the new reality Europe must learn to live with.

That said, there is a possible upside. American pressure could push centrist and pro-European forces into action. The results of the German elections may be interpreted in that light. In France, the vocal support of Musk, Vance, and Steve Bannon is splitting the far right, which has historically fed off anti-Americanism.

Let's not forget that before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many European states—especially in the South—saw their main challenge as coming from the South: uncontrolled migration and the rise of Islamic radicalism within Europe.

Let's not forget that before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many European states—especially in the South—saw their main challenge as coming from the South: uncontrolled migration and the rise of Islamic radicalism within Europe. These threats have not disappeared, but they have been overshadowed by the existential dangers posed by Russia and the potential collapse of the U.S. security guarantee. Under these new conditions, countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean—Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Türkiye, and Syria—are gaining new leverage. Europe must build smart partnerships with them or risk having them maintain migratory pressure as a geopolitical tool.

None of this justifies hesitation. Europe must act—and act decisively. The seriousness of the moment leaves no room for delay. The idea of Joint European Forces (JEF) must take concrete form—and quickly—even if outside NATO and EU structures. It is telling that in over 65 years of the EU's existence, the only force wearing a European uniform is FRONTEX, created in 2004. That's not enough. The EU wasn't designed for military integration, but it can contribute financially to building a Euro-

pean defense capability, foster convergence among defense industries, and support the creation of an integrated defense sector. These efforts must extend to Ukraine, the UK, Türkiye, Switzerland, and Norway—countries that must, ideally, become full members of the future European pole, or at the very least, close and reliable partners.

Europe is already a powerhouse in trade and finance. As noted above, it has the tools to confront tariff wars. The uncertainty sown by the U.S. in markets and supply chains, though damaging, may also offer Europe an opportunity. If handled wisely, Europe's stability—including its legal predictability—could make it a global pole of attraction, particularly as Trump undermines the foundations of the U.S. judicial system.

But Europe must urgently strengthen its [competitiveness](#). In the last 25 years, it has fallen behind the U.S. by nearly 26%. Bureaucracy and lagging innovation are key factors. There is real potential for growth by deepening the single market and investing in the defense industry. The [Draghi Report](#) has already laid out much of what is needed: a Capital Markets Union, investment in innovation and research, reducing digital dependency. Europe must cultivate what made the U.S. strong—competitiveness, scientific innovation, and the rule of law. There is no miracle solution.

Achieving these goals will require greater European integration. But this is difficult while EU institutions suffer from a deep crisis of legitimacy. Populist forces exploit the EU's faceless bureaucracy and lack of identity. For Europe to become a true global pole, it must undergo not just institutional change but a philosophical transformation. This is possible. Europe has the history, culture, and intellectual depth to imagine itself anew. What's needed now is the political will—and urgency—to do so.

Quo Vadis Georgia?

Historically, multipolar systems have been volatile and marked by shifting alliances and frequent conflicts. These conflicts emerged not only directly between the leaders of the poles but also on their periphery. Georgia is a small country and for Tbilisi, the membership of a bigger interstate alliance is necessary for survival.

What opportunities lie ahead? In today's emerging multipolar world, one of the most dangerous poles is the one dominated by Russia—the so-called Russkii Mir. And it has its eyes on Georgia.

What opportunities lie ahead? In today's emerging multipolar world, one of the most dangerous poles is the one dominated by Russia—the so-called Russkii Mir. And it has its eyes on Georgia. We already have a clear sense of what alignment with this bloc entails, thanks to the cautionary examples of Belarus, several Central Asian states, and Armenia—all of which are now trying to break free after having been sacrificed, stripped of their sovereignty, and robbed of the geopolitical gains they achieved in the 1990s.

The countries orbiting Moscow are experiencing a new form of limited sovereignty—a modern-day Brezhnev Doctrine 2.0. This version is, in many ways, even more repressive. It is cloaked in the ideology of Russian imperialism and nationalism; it operates economically as a mafia-style system run by corrupt oligarchs loyal to Putin; and it sustains itself politically through authoritarian regimes that crush fundamental freedoms. On the international stage, this bloc defines itself through hostility toward the West—what remains of it—and a permanent readiness for conflict.

The Georgian Dream government's policy is moving in this direction.

The alternative to this outlook depends on the success of the European project in building a pole of attraction of its own. If, at the strategic and defense level, Europe transforms from a “teddy bear” into a “porcupine”, and becomes more efficient and competitive at the economic level, it could emerge as a compelling force. Politically, it remains one of the very few—if not the only—zones that safeguards individual and public freedoms, guaranteed by the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Culturally, it ensures the preservation of diversity. For Tbilisi, this could be an ideal option.

The *sine qua non* condition for Georgia's rapprochement with this bloc is the rise to power of democratic and pro-European forces—something that, at least in principle, aligns with the will of the Georgian people. But does a transforming Europe view Georgia as a potential member of its renewed alliance? With the current government in power, the answer leans toward the negative. Unlike Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia appears to be less favored for integration. What Georgia needs to do in order to associate itself with this pole—and what Europe strategically needs in the Caucasus-Black Sea region—are questions that must be urgently addressed in both Tbilisi and European capitals.

An alternative path lies in Georgia's potential involvement in the axis being shaped by Türkiye in tandem with Azerbaijan. While this is not a pole in itself, it is an axis built on shared geopolitical and economic interests—particularly in energy transit, trade, and major infrastructure projects—that is establishing itself as an indispensable partner to Europe. If a durable and mutually acceptable [peace deal](#) is reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Yerevan could also become a future participant in this axis.

The Georgian Dream government must reckon with the strengthening of this South Caucasus axis. However, its ability to act is constrained by Russia, which would not look kindly on Tbilisi's

deep integration into it. Let us recall that in the 1990s, Moscow did everything it could to obstruct major energy initiatives such as the BTC pipeline—including organizing [coup](#) attempts, terrorist attacks against heads of state, and the sabotage of infrastructure. In 2025, Russia remains a competitor of Türkiye in the region, even if the war in Ukraine compels Moscow to adopt a more conciliatory and flexible posture toward Ankara.

Much will depend on the future of Georgia's relations with Europe, which in turn will shape the nature of the Turkish-dominated axis in the region. This equation includes multiple unknowns, the resolution of which will depend on internal political developments in Türkiye, the trajectory of Turkish-American relations, the evolving situation in the Middle East, and more ■

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Russia's Vision of Multipolarity – Spheres of Influence and Subjugation of Nations

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shaken the global order, exposing the fragility of the rules-based international system. While Western governments rallied behind Ukraine early on, their efforts have struggled to resonate beyond North America, Europe, and the Pacific. In Asia, South America, and Africa, Russian propaganda has gained traction, shaping pro-Russian views. Even some Central and Eastern European governments have openly sided with Moscow. More recently, pro-Russian narratives have gained ground in the U.S. and Western Europe, further undermining Western unity.

The Trump administration's [shift](#) on Ukraine—first signaled at the February 2025 Munich Security Conference and crystallized in the Oval Office clash with Volodymyr Zelenskyy—revealed that

sympathy for Russia's stance is no longer fringe in Washington. This shift reflects not just a policy change but a broader embrace of a multipolar world where power dictates respect and where might is right.

Bipolar Multipolarity: Russia's Imperial Blueprint

As the Trump administration shifts closer to Russia's position on Ukraine, it is also sidelining Europe, excluding the EU and NATO from key security discussions. By dropping support for Ukraine's NATO membership and marginalizing European allies, the U.S. is reinforcing a model where major powers decide security matters without smaller nations—a long-standing Russian [goal](#).



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Trump's [rhetoric](#) on controlling Greenland and [clashing](#) with Canada, both founding NATO members, further normalizes the idea of using national security to justify territorial ambitions, echoing the logic of revisionist powers like Russia and China.

Russia capitalizes on these fractures, promoting its multipolar vision as a fairer alternative to “Western hegemony.” In truth, it is a return to spheres of influence where power overrides law and sovereignty. Any U.S.-Russia deal will have consequences far beyond Ukraine, reshaping European and global security.

Russia's push for a multipolar world is rooted in the Primakov Doctrine of the 1990s which laid out three enduring goals: countering U.S. dominance, restoring Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, and halting NATO expansion.

Russia's push for a multipolar world is rooted in the Primakov Doctrine of the 1990s which [laid out](#) three enduring goals: countering U.S. dominance, restoring Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, and halting NATO expansion. These goals have guided Moscow's foreign policy ever since, culminating in the December 2021 ultimatums to [NATO](#) and [the U.S.](#), demanding a rollback of Western military presence near Russia's borders.

This strategic vision is not reactive but deeply embedded in Russia's worldview—where great power status is tied to territorial control. Vladislav Surkov's 2019 [essay](#), Putin's Lasting State, reframed expansion as an existential imperative, positioning Russia as a civilizational alternative to the West and promoting its authoritarian model globally, from Belarus and Georgia to Hungary, Venezuela, and beyond.

Even in the 1990s, Moscow never accepted the Soviet collapse as a loss of imperial privilege. De-classified talks between Clinton and Yeltsin confirm that post-Cold War Russia still saw itself as entitled to influence its former empire. Putin's [speeches](#), [epistolary addresses](#), and actions have only made this more explicit.

With the West divided and pro-Russian leaders gaining ground in Europe, Moscow's decades-long ambition to replace the liberal order with one built on power and spheres of influence is closer than ever to becoming a reality.

The war in Ukraine is Russia's boldest move yet to formalize its sphere of influence and reshape the global order. With the West divided and pro-Russian leaders gaining ground in Europe, Moscow's decades-long ambition to replace the liberal order with one built on power and spheres of influence is closer than ever to becoming a reality.

Not a Peace Deal but a New Global Balance

With no path to military victory in Ukraine, Putin has shifted to a war of attrition, aiming to wear down Western support and force Ukraine into a settlement on Russia's terms. This strategy relies on political fatigue in the West—and, unexpectedly, the Trump administration's willingness to pressure Kyiv into concessions, including abandoning NATO ambitions and accepting territorial losses.

Putin's apparent [openness](#) to Trump's ceasefire proposal is a smokescreen. His only real offer—a brief pause in strikes on energy infrastructure—serves Russian interests while maintaining aggression. His so-called “peace plan” is, in reality, a blueprint for Ukraine's capitulation. Putin's conditions include erasing the root causes of the con-

flict by denying Ukraine's right to determine its own future, refusing to negotiate with President Zelenskyy as a direct call for regime change, halting all foreign military aid to Ukraine as a demand for its demilitarization and vulnerability, and insisting on one-on-one talks with the U.S. in an attempt to sideline Ukraine and European stakeholders, reducing Ukraine from a sovereign nation to an object of negotiation.

While the White House emphasized only the limited positive aspect of talks, Putin's bold declaration made his real intentions clear: his objective is not peace but Ukraine's submission.

The stark contrast between Putin's ambitions and the official readout from the White House is telling. While the White House [emphasized](#) only the limited positive aspect of talks, Putin's bold declaration made his real intentions clear: his objective is not peace but Ukraine's submission.

Indications on one of the most critical aspects to be addressed through diplomatic discussions—Ukraine's territorial integrity—do not look promising. The U.S. stance allows the Kremlin to extend focus from Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk to Kherson and Zaporizhzhia - Ukrainian regions now claimed under Russian law as Russian territories. From Russia's legal standpoint, there is no distinction between Crimea and these newly annexed territories. Alarming, one of the key U.S. negotiators, Steve Witkoff, appears to [echo](#) Russia's stance even on these outrageous claims, raising serious concerns that Washington's negotiating team may be tacitly legitimizing Russia's territorial ambitions under the guise of pragmatism of peace-making.

If the United States sustains its support for Russia's positions, it will indeed validate Putin's long-term strategy of outlasting Western resolve. How-

ever, the real danger goes beyond Ukraine. Putin's conditions for peace are not limited to retaining occupied Ukrainian territories; they are rooted in his broader vision of a new multipolar world order where Russia's spheres of influence are formally acknowledged and respected far beyond Ukraine. His ambitions extend to reshaping global power dynamics and reasserting Russian control over the former Soviet sphere of influence. If the West allows Russia to dictate the terms of peace, it will not just mean the loss of Ukrainian sovereignty but a fundamental shift in the balance of power that undermines Euro-Atlantic security and global stability.

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The ongoing diplomatic dynamics suggest that Putin is imposing a zero-sum game, blackmailing Ukraine and the West to accept these "new realities" just as he did with Transnistria, Abkhazia, Tskhinvali, Crimea, and Donbas at different points in time. Expecting Putin to compromise and return annexed or occupied territories without serious pressure is entirely unrealistic since, at this point, negotiations seem to be going under Russia's conditions.

Some argue Trump's team is prioritizing a quick pre-election win over a just peace or pursuing a "reversed Kissinger" strategy to realign with Moscow against China. Whatever the motive, the result risks legitimizing Russia's vision of a multipolar world with formalized spheres of influence. In turn, striving towards multipolarity is a rare example of a strategic alignment between Russia and China. Thus, if materialized, the new multipolar world will be a great strategic victory for Russia's

and China's long-standing revisionist policy aimed at revising and taking down the rules-based international system.

The Multipolar Trap: What Russia's Vision Means for the West

For countries long in Moscow's shadow, it is clear: only a decisive Russian defeat in Ukraine can dismantle the Soviet legacy and halt the Kremlin expansionism. However, in Western capitals, this remains a fringe view. Trump's pivot from "whatever it takes" to "end the war at all costs" plays into Putin's hands. Without a strong, unified Western stance, the danger grows that power politics, not international law, will decide Ukraine's fate.

A real success for Ukraine requires a decisive shift: an unambiguous strategic communication campaign affirming that nothing is off the table and the West's objective is the full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, backed by the delivery of all necessary weapons to achieve it, and sealed with credible security guarantees. The recent U.S.-Ukraine meeting in Jeddah briefly [revived](#) hopes that Ukraine's national interests and international norms might still shape any future peace deal. However, the reversing dangerous trend toward a multipolar trap still looks real and scary.

Putin's vision of multipolarity is well articulated—and, simply put, it echoes the logic of the old Warsaw Pact and the [Iron Curtain](#). In practical terms, it means that whatever the West may say about events in Russia's so-called neighborhood, Moscow will either absorb the territory, pull it into one of its integration structures, such as BRICS, the Eurasian Union, or the CIS, or bind it into some form of "Union State." This is the core of the threat: the re-establishment of a Russian sphere of influence under the guise of multipolarity. Yet what remains

dangerously unclear is whether the West—particularly the U.S. administration—fully understands what entering into any tacit or explicit multipolar arrangement with Russia would entail for a number of Eastern European states. What would it mean for the Euro-Atlantic security architecture? What norms would be compromised, and whose sovereignty would be up for negotiation?

Three key questions follow. First of all, is the U.S. ready to accept a multipolar order shaped by Russia, China, and other authoritarian regimes? Washington's retreat from long-standing commitments—such as its [hesitation](#) on NATO enlargement and failure to uphold assurances from the Bucharest Summit and Budapest Memorandum—suggests it may be edging toward de facto acceptance of a Russian version of multipolarity. Ukraine's sovereignty has become the test of whether the U.S. still supports a rules-based international order.

Second, *can the West stay unified—or will the U.S. and Europe become separate poles in a fractured world?* The transatlantic unity that once defined the West is under severe strain. NATO's coherence is weakened by uncertainty from Washington. Meanwhile, the EU faces growing internal divisions, with Hungary and Slovakia obstructing key foreign policy decisions. Europe finds itself entangled in a tech war with China, a defense standoff with Russia, and a trade imbalance with the U.S. Post-Brexit, the concept of a "coalition of the willing" may emerge as a stopgap, but without unified leadership, the West risks fragmenting into distinct and potentially competing centers of power.

The third inevitable question is whether a new arms race can be avoided in this freshly baked multipolar world. With the blatant violation of the Budapest Memorandum and doubts over NATO guarantees, the foundation of global non-proliferation is [eroding](#), and nuclear deterrence is seen as the only realistic guarantee of security. This is already prompting [discussions](#) in Europe about alternative

defense models, including France offering a nuclear umbrella to Poland. Simultaneously, Baltic and Polish defense ministers [recommend](#) withdrawal from the Ottawa Convention to allow landmines as a last-resort border defense against Russia. As deterrence erodes, a dangerous global arms race looms. Authoritarian regimes, such as Russia and China, which do not rely on public opinion for their policy-making, can undoubtedly keep pace, leaving a serious question about whether affluent Western economies can afford to pay for more guns at the expense of public welfare or to what extent the patience of democratic electorates will support such a drive for larger military expenditures.

These questions, and the lack of answers thereto, lead to one conclusion – Russia’s “multipolarity” is not a fair alternative—it is a threat to sovereignty, security, and the rules-based order. And the West must confront this reality before it is too late.

What Russia’s Multipolar World Means for Georgia

Russia’s push for a multipolar world raises urgent concerns for small states like Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia—nations whose security is deeply tied to Ukraine’s fate. If, after years of resistance, Ukraine is pressured into accepting a deal that rewards Russian aggression and is brokered without its full consent, it would set a dangerous precedent.

Russia’s push for a multipolar world raises urgent concerns for small states like Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia—nations whose security is deeply tied to Ukraine’s fate. If, after years of resistance, Ukraine is pressured into accepting a deal that rewards Russian aggression and is brokered without its full consent, it would set a dangerous prece-

dent. It would send a clear message that the use of force to redraw borders and dictate terms is once again a legitimate tool of statecraft—especially in Russia’s neighborhood.

Such an outcome would cast doubt on the future of Europe’s eastern frontier. What credibility would remain in the promise of Western integration for states that have made painful sacrifices to move closer to the EU and NATO? Can the EU or the U.S. realistically reclaim influence in Eastern Europe under current conditions—or will the region be surrendered, incrementally, to Moscow’s sphere of control?

Nowhere is this dilemma more acute than in Georgia. A peace deal that compromises Ukraine’s territorial integrity would embolden Moscow’s efforts to dominate the so-called “near abroad” and devastate Georgia’s long-term security. It would confirm that the West is either unwilling or unable to protect its partners in Russia’s shadow.

Even in a more hopeful scenario—where Ukraine secures new security guarantees and a clear path to the EU—Georgia may still be left behind. The ruling Georgian Dream party continues to steer the country away from the West, aligning with anti-democratic forces and [isolating](#) Georgia from any emerging security framework. Government statements [blaming](#) Georgia for past conflicts only help Putin frame the country as part of Russia’s rightful sphere, undermining any Western claim to engagement.

If Ukraine is ultimately absorbed into Russia’s orbit, it will not just end Kyiv’s European aspirations—it will extinguish hope for a democratic, sovereign future across the entire Eastern Neighborhood.

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it will not just end Kyiv's European aspirations—it will extinguish hope for a democratic, sovereign future across the entire Eastern Neighborhood. The broader Black Sea region will inevitably face growing instability, deeper authoritarian entrenchment, and a dangerous new normal where small states can no longer choose their destiny.

To prevent a dangerous rollback of democratic progress in the region, the West must adopt a clear and bold strategy for Georgia. There should be no room for speculation about restoring relations with the current regime. Instead, it must be made

unmistakably clear to Georgia's overwhelmingly pro-Western society that the Georgian Dream's path—one that isolates the country from Western interests and values—poses a direct threat not only to its Euro-Atlantic future but also to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. A strong, coordinated response is needed: robust sanctions targeting the regime's leadership and a meaningful support package for democratic actors and institutions. This would send the right message—that the West stands with the Georgian people and that those fighting for Georgia's freedom and democracy are not left alone against Russia and its local proxies ■

The Brain Drain That Will Break Georgia's Democracy

In April 2024, during the election campaign, Georgia's shadow ruler, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, dropped the mask. Speaking to Georgian Dream supporters, he openly [declared](#) war on the opposition and civil society. He grouped together all critics—be they NGOs, political parties, or private individuals—under one label: the “Collective United National Movement,” branding them enemies of the state. With striking contempt, he called civil society “pseudo-elites nurtured by foreign countries” who, in his words, “have no homeland” and “are ashamed of their people.”

Soon after the Georgian Dream claimed victory in the contested 26 October elections—results questioned by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe—Ivanishvili's words were turned into law. The ruling party launched a broad assault on all remaining pockets of dissent. They crushed street protests through steep fines and jail time, froze the accounts of the ad hoc funds, which financed the activists, copied the U.S. for-

eign agents' law without adapting it to Georgia's context, and passed legislation that silences the critical media. The Georgian Dream also re-introduced treason charges to target the opposition and began rewriting history through a parliamentary commission investigating the United National Movement's (UNM)'s time in power (2003–2012) – an effort that will inevitably lead to the outlawing of opposition parties.

All of these actions, if not reversed promptly, will not just suppress the dissent but will likely lead to a massive brain drain from Georgia to the EU. This will, in turn, be a final nail in the coffin of Georgian democracy.

An Anaconda Strategy to Suffocate Dissent

The Georgian Dream has acted like an anaconda, slowly and relentlessly tightening its grip on the democratic resistance until the target is too weak to



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resist. The crackdown has been methodical—using the façade of democratic procedure to legitimize repressive laws. Unsurprisingly, Ivanishvili was allegedly called *anaconda* when doing business in Russia in the 1990s.

To deter escalating protests since late 2024, the Georgian Dream changed the administrative code, imposing GEL 5,000 (approximately EUR 1,700) fines or 60-day jail terms for blocking roads. For a country where the average monthly salary is less than half that, and youth unemployment among 20–24-year-olds [stands](#) at 32%, this is a crushing blow. Facial recognition technology is now used – illegally – to track protestors, and the community funds that covered the fines of the protestors have been foreclosed, deepening the chilling effect.

For instance, in the U.S., FARA does not apply to think tanks, media, and NGOs, while in the Georgian case, according to the explanatory note prepared by the Georgian Dream, FARA is necessary to regulate civil society's funding from abroad.

Instead of implementing the Russian-style “foreign agent” law passed in 2024, which was full of legal loopholes that civil society actors were prepared to exploit, the Georgian Dream adopted a copy of the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) – in its 1938 form, without the subsequent legal interpretations and precedents. For instance, in the U.S., FARA does not apply to think tanks, media, and

NGOs, while in the Georgian case, according to the explanatory note prepared by the Georgian Dream, FARA is necessary to regulate civil society's funding from abroad. In Georgia's context, where nearly all civil society organizations depend on foreign funding, it effectively criminalizes the sector. NGOs that do not register as "foreign agents"—a term tainted by Soviet-era stigma—face steep fines and up to five years in prison. This would render the previously "vibrant" civil society "non-existent." But the Georgian Dream seems to be ready to swiftly replace civil society organizations with loyal ones, just like it recreated "loyal opposition" in the Parliament after all real opposition parties boycotted the legislative body. Specifically, a state agency has been created to issue grants to pro-government NGOs, with GEL 20 million (approximately EUR 7 million) earmarked for the effort in 2025 in order to nurture loyal NGOs and GONGOS.

Much of Georgia's independent media faces extinction without foreign funding and editorial independence. One of the nine requirements the EU had with Georgia was to ensure institutional independence and impartiality of the Communication Commission, something which Georgia failed to deliver.

Then comes the media. Allegedly borrowing from the UK Broadcasting Code, the Georgian Dream introduced new rules banning foreign funding for audiovisual media and gave sweeping content control powers to Georgia's National Communications Commission (GNCC) —an institution long criticized for being under the ruling party's thumb. Much of Georgia's independent media faces extinction without foreign funding and editorial independence. One of the [nine requirements](#) the EU had with Georgia was to ensure institutional independence and impartiality of the Communication Commission, something which Georgia failed to deliver.

Now, the GNCC will serve as the main censor of free speech.

The Georgian Dream passed new amendments to the Criminal Code, reintroducing the charges of treason aimed squarely at the United National Movement. It blames them for the 2008 war and subsequent loss of territory and now seeks legal retribution under the guise of historical justice.

And finally, the fatal blow is being prepared for the political opposition. The Georgian Dream passed new amendments to the Criminal Code, reintroducing the charges of treason aimed squarely at the United National Movement. It blames them for the 2008 war and subsequent loss of territory and now seeks legal retribution under the guise of historical justice. A special parliamentary commission was launched to investigate "crimes" allegedly committed by the UNM between 2003 and 2012. On 7 August 2024, the Georgian Dream issued a [statement](#) stressing that "the treasonous crime of the National Movement had the worst consequences. As a result of the 2008 war, we lost two historic regions, hundreds of soldiers and civilians were killed, and 30,000 people were displaced. It is unacceptable for a crime of this magnitude to go unpunished without a legal assessment." This legal assessment, as already publicly stated by the ruling party, will lead to the banning of the "collective UNM," that is, all opposition parties. The relevant legislative amendment has already been [tabled](#) in the Parliament.

Following Targets: Education and the Internet

As in other consolidating autocracies, education is emerging as one of the next battlegrounds for control. Having already neutralized independent institutions like the judiciary and media, the Georgian

Dream is now poised to tighten its grip on universities—some of the last remaining spaces for critical thinking and dissent.

Universities have historically been hubs of resistance, dialogue, and civic mobilization in Georgia, especially among the youth. The Georgian Dream sees this autonomy as a threat. The government is expected to deploy a mix of bureaucratic and legal tools to bring higher education under tighter control.

Universities have historically been hubs of resistance, dialogue, and civic mobilization in Georgia, especially among the youth. The Georgian Dream sees this autonomy as a threat. The government is expected to deploy a mix of bureaucratic and legal tools to bring higher education under tighter control. Stricter accreditation procedures, new regulatory hurdles, and politically motivated inspections are all likely to be used to exert pressure on universities perceived as unfriendly. The goal is twofold: silence critical academic voices and reshape the intellectual landscape into one that reinforces the ruling party's ideology. In January, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze already [announced](#) that the education system would be dramatically transformed – not hiding the will to subjugate it to political control.

Another target is Georgia's increasingly internationalized university system, which is a main source of independence for many critically minded academic institutions. Foreign students now [comprise](#) 17.3% of the student population, with 31,000 international students contributing approximately GEL 800 million (EUR 266 million) to the national economy in 2024. Many of these students come from India, Iraq, Nigeria, and other developing countries, attracted by affordable English-language medical and technical degrees.

This growing sector—an economic and reputational asset—is now vulnerable. The government may restrict student visa issuance, tighten immigration rules, or limit university autonomy in admitting international students under the pretext of national security, immigration, or administrative reforms. These actions will not only undercut revenue streams for Georgian, especially private, universities but also sever international academic linkages, further isolating the country from global education and research networks. The effects of the new FARA on academia are yet unknown, as many academic institutions dread the possibility of losing access to European research grants, programs like Horizon, or funding opportunities for academics. The experience of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus shows that once restrictive legislations are enacted, academia suffers as well, even if, on paper, exceptions for academic activities are envisaged in the laws.

The Georgian Dream initiated another legislative change – limiting the ability of civil servants to work in academia. If academic freedom had been respected before, and public servants could have been employed in the universities, new changes would only allow them to give courses and read lectures upon explicit consent from the boss.

Just recently, the Georgian Dream initiated another legislative change – limiting the ability of civil servants to work in academia. If academic freedom had been respected before, and public servants could have been employed in the universities, new changes would only allow them to give courses and read lectures upon explicit consent from the boss.

At the same time, there are clear signs that internet freedom is next on the chopping block. While the Georgian Dream has so far stopped short of passing formal internet censorship laws, ruling party fig-

ures have repeatedly floated the idea of regulating online platforms. The aim is to dismantle the last bastion of unfettered public discourse—the digital sphere.

This could take the form of “cybersecurity” legislation modeled on laws seen in Russia or Türkiye, allowing the government to block websites, demand data from platforms, or punish vague offenses like spreading “false information.” Independent media outlets, civil society groups, and even private citizens using social media to mobilize protest or challenge power could find themselves under increasing digital surveillance and legal threat. If implemented, such measures would mark a chilling turn toward comprehensive state control over public expression, both offline and online.

The Inevitable Brain Drain

Amid this rapidly closing civic space, Georgia is on the verge of a massive and targeted brain drain—one with serious long-term consequences for its democratic future.

For civil society leaders, investigative journalists, outspoken academics, and public intellectuals, the options are bleak: register as “foreign agents” and legitimize the government’s narrative; continue working and risk prosecution; shut down operations altogether; or leave the country.

For civil society leaders, investigative journalists, outspoken academics, and public intellectuals, the options are bleak: register as “foreign agents” and legitimize the government’s narrative; continue working and risk prosecution; shut down operations altogether; or leave the country. With USAID,

NED, RFE/RL, and the VOA suspending operations, many are already packing their bags—taking their experience, networks, and institutional memory with them.

Georgia has known emigration before, especially in the 1990s. But this exodus will be qualitatively different. It will not be driven by economic hardship alone but by political suffocation. It affects a distinct social stratum: the urban, educated, pro-European middle class—those who have been the engine behind Georgia’s democratic reforms, civic innovation, and EU integration efforts. Their removal will leave a gaping void in the country’s intellectual and civic life.

In 2023 alone, 205,000 people [left](#) Georgia. According to a CRRC survey, 45% of Georgians [said](#) they would consider leaving the country temporarily. With political repression rising in 2025, that number is likely to grow significantly. But this will not be a repeat of the Central and Eastern European migration post-EU accession where emigrants eventually returned, bringing back know-how and investment. Under the Georgian Dream’s current trajectory, exiled dissidents will not be welcomed back. Instead, they will become part of a disenfranchised diaspora, disconnected from the policymaking processes at home. As Ivanishvili once famously said, the Georgians are welcome to leave the country and live and work in the EU.

The consequences will ripple far beyond civil society. Many of those leaving are university lecturers, trainers, and public educators, meaning Georgia’s educational system will be further hollowed out. Others lead human rights organizations, run fact-checking initiatives, or provide legal aid to the most vulnerable. Their departure will dismantle the only remaining counterweight to the Georgian Dream’s expanding dominance.

Europe Must Prepare—And Respond

As Georgia's democratic space collapses, Europe must step in—not just with words, but with a concrete plan to support the country's civic infrastructure both inside and outside its borders.

The reality is clear: more Georgians will seek asylum in the EU. Currently, 20 EU and Schengen countries classify Georgia as a “safe country of origin,” which [allows](#) for fast-track rejection of asylum claims. But this classification is increasingly outdated. Countries like Belgium, Malta, Hungary, and Slovakia already do not apply this status to Georgia, and recent rulings in Germany—where a Berlin court [refused](#) to treat Georgia as a safe country—signal that change is coming.

EU member states should be ready to revise their safe-country lists and process Georgian asylum applications with political nuance and urgency.

EU member states should be ready to revise their safe-country lists and process Georgian asylum applications with political nuance and urgency. Beyond asylum, they should create tailored humanitarian visa pathways, residency permits, and professional support schemes for civil society actors, journalists, and academics fleeing repression. The lessons from Belarus and Ukraine could come in handy.

But more importantly, Europe must invest in Georgia's democratic diaspora. These are the people who will be instrumental in rebuilding Georgia's institutions when political conditions shift. Such support must include:

- Legal and logistical assistance to establish NGOs in exile;
- Institutional development funding for civic groups forced to relocate;

- Fellowships and grants for journalists, researchers, and policy experts working on Georgia-related issues;
- Support for independent online media hubs and information platforms;
- Continued engagement with civil society organizations still operating in Georgia—especially those refusing to register as “foreign agents.”

The Georgian Dream is not merely undermining democracy—it is attempting to dismantle the very idea that citizens can organize independently, speak freely, or hold power accountable. The consequences of this are not confined to Georgia's borders. A captured, autocratic Georgia would destabilize the wider Black Sea region, embolden authoritarianism, and deal a blow to the EU's credibility in its neighborhood.

The brain drain that is coming—and in many ways already underway—is not just a crisis of migration. It is a deliberate ejection of Georgia's democratic soul, engineered through legal pressure, financial starvation, and fear.

The brain drain that is coming—and in many ways already underway—is not just a crisis of migration. It is a deliberate ejection of Georgia's democratic soul, engineered through legal pressure, financial starvation, and fear. If the West fails to respond, it will not only betray its Georgian partners—it will cede the field to those who believe that repression works and that democracy can be erased without consequence.

Europe must act—not only to shelter Georgia's exiles but to amplify their voices, support their work, and keep the promise of democratic renewal alive. Because once the conscience of a nation is forced into silence or exile, rebuilding it will be a far steeper and lonelier climb ■

Georgia's Great Imitation: How Ivanishvili Is Deceiving Trump's World to Cement His Authoritarian Rule

In recent months, the ruling Georgian Dream party has adopted a strikingly familiar rhetorical strategy: invoking the language of Trumpism. From denouncing the “deep state” and globalist elites to railing against foreign-funded NGOs and a bloated government, Georgian Dream officials have echoed the very terms that have become staples of the America First political movement. They speak of sovereignty, conservative values, media accountability, and bureaucratic reform. On paper, it may seem like Georgia's government has embraced a Trump-style populist awakening, also visible in some European states.

But behind this borrowed language lies a cynical, calculated deception—one that risks fooling American allies, enabling authoritarianism, and handing a key strategic partner in the South Caucasus over

to America's greatest adversaries: Russia and China.

The Georgian Dream is not fighting the deep state—it is building one. It is not slashing bureaucracy—it is expanding it. It is not defending free speech—it is criminalizing it. It is not protecting national sovereignty—it is surrendering it to Russian influence and Chinese capital.

The truth is this: The Georgian Dream is not fighting the deep state—it is building one. It is not slashing bureaucracy—it is expanding it. It is not defending free speech—it is criminalizing it. It is not protecting national sovereignty—it is surren-



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dering it to Russian influence and Chinese capital. It is not aligning with conservative values—it is embracing a medieval-type dictatorship. And it is doing all of this while cloaking itself in Trumpist rhetoric, hoping that the Trump administration, distracted by language and symbolism, will overlook the regime's betrayal of everything the conservative movement stands for.

The Illusion Behind the Trump-Like Language

The Georgian Dream's sudden embrace of “deep state” rhetoric—replacing its earlier favorite, the “global war party”—is no coincidence. In late 2024, Georgian Dream leaders began mimicking the language of the American right, hoping to win favor with Trump allies. Kakha Kaladze, the ruling party's secretary general, recently [boasted](#) on TV that Georgia had exposed the “deep state” before Trump, rewriting history to suit the narrative. In truth, the Georgian Dream had long [blamed](#) a vaguely defined “global war party”, not a “deep state” of Western institutions and NGOs for pressuring Georgia into conflict with Russia for electoral purposes, trying to portray itself as pro-peace. So what, that no U.S. or EU official has ever called on Georgia to join the war in Ukraine?

Now, as Trump's influence grows, the Georgian Dream is rebranding its conspiracies under the more familiar label of the “deep state,” even [accusing](#) Nordic and Baltic states of being fully controlled by it—using the English term in Georgian speeches because the concept does not even translate into Georgian. The pitch is simple: once Trump defeats the deep state at home, U.S.-Georgia ties will be “instantly restored.”

This narrative is crafted for a domestic audience worried about Georgia's crumbling relationship with the West and, particularly, the U.S., especial-

ly after the Biden administration [suspended](#) the Strategic Partnership in November 2024. Georgia has long had one of the most pro-American societies in the region – polls consistently [show](#) overwhelming support for U.S. and Euro-Atlantic integration. But the Georgian Dream is weaponizing American domestic political debates in order to justify its own attacks on democracy. When Elon Musk criticizes USAID, ruling party leaders cheer, forgetting that they were once its biggest beneficiaries. They also celebrated cuts to Radio Free Europe, a network that has repeatedly exposed government corruption. The party has turned civil society—NGOs, fact-checkers, investigative outlets—into its enemy, not because they are foreign agents, but because they are domestic watchdogs.

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To reinforce the illusion, the Georgian Dream [created](#) its own Department of Government Efficiency, parodying Elon Musk's DOGE and copying the “drain the swamp” mantra. But instead of shrinking government, it has expanded it—civil service and bureaucratic expenditures [increased](#) significantly since the Georgian Dream came to power while jobs and benefits were channeled to party loyalists. Watchdogs found that every fourth salary is [paid](#) by the state budget and that state welfare recipients are [exploited](#) to support the ruling party. The Georgian Dream's populist gestures are pure performance: [scrubbing](#) the word “gender” from laws they themselves passed, dismantling the Gender Equality Council they created, and flirting with bans on LGBT symbols. Trump never called for these measures—but Russia has. This is not American conservatism. It is authoritarianism in a red hat.

Georgia's Deep State Exists—And Ivanishvili Runs It

At the center of this carefully staged deception stands Bidzina Ivanishvili—the reclusive billionaire, former prime minister, and undisputed puppeteer of Georgian politics. Although he holds no formal office today, Ivanishvili exercises unchecked power over every branch of government: the judiciary, the parliament, the security services, and the media.

His personal network appoints lifetime judges who now dominate Georgia's High Council of Justice—some of whom have been sanctioned by the U.S., the UK, and the EU for corruption, political interference, and the erosion of democratic checks and balances. These so-called “clan of judges” are not just Ivanishvili's legal enforcers—they are his insurance policy. Through them, political opponents are prosecuted, dissent is criminalized, and civil society is neutered. Recent journalistic investigations have also [revealed](#) that his closest political and business allies, including Irakli Rukhadze, who also runs the domestic propaganda Imedi TV, have ties to Russian oligarchic circles, raising further alarm about the foreign influences shaping his regime.

Beyond the courts, Ivanishvili bankrolls an entire parallel media ecosystem—a network of so-called “alternative” outlets designed to mimic independent journalism while spreading conspiracy theories, disinformation and smear campaigns against critics, opposition parties, and the West. These outlets, many of which operate under the guise of patriotic nationalism, have been key tools in reframing civil society organizations and pro-Western voices as “foreign agents.” At the same time, the government harasses or censors actual independent journalists. Investigative outlets like *Publika*, *Batumelebi*, *Formula*, and *Mtavari* have been targeted with lawsuits, advertising boycotts, and

even physical attacks. In 2024 alone, over 90 journalists were detained or injured while covering protests or political events—a staggering figure in a country of 3.7 million people. As international watchdogs like Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders have noted, Georgia is [no longer considered](#) a “free” media environment.

Ivanishvili has created the very kind of entrenched, unaccountable bureaucracy that the American conservative movement has spent years fighting against—a real deep state.

In short, Ivanishvili has created the very kind of entrenched, unaccountable bureaucracy that the American conservative movement has spent years fighting against—a real deep state. Yet now he dares to speak the language of Trump's America, claiming to battle the same enemies that he himself personifies: elite corruption, captured institutions, and media propaganda. It is the political equivalent of a counterfeit bill—mimicking the surface design while reversing its entire value. This is not just dishonest politics; it is a dangerous illusion. If American conservatives—who rightly distrust entrenched power—are duped by this imitation, they risk legitimizing a regime that fundamentally betrays U.S. values and long-term interests in a vital strategic corridor bridging Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

But this deception is not just a threat to the United States. It is a betrayal of Georgia's national interest. Under Ivanishvili's rule, Georgia has turned from a beacon of reform into a regional cautionary tale. Foreign investment is down. Emigration is rising. The economy is increasingly reliant on remittances and Russian-linked capital. Young professionals are leaving, democracy is shrinking, and corruption is rising—all while Ivanishvili and his inner circle amass more wealth and entrench their grip on power. The Georgian Dream does not stand for “Geor-

gia First.” Its true slogan is “Ivanishvili First”—and that should concern anyone who cares about liberty, sovereignty, or stability in the region.

Authoritarian *Fait Accompli*

Since the rigged October 2024 parliamentary elections, the pace of authoritarian consolidation has accelerated in Georgia and the one-party dictatorship is all but *fait accompli*. Independent observers described the October 2024 elections as the worst in Georgia’s modern history—marred by fraud, intimidation, and abuse of state resources. Peaceful protesters have been beaten in the streets. Journalists and activists were arrested. New laws are being introduced to control conventional and social media, censor online content, and silence civil society—all under the false pretense of “fighting fake news,” “regulating foreign influence,” and “protecting national sovereignty.”

Perhaps the Georgian Dream government’s most cynical distortion of American policy is the recently passed “Foreign Agents” law—falsely presented as Georgia’s version of the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). While FARA in the U.S. was designed to ensure transparency in cases of foreign lobbying by agents of hostile governments, the Georgian Dream’s draft law is a weapon aimed squarely at Georgia’s civil society. Under the guise of transparency, it seeks to criminalize NGOs, think tanks, fact-checkers, watchdog journalists, and even educational initiatives that Western allies, including the United States, have long supported. The purpose is not to expose foreign interference—it is to silence critics, intimidate activists, and brand pro-democracy voices as “traitors.” This is not a conservative policy. It is Russian-style authoritarianism wearing a MAGA mask.

The irony is that the Georgian Dream claims to be imitating the American model of fighting foreign influence, just as Donald Trump’s own Department of Justice has been moving in the opposite direc-

tion. On 5 February 2025, Attorney General Pam Bondi significantly [narrowed](#) the scope of FARA enforcement, ordering prosecutors to pursue only those cases involving “traditional espionage” or direct action by foreign governments. This rollback was a clear rejection of using FARA as a blunt instrument against NGOs or civil society actors—a trend that had emerged during the Biden administration. Bondi’s directive made it clear: the law should not be used to criminalize transparency advocates or non-profit organizations engaged in public debate. But the Georgian Dream has done exactly that. It has embraced the harshest, most punitive interpretation of the 1938 version of FARA—once aimed at Nazi and Soviet propaganda—and is using it to target election observers, anti-corruption activists, and any organization that challenges the ruling party’s authority.

This is not the “American approach.” It is the Russian playbook—from labeling NGOs as “foreign agents” to banning critical media to criminalizing dissent under the veneer of legality.

This is not the “American approach.” It is the Russian playbook—from labeling NGOs as “foreign agents” to banning critical media to criminalizing dissent under the veneer of legality. And that deception must be exposed—especially to those in Washington who understand the true intent of FARA and who should see through this deliberate distortion.

Ivanishvili’s Game: Fool Trump, Consolidate Power

Ivanishvili and his party know that their popularity inside Georgia is dwindling. They know that they have alienated the European Union and the U.S. administration. So now, they are placing their hopes in Trump’s presidency—hoping that by mim-

icking his language, flattering his worldview, and vilifying his enemies (the media, the “deep state”, NGOs), they can win favor or at least indifference from Washington.

But this is not an ideological alignment. It is a transactional trick. Ivanishvili is betting that the Trump movement is superficial—that its leaders will not look beyond the slogans. He is betting that Trump allies will ignore Georgia’s political prisoners, overlook China’s growing foothold in the Caucasus, and accept flattering talk as a substitute for real reform.

He is wrong.

America First does not mean America Fooled. Supporting allies who merely imitate our language while enacting policies that betray our values is not just morally corrosive—it is strategically reckless.

It is clear that the Congress, especially the Helsinki Commission, is not fooled by Ivanishvili’s cronies’ mimicking language. It is also clear that the State Department has not been fooled either. Congressman Joe Wilson has been actively [exposing](#) the Georgian Dream’s anti-democratic turn and ringing alarm bells in Washington about the growing influence of Russia and China in Georgia.

On 2 April, in a sharply worded statement, the U.S. State Department [warned](#) Georgian Dream that it “cannot win a democratic mandate by censoring or jailing opponents,” calling recent actions by the ruling party anti-democratic. The message, delivered in response to questions about arrests of peaceful protesters, disputed elections and jailed journalists, emphasized that the U.S. remains committed to Georgia’s sovereignty but is reevaluating its approach.

It is noteworthy that once the stern statements started coming from the Trump administration, the tone of the Georgian Dream’s propaganda

changed. All of a sudden, ruling party propagandists started [spinning](#) the message that Trump is failing to defeat the “deep state” and is still “a hostage of a deep state.” Once a bluff is called, folding is the only option.

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Why Georgia Still Matters

Many in the U.S. might ask why the Trump administration should pay attention to Georgia—a small, distant country seemingly insignificant compared to other global hotspots. But Georgia is not just another post-Soviet state. It is a frontline in the 21st-century struggle between freedom and authoritarianism, between Western-led democracy and Eurasian kleptocracy. If Georgia falls, it will be a strategic victory for the Kremlin and Beijing—and a profound loss for the United States and its allies.

If Georgia falls, it will be a strategic victory for the Kremlin and Beijing—and a profound loss for the United States and its allies.

And the inverse is also true. If Washington supports the Georgian people—not the regime currently in power—then Georgia can once again become a model of democratic reform, economic freedom, and strategic partnership in a hostile region. For decades, Georgia has been one of America’s most loyal and credible allies. Its soldiers have fought and died alongside American troops in every major U.S.-led conflict since the early 2000s—without NATO protection or formal treaties, but

out of conviction and loyalty to the cause of freedom. Per capita, no other non-NATO country has contributed more.

Georgia is not just a moral ally—it is a strategic one. Located within hours of Tehran, Moscow, Kyiv, Istanbul, and Tel Aviv, Georgia sits at the crossroads of Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Its ports, pipelines, and energy routes are essential for the West's continued presence in Eurasia, particularly for U.S. engagement with Central Asia. U.S. trade with the region is expanding: in 2024 alone, Kazakhstan recorded USD 3.4 billion in bilateral [trade](#) and over USD 3.1 billion in U.S. investment, mostly in energy and raw materials. Uzbekistan [followed](#) with USD 423 million in trade and nearly USD 3.9 billion in FDI. The region is vital to American interests as a counterweight to China and Russia, offering access to key resources, emerging markets, and strategic leverage.

Georgia plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. As the lead transit country on the Middle Corridor connecting Central Asia to Europe, its Black Sea ports—especially the forthcoming Anaklia Deep Sea Port—could secure alternative trade routes that bypass both Russia and Iran.

Georgia plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. As the lead transit country on the Middle Corridor connecting Central Asia to Europe, its Black Sea ports—especially the forthcoming Anaklia Deep Sea Port—could secure alternative trade routes that bypass both Russia and Iran. Undermining Georgia's role through internal instability or foreign control over key infrastructure would weaken U.S. access to Central Asia and limit its geopolitical reach. Preserving Georgia's pro-Western trajectory and logistical capacity is thus vital to America's long-term economic and strategic presence in the wider region.

Yet under the Georgian Dream government, all of this is slipping away. Anaklia, initially earmarked for American investors, is now on track to be [handed over](#) to a Chinese firm linked to the Chinese Communist Party. In 2019, Secretary Pompeo [warned](#) Georgia against ceding control of strategic assets to Beijing—a warning that was ignored. On April 2, 2025, the Helsinki Commission [declared](#) that Anaklia's transfer to a CCP-backed, U.S.-sanctioned conglomerate threatens not only Georgia's sovereignty and democracy but also America's long-term influence in the region.

A bipartisan group of U.S. Senators recently [introduced](#) the *Strategic Ports Reporting Act* to counter China's growing grip on key global infrastructure. The bill mandates a comprehensive assessment of ports vital to U.S. military and economic security—particularly those influenced by Beijing. Georgian ports, especially Anaklia, must be part of that strategic review if the current government proceeds with handing over the project to a Chinese state-linked entity.

Georgia is also part of a broader regional chessboard, where Russia and China work in tandem to checkmate the West. Whether Georgia slips back into Russia's orbit will likely be decided in the coming months—and if it happens, it will occur under Trump's watch. On March 4, 2025, President Trump [claimed](#) that under Bush, Russia “got Georgia.” While Russia did invade in 2008, it failed to change the regime or fully subjugate the country. Georgia retained its independence and Western trajectory. But if Georgia now falls under Russian or Chinese control, it will not be a historical footnote—it will be a present-day failure to be ascribed to President Trump.

Since November 28, 2024, Georgians have taken to the streets for over 130 consecutive days, protesting their government's abandonment of the pro-Western path. The people of Georgia still [fly](#) American flags at demonstrations. They over-

whelmingly support Euro-Atlantic integration and look to the U.S. as a symbol of hope. Reagan is revered for helping bring down the Soviet Union, which allowed Georgia to regain its independence. In a world increasingly skeptical of American leadership, Georgians still believe in it.

Yes, Georgia is far away. But it is a test of whether American leadership still matters—whether the U.S. can still stand by its allies, defend democracy, and counter authoritarian influence in one of the world's most strategic crossroads. The cost of indifference would not just be Georgia's future—it would be America's credibility.

America Must Act on Georgia

If America—especially its current leadership—fails to stand with Georgia's people now, it will send a clear signal: Authoritarian regimes can co-opt American rhetoric, trample American values, and still get a pass.

The Georgian Dream is betting that language is all that matters—that by parroting “deep state” and “sovereignty,” and “USAID is bad,” they can dupe Washington. But the Trump team must see beyond that. The United States must become serious about stopping Georgia's slide into authoritarianism and preserving its role as a frontline ally. For this, Washington must act with purpose and precision.

First and foremost, President Trump should publicly call for new elections in Georgia. The Georgian Dream clings to one last bastion of legitimacy: the hope of recognition from Trump and his team. If that illusion is shattered, their external credibility collapses—and with it, their internal grip on power will face a significant backlash. A single statement from Trump—calling for free and fair elections—could have more impact than a dozen EU declarations or diplomatic notes.

Alongside that, the U.S. administration must ratchet up targeted sanctions against the corrupt circle surrounding Ivanishvili. The existing sanctions are a good start, but they are not enough. Further financial pressure—especially State Department-led measures—can effectively paralyze the regime's economic lifelines. These sanctions must be clearly tied to the repeal of draconian foreign agent laws, media censorship policies, and rigged electoral rules. The message should be unmistakable: Georgian leaders will be sanctioned for behaving like Russian satellites. The aforementioned propagandist Rukhadze, who is also a U.S. citizen, publicly boasts that he can not be sanctioned because of his citizenship. The U.S. can still find ways how to hold him responsible for championing Russian interests instead of American ones.

Washington must draw a red line around Georgia's strategic infrastructure. The quiet handover of the Anaklia port to a CCP-linked conglomerate should not be ignored.

At the same time, Washington must draw a red line around Georgia's strategic infrastructure. The quiet handover of the Anaklia port to a CCP-linked conglomerate should not be ignored. Georgia is not just drifting from the West—it is selling off its sovereignty to America's adversaries. A public warning from the U.S. government that creeping Chinese or Russian control over Georgia's economy will trigger further sanctions is essential. The administration should also accelerate legislative efforts in Congress, including the [MEGOBARI Act](#) and the [Georgian Nightmare Non-Recognition Act](#). Even a single, well-placed endorsement from the State Department or the Vice President would give these bills momentum and show that the U.S. is not bluffing.

Beyond pressure, renewed support for Georgia's democratic forces is urgently needed. U.S. assis-

tance to Georgia's democracy defenders—civil society groups, independent media, and grassroots organizers—has been a key force for good and should be reinvigorated in coordination with the EU. Unlike other places where such funding went astray, it helped protect liberty and American interests alike in Georgia. With the demise of USAID and American withdrawal from the global democracy support project, U.S. interests have suffered. Nowhere is it more visible than in Georgia.

Finally, Washington must send a loud, unequivocal message: Georgia is not for sale, not to Russia, not to China, and not as a bargaining chip in a future Ukraine settlement. This is not Russia's backyard—it is a sovereign nation fighting for its future. And the United States must stand with the Georgian people and not the regime that betrays them ■

Who Are You, Uncle Sam?!

Georgia's Liberals Struggle with U.S. Ideological Drift

On 22 March, hundreds of Georgians took to the streets to show their support for the [MEGOBARI Act](#)—a bipartisan bill that seeks to sanction the ruling Georgian Dream party for its alleged anti-democratic practices. The MEGOBARI Act targets a regime accused of constitutional overreach, election rigging, and the suppression of dissent. Yet, a call to hold Georgia's government accountable for its authoritarian tendencies is emerging at a time when the U.S. political class itself is grappling with the erosion of long-standing democratic conventions by Donald Trump's administration.

This convergence of domestic and U.S. crises of democracy could not come at a worse time for Georgia where the ideas of freedom and individual rights were so firmly rooted in the cultural affinity of the liberal political elite with the United States.

Anchored In the U.S. No More?

The genesis of modern Georgian democratic culture and political class is deeply entwined with the U.S. In part, this anchoring is a curious by-product of the post-Soviet nation's yearning for a complete break from the oppressive legacies of the past.

For decades, Georgian elites viewed America as the emblem of individualism, freedom, progress, and modernity—a stark contrast to the repressive, centralized power structures known from Soviet rule. The binary of the “evil empire” versus the beacon of American democracy was not just a rhetorical device but a framework that informed policy and societal aspirations. America was held up as the paragon of liberal democracy, and often on the crossroads of development, Georgian political elites proposed a straightforward transplant



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of U.S. models, from the introduction of low taxes to the sweeping privatization of health insurance, from the popular election of local sheriffs and to the widespread use of jury trials. If it was American, you could not go fundamentally wrong with it.

By invoking loony ideas such as “deep state conspiracy,” critiquing mainstream media as inherently elitist, and lambasting Europe’s bureaucratic overreach, the Georgian Dream has mirrored recent American political discourse to justify its own authoritarian measures.

The tables have turned now. By invoking loony ideas such as “deep state conspiracy,” critiquing mainstream media as inherently elitist, and lambasting Europe’s bureaucratic overreach, the Georgian Dream has mirrored recent American political discourse to justify its own authoritarian measures. This is not necessarily a matter of some fundamental “alignment of values” with MAGA as the Georgian Dream officials claim but the disintegration of consensus over the role of the civil service as a politically neutral body in the U.S. attempts to challenge the legitimacy of electoral processes and the questioning of the integrity of the media are all an extremely useful *alibi* for Georgia’s consolidating autocracy to anchor its own legitimacy into the U.S. and to disorient its opponents – those same people who marched under American flags.

The Trump/MAGA era has laid bare deep contradictions within the very democratic institutions that many in Georgia once looked up to. In the United States, growing polarization over the role of government, distrust in electoral processes, and attacks on the media have triggered crises of legitimacy that resonate far beyond its borders. The Georgian Dream has been quick to capitalize on these trends. It has adopted populist, anti-establishment

rhetoric reminiscent of the MAGA playbook, using it to discredit and attack its domestic critics—particularly independent media and civil society organizations that serve as vital checks on power.

The glaring case in point is the Georgian Dream replicating to the letter the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) to target its opponents.

The glaring case in point is the Georgian Dream replicating to the letter the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) to target its opponents. The previous law, rammed through the parliament on the tips of the police truncheons and water cannons, was successfully framed by the opposition as the “Russian law” and discredited. Now, the Georgian Dream parliament has rubber-stamped an even more repressive FARA, counting on the reflexive public acceptance of the U.S. model as always being the “correct” one.

This replication of U.S. political patterns for authoritarian consolidation triggers a profound identity crisis among Georgia’s liberal elites. Having anchored their hopes for democracy in an American model that now confronts its own demons, these elites are also forced to confront the limitations of importing a blueprint.

The painful truth is that often instinctive “pro-Americanism” of the post-Soviet Georgian elite has its dark side. Yes, parts of the Soviet *intelligentsia* admired the U.S. because of its democratic ideals but larger swaths of Soviet citizens latched on to the U.S. because they felt it was an *inverted* Soviet Union.

There are many elements common to the U.S. political imagery: the imperial symbolism of Hollywood’s Roman-themed colossus, the brag and swagger of the Reagan administration, the space-race idea of a “final frontier,” the idealization of the

masculine force in Rambo movies, and the Manichean view of the world which appealed instinctively to Soviet citizens, conditioned by the heroics of social-realism but living in the “swamp” of the Brezhnev era. They felt the U.S. *won the Cold War because it was like us but stronger*. Vladimir Putin’s parable of Russia “getting up from its knees” means, among other things, that Russia can, once again, speak on par with the U.S. and speak the language of power.

Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose personal foibles profoundly shape the Georgian Dream, is one of these Soviet men. The European reflexiveness, compromise, endless debates and committees, and obsession with form and niceties are too complex or, to quote one of the tech brothers – “lacking in masculine energy.” By contrast, designating the U.S. as a personal enemy is an article of pride, a sign that you made it up in the world, that you are sparring with THE power.

Georgian liberals suddenly discover that some of their fellow pro-American travelers were there for different (wrong?) reasons. Their struggle to emancipate themselves from the instinctive affinity with what the U.S. leadership says or does is emblematic of this broader crisis: Georgia’s republican identity must be defined in a way that resonates with its unique historical, cultural, and social realities. It needs to become more authentic, more “self-standing” in a world where geopolitical alliances are in flux and ideological and geopolitical dividing lines may no longer coincide.

In this context, it symbolizes a reaction against domestic authoritarianism and an acknowledgment of the need to re-examine the foundations upon which modern Georgian liberalism has been built.

Going Local - An Opportunity

Georgia’s historical and cultural tapestry is rich with democratic traditions that predate its mod-

ern struggles. Centuries of political evolution have left the nation with a legacy that includes Christian conservatism, nationalist conservatism, and the progressive nationalism of the national revival at the end of the 19th century. This heritage reached a brief flowering during Georgia’s first independent republic (1918–1921) when social democracy played a pivotal role in shaping the national political landscape. These indigenous forms of democratic practice, however, have been largely trampled upon by Soviet oppression, distorted by its propaganda machine, and, more recently, overshadowed by the copycat institutionalization of the democratic façade on the American model.

Georgia’s historical and cultural tapestry is rich with democratic traditions that predate its modern struggles.

The current moment, fraught with internal political strife and external ideological pressures, presents a unique opportunity to revive locally rooted democratic principles.

As the American model is increasingly under scrutiny, so are its vulnerabilities revealed and the foundations of the democratic edifice laid bare. While the U.S. stands exposed in a moment of deep vulnerability, for an external observer and scholar, it offers a rare opportunity to peer into the heart of this great democracy—to see not only what makes it tick, but also what causes it to falter.

There are lessons to learn and the possibility to go beyond the dogma.

Georgian liberal intellectuals can also look inward to Georgia’s own historical experience for inspiration and combine it with the lessons gleaned from the U.S.

The challenge is formidable. Contemporary Georgia is not merely contending with the legacies of

its Soviet past; it is also wrestling with the imported debates over “wokeism” and other cultural issues that have little relevance to its own democratic traditions. Moreover, the pervasive influence of social media has deepened the polarization of political discourse, reducing complex debates to simplistic binaries of us versus them.

By drawing on centuries-old traditions and reinterpreting them in light of modern challenges, Georgian society could develop a model of democracy that is both authentic and resilient.

Yet the prize is extracting Georgia from the damaging cyclical spirals of democratic crises. There is a growing sense among intellectuals and civic activists that the time is ripe for a re-engagement with Georgia’s own democratic heritage. By drawing on centuries-old traditions and reinterpreting them in light of modern challenges, Georgian society could develop a model of democracy that is both authentic and resilient.

This locally rooted approach would emphasize the importance of civic participation, institutional accountability, solidarity, and a pluralistic political culture—values that are deeply embedded in Georgia’s historical narrative but have been sidelined by the allure of a supposedly “proven” liberal model. Such a shift would require not only a rethinking of political strategies but also a fundamental transformation in how democracy is conceptualized and practiced in Georgia. Reclaiming this narrative will be neither swift nor straightforward. It will necessitate a prolonged period of political mobilization and intellectual debate, one that goes beyond the present moment’s fleeting protests and partisan skirmishes.

If Georgian society can sustain a broad-based dialogue that transcends the polarization of the cur-

rent era, it might finally create the space needed for a democratic reawakening for the new Republic to be formed. This process of “de-anchoring” from an external model could enable Georgia to develop a more robust, contextually appropriate system of governance that honors its unique legacy while adapting to modern challenges.

Reinventing the Republic

The unfolding political drama in Georgia encapsulates a broader global crisis: the erosion of democratic principles once taken for granted and the challenges of reconnecting the sclerotic democratic rituals to their original republican meaning.

Georgian liberal elites now face a critical juncture. Their long-held belief in the superiority of the American model and their instinctive mistrust of the continental, more complex pluralistic deliberation are both laid to a test as the U.S. grapples with populism and Europe seeks ways to respond to the Russian threat.

The path forward is undoubtedly challenging. It demands that political leaders, civic activists, and the broader citizenry engage in a sustained and honest dialogue about the nature of democracy, free from the unthinking validation of external models. Only by embracing a pluralistic vision—one that reconciles the lessons of the past with the demands of the present—can Georgia hope to reclaim its agency on the international stage and foster a democratic culture that is both authentic and enduring.

The road ahead is uncertain but the potential for a revitalized, locally grounded democracy remains an inspiring possibility ■

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