

Too Young to Fear, Too Strong to Break: Georgia's Fight for Europe

For more than 280 days, large numbers of pro-European Georgians have taken to the streets to protest the decision of Bidzina Ivanishvili and the ruling Georgian Dream party to suspend Georgia's EU accession process. At the forefront of these demonstrations stand young activists who passionately believe in Georgia's European future.

According to the [2023 Youth Study](#) by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), 79 percent of Georgian youth view the European Union's role in the country as rather positive or clearly positive. For them, democracy is closely linked with freedom, free speech, and the principle of popular rule. Liberty and freedom of expression are considered the most important democratic values, while active citizenship, political participation, and respect for differing opinions are also integral to their understanding of democracy. Young Georgians look to the United States and European countries as models, embracing European values and striving to promote them at home.

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Silencing this segment of society has proven to be one of the most formidable challenges for the Georgian Dream. The ruling party has systematically sought to entrench economic and social dependence on the state, thereby ensuring loyalty. The number of civil servants has steadily increased in recent years, subsidies have expanded, and large businesses remain closely tied to ruling elites. A significant share of companies relies on public tenders for survival, further reinforcing dependence on government structures.

Youth activists, however, have largely escaped this web of control. With little or no reliance on state structures, they remain beyond the Georgian Dream's leverage. Many have benefited from



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EU and U.S. educational opportunities and grants, gaining exposure to Western democratic values and strengthening their roles as community leaders and drivers of change. Their strong media literacy and fact-checking skills make them less susceptible to the ruling party's anti-Western propaganda, rendering them an especially difficult target for manipulation.

For the Georgian Dream's leadership, this independence poses a direct threat to its grip on power. The government has, therefore, sought to suppress youth activism through a wide range of measures. These include: enacting draconian legislation prohibiting NGOs and activists from receiving foreign funding, discrediting them by labeling them as "foreign agents" or traitors, imposing heavy fines, blocking bank accounts, and creating a chilling effect; deploying police violence and arrests, establishing state-controlled agencies to distribute funds selectively to loyalist organizations, and pressuring activists to leave the country through moral and physical intimidation. In parallel, the ruling party is quietly advancing higher education reforms aimed at tightening control over the more liberal universities, restricting student activism, and increasing state control mechanisms over universities, including the private ones.

For the Georgian Dream, young people represent the most serious obstacle to its continued rule – perceived as troublemakers, yet also as the driving force behind Georgia's democratic aspirations. In confronting them, the government has increasingly substituted the "force of argument" with the "argument of force."

The Tools for Silencing

The Georgian Dream's strategy for maintaining power rests on three main pillars: economic dependence, intimidation, and propaganda.

Controlling the Business Community and Civil Service

A central pillar of the Georgian Dream's power is its ability to control both the business sector and the civil service through corruption and dependence on state funds. Transparency International Georgia, the country's leading anti-corruption watchdog, [re-reported](#) 250 alleged cases of high-level corruption as of August 2025.

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Financial flows reveal the extent of this dominance. In the first half of 2025, all political parties in Georgia [collectively received](#) GEL 7.59 million (approximately EUR 2.38 million) in donations. Of this, 87 percent—GEL 6.57 million (EUR 2 million)—went to the Georgian Dream alone. This amount is more than six times greater than the combined donations received by all opposition parties.

The alignment between political donations and government contracts is striking. Since 2024, eleven companies tied to Georgian Dream donors have won state tenders worth GEL 143.6 million (EUR 45 million). Since 2016, these same companies have secured tenders worth GEL 422 million (EUR 133 million). In addition, 23 donor-linked companies have received simplified procurement contracts totaling GEL 1.5 million (EUR 480,000) since 2016, rising to GEL 15 million (EUR 4.8 million) in cumulative value. By contrast, no company connected to opposition party donors has won a tender during the same period and their total procurement contracts amounted to a mere GEL 185,447 (EUR 58,000).

The public sector offers another avenue of control. In 2024, out of [1.4 million](#) employed Georgians, 320,000—or one in four—worked in the state sector, drawing their salaries from the national budget. This widespread dependence makes many civil servants vulnerable to political pressure. Yet, even within this environment, some dared to voice opposition after the Georgian Dream announced the suspension of EU accession talks.

The response was swift and punitive. Authorities launched so-called “reorganization” [processes](#) in government institutions—effectively purges designed to remove dissenters. Dozens of employees [were dismissed](#) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and even the Parliament. One of the most symbolic moves was the [abolition](#) of the EU-NATO Information Center, established in 2005 with generous support from Brussels and Washington to provide citizens with objective information about Euro-Atlantic integration. Its closure underscored the ruling party’s determination to dismantle institutions that foster transparency and European values.

Intimidation and the Shrinking Space for Civil Society

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As demonstrations grew, the government amended administrative legislation to introduce harsher penalties for civic activism. The fine for blocking streets was increased tenfold—from GEL 500 (EUR 160) to GEL 5,000 (EUR 1,600)—while the penalty for staging minor disruptions such as drawing standstills rose twentyfold, from GEL 50 (EUR 16) to GEL 1,000 (EUR 315). Between November 2024 and March 2025, cumulative fines for street blockages alone reached [GEL 2 million](#) (EUR 700,000). More than 60 activists were arrested during this period, including [Mzia Amaglobeli](#), founder of the independent media outlets, *Netgazeti* and *Batumelebi*, alongside opposition leaders and former politicians.

To further intimidate critics, the Georgian Dream [reinstated](#) the charge of “treason against the homeland” in the criminal code. Broadly defined to include espionage, plotting to overthrow the government, and other national security offenses, the provision provides a legal framework for politically motivated prosecutions.

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Civil society organizations—long at the forefront of pro-democracy activism—have also come under direct attack. The Georgian Dream introduced a Georgian adaptation of the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act ([FARA](#)), obliging NGOs to register as “agents of foreign principles.” Defiance of this requirement carries severe penalties, including criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Complementing this, amendments to the law on grants now require foreign donors to obtain prior approval from the Anti-Corruption Agency, an institution firmly under government control. If approval is denied but funding proceeds, NGOs face fines amounting to double the value of the grant. This mechanism has already had tangible [consequences](#): the UK Embassy in Georgia was forced to cancel grants intended

to support election monitoring ahead of the October 2025 local elections.

Several prominent organizations—including the Civil Society Foundation (CSF), Transparency International Georgia (TI), International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Social Justice Centre, Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC), Sapari, the Media Development Foundation (MDF), and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA)—have [faced](#) intrusive inspections. Courts have compelled them to hand over sensitive beneficiary data, including personal information, further threatening the security of activists.

Even crowdfunding initiatives designed to support protesters have been stifled. On the basis of a Tbilisi City Court ruling, bank accounts belonging to Nanuka's Fund (managed by journalist Nanuka Zhorzholiani), Prosperity Georgia (led by former Prime Minister Nika Gilauri), Human Rights House Tbilisi, Fund for Each Other 24/7, and the Shame Movement [were frozen](#). These funds had been used to assist individuals fined for protesting or dismissed from their jobs due to civic activism. Law enforcement authorities also raided the homes of several NGO leaders.

Meanwhile, the ruling party has moved to strengthen its own ecosystem of loyalist organizations. The Georgian Dream [allocated](#) GEL 20 million (EUR 7 million) to establish the State Grants Management Agency, designed to distribute funds to government-organized NGOs (GONGOs). In a striking irony, one of the agency's 12 funding priorities is “foreign policy and Georgia's integration into the EU.” Applicants can request up to GEL 100,000 (EUR 30,000) for projects, while institutional development grants may reach GEL 700,000 (EUR 220,000).

Promoting Disinformation and Propaganda

Propaganda forms the third component of the ruling party's toolkit. The Georgian Dream relies heav-

ily on pro-government television channels such as *Imedi TV*, *Rustavi 2*, and *POSTV*. These outlets saturate the public with anti-European narratives while marginalizing or silencing critical voices. Given that 49 percent of Georgians [cite television](#) as their primary source of news, control of broadcast media remains essential for shaping public opinion and maintaining the ruling party's grip on power. Coverage of the European Union is framed to erode trust and discredit EU institutions, portraying them as hypocritical, guided by “double standards,” and controlled by the so-called “Deep State.” These channels also promote the claim that Brussels seeks to drag Georgia into war and open a “second front” against Russia—an argument designed to instill fear and undermine pro-European sentiment.

Financial support for these broadcasters is substantial, sustained mainly by Georgian Dream-affiliated businesses purchasing advertising airtime. Their [revenues](#) are robust: in the second quarter of 2025, *Imedi TV* earned GEL 5.4 million (EUR 1.7 million), *Rustavi 2* collected GEL 2.6 million (EUR 900,000), and *POSTV* received GEL 1.6 million (EUR 500,000). By comparison, opposition-leaning channels earned far less—*TV Pirveli* took in GEL 1.6 million (EUR 500,000) and *Formula TV* just GEL 1.4 million (EUR 450,000). With the closure of the *Mtavari TV* in May 2025 following internal disputes, *TV Pirveli* and *Formula TV* now stand as the country's principal government-critical broadcasters.

Seeking to tighten control further, the Georgian Dream [amended](#) the Law on Broadcasting. The new rules [prohibit](#) foreign funding for broadcasters and expand the authority of the government-controlled Communications Commission to regulate content. Because much of Georgia's independent online media relies heavily on foreign funding, these changes threaten the survival of many critical outlets.

The Final Countdown

Yet, among Georgia's youth, the aforesaid levers are at their weakest. Unlike the business community, which survives on government tenders, and civil servants, who draw their salaries from the state, young Georgians are less tied to patronage networks. Many of them operate outside the party-state economy, studying abroad, working in the private digital sector, or building careers less reliant on state contracts. This economic independence makes them harder to co-opt or silence.

Equally, intimidation has a more limited effect on the young. Having grown up in Georgia, where protest culture is part of civic life, they are less fearful of police raids, arrests, or fines. Instead, each act of repression often galvanizes youth further, transforming punishment into proof of the regime's illegitimacy. Even the most punitive legal innovations—the treason charges, harsh fines for demonstrations, and repressive NGO legislation—have failed to break their will.

Propaganda, meanwhile, finds its least receptive audience among the younger generation. Youth consume information primarily through digital platforms and independent online outlets, not the pro-government television channels that remain dominant among older generations. Their media literacy, fluency in English, and access to international networks provide them with a resilience that older citizens lack. Rather than absorbing state-sponsored disinformation, they expose and ridicule it, spreading counter-narratives across social media.

This explains why Georgia's youth, alongside civil society organizations and the few independent media outlets left standing, form the backbone of the country's democratic resistance. They are the most immune to the Georgian Dream's authoritarian toolkit precisely because they are less dependent, less afraid, and less manipulated.

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This is also the reason why Georgia is now witnessing the longest protest movement in its modern history. The resilience of youth, civil society organizations, and independent media has so far prevented the Georgian Dream from extinguishing all dissent. Yet, their capacity to resist is not limitless. With civic space rapidly shrinking and authoritarian practices deepening, Georgia's freedom fighters urgently need support. Statements of solidarity and half measures from the international community are no longer enough. The European Union, in particular, must act decisively, offering tangible assistance to independent media, civil society organizations, and the country's youth.

This support can and must take many forms. Sanctions should be targeted not only at Georgian Dream leaders but also at their propagandists, law enforcement chiefs, and election officials—whether through EU-wide consensus or, failing that, through coalitions of willing member states. Hungary's veto can no longer be an excuse for inaction. International financial institutions should be pressed to cut budgetary support that props up the regime, while Brussels should not shy away from initiating procedures to suspend the Association Agreement ([AA](#)) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area ([DCFTA](#)), turning this into a political message rather than a bureaucratic warning. Symbolic acts—such as turning back a high-ranking Georgian Dream official at a European airport—would resonate loudly at home, undercutting the ruling party's narrative of normality.

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Equally urgent is finding flexible ways to channel resources directly to civil society and media before they are suffocated. The recently agreed EU decision allowing selective visa-free suspensions should be used to target Georgian Dream elites and secu-

rity personnel rather than punishing the broader population.

In short, Europe must abandon hesitation and embrace resolve. Only through real action—not rhetoric—can Georgia's democratic forces hope to preserve the country's European future ■