GEOPOLITICS

№36 | November 2026



2960-9453

WWW.POLITICSGEO.COM

GEOPOLITICS

Issue **№36**
November, 2026

Our Mission

Issue	**№36**
November	**2026**
www.politicsgeo.com	
info@geopoliticsjournal.org	

follow

We, at *GEOpolitics*, believe that disseminating knowledge and analysis conducted with integrity and impartiality can advance national interests and strengthen democratic institutions in Georgia and across the broader region. Our journal fosters a culture of intellectual exchange, encouraging meaningful contributions to the wider geopolitical discourse, with particular attention to Georgia and the South Caucasus.

In line with our ethos, the journal is firmly committed to promoting Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration and democratization, while also engaging with political and security developments across the wider region. *GEOpolitics* reflects the Georgian people's strategic orientation towards the Western world, democracy, and Europeanization. Our vision is that Georgia can and must contribute to universal democratic values and to strengthening regional and international security through analytical and intellectual engagement.

We have assembled a team of experts and contributors with strong policy experience who enrich the debate on Georgia's foreign and security policy, while examining broader dynamics in the South Caucasus. We analyze Georgia's relations with the EU, NATO, Russia, and other key geopolitical actors and institutions, and assess how internal developments shape Georgia's geopolitical role, fostering informed dialogue from, about, and in Georgia and the broader region.

Contributors



Sergi Kapanadze
Editor and Contributor

Dr. Sergi Kapanadze is a Professor of International Relations and European Integration at the Ilia State and Caucasus Universities in Tbilisi, Georgia. Dr. Kapanadze was a Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia from 2016–2020 and a Deputy Foreign Minister in 2011–2012. He is a co-founder and former director and chairman of the board of the Georgia-based think tank, Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS). He received a Ph.D. in International Relations from Tbilisi State University in 2010 and an MA in International Relations and European Studies from the Central European University in 2003. He holds the diplomatic rank of Envoy Plenipotentiary.



Thornike Gordadze
Contributor

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 Sciences Po 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 Sciences Po Paris (2005).



Shota Gvineria
Contributor

Ambassador Shota Gvineria joined the Baltic Defense College as a lecturer in Defense and Cyber Studies in July 2019. He is also a fellow at the Economic Policy Research Center since 2017. Previously, Amb. Gvineria held various positions in Georgia's public sector, including Deputy Secretary at the National Security Council and Foreign Policy Advisor to the Minister of Defense. From 2010-14, he served as the Ambassador of Georgia to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and later became the Director of European Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Amb. Gvineria, with an MA in Strategic Security Studies from Washington's National Defense University, also earned MAs in International Relations from the Diplomatic School of Madrid and Public Administration from the Georgian Technical University.



Temuri Yakobashvili
Contributor

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



Jaba Devdariani
Contributor

Jaba Devdariani, a seasoned analyst of Georgian and European affairs, has over two decades of experience as an international civil servant and advisor to both international organizations and national governments. His significant roles include leading the political office of OSCE in Belgrade from 2009 to 2011 and serving as the Director for International Organizations (UN, CoE, OSCE) at the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011-2012. Currently, as a volunteer co-editor for Europe Herald, a Civil.ge project (FB/@ EuropeHerald), Devdariani dedicates his expertise to elucidating European current affairs for a broader audience.



Vano Chkhikvadze
Contributor

Vano Chkhikvadze is based in Brussels, Belgium and heads the EU Policy of Araminta, a human rights organization operating in Germany. He used to work as the EU Integration Programme Manager at Open Society Georgia Foundation, Tbilisi, Georgia for 13 years. With a background as a country analyst for the European Stability Initiative and prior roles at the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in Georgia, he has extensive experience in monitoring EU program implementation in various areas. Vano Chkhikvadze also oversees EU projects related to regional cooperation. He holds a Master's Degree from the College of Europe in European Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies and another from the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs in Policy Analysis.

Guest Contributor



Lesia Bidochko
Guest Contributor

Lesia Bidochko is a Policy Fellow at the European Policy Institute in Kyiv (EPIK) and an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Her research focuses on Ukraine's defense innovation and the political economy of drone production; as a Petro Jacyk Non-Residential Scholar, she examines the governance of Ukraine's decentralized wartime drone economy and its implications for postwar state-building. She has held fellowships at New Europe College in Bucharest and the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), and previously served as Deputy Head of the Detector Media Research Center, where she researched Russian foreign information manipulation and interference. She holds a PhD in Political Science from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, and her work has appeared in The National Interest, Just Security, New Eastern Europe, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, and Ukraine-Analysen.

As America Changes Color, Will Its Foreign Policy Follow?

In November, America's political map has shifted from red toward blue. The Democrats' victory in both chambers of Congress has broken Donald Trump's unified control of Washington and reopened the question of how far he can take the United States in his chosen direction. For Americans, the midterms will shape the remaining two years of his presidency and the contest over what follows. For Ukraine, Europe, and Georgia, the immediate question is whether a different balance of power in Washington will produce a different American foreign policy and whether internal constraints will deter Trump from making decisions which could embolden Putin, his 'friend' per his own saying, to continue killing Ukrainians, undermining neighbors' territorial integrity and sovereignty and destabilizing wider European and global security architecture.

The Blue Wave gave Democrats control of Congress, but the president still retains the initiative in diplomacy. A Democratic majority can contest funding decisions, tighten sanctions legislation, investigate executive actions, and challenge the administration's treatment of allies, but its ability to prevent a bargain with Moscow at Ukraine's expense will depend on whether it can turn those powers into enforceable constraints. The election has created an opening for change, but Ukraine and Europe cannot build their security around the expectation that Washington will soon reverse course.

This issue addresses the region's state of affairs in light of this development, since the consequences of American elections and foreign policy reach far beyond America. For Ukraine and European allies, the next two years could become about internal strengthening, resistance, and waiting, while Russia will almost certainly try to achieve its military and diplomatic goals in the remaining window. For Georgia, the uncertainty is especially consequential: its government is fundamentally eroding the European and Euro-Atlantic relationships that could help it withstand a less predictable international environment.

Shota Gvineria opens the issue by examining what the American midterms can and cannot change in the struggle over Europe's security order. Using Russia's "hybrid kill chain" as his analytical framework, he traces how Moscow combines escalation and negotiations to seek concessions it has failed to secure on the battlefield. The article warns that the danger extends beyond Ukrainian territory, as Russia seeks to reorder European security around spheres of influence. Gvineria assesses the incoming Congress's leverage over the administration and argues that Europe and Ukraine must act together rather than wait for American domestic politics to resolve their predicament.

Sergi Kapanadze turns to the domestic political logic driving Georgia away from its Western partners. He examines how the Georgian Dream erases the distinctions between party, government, constitutional order, and state. Criticism of officials becomes hostility toward Georgia; demands for accountability become attacks on sovereignty; and opposition politics becomes evidence of unconstitutional intent. The party-ban proceedings, underway since October, bring this logic into particularly sharp focus. The article also offers a practical conclusion for European policymakers: they should not treat

Georgian people and Georgian Dream as similar, and the measures aimed at those responsible for repression should not affect Georgian society's relations with the civilized West.

Thornike Gordadze explores how Georgian Dream exploits ongoing protests in France to portray Europe as a declining civilization. His examination shows how propaganda supports apparently contradictory, but politically expedient messages: European police are too repressive to criticize Georgia, while European governments are too weak to maintain order. Both serve the campaign to discredit Europe and vindicate Georgian Dream's anti-European turn. The article also examines why some of these interpretations resonate among Georgians who oppose the government and support European integration. Defending Europe, Gordadze argues, requires an honest account of its difficulties and of the democratic institutions available to address them.

Vano Chkhikvadze then measures the distance between Georgia's declared European ambitions and its accession record. His assessment of the European Commission's reports shows Georgia losing momentum while Moldova and Ukraine advance. The most consequential weaknesses concern the political foundations of membership, including judicial independence, fundamental rights, and foreign-policy alignment. The government's assumption that it can return to accession talks at a convenient moment overlooks an enlargement process moving on its own timetable. Georgia is missing, if it has not already missed, an opportunity that candidate status and strategic geography alone cannot preserve.

Temuri Yakobashvili brings the cost of estrangement into the country's airspace. He examines how cheap drones have transformed defense economics, letting attackers impose costs small states struggle to sustain. Effective protection requires integrated detection, interception, intelligence, training, and procurement, which are nearly impossible to achieve bilaterally without being part of a wider security arrangement, such as NATO. The article argues that for Georgia, with occupied territories, exposed infrastructure, and limited resources, access to collective capabilities is the only affordable security route. Yakobashvili argues that no alternative could compensate for weakened partnerships that make those capabilities available.

Lesia Bidochko closes the issue with Ukraine's struggle over return, reconstruction, and belonging. She traces how a conditional forecast of future labor needs became a story about foreign migrants supposedly replacing Ukrainians. That narrative draws its force from real absence: people killed, displaced, serving at the front, or building lives abroad. The article distinguishes those losses from the exclusionary politics that claim to speak for them. Her proposals for making return credible and demographic planning transparent bring the discussion back to households deciding how to rebuild their lives, and to the kind of society Ukraine hopes to rebuild.

The American midterms have changed the political conditions under which these choices will be made. They have also sharpened the need for countries on Europe's exposed frontier to exercise their own agency. Indeed, Washington's next two years matter enormously, but the decisions made in Kyiv, Tbilisi, and European capitals during those same years will matter just as much ■

With Respect,

Editorial Team

Content

U.S. Midterms, the Hybrid Kill Chain and the Bargain over Europe's Security Order 9
SHOTA GVINERIA

L'État, C'est Moi — Georgian Dream Style 16
SERGI KAPANADZE

The Weaponization of Europe's Discontents: How Georgia's Ruling Party Turns France's Turmoil Against Europe 26
THORNIKE GORDADZE

Georgia Is Drifting Out of Europe's Enlargement Process 35
VANO CHKHIKVADZE

Sky Is the Limit 44
TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI

The Absent Ukrainian and the Imagined Migrant: How a Labor Forecast Became a Struggle Over Belonging 50
LESIA BIDOCHKO

Disclaimer:
GEOpolitics offers space for a wide range of perspectives, fostering independent thinking and open discussion. The journal articles reflect contributors' views and may not represent the editorial team's position.

U.S. Midterms, the Hybrid Kill Chain and the Bargain over Europe's Security Order

On November 10, one week after American voters handed both chambers of Congress to the Democrats, Russian negotiators in Abu Dhabi circulated an unsigned paper that restates and extends the ultimatum Moscow issued in December 2021: NATO assets back to their 1997 positions, no further enlargement, an end to Western arms for Ukraine, Ukraine's exclusion from the EU's common defense policy, and a pledge by France and Britain not to use their nuclear weapons in defense of other European states. Delegations from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the EU, and NATO were in Abu Dhabi and outside the room.

> ***Washington treats the war as a territorial dispute and commercial opportunity, while Moscow seeks a sphere-of-influence order, which is why pressing Kyiv toward capitulation raises risks to Europe-wide security.***

Five days earlier, President Donald Trump's envoy Jared Kushner announced that the peace process would now extend to a "broader European security architecture", the conversation Russia has demanded for three decades and that the United States is now convening. As we argued before, Washington treats the war as a territorial dispute and commercial opportunity, while Moscow seeks a sphere-of-influence order, which is why pressing Kyiv toward capitulation raises risks to Europe-wide security. The midterms have raised a new question: can a Democratic Congress pull American policy back toward honest mediation, or even back to the victim's side? Congress can indeed raise the price of the current presidential course, but the president will lead negotiations for two more years, and Congress's real leverage over the President in foreign policy is limited.



SHOTA GVINERIA
Contributor

Ambassador Shota Gvineria joined the Baltic Defense College as a lecturer in Defense and Cyber Studies in July 2019. He is also a fellow at the Economic Policy Research Center since 2017. Previously, Amb. Gvineria held various positions in Georgia's public sector, including Deputy Secretary at the National Security Council and Foreign Policy Advisor to the Minister of Defense. From 2010-14, he served as the Ambassador of Georgia to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and later became the Director of European Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Amb. Gvineria, with an MA in Strategic Security Studies from Washington's National Defense University, also earned MAs in International Relations from the Diplomatic School of Madrid and Public Administration from the Georgian Technical University.



Why There Is a War and Who Can End It

The war rages for one reason only: Russia invaded Ukraine in pursuit of aims that have never changed. As this journal argued in February 2024, the war can end only when the West and Ukraine defeat Russia's aggression, because talks on Moscow's terms merely freeze the fighting, "rewarding" aggression and setting conditions for further expansion. Russia could have stopped its war of aggression at no objective cost to its national security at any moment. Ukraine could stop the war only by accepting Moscow's terms, which means ending the war by ceasing to exist as a sovereign state.

> ***The war can end only when the West and Ukraine defeat Russia's aggression, because talks on Moscow's terms merely freeze the fighting, "rewarding" aggression and setting conditions for further expansion.***

Adequate pressure therefore must fall on Moscow, yet since the White House meeting of February 2025, American policy has prioritized a quick ceasefire over support for Ukraine, raising the question of whether a truce without firm guarantees would only give Russia time to regroup. Furthermore, for the past two months, the pressure has flowed entirely toward Kyiv. Speed limits imposed on Ukraine's Starshield terminals overnight on October 13–14 still disrupt its interceptor drones, and on November 16 the American president said he had not heard of them while describing Putin as "backing down a little bit." Kyiv has meanwhile moved as far as a state at war can move: it now accepts a freeze along the current line of contact and refuses only to hand over land that Russia has failed to take. After receiving the American envoys in Moscow on November 12, Putin repeated his territorial demands and ruled out foreign peacekeepers. The party that can stop the war has been given no reason to, while the party that cannot is asked for more.

Almost There: Primakov's Doctrine at the Threshold

Russia wants what it has wanted since the 1990s. As the April 2025 edition set out in detail, its multipolarity is a return to spheres of influence in which power overrides law and sovereignty, built on the three goals of the Primakov doctrine: ending American primacy, restoring control over the former Soviet space, and stopping NATO, with the December 2021 ultimatums as their culmination. Measured against those goals, November 2026 is the closest Moscow has come.

On the first, the United States now treats European security as a file to settle with Russia and has gone to Shenzhen for a first trilateral summit with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping on November 19, on the margins of the APEC summit, a meeting Beijing describes as devoted to strategic stability among major powers. On the second, the Russian paper in Abu Dhabi demands an end to any NATO activity in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. On the third, Ukraine's exclusion from NATO has become the American starting point, and Washington has asked Russia to accept the substitute guarantees it proposes for Kyiv. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that any guarantee must be something Russia agrees to. Asking the aggressor to approve the victim's protection concedes in practice the veto that the December 2021 drafts were written to obtain.

> ***Russia stands at the threshold: it has obtained Washington's recognition that Europe's order is negotiable, and now needs either Ukraine's surrender or Europe's consent to make that recognition a fact.***

Moscow has won the agenda, but has yet to win the outcome. The evidence shows a procedural victory: the format, sequence, and vocabulary of the talks now closely resemble Russian. It does not show a substantive one yet. Ukraine has not capitulated. The EU's foreign policy chief has said Europe will not implement a security deal negotiated without it, and Zelenskyy has warned against a "Yalta 2.0." Russia stands at the threshold: it has obtained Washington's recognition that Europe's order is negotiable, and now needs either Ukraine's surrender or Europe's consent to make that recognition a fact.

Who Is Afraid of NATO and Why?

Moscow presents its demands as a response to a threat from NATO, and the past five years have tested that claim to destruction. If the Alliance had any intention of attacking Russia, no moment could be better than the present, with the Russian army committed in Ukraine for a fifth year and unable to achieve its goals there. The record points the other way. As we wrote in March 2026, NATO membership has been the dividing line: the Baltic states were never invaded after joining, while Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, which stood outside, faced war, annexation, or occupation. Moscow wants NATO to leave because NATO's presence is the one barrier it has never dared to cross. The demand to return to 1997, taken from Article 4 of the December 2021 draft, would effectively strip allied forces from the sixteen members that joined after that date.

> ***Europe has made the Russian task easier by arguing over who speaks for it, as the Danish criticism of the Finnish and Norwegian call to Putin on October 27 showed, although Washington praised the call and Kyiv had been consulted.***

The American answer is a list of five goals: permanent consultations, crisis communications, military transparency, mutual steps to lower the risk of escalation, and a lasting framework. Every item has existed before, in the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE, and those arrangements ended because

Russia violated them. The proposal's premise, that Europe and Russia have spent thirty years failing to find a framework, turns the violator of an order into a party deprived of one. Europe's architecture is unfinished in a different sense: deterrence fails when allies hesitate, and Europe still lacks clear red lines and the preparedness to defeat a limited, deniable provocation against a member. Europe can fix this only by building up its own defense. A security deal with Moscow would do the opposite, pulling allied forces back from the states that need them most. Europe has made the Russian task easier by arguing over who speaks for it, as the Danish criticism of the Finnish and Norwegian call to Putin on October 27 showed, although Washington praised the call and Kyiv had been consulted, and Russian negotiators now cite the absence of a European proposal as grounds for doubting that there is anything to discuss with Europeans.

Before and After Abu Dhabi

The November 10 and 11 round was the first trilateral meeting since February, but the weeks before set its terms. The European delegations met the Americans before the sessions and stayed outside them. On November 5, Trump met with Putin's envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, and said a deal "might involve all of Europe"; the five goals were published the same day. The two days of talks ended with an agreement in principle on a large prisoner exchange and no movement on territory, guarantees, or a ceasefire. Abu Dhabi produced a prisoner exchange for Ukraine and an agenda for Russia.

> ***The talks stand where the war stands: Russia asks for what it could not take, and the mediator asks the defender what it is willing to give.***

Russia demands the rest of Donbas, Ukrainian neutrality, no foreign troops, and the 1997 line, and offers a prisoner exchange; the German daily Bild adds Finland's exit from NATO, a ban on NATO bases in the Baltic states, and the demilitarization of Odesa and Mykolaiv, though the Kremlin has denied the Finland demand. Ukraine accepts a freeze and rejects withdrawal and recognition. American negotiators have reportedly explored trading the rest of Donbas for guarantees modeled on NATO's, a concession Kyiv refuses. The United States wants a settlement quickly, proposes guarantees whose content nobody has defined, and treats Europe's order as part of the price. Europe insists on a ceasefire, then a peace agreement, and only then wider architecture, and expects a seat at the next round, which Moscow ruled out before Abu Dhabi. In an interview reported on November 16, former American envoy Keith Kellogg floated a freeze along the current line with a demilitarized zone, close to Kyiv's position, which Moscow rejects. The talks stand where the war stands: Russia asks for what it could not take, and the mediator asks the defender what it is willing to give.

The Kill Chain, Reset at a Higher Level

The framework that explains this sequence is Russia's hybrid kill chain, consisting of five steps: weaponize a vulnerability to create a crisis; open negotiations from a position of manufactured strength to impose new realities; escalate and threaten while negotiating; obtain concessions; then secure the gains and search for the next vulnerability.

In the Ukrainian cycle, Moscow created the crisis by massing troops on Ukraine's borders and then issued the ultimatums of December 2021, expecting easy concessions as in every earlier round; the invasion of 2022 was the escalation step, but it failed to deliver them. Ukrainian resilience and allied support denied Moscow the fourth step, and for nearly five years Russia has been stuck in the escalation phase of its own chain, raising the stakes without converting pressure into concessions. Each near miss since then, above all the American 28-point framework

of November 2025, has taught Putin that payment can still be extracted at the negotiating table.

The Ukrainian cycle thus remains stuck at escalation, and Putin has wrapped it inside a larger cycle whose target is Europe. Europe's vulnerability stems from incomplete defenses and dependence on an American administration that wants to leave, compounded by the European dispute over who speaks for the continent. Moscow turned that vulnerability into a crisis through 2026 with sabotage and drone incidents across Europe, a strike near the Polish border in September, and the Russian foreign ministry's naming, on September 30, of European arms factories as potential targets. The second step followed in Abu Dhabi. An army that cannot take the rest of Donbas arrived with a paper map of Europe, and the mediator helped manufacture the strength behind it, as the American president spoke of an agreement reaching beyond Ukraine, widening the negotiation agenda in Moscow's interests. The third step runs in parallel: on November 12, Putin restated every demand to the American envoys, while Russian strikes keep getting through air defenses weakened by the Starshield limits.

The new European cycle now stands closer to the fourth step, and has a clearer path to it, than the original Ukrainian chain ever did. Several payments have already been banked without any Russian move in return: the October 16 sanctions waiver, Ukraine's exclusion from NATO as the American baseline, a negotiating room without Europeans, and the recognition that Europe's order is open to negotiation. The principal payments — Ukrainian territory and the 1997 line — remain off the table. The size of the new demand also serves the old cycle: once NATO's own posture is on the table, the surrender of Donbas starts to look like the moderate compromise. This is also why Russia keeps escalating and keeps alive the threat of attacking a NATO member or even using nuclear weapons: Putin understands that he cannot reach his objectives any other way, so he needs ever more room to escalate.

Shenzhen and Berlin: Two Summits, One Hierarchy

The first trilateral meeting of the American, Chinese and Russian leaders produced no breakthrough, as some had expected. U.S. officials had described it as an opening for dialogue, and the joint declaration covered UN reform, fuel supplies and nuclear risks without mentioning the war in Ukraine. The protocol actually said more than the communiqué. Xi broke with decades of practice by greeting Trump personally at the airport, returning the gesture Trump made when he welcomed Xi at Joint Base Andrews in September, and the two stood side by side for the American anthem. Putin, who landed at the same airport earlier, was met by Xi's chief of staff. Before the trilateral, Trump held a formal bilateral of more than an hour with Xi. His conversation with Putin lasted 40 minutes, was unannounced, and a U.S. official called it informal. Moscow tried to look like an equal of Washington and Beijing by landing strategic nuclear bombers in Vietnam as Putin arrived. A state that has to point to its warheads to claim a seat among the great powers is showing that the seat is in doubt.

Berlin was also mostly about appearances. Leaders of the Coalition of the Willing met the same day and agreed to continue providing strong joint support to Ukraine next year, but the meeting produced no new commitments on security guarantees or deploying the multinational force. Its purpose was to establish Europe's place. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said he was prepared for talks with Russia, provided European countries had a seat at the negotiating table alongside the U.S., Russia, and Ukraine, and British Prime Minister Andy Burnham said Europe has a clear, consistent, and united negotiating position. European leaders presented themselves as stakeholders no settlement of European security can bypass.

Putin went to Shenzhen for the photograph of a new Yalta and got one that ranked Russia third.

That ranking explains the logic of the new kill chain cycle. Throughout the year, Moscow escalated across Europe with an army that cannot take the rest of Donbas, and in the same year the talks moved from Ukrainian territory to NATO's withdrawal and the architecture of European security.

Whether Washington widened the agenda under Russian pressure or for its own reasons, Moscow drew the same lesson: escalation was followed by a larger table and more room for Putin's demands. The same dynamics make the Baltic crisis sketched in January both viable and affordable. If sabotage, drones and threats bought Moscow a negotiation over NATO's posture, a manufactured crisis in a Baltic state after a withdrawal to the 1997 line would cost less and promise more. Europe met in Berlin to claim a seat the United States has not offered, while the transatlantic link remains weak and divided over Ukraine, and declarations of support alone will not become a negotiating role. Europe must turn its commitment to Ukraine into leverage the parties in Shenzhen cannot ignore: the financing that keeps Ukraine fighting, the sanctions regime, and the forces it is preparing for postwar guarantees. Until it does, Europe will be discussed in rooms where it is not present, and the chain will keep searching for its next vulnerability.

What the Midterms Can and Cannot Change

The November 3 election gave Democrats both chambers by wide margins, 56 seats to 44 in the Senate and about 260 to 175 in the House, although the new Congress will not be seated until January 3, 2027. The incoming majority has announced its intentions: an aid package of about USD 15 billion and a rewrite of the Graham Act, the Financial Times reported. Several of Washington's October decisions on Ukraine policy and narrative may have been driven by the election campaign. Facing record diesel prices that economists trace chiefly to the Iran war, the president blamed Ukraine's strikes on Russian refineries and refinery closures in Democratic-led states, called for Zelenskyy to be replaced, and struck a diesel deal with Putin. The electoral motive for blaming Ukraine has expired: after the defeat, President Trump attributed the prices to Iran himself, while the policies adopted in those weeks, the sanctions waiver and the diesel arrangement, remain in force.

> ***The midterms changed the majority in Congress and left unchanged who negotiates for the United States. For the next two years the talks might be led by the same president and the same envoys, and the Constitution gives Congress no seat at that table.***

The midterms changed the majority in Congress and left unchanged who negotiates for the United States. For the next two years the talks might be led by the same president and the same envoys, and the Constitution gives Congress no seat at that table. The real question is whether majorities in both chambers amount to a lever over foreign policy, and, more importantly, over how it is carried out. On paper, the tools exist: the budget, sanctions law, oversight, and the Senate's consent to treaties. In practice, each of them runs through the executive. The Graham Act shows the limit. Congress passed it by large majorities, 86 to 11 in the Senate and 262 to 159 in the House; the text itself gave the president a national-interest waiver, and he used it within a month of signing. A new law without a waiver needs his signature or two-thirds of both chambers, and the Act's own vote in the House, 262 of 421, fell short of that; in the new Senate an override would need at least eleven Republicans. Even if a law passes, the administration applies it and decides how hard to enforce it. Ukraine is also not among the new majority's first priorities, and the main levers of foreign policy stay in the president's hands: Congress can constrain him but cannot replace him in diplomacy.

Three instruments remain within reach of the new majority, and they are of unequal weight. The first is the Senate's consent. Any guarantee to Ukraine meant to outlast this presidency must be a treaty, which requires a two-thirds Senate vote, because an executive agreement binds no successor, and the Secretary of State has already pointed to the difficulty of winning that vote. A Senate that insists on seeing the text can prevent an empty guarantee from being traded for real territory. Second is the power to lock in American commitments in law, as Congress did in 2023 when it barred any president from leaving NATO without the consent of two-thirds of the Senate or an act of Congress. The third and weakest is oversight. Hearings and subpoenas cannot reverse a decision, yet they can establish who ordered the Starshield limits and on what grounds the sanctions waiver was certified, and so raise the political cost of the next one.

The developments traced in this article strongly suggest that President Trump's strategy is aimed at a grand deal with Russia on the European and transatlantic security architecture. That course will be hard to change while he is in office, since Congress can slow it and expose it but cannot negotiate in his place. That leaves the outcome where the kill chain has always left it: those being asked to pay. Russia stands closer to the fourth step than at any time since 2021, and it can complete that step only if Ukraine surrenders or Europe accepts a place in an architecture designed in Moscow. Buying a temporary pause at the expense of principle or territory would validate the chain and invite its next round. By Russia's own strategic logic, that round would target NATO itself, because Moscow has never been this close to even a chance of undermining the Alliance's credibility.

Putin also understands that time is no longer on his side, now that the election has made Washington's future position less certain. Europe and Ukraine therefore cannot wait for Washington to correct itself. If they refuse the concessions step, with one voice and in advance, the chain stalls again as it did in 2022; if they do not, the next two years may divide Europe along the 1997 line ■

L'État, C'est Moi — Georgian Dream Style

On November 4, 2026, the European Commission reported that Georgia's accession process "remains de facto halted" and that the country is a candidate "in name only." The same document pledged "unwavering support for the European aspirations of the Georgian people." Tbilisi's Foreign Ministry heard something else: a report that feeds "anti-Georgian narratives." Tbilisi treated a text criticizing a government as an attack on the state.

That reflex is the primary symptom of Georgian Dream's (GD) authoritarian nature. Georgian Dream has spent years erasing the line between the Georgian state and the party that currently runs it. The party has continuously recast criticism as hostility to Georgia. Attempts to vote it out or protest it out became plots against the constitutional order, and calls for sanctions against its officials became sabotage against the state.

The formula has a famous name. *L'État, c'est moi* is attributed to Louis XIV. While the French monarch almost certainly never said it, the apocryphal line survived because it signified how Louis XIV ruled the country. So it is in Georgia: no GD leader has declared that the state is the party and that Ivanishvili is the state. They legislated it instead and now use the same logic to ban opposition parties.

Max Weber described this underlying logic as patrimonialism, a form of rule in which office is treated as the ruler's personal affair and the public and private realms are not separated; later scholars coined the term neopatrimonialism for systems that keep the formal distinction on paper while dissolving it in practice. The description fits Georgia, whose main political actor, Bidzina Ivanishvili, is the ruling party's honorary chairman and holds no elected office. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way defined competitive authoritarianism by the same mechanism: regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist, but incumbents' abuse of the state gives them a significant advantage over their opponents, making the fusion of party and state a primary modus operandi.



SERGI KAPANADZE
Editor and Contributor

Dr. Sergi Kapanadze is a Professor of International Relations and European Integration at the Ilia State and Caucasus Universities in Tbilisi, Georgia. Dr. Kapanadze was a Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia in 2016-2020 and a Deputy Foreign Minister in 2011-2012. He is a co-founder and former director and chairman of the board of the Georgia-based think tank – Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS). He received a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Tbilisi State University in 2010 and an MA in International Relations and European Studies from the Central European University in 2003. He holds the diplomatic rank of Envoy Plenipotentiary.


L'Etat,
c'est moi
© GEOPOLITICS

Two further ideas complete the picture. Kim Lane Scheppele's concept of "autocratic legalism" describes elected leaders who dismantle constitutional constraints by means of law and not in defiance of it, just as the Georgian Dream has strengthened its grasp on power through a series of authoritarian laws in 2024-2026 and is now banning the opposition through the Constitutional Court. The Copenhagen School's theory of securitization explains GD's accompanying rhetoric, since declaring opposition an existential threat to the constitutional order removes the discourse from ordinary politics and makes extraordinary measures possible. Together, the two let repression take a respectable form: opponents cease to be rivals for office and become a danger to sovereignty, and the laws that silence them can be presented as acts of national defense.

> ***Democratic accountability means keeping these four apart, so citizens can remove the party and the government without touching the constitutional order or the state; once the distinction is erased, every election, every protest, and every critical broadcast can be described as an attempted coup. Scratch the surface of Georgia's current politics, and this is what we will see.***

This entire construction depends on treating as synonyms four terms that democratic theory keeps clearly distinct. The state is the permanent political community; the constitutional order is the set of rules by which power is won, exercised, and lost; the government is the temporary holder of executive power; and the ruling party is a private association that competes for it. Democratic accountability means keeping these four apart, so citizens can remove the party and the government without touching the constitutional order or the state; once the distinction is erased, every election, every protest, and every critical broadcast can be described as an attempted coup. Scratch the surface of Georgia's current politics, and this is what we will see.

A Lawsuit Against All Opponents

Georgian Dream's restatement of this doctrine runs to 470 pages. On September 2, 2025, GD lawmaker Tea Tsulukiani presented the report of the parliamentary investigative commission she chaired, a body this journal has described as unconstitutional in its very composition, and whose conclusions relabel the 2003 Rose Revolution as a coup. This report effectively filed more than a decade of opposition politics under the heading of serial revolutions: the attempt to "storm" parliament on June 20, 2019; the 2020 parliamentary elections and subsequent demonstrations and boycott; the 2021 local elections and return of Mikheil Saakashvili and his arrest; the 2022 protests against the government, which failed to get the candidate status; 2023 protests against the foreign agents bill (so-called Russian law); 2024 parliamentary elections and post-election protests and boycott; and massive demonstrations after the November 2024 announcement to refuse accession talks. Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili later counted "six direct attempts" at overthrow between 2019 and 2024.

What is striking about this catalog is the nature of the events it contains: with a single exception, they are election disputes, parliamentary boycotts, and street protests against the laws, that is, attempts to change the government, not to abolish elections, courts, or the constitution. The report nonetheless served as the evidentiary basis for a lawsuit claiming that the opposition parties have attempted to change the constitutional order.

The legal hook for banning the opposition parties is Article 23 of the Constitution, which prohibits parties that aim to overthrow or forcibly change the constitutional order. Papuashvili himself made the most candid connection between this provision and the opposition, explaining that the opposition has

"denied both the domestic political and foreign policy legitimacy of the current Georgian government" and, therefore, "must be declared unconstitutional." In this reasoning, either the government is illegitimate, or its critics are illegal, and it admits no third possibility, such as a lawful opposition that disputes the fairness of an election, or angry people who protest the detour from the European integration path, protected by the Constitution.

European law draws the line in a different place. The European Court of Human Rights holds that a party may campaign for a change in the law, and even in the constitutional structure of the state, provided that the means it uses are "legal and democratic" and that the change it proposes is itself compatible with fundamental democratic principles, and it has upheld dissolution only where a party was tied to terrorism and violence (*Herri Batasuna*) or was found to threaten democracy itself (*Refah Partisi*). The Venice Commission's guidelines likewise reserve prohibition for parties that advocate or use violence to overthrow the democratic constitutional order, and treat peaceful advocacy of constitutional change as insufficient. Hence, no surprise that its October 2026 opinion on Georgia's party-ban amendments was extremely critical.

The government's claim nevertheless deserves a serious answer. Some protesters did attempt to force their way into parliament on June 20, 2019, and prosecutors charged five opposition figures with a coup attempt after the protests of October 2025. However, when violence occurs, courts can punish it through individual criminal liability. Such episodes cannot convert a decade of contested elections into a single conspiracy, or turn more than a third of the electorate into its accomplices.

The Georgian Dream's pleadings have since made the equation explicit. Archil Gorduladze, who represents the ruling party in the proceedings, said on October 31, 2026, that "actions directed against the people's sovereign will should receive an appropriate constitutional assessment" and that the lawsuit "serves exactly this goal," adding the same day that "the source of state power is the people" and that the opposition parties "still do not recognize the Georgian people's choice." On November 10, before entering the courtroom, he told journalists that these parties "are trying to establish external rule in the country" and "carry out the will of these foreign forces." The lawsuit he defends supplies the detail: the opposition is accused of seeking to have the Georgian state and government "punished" from abroad, so that the resulting discontent serves "as a lever of pressure on the Georgian government," and resolutions of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and of the European Parliament are entered as evidence.

> ***Popular sovereignty, which belongs to the people and is exercised through elections that may go either way, is treated as having been transferred to the party that won the last one, so that disagreement with that party, once voiced abroad, becomes an offense against the nation.***

To paraphrase, the argument runs as follows: GD was elected by the people and therefore exercises the sovereignty which the people conferred; pressure from European states and institutions to alter its decisions or the country's course is an assault on that sovereignty; and parties which invite such pressure have placed themselves outside the Constitution. The syllogism deserves to be stated plainly because it contains the whole doctrine in miniature: popular sovereignty, which belongs to the people and is exercised through elections that may go either way, is treated as having been transferred to the party that won the last one, so that disagreement with that party, once voiced abroad, becomes an offense against the nation.

Protest, Sanctions, Legitimacy

As the party ban hearings in Batumi have progressed, the ruling party's representatives' pleadings and the bench's questions have reduced the case to three cornerstones: protests, sanctions, and legitimacy. Each of them names a form of political opposition that is lawful in a constitutional democracy, and each is converted by the same operation into an offense against the state.

The first concept concerns the streets and demonstrations. A rally against Georgian Dream is described not as an exercise of the freedom of assembly but as an attempted coup and an attempt to change the constitutional order by force. This is why Goguladze sought at the November 11 hearing to tie the men charged over the events of October 4, 2025 to the United National Movement (UNM) as a whole. The reasoning runs from the acts of some individuals at one demonstration to the character of every demonstration, and from there to the parties whose supporters attend them, or who organize some of them, although the object of a protest that demands new elections or a government's resignation is the government, while the constitutional order, which provides for both elections and resignations, is left exactly where it was.

The right to oppose power is older than any constitution. In Reykjavik, facing the parliament building, stands Santiago Sierra's Black Cone, unveiled in 2012 as a monument to civil disobedience, whose plaque cites the French Declaration of 1793 to the effect that when government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is "the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties." The closest modern equivalent is the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which warns that the rule of law must protect human rights "if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression." None of this seems to be an argument that the Georgian Dream shares, even if none of the "attempted revolutions" called for insurrection or revolution.

> ***The GD presents sanctions against the ruling-party officials, or against those who serve it in the courts and the police, as directed at the Georgian state, and frames advocacy for them as participation in an attack on it.***

The second concept concerns the sanctions. The GD presents sanctions against the ruling-party officials, or against those who serve it in the courts and the police, as directed at the Georgian state, and frames advocacy for them as participation in an attack on it. The lawsuit cites the opposition's calls for Western sanctions as evidence of an effort to "punish" Georgia, and the judge-rapporteur, Vasil Roinishvili, asked the applicants whether they had calculated the material damage the defendants' actions caused the state, citing visa regimes and international resolutions. The question presupposes its own answer, since a visa ban on a minister or an asset freeze on a judge inflicts no loss on the public purse or the citizenry, and can count as damage to the state only if the officeholder and the state are taken to be one and the same.

At the hearing of November 13, 2026, Judge Giorgi Tevdorashvili put the same thought more directly, asking whether it does not harm the country's economy when the government is sanctioned, to which the United National Movement's representative replied by asking what economic damage the Georgian state had suffered from the sanctioning of a single named police official. The question returned on November 16, when Tevdorashvili asked Gvaramia whether "demanding sanctions on government representatives" harms state interests, and the President of the Court, Revaz Nadaraia, asked Lelo's Grigol Gegelia whether a constant demand for sanctions on high officials could be directed against the state. "Unequivocally and categorically, no," Gegelia replied. "We never demanded harm to the people or to our state." Gvaramia's counter-question was simpler: "How does a sanction on Bidzina Ivanishvili harm this country?"

The lawsuit itself is unambiguous on this point. Under the heading of assistance to a foreign power in undermining Georgia's independence, it alleges that the opposition parties strive to have "the Georgian state and the Georgian government" "punished" from abroad, so that discontent accumulates among citizens, who then turn against "the government they lawfully elected," and that this process is used "as a mechanism of sabotage against the Georgian state and as a lever of pressure on the Georgian government."

Among the acts listed are conduct said to be harmful to the visa-free regime, the obstruction of Georgia's path to EU membership, and a "systematic information attack from abroad on the Georgian state and the Georgian government," together with attempts to have "foreign sanctions imposed on the Georgian state and the Georgian government," the evidence for which consists of resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, resolutions of the European Parliament adopted with the support of the opposition's partner political groups, and bills introduced in the United States Congress. Throughout these passages, state and government appear as a fixed pair, so a resolution criticizing the government's conduct, or a draft law aimed at its officials, is counted, without further argument, as an attack on the country's independence.

> ***In reality, disputing an election result appeals to the constitutional order, rather than rejecting it, because the claim that a parliament was unlawfully elected presupposes the binding force of the very rules that define lawful election.***

The third concept concerns legitimacy. The refusal to recognize the government formed after the disputed elections of 2024 is treated as a refusal to recognize the state itself and as an action against the constitutional order, which is the meaning of PM Kobakhidze's remark that the members of Gakharia's party "do not recognize the constitutional order or the legitimacy of the government," as though these were a single object. The same logic underpins the new Article 316[1] of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes promoting a "perception" of illegitimacy. In reality, disputing an election result appeals to the constitutional order, rather than rejecting it, because the claim that a parliament was unlawfully elected presupposes the binding force of the very rules that define lawful election. The argument of non-recognition also applies to the Lelo-Strong Georgia and Gakharia For Georgia parties, both of which participated in the 2025 local elections and have taken their seats in the local councils, with Gakharia's party even returning to Parliament in October 2025.

The lawsuit's central section joins under a single heading the "refusal to recognize the legitimacy of bodies and officials elected through universal elections," and the "attempts to overthrow the constitutional order of Georgia or change it by violent means," and it describes the opposition's refusal to accept the results of the elections held since 2016 as "sabotage conducted against the Georgian state and the Georgian government," a phrase in which the two are named as a single target. The same section holds that the parties were "essentially oriented not toward elections but toward overthrowing the government," defining overthrow as a change of government "by unconstitutional, non-electoral means," and dismissing the idea of a "peaceful overthrow of the government" as a contradiction in terms. This logic also treats the demand for the government's resignation and for a technical cabinet, raised in 2022 after the EU withheld candidate status (characterized in the appeal as an 'artificial pretext'), as participation in an attempt to overthrow the constitutional order.

The bench has adopted the applicants' vocabulary here, too. On November 16, 2026, Judge Eva Gotsiridze asked Nika Gvaramia of the Coalition

for Change, "If overthrow means violent actions, then what is a peaceful overthrow?", restating the lawsuit's oxymoron as a question. At the same hearing, when Judge Sergo Metopishvili told Lelo's representative that his party had recognized neither the 2021 nor the 2025 local elections, a representative for another respondent interjected: "That's a different party, Mr. Judge." The slip shows how readily five separate parties are being tried as one.

The same principle of party-as-state polices broadcast vocabulary. Under the 2025 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, the Communications Commission, acting on complaints filed by GD itself, ruled on July 3, 2025, that Formula and TV Pirveli had broken the law by using terms such as "illegitimate parliament," "regime," and "oligarch," and fines followed in due course, with Formula penalized in May 2026 for phrases that included "Ivanishvili's rule" and "the regime's court." In October 2026, Transparency International Georgia reviewed seven of the regulator's memoranda from the preceding six months and counted 93 distinct words and phrases that had been held impermissible, among them "political prisoners," "prisoners of conscience," "repressive laws" and "judicial clan," while the fines imposed had climbed from GEL 2,500 to 10,000.

The same pattern, interestingly, extends to proposals for judicial reform, including vetting of the judges. Back in 2024, Kobakhidze said that "the so-called vetting conflicts with the Georgian Constitution and constitutional principles in general" and that checking the integrity of judges "is nobody's business," while Papuashvili held that "the participation of the foreign organization in the issues of the judiciary today is equal to the attack on the judiciary." The measure thus denounced had been requested by the European Commission itself, whose November 8, 2023 recommendation on the nine steps included a mechanism to check judges' integrity, so a demand drawn from the conditions of Georgia's own candidacy now serves as evidence of unconstitutional intent. The importance of vetting was also highlighted in the November European Commission report on Georgia.

The bench returned to vetting at the hearing on November 13, 2026, and it took more time than any other issue, while the judges' positions proved difficult to distinguish from the applicants'. Judge Eva Gotsiridze asked UNM representatives why inviting foreign experts was so necessary and whether, in their view, there were no honest people in Georgia. She then likened the proposal to the appeal which the Slavic tribes of the ninth century addressed to the Vikings, to the effect that theirs was a good country without order and that the Vikings should come and rule it, before asking whether the opposition was proposing a return to the Russia of the ninth century and whether the state's refusal of such an arrangement was not correct from the standpoint of constitutional law. The President of the Court supported this line of questioning by asking whether the respondents considered constitutional a vetting that would extend to the judges of the Constitutional Court themselves. This logic is instructive on two counts. A proposal contained in a party's program, and corresponding to the extraordinary re-evaluation of senior appointees with the participation of international experts which the Commission has asked of Georgia, is being examined as possible evidence of unconstitutionality; and the argument of sovereignty is advanced from the bench by judges who could themselves be subject to the scrutiny in question. On November 17, the UNM's Khatia Dekanoidze responded that the judges were "misleading the Georgian people" by presenting resistance to vetting as a defense of sovereignty, since the proposal "did not provide for checking the entire judicial corps" but only its senior ranks.

Article 78, Read Backward

Nowhere is the gap between the interest of the party and the interest of the state wider than on the question of Europe. Georgia applied for EU

membership on March 3, 2022; in June of that year the Commission's opinion set out twelve priorities and the European Council recognized a European perspective while withholding candidate status; on November 8, 2023, the Commission recommended candidacy on the basis of nine steps; and on December 14, 2023, the European Council granted the status "on the understanding that the relevant steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 are taken." None of these lists constituted a legal obligation, since they were political conditions for moving to the next stage, but their political character made them consequential.

> ***Faced with a choice between the country's European integration and its own grip on power, GD chose the latter, so that by June 27, 2024, the European Council judged the accession process to be de facto halted, and on November 28, 2024, Kobakhidze announced that accession talks would be kept off the agenda until the end of 2028.***

These conditions called for de-oligarchization, an independent judiciary, free elections, depolarization, free media and a civil society able to work without harassment. For Georgian Dream, whose power rests on an informal ruler, a loyal judiciary bench and administrative advantage at the polls, this amounted less to a reform agenda than to an order to dismantle its own foundations. Faced with a choice between the country's European integration and its own grip on power, GD chose the latter, so that by June 27, 2024, the European Council judged the accession process to be de facto halted, and on November 28, 2024, Kobakhidze announced that accession talks would be kept off the agenda until the end of 2028. The string of laws adopted after that, curbing fundamental freedoms, has buried deeper the chances of Georgia's European integration.

The Constitution points in the opposite direction, because Article 78 instructs the constitutional bodies to take all measures within their competence to ensure Georgia's full integration into the EU and NATO. The ruling party's answer, delivered in June 2026 by the chair of parliament's legal affairs committee, Archil Gorduladze, was that "we do not start reading the Constitution from Article 78, but from Article 1," by which the party claims for itself the authority to rank the Constitution's commands. The Tsulukiani report meanwhile accuses the opposition of "deliberate damage to European integration," and the government, which suspended the process, now charges its critics with sabotaging it.

Sabotage against the state (read: party) is also the literal charge. On November 6, 2025, the Prosecutor General announced proceedings against eight opposition leaders, among whom Elene Khoshtaria, Zurab Japaridze and Giorgi Vashadze were accused of supplying foreign states with lists of officials "for the purpose of imposing sanctions," under Article 318 (sabotage) and Article 319 (assisting a foreign state in hostile activities) of the Criminal Code, which carry sentences of up to 15 years, the alleged harm being that "up to 300 Georgian citizens" were sanctioned as a result. The theory behind these allegations is revealing, because it treats travel bans and asset freezes imposed on named officials as injuries to Georgia.

The Friends Who Ask No Questions

The same party-as-state logic governs Georgian Dream's choice of friends, and Georgia's. In November 2026, Papuashvili declared that the European bureaucracy does not notice Georgia and would all but erase it from the map, whereas China sends a visitor at the level of vice president, which, in his reading, shows that Brussels does not respect the Georgian people and China does; in the same days he described the EU's policy as "anti-Georgian."

The implication that Georgians have a truer friend in Beijing than in Brussels can be tested against a standard Papuashvili himself set in January 2026, when he said that a state that does not recognize Georgia's territorial integrity "can never be friends of the Georgian people."

Beijing does recognize Georgia's borders on paper, but if the standard applies to conduct rather than declarations, the record favors Brussels by a wide margin. Every year since 2008, Georgia has tabled a UN General Assembly resolution on the right of return for those displaced from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, which EU member states support and co-sponsor, and on which China, as in the June 2025 vote that passed 107 to 9, has continued to abstain. The Association Agreement commits the EU to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and EU monitors have patrolled the occupation line since 2008, whereas the strategic partnership statement that Tbilisi signed with Beijing on July 31, 2023 records Georgia's firm adherence to the one-China principle while offering in return only a general respect for the territorial integrity "of all countries," without a word about Abkhazia or Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

The material record is equally lopsided. Georgians have traveled to the Schengen area without visas since March 2017 and to China only since May 28, 2024. In 2025, the EU was Georgia's largest trading partner, accounting for 21.6% of its trade and buying EUR 776 million of its exports, while China ranked fifth at 8.9% and bought EUR 290 million. Chinese direct investment between 2010 and early 2024 totaled roughly USD 688 million, less than what the United Kingdom and the Netherlands invested together in 2023 alone, and the EBRD has committed EUR 5.8 billion to 318 Georgian projects since 1992.

The human ties tell the same story. Some 180,000 Georgians were living in EU and Schengen countries by 2020, and the money they send home sustains a considerable part of the economy: of the USD 3.65 billion in remittances received in 2025, Italy alone supplied 17%, whereas transfers from China came to USD 2.7 million, or less than 0.1%. Over the period 2008–2025, National Bank data put remittances from EU countries at about USD 12 billion and those from China at about USD 32 million. More than 13,000 Georgian students and academic staff have studied or trained in Europe through Erasmus+, and China offers no comparable program.

If China is nevertheless presented as the power that "respects Georgians," the explanation lies in what Beijing does not ask. It attaches no conditions concerning elections, courts, broadcasters or NGOs, and it has no difficulty with Georgian Dream or with the dismantling of democratic checks that Brussels describes as backsliding, so that the respect Papuashvili has in mind is respect for the ruling party, attributed, in what is by now a familiar move, to the Georgian people. Another state that couldn't care less about elections and courts is Russia. Hence Moscow's increased praise of the Georgian Dream in recent years.

Europe's Choice of Target

Ironically, Europe now faces the same question, because if Brussels responds to Georgian Dream's conduct with measures aimed at the country as a whole, it accepts the party's premise that the two are one. The measures adopted so far have for the most part been aimed correctly: direct financial assistance to the authorities was suspended in June 2024, political contacts were downgraded, and on March 6, 2026, the Commission suspended visa-free travel for holders of diplomatic, service and official passports for a period of twelve months, while Western states acting in their national capacity have, by Transparency International Georgia's count, sanctioned more than 230 individuals linked to GD.

> ***Ironically, Europe now faces the same question, because if Brussels responds to Georgian Dream's conduct with measures aimed at the country as a whole, it accepts the party's premise that the two are one.***

What has been proposed, however, by some member states is considerably broader. The Commission notes that it "can also decide to extend the measure to all Georgian citizens," and a letter from Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to Georgian opposition leaders, reported in February 2026, pointed to a second stage of visa restrictions that would cover the entire population. In July 2025, EU foreign ministers weighed a menu that included suspending candidate status, a step the Union has never taken unilaterally and could take only by unanimity, as well as assessing the Association Agreement, which could lead to suspending its trade provisions by qualified majority.

Each of the country-wide measures would fall on the wrong people. Visa-free travel serves students, workers, patients and, as was argued in these pages, activists who may need to leave the country at short notice; the free-trade area serves exporters and their employees; and candidate status belongs, in the EU's own telling, to a society and not to a cabinet, which is why the 2026 enlargement communication still invokes the "European aspirations of the Georgian people." The same logic granted Georgia EU candidacy in December 2023, even though Georgia's government was already drifting away from its commitments by then. Officials with second passports and assets abroad would feel little of this, whereas GD's propaganda would gain a great deal, since Kobakhidze already describes visa warnings as European bureaucrats "wildly blackmailing our country," and a blanket suspension would turn that slogan into lived experience and hand the party the one proof it presently lacks, namely that Europe is hostile to Georgians and not merely to the ruling regime.

The alternative, discussed in several European capitals, is a response as personal as the regime itself, and the EU already has a precedent. On April 28, 2023, the Council created a dedicated framework for Moldova, allowing asset freezes and entry bans on persons who undermine that country's sovereignty, democracy, rule of law, stability, or security. The difference between the two cases is instructive: Chișinău asked for the framework, whereas Tbilisi never will, simply because in Georgia the people such a framework would name are in government, which is precisely what makes the comparison instructive.

> ***Europe should decline to adopt Georgian Dream's party-as-state logic. Georgia holds the Association Agreement, the free-trade area, visa-free travel, and the membership perspective, which will outlast this government.***

The principle for European decision-makers follows directly from the analysis above: Europe should decline to adopt Georgian Dream's party-as-state logic. Georgia holds the Association Agreement, the free-trade area, visa-free travel, and the membership perspective, which will outlast this government, while identifiable people bear responsibility for the laws, the prosecutions, and the party-ban lawsuit. A European policy that keeps the first intact while distinguishing it from the second would accomplish what the Georgian authorities are no longer able or willing to do—tell the difference between a state and those who happen, for the time being, to rule it ■

The Weaponization of Europe's Discontents:

How Georgia's Ruling Party Turns France's Turmoil Against Europe

During my childhood (the late Soviet period), the coverage of the capitalist West by the media focused almost exclusively on social unrest: dramatic footage of police beating protesters, using water cannons to disperse demonstrations, rising prices, inflation, unemployment, crime, and various social problems. As a child, before my parents carefully explained that the news was largely biased, I came to believe that life in Europe and America must be dangerous.

The Old Soviet Playbook with a New Audience

After a paradigm shift in the 1990s, starting in the mid-2000s, Russian television (RT, Sputnik) and media brought back this narrative, but this time without glorifying the socialist alternative. I remember stories shown on RT about people supposedly being unable to celebrate Christmas or able to afford only one McDonald's hamburger to share for dinner with their family of four. It was so absurd that we actually laughed, thinking Russian propaganda had somehow outdone even the Soviet version. But I would never, ever have imagined that 35 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I would be witnessing something similar in Georgia. Yet today, watching Georgian television news, I sometimes feel that it has absolutely nothing to envy about Soviet-era or Putin's Russian propaganda.

> ***Today, Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, seems to have turned every social or political crisis unfolding in Europe into an opportunity for domestic propaganda.***

Today, Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD), seems to have turned every social or political crisis unfolding in Europe into an opportunity for domestic propaganda. Strikes, demonstrations, clashes with the police: any event capable of tarnishing the image of European democracies becomes fodder for media exploitation.



THORNIKE GORDADZE
Contributor

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 Sciences Po 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 Sciences Po Paris (2005).


1312
ACAB
ACAB
ACAB
PEACE
1312
© GEOPOLITICS

One recalls, in particular, the caricatural reports by Georgian pro-government media journalists on the Danish police intervention in Copenhagen on May 13, 2026, where activists attempting to block Maersk's headquarters, as its ships were suspected of carrying military equipment to Israel, were forcibly removed. Georgian Dream's propaganda channels routinely opened their evening bulletins with reports from Copenhagen, portrayed as little short of a war zone. Meanwhile, Russia's creeping occupation of Georgian territory and a succession of arrests of former and serving government officials on corruption charges received barely a passing mention. GD Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, was bold enough to be ridiculous, addressing an open letter, widely discussed by the regime media, to Presidents Costa, von der Leyen and Metsola, requesting that they condemn the Danish police's behavior. Later on, he even gave a long interview on this topic to GD's favorite television channels.

The tactic is hardly original. In Russia or Iran, isolated dysfunctions in Western democracies are turned into evidence of systemic collapse. Iranian regime officials complained about France's treatment of street protests only months after the regime massacred up to 30,000 civilians in January 2026.

Since Soviet times, the scenery has changed, and so have the means of communication, but the reflex remains remarkably intact. Yesterday, Soviet television proclaimed the imminent demise of the capitalist world; today, Georgian Dream's media outlets stage its convulsions. The difference lies less in the narrative itself than in the packaging.

> ***The objective is not to understand France, but to discredit Europe.***

The instrumentalization of France's October–November 2026 social unrest by Georgia's ruling party is hardly surprising. Its political narrative is remarkably flexible: images of police violence are used to dismiss European criticism of the Georgian authorities' repression of demonstrators, while scenes of looting, clashes, and urban disorder are presented as evidence of the collapse of Europe's liberal, multicultural, and supposedly permissive model. The contradictions are not accidental. The objective is not to understand France, but to discredit Europe.

Why the French Crisis Is Read More Radically Abroad

When social crises, riots, or demonstrations erupt in France, they naturally give rise to a range of interpretations within the French debate itself. But those interpretations are not necessarily exported abroad in the same form. In France, the debate is relatively contextualized and multifaceted. Depending on the actors involved, it draws on a variety of themes: social inequality, poverty, and territorial segregation; relations between young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods and the police; the difficulties of integration in the education system and in republican institutions; the crisis of political representation; economic frustration; but also, of course, interpretations that emphasize immigration, insecurity, the erosion of state authority, failures of integration, or what they portray as a weakening of republican order.

Abroad, such events are stripped of their context and recast as evidence of a broader crisis of the Western model. France is no longer portrayed as grappling with a crisis of its own, but as embodying the failure of an entire political and social system. Georgian Dream is hardly alone in exploiting this narrative: from Germany's AfD to MAGA, and Netanyahu's description of the protesters as "Hamas on the streets of Paris," the events of October 17 offered illiberal forces an opportunity to reinforce their ideological claims. More surprising, perhaps, is that some voices within Georgia's pro-Western opposition have echoed similar interpretations, a point to which we shall return.

> ***In media environments where knowledge of French politics and society is limited, as is often the case in Georgia, these images can readily be turned into sweeping verdicts on immigration, national identity, or state failure.***

The mechanism centers on context giving way to spectacle. Illiberal forces abroad reduce French protests to a succession of arresting images (not to mention countless fakes): burning cars, looting, clashes, and barricades. In media environments where knowledge of French politics and society is limited, as is often the case in Georgia, these images can readily be turned into sweeping verdicts on immigration, national identity, or state failure. The violence was real, but it was neither the whole story nor an adequate account of the motivations of those who took to the streets. What is lost in this process is precisely the context that might complicate, and ultimately challenge, the narrative being advanced.

French crises can thus be recast as evidence that liberal democracies cannot maintain order, tolerance breeds weakness, multiculturalism undermines national cohesion, liberal elites have abandoned ordinary citizens, Western states are losing their capacity to govern, and their economic models are failing to meet social expectations. This framing is especially potent in countries where governments, media, or political movements seek to legitimize more authoritarian, nationalist, or conservative alternatives.

The Abuse of the French Crises by the Georgian Leadership

Why is GD particularly inclined to seize upon and amplify this interpretation of the French crisis? Its propaganda aims to undermine the legitimacy of the European model and shield the Georgian regime from both external scrutiny and domestic criticism.

In covering French unrest, GD deploys two narratives that may be difficult to reconcile analytically, but are perfectly complementary politically. The first focuses on police violence in France, with pro-government media eagerly broadcasting footage of clashes, arrests, and alleged abuses to relativize, if not neutralize, European criticism of police brutality against demonstrators in Georgia. The second narrative is the exact opposite of the first: because they abandoned "traditional values" and sovereignty, European states lost their authority and power, and they are overwhelmed by violent migrants who riot and loot.

The almost pathetic scramble by pro-regime television correspondents to capture scenes of violence live in the streets of Paris illustrates the first narrative. On October 6, GD Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili indignantly denounced French police for "beating peaceful demonstrators, women, with batons and dragging them along the ground"; two weeks later, on October 19, the same self-proclaimed champion of human rights described events as a "bloody chronicle of the streets of Paris," linking them to Emmanuel Macron's supposed support for Georgian protesters, having posted the day before a photograph of France's former ambassador to Georgia, Sheraz Gasri, with activists, alongside the ominous message: "Whoever sows the wind in another country will reap the whirlwind in their own."

The message, crude but unmistakable, is aimed less at Europeans than at Georgian audiences: the West is no better, and has no moral standing to lecture Georgia on repression. European condemnation may have limited impact on Western attitudes, but it resonates more readily with the regime's domestic audience, its principal target. Of course, the double standard is glaring: the same media and officials who denounce violence by French police routinely condone, celebrate, or encourage violence against demonstrators in Georgia. GD politicians, ministers, mayors, and other public figures regularly dehumanize opponents, branding them extremists, foreign agents, or even Satanists, thereby legitimizing, and at times encouraging, the violence directed against them.

The second narrative is one of French society in collapse. The regime foregrounds looting, arson, urban violence, and images of particular groups of demonstrators, tying them to a chain of associations: urban violence is attributed primarily to immigration, which in turn is blamed on liberalism and multicultural policies. Multiculturalism is then cast as an expression of progressive liberal ideology, whose triumph supposedly reflects European elites' willingness to sacrifice national identity and public safety. European governments, the argument goes, are now incapable of restoring order because they remain captive to these very ideologies, and all this is orchestrated by Brussels and "its bureaucracy."

In the same statement on October 19, Shalva Papuashvili spoke of a "civilizational abyss into which Brussels is steering Europe." He cast Georgia as bearing a considerable responsibility for rescuing Europe and preserving the civilization forged by European peoples, even as, in his telling, the European Union itself is busy destroying it. "Today, Europe needs to be saved from Brussels." One might be relieved to discover that Papuashvili is not alone in this formidable civilizational rescue mission: the day before, Kirill Dmitriev, one of Putin's emissaries, had described the Paris unrest as the "suicide of Western civilization through migration chaos."

This is entirely consistent with Irakli Kobakhidze's speech at the 2024 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Budapest, where he declared that "uncontrolled migration poses the greatest threat to the national identity of European countries." The irony, however, is hard to miss: under Georgian Dream's own rule, Georgia has itself experienced a substantial influx of Russian migrants, contributing to a 5.8% increase in its population between the 2014 and 2024 censuses, even as thousands of Georgian citizens keep on emigrating to Europe and the United States.

Yet, in the interests of intellectual honesty, we should acknowledge that this second narrative of Europe's decline, portrayed as the loss of control over immigration, particularly from Africa and the Arab-Muslim world, resonates well beyond Georgian Dream's core supporters. The image of a Europe supposedly overwhelmed by Black and Arab immigrants has become a remarkably commonplace refrain in Georgia, heard across social strata, from taxi drivers to university professors. Nor is this perception confined to supporters of the government's increasingly anti-European course: a sizable number of Georgians who oppose Georgian Dream, sometimes vehemently, share it. This broader social resonance deserves closer examination and is discussed below.

> ***They serve two distinct purposes. The first is defensive: it seeks to relativize, normalize, or discredit criticism of the Georgian regime's repression of its own protesters. The second is offensive: it seeks to undermine Europe, its political model, values, institutions, and ability to maintain social order.***

The two narratives need not be consistent with one another. They serve two distinct purposes. The first is defensive: it seeks to relativize, normalize, or discredit criticism of the Georgian regime's repression of its own protesters. The second is offensive: it seeks to undermine Europe, its political model, values, institutions, and ability to maintain social order.

What the Comparisons Conceal

Georgian Dream's rhetoric is not particularly difficult to dismantle, but doing so matters. The regime's relentless spotlight on police violence in France, juxtaposed with its diametrically opposite attitude toward abuses at home, should not obscure the questions that actually matter: in what circumstances was force used, against what kinds of demonstrators and under what conditions, and was it proportionate? More importantly, any meaningful comparison between France and Georgia must consider whether allegations of abuse can be

investigated independently, whether victims have access to effective remedies, and whether those responsible can be identified and held to account. The yardstick of democracy is not the absence of police violence, but the existence of mechanisms of oversight, accountability, transparency, and redress capable of addressing it.

> ***The yardstick of democracy is not the absence of police violence, but the existence of mechanisms of oversight, accountability, transparency, and redress capable of addressing it.***

In Georgia, human rights organizations have documented arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment, violence against protesters and journalists, and persistent obstacles to accountability during the crackdown on demonstrations since late 2024. By November 2026, despite hundreds of reported cases of torture and abusive use of force by Georgian law-enforcement officers, accountability remained profoundly inadequate. Of the 624 detained or injured demonstrators visited by the Public Defender, 360 reported ill-treatment; yet only five police officers had been convicted, raising serious questions about the effectiveness and thoroughness of investigations. In addition, it is unclear how the sentences handed down will actually be enforced.

In France, too, allegations of police violence, injuries, arrests, restrictions on demonstrations, and the proportionality of force deserve serious scrutiny. The events of October 2026 prompted investigations into alleged police abuses, restrictions on demonstrations, and an ongoing debate over the security response. The analytical distinction, therefore, is not that France is free from police violence, but that its institutions retain the capacity, however imperfectly, to acknowledge abuses, investigate them, challenge them, and sanction those responsible. Comparing France and Georgia cannot be reduced to two videos of police officers beating protesters.

This narrative of "the civilizational abyss" is, factually and analytically, as flawed as the first one.

First, it conflates protesters, perpetrators of violence, and immigrant populations. The French demonstrations of October 2026 initially centered on grievances about education, living conditions, public services, and the cost of living, then broadened to include violence, looting, clashes, and destruction. It is entirely legitimate to investigate the profiles, motivations, and dynamics of those involved in violent incidents. But images alone cannot establish that violence is primarily the product of immigration. After all, France has a rather long history of riots, revolutions, and violent upheavals in which immigration played little, if any, part. The French, it turns out, have never needed much outside help to turn their streets upside down. Conflating violent offenders, immigrant populations, French citizens of immigrant background, protesters, and those voicing social grievances is precisely one of the distortions on which this narrative relies.

Second, it reduces a multidimensional crisis to a single causal explanation. France's unrest must be understood through a combination of factors, whose relative weight remains to be established.

Third, it turns a social and political crisis into purported evidence of Europe's collapse. This is perhaps the most consequential analytical distortion. France is experiencing a crisis, but crisis is not synonymous with collapse.

GD, exactly like Putin or other authoritarians, views unrest in France through an authoritarian lens: as evidence that disorder exposes the inherent weakness of democratic systems. Yet the paradox is that authoritarian regimes may be far more vulnerable to protest than democracies. Their apparent stability rests on coercion, fear, and the suppression of dissent, not on institutions that can absorb conflict and correct themselves. When that façade cracks, unrest can threaten the entire system. Democracies, by contrast, may be noisy, turbulent,

and deeply divided, but their institutional resilience allows them to endure crises without necessarily collapsing.

The Political Endgame of Discrediting Europe

In Georgian Dream's case, the coverage of the French unrest can ultimately be understood as part of a broader, multi-layered strategy to undermine Europe's legitimacy.

Most consequentially, it seeks to weaken Georgia's own European orientation. Europe is no longer presented as a political and institutional model to which Georgia might aspire, but as a society in crisis, even in decline, whose criticism of Tbilisi carries little credibility.

> ***By portraying Europe as a cautionary tale rather than an aspirational destination, Georgian Dream seeks to recast Georgia's rapprochement with the EU as naïve, perilous, or inherently contradictory.***

By portraying Europe as a cautionary tale rather than an aspirational destination, Georgian Dream seeks to recast Georgia's rapprochement with the EU as naïve, perilous, or inherently contradictory.

This last dimension is crucial. The campaign to discredit Europe is not simply commentary on European problems; it is part of a domestic political struggle over Georgia's geopolitical direction, sovereignty, the legitimacy of its European aspirations and, ultimately, the legitimacy of the ruling party itself. By portraying Europe as a cautionary tale rather than an aspirational destination, Georgian Dream seeks to recast Georgia's rapprochement with the EU as naïve, perilous, or inherently contradictory.

Pro-Europeanism Is Not a Culture War

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, some figures in Georgia's pro-European opposition and intellectual circles also tend to overestimate identity issues. Their criticism of France occasionally echoes the arguments of Europe's populist and radical right.

This considerably complicates the picture. A broader societal skepticism toward certain developments in Western Europe cuts across political divides and extends into parts of the democratic opposition itself. For instance, the prosecution of the controversial French writer Michel Houellebecq was portrayed by some – in theory pro-European – Georgian personalities as proof of the triumph of woke ideology, while invoking immigration and Islam as symptoms of France's, and ultimately Europe's, civilizational decline.

Such reactions raise a more fundamental question: what kind of Europe are these Georgian pro-European voices actually defending?

The judicial proceedings involving Houellebecq should not be confused with a conviction, nor should they be presented as evidence that France criminalizes literary or political opinions indiscriminately. The case concerns allegations of complicity in incitement to discrimination, hatred, or violence against a group on grounds of origin or religion, and its outcome remains a matter for the courts. The principle at stake is not the suppression of freedom of expression, but the boundaries established by law and the safeguards that accompany their enforcement.

This is precisely what distinguishes the European democratic project from a civilizational or ethnically defined political vision. Europe is not merely a geopolitical alignment against Russia, nor a Christian, white, or culturally homogeneous community. Its political foundations include human dignity, freedom, equality, pluralism, the rule of law,

and the protection of minorities. These principles do not prevent Europeans from debating immigration, integration, security, borders, religion, or their societies' shortcomings. But they do require that such debates avoid turning entire populations into collective scapegoats.

This distinction matters for Georgia. Being opposed to Georgian Dream's increasingly authoritarian and pro-Russian trajectory, and supporting Georgia's European integration, does not automatically amount to an embrace of all of Europe's democratic values. European orientation cannot be reduced to geopolitics. It also entails a commitment to the principles that underpin the European political and legal order. And the absorption of this requires much more time and probably some serious social transformation.

At the same time, Europeans or liberal pro-Europeans cannot simply counter such perceptions with moralizing rhetoric, branding those who share them as reactionary, xenophobic, or dupes of Russian propaganda. This approach risks deepening divisions and undermining the democratic camp's credibility among significant sections of society.

The central question is: how can the Georgian democratic opposition simultaneously defend the European project without reproducing caricatures of Europe subsumed into an overarching narrative of civilizational decline and without dismissing legitimate concerns about security, integration, cultural change, and social cohesion?

The Paradox of the Georgian Pro-European Conservative

Democratic, pro-European individuals who oppose authoritarian regimes and may be deeply committed to civil liberties can nevertheless hold views on immigration, national identity, and Europe's supposed crisis that closely resemble those of the Western far right. There are several reasons for this apparent paradox.

The first lies in Europe's dual image in parts of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet world: it is both a political model and an imagined ideal. For decades, especially after 1991, Europe represented to many Georgian elites democracy, the rule of law, prosperity, individual freedom, modernity, and political normality: a return to a civilization they believed their country had historically belonged to. Yet many Georgian elites often viewed this idealized Europe from a distance. The societies looking toward it had not experienced, to anything like the same extent or under the same historical conditions, the transformations that reshaped Western Europe after the 1960s: decolonization, mass labor migration, the emergence of postcolonial societies, and the settlement of communities from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

The result is sometimes a highly selective conception of Europe. People covet its institutions, freedoms, living standards, and social protections, but not necessarily the societal changes that accompanied its historical evolution. Europe is imagined as a place of prosperity, culture, security, elegant cities, and Christian or historical heritage, but also as a relatively homogeneous society whose recent transformations are seen as a rupture, even a decline.

A second factor is the divergence in historical experience. Georgia has historically been a multicultural society, in fact, more multicultural than many European societies. Yet over the past few decades, the number of minority communities, particularly those living in ethnically mixed areas, has declined sharply as a result of emigration. The sizable minorities that remain, such as ethnic Armenians in Javakheti, ethnic Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli, and Kists (Georgian Vainakhs) in the Pankisi Gorge, tend to be concentrated in relatively homogeneous districts. Their opportunities for everyday interaction with the ethnic Georgian majority, and for participation in wider public debates, remain limited.

The difference is also experiential. Many people in Georgia encounter African or Arab immigration

in Europe less through direct experience than through television, social media, political rhetoric, and the accounts of relatives or friends who have traveled or settled there. A social reality known primarily through images is especially vulnerable to simplification and dramatization.

There is also a deeper historical and political dimension. In societies shaped by imperial domination, occupation, Russification, and the suppression or contestation of national identity, the nation is more than one political construct among others. It is associated with resistance, survival, sovereignty, language, culture, and the preservation of a historical community. Western debates about multiculturalism, minority rights, anti-discrimination policies, and identity can therefore be interpreted as challenges to the nation itself, to majority culture, religious traditions, or established historical reference points.

Democratic opposition does not necessarily mean social liberalism. Western observers sometimes assume that movements opposing authoritarian regimes and defending European integration, political freedoms, and the rule of law naturally belong to the liberal camp in its broadest political and cultural sense. That assumption is misplaced. Democratic oppositions are rarely ideologically homogeneous. They bring together liberals, conservatives, nationalists, social democrats, religious figures, civic activists, and intellectuals whose principal common ground may simply be their rejection of the incumbent regime.

Their commitment to Europe may be primarily institutional and geopolitical: Europe stands for the rule of law, freedom, independence from Moscow, prosperity, security, and the prospect of living in a country governed by democratic rules. It does not necessarily entail endorsement of every cultural or social development in Western democracies.

A Georgian Dream opponent, for instance, may campaign passionately for EU membership, protest against the government, defend press freedom, and denounce arbitrary arrests, while believing that immigration into Europe has gone too far, or that European governments have lost control of their borders.

Defending Europe Without Idealizing It

The political divide shaping pro-European conservatives' engagement may be less about conservatism versus progressivism than about democracy versus authoritarianism, national sovereignty versus Russian domination, and Europe versus Russia. If the pro-Europe and pro-democracy camp doesn't want to marginalize this significant component of Georgian society, a more effective response would be empirical, nuanced, and intellectually honest: acknowledging the real difficulties facing European societies, distinguishing between genuine problems and simplistic explanations of their causes, and demonstrating that democracies possess institutional, political, and social mechanisms for addressing these challenges without sacrificing civil liberties, fundamental rights, or the rule of law.

> ***The real challenge for pro-European forces in countries such as Georgia may not be to persuade their societies that Europe has no problems, but to show that Europe's problems do not prove liberal democracy has failed.***

The real challenge for pro-European forces in countries such as Georgia may not be to persuade their societies that Europe has no problems, but to show that Europe's problems do not prove liberal democracy has failed ■

Georgia Is Drifting Out of Europe's Enlargement Process

On November 4, 2026, the European Commission published its annual enlargement package, assessing the preparedness of ten candidate and potential candidate countries. This is the fourth comprehensive enlargement report on Georgia since the country embarked on its European path in 2022. Yet, despite starting the accession journey alongside Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia has fallen far behind its former partners. Brussels has outlined tentative timelines for Moldova and Ukraine to conclude accession negotiations by 2028, while Georgia remains what the Commission itself calls a candidate country "in name only."

A four-year assessment (2023–2026) of the 33 negotiating chapters covered by the Commission's reports shows a steady loss of momentum: in 2026 alone, Georgia stagnated or regressed in more than half of the policy areas (17 out of 33). In 2026, its net progress score was just 2.50 (4.50 points for progress against 2.00 points for backsliding), compared with 23 for Moldova and 17 for Ukraine, according to the scoring used in this article. Georgia is moving backward in key areas that are fundamental to accession, particularly the judiciary and fundamental rights, as well as foreign, security, and defense policy. Its alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) fell from 53% in 2024 to 38% by September 2026. By comparison, Moldova's alignment stands at 91% and Ukraine's at 99%. The widening gap is not simply a matter of different reform speeds; it raises a more consequential question: whether Georgia will still be in a position to benefit from the next phase of EU enlargement.

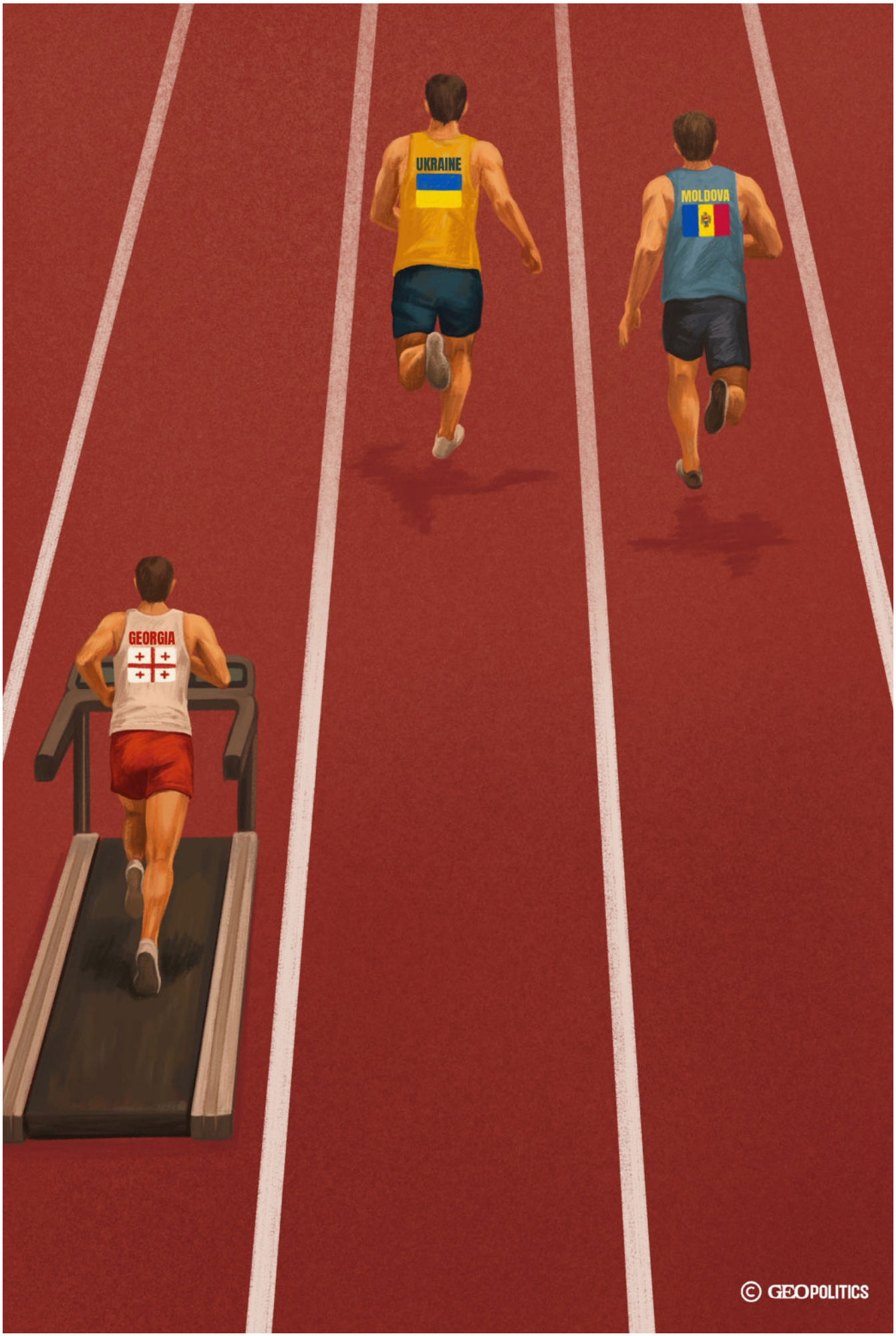
> ***As Georgia drifts further from Moldova and Ukraine, it risks being grouped with candidate countries such as Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose accession processes are at a standstill.***

The Georgian government's claim that it can shelve the opening of accession talks and return to the matter in late 2028 overlooks the political and institutional realities in Brussels.



VANO CHKHIKVADZE
Contributor

Vano Chkhikvadze is based in Brussels, Belgium, and heads the EU Policy of Araminta, a human rights organization operating in Germany. He previously served as the EU Integration Programme Manager at the Open Society Georgia Foundation in Tbilisi for 13 years. With a background as a country analyst for the European Stability Initiative and prior roles at the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in Georgia, he has extensive experience in monitoring EU program implementation across various sectors. Vano Chkhikvadze also oversees EU projects related to regional cooperation. He holds a Master's Degree from the College of Europe in European Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies and another from the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs in Policy Analysis.


UKRAINE
MOLDOVA
GEORGIA
© GEOPOLITICS

By then, the EU will be approaching a new parliamentary and Commission cycle, likely focused on integrating the current frontrunners. For countries that have fallen behind, the next opportunity to move forward could be far off. As Georgia drifts further from Moldova and Ukraine, it risks being grouped with candidate countries such as Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose accession processes are at a standstill. This risk becomes clearer when viewed against the timetable now taking shape for the countries still advancing.

The Enlargement Clock Is Ticking

For the first time in years, the European Union's enlargement agenda is beginning to look less like an open-ended promise and more like a process with a timetable. In its 2026 package, the European Commission sets out a cautious outlook for the countries moving ahead: if they sustain their reform momentum, Montenegro could conclude accession negotiations by the end of 2026, Albania in 2027, Moldova by early 2028, and Ukraine by the end of 2028. These dates are not guaranteed, but they show that the next enlargement is no longer a distant possibility; for the frontrunners, it is becoming a realistic political horizon.

Against this backdrop, Georgian Dream (GD) Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced on November 28, 2024, that Georgia would not put the opening of accession negotiations on its agenda until the end of 2028. Even if Tbilisi were to return to the table at that point, it would collide with a very different political reality in Brussels. By late 2028, negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine may be nearing completion, just as the EU turns its attention to the 2029 European Parliament elections, the formation of a new European Commission, and the start of a new 2029–2034 political cycle.

The renewed push for EU enlargement is rooted above all in the geopolitical transformation triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war has made the security of the EU's eastern and southeastern neighborhood an urgent strategic priority. But once the current enlargement wave has helped secure the Union's immediate eastern and southeastern flanks, that sense of urgency may begin to fade. Without that overriding security imperative, future candidates could face a slower, more technocratic, and less politically flexible process, with every legal, institutional, and economic benchmark scrutinized more rigorously.

The EU has historically taken lengthy pauses after successive rounds of enlargement, focusing on integrating new members rather than immediately opening the door to further candidates. By 2029, the bloc could be preoccupied with the substantial institutional, budgetary and decision-making reforms needed to accommodate Montenegro, Albania, Moldova and Ukraine. Georgia could find itself not simply at the back of the queue, but facing a door that has effectively closed as the EU enters another period of internal consolidation. A further complication is the possibility that public support for enlargement in EU member states could weaken, making the political climate for future accessions even less favorable. The question, then, is not only how much time Georgia is losing, but how that loss can be measured and what the record reveals about the direction of the country's European course.

Measuring the Distance: Georgia's Four Years on the EU Path

How far has Georgia really traveled on its EU accession path and, more importantly, how much ground has it lost? The European Commission's annual enlargement reports offer a way to answer that question. They do more than describe the state of play in individual policy areas or negotiation chapters; they also assess whether each country is moving forward, standing still, or slipping backward.

Four Years in the Numbers:

Where Georgia Has Advanced — and Where It Has Fallen Back

Setback No change Progress

Chapters	2023	2024	2025	2026
1 Free movement of goods	0.25	0	0	0.25
2 Free movement of labor	0.25	0	0	0
3 Establishment & services	0	0	0	0
4 Free movement of capital	0.25	0.25	0	0.25
5 Public procurement	0.75	0.5	0	0.25
6 Company law	0.25	0.25	0	0
7 Intellectual property rights	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
8 Competition policy	0	0.5	0	0
9 Financial services	0.25	0.25	0	0.25
10 Digital & media	0.5	0.25	0	0
11 Agriculture & rural development	0.25	0.5	0.25	0.25
12 Food safety	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.25
13 Fisheries	0	0.25	0.25	0.25
14 Transport policy	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
15 Energy	0.25	0.5	0.25	0
16 Taxation	0.5	0.25	0.25	0.25
17 Economic & monetary policy	0	0.25	0.25	0.25
18 Statistics	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
19 Social policy & employment	0.5	0.25	0	0
20 Enterprise & industry policy	0.25	0.25	0	0
21 Trans-European networks	0.5	0.5	0.25	0.5
22 Regional policy	0.5	0.5	0	0
23 Judiciary	0.25	-1	-1	-1
24 Justice & security	0.5	0.25	-1	0
25 Science & research	0.5	0.5	0.25	0.25
26 Education & culture	0.5	0.25	0.25	0
27 Environment & climate	0.5	0.5	0.25	0.25
28 Consumer & health	0.25	0.5	0.25	0
29 Customs	0.5	0.5	0.25	0.25
30 External relations	0.25	0.25	0	0
31 Foreign, security & defense	0.25	0	-1	-1
32 Financial control	0	0	0	0
33 Finance & budget	0	0	0	0
Total score	10.25	9.5 / -1	4.25 / -3	4.5 / -2

Source: Author's calculations based on the European Commission's reports on Georgia for 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026.

The Commission uses six categories to describe progress: backsliding, no progress, limited progress, some progress, good progress, and very good progress. To make these assessments easier to compare over time, this article converts the Commission's qualitative evaluations into a numerical scale. Each category is assigned a value: backsliding is scored at –1; no progress at 0; limited progress at 0.25; some progress at 0.5; good progress at 0.75; and very good progress at 1.

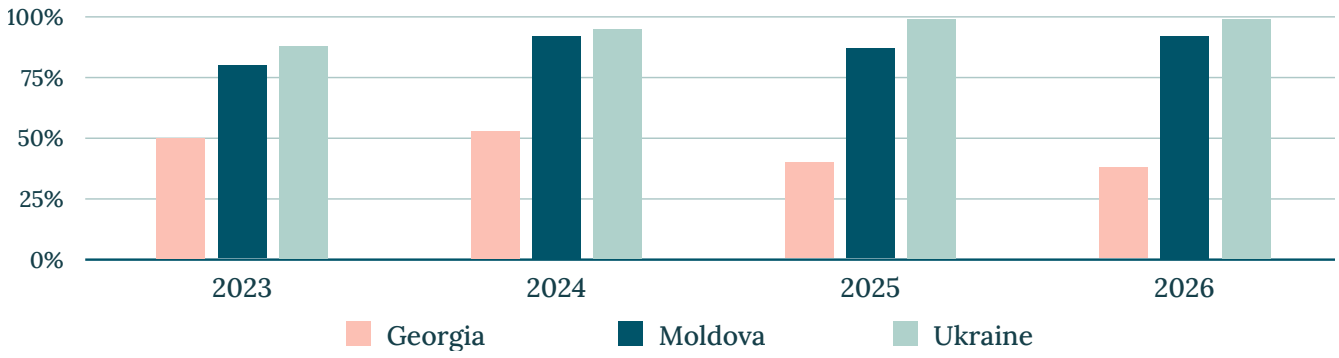
The conversion of qualitative assessments into numerical values draws on the methodology used by the European Stability Initiative (ESI) to measure preparedness. Applying the same scale to all 33 negotiation chapters makes it possible to trace changes in Georgia's performance between 2023 and 2026 and to compare its record with those of Moldova and Ukraine. The scores should not be read as precise measurements of accession readiness. Their purpose is more modest: to make the direction and scale of progress, stagnation and regression visible, and to provide a consistent basis for comparison.

The pattern that emerges from the table above is one of diminishing momentum. Over the past four years, Georgia's progress has slowed to a crawl, and in 2026 it stagnated or moved backward in more than half of the policy areas covered by the EU accession process: in 17 of the 33 chapters, progress stalled (15) or reversed (two). Fourteen chapters saw only limited progress, and just two (transport policy and trans-European networks) recorded some progress. Stagnation is particularly evident in areas such as media, external relations and education. The most serious deterioration, however, has occurred in the judiciary and in foreign, security, and defense policy.

> ***The chapters in which Georgia is losing ground are not marginal areas of technical alignment; they concern the foundations on which EU membership rests: democracy, the rule of law, human rights and a country's relationship with the Union's common foreign and security policy.***

This distinction is very significant. The chapters in which Georgia is losing ground are not marginal areas of technical alignment; they concern the foundations on which EU membership rests: democracy, the rule of law, human rights and a country's relationship with the Union's common foreign and security policy. Progress in these areas requires more than administrative adjustments. It depends on political commitment and institutions that can operate independently and uphold democratic standards. Candidate countries are also expected to align their foreign and security policies with those of the EU.

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine alignment with EU CFSP



Source: European Commission reports (Chapter 31) on Georgia (2024, 2025, 2026), Moldova (2024, 2025, 2026), and Ukraine (2024, 2025, 2026).

Georgia's record in this respect has moved in the opposite direction. Its alignment with the EU's foreign and security policy stood at 50% in 2023, rose to 53% in 2024, then fell to 40% in 2025 and further to 38% by September 1, 2026. The chart below places this decline in perspective by comparing Georgia's alignment with that of Moldova and Ukraine. The figures for 2023–2025 are the annual rates given in the following year's Commission report; the 2026 figure covers alignment up to September 1, 2026.

The recommendations issued by the EU when Georgia was granted candidate status remain entirely unaddressed, as was already the case in 2025. These nine steps range from countering disinformation, aligning with the CFSP, and reducing political polarization to ensuring free and fair elections, strengthening parliamentary oversight, reforming the judiciary, guaranteeing the independence of anti-corruption and oversight bodies, pursuing de-oligarchization, and protecting human rights and civil society. Their continued neglect points to a problem beyond the pace of technical preparations: the country is failing to act on the very commitments meant to anchor its candidacy.

The Trio Has Split: Moldova and Ukraine Move Ahead

The figures show Georgia's trajectory, but their significance becomes clearer when set beside the progress of the two countries with which it once shared the European path. EU enlargement has often advanced in regional waves, and Georgia long sought to pursue its European future alongside Moldova and Ukraine. The three countries began this phase of their EU accession journeys in 2022 and share important political and historical circumstances. Comparing their performance therefore reveals not just who is moving faster, but how differently the three governments have responded to the same historic opening. The following comparison applies the same scoring system to the Commission's 2026 assessments of all three countries.

This comparison shows that Moldova and Ukraine are now several steps ahead of Georgia. Even setting aside Georgia's backsliding in the most consequential areas and looking only at chapters where some progress has been made, the difference is striking. Moldova's score is more than five times Georgia's, while Ukraine's is nearly four times as high. Moldova and Ukraine have opened four of the six negotiating clusters and, with Hungary dropping its objections in November, aim to open the remaining two by the end of 2026.

> ***Can a country remain a credible EU candidate when its political choices pull it further from the standards and policies it is expected to adopt?***

By contrast, Georgia is no longer treated as part of the group once known as the Associated Trio. Its position increasingly resembles that of countries such as Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the accession process has, for all practical purposes, ground to a halt. This widening gap goes beyond lost prestige or delayed negotiations and raises a deeper question: can a country remain a credible EU candidate when its political choices pull it further from the standards and policies it is expected to adopt?

The Real Test: Commitment to the Fundamentals

The most consequential finding is not that Georgia has accumulated fewer points than its neighbors, but that its weakest performance is concentrated in the very areas that determine whether accession is politically possible. Technical progress in selected economic and regulatory fields can keep parts of the process moving, but it cannot compensate for a deterioration in judicial independence, fundamental rights or democratic governance. In that sense, Georgia's positive overall score risks creating a misleading impression: the arithmetic may remain

The 2026 Comparison:

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

Setback No change Progress

Chapters	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
1. Free movement of goods	0.25	0.75	0.75
2. Free movement of labor	0	0.75	0.25
3. Establishment & services	0	0.75	0.25
4. Free movement of capital	0.25	0.25	0.25
5. Public procurement	0.25	0.75	0.5
6. Company law	0	0.5	0.25
7. Intellectual property rights	0.25	0.5	0.25
8. Competition policy	0	0.75	0.25
9. Financial services	0.25	0.75	0.75
10. Digital & media	0	0.75	0.75
11. Agriculture & rural development	0.25	0.75	0.75
12. Food safety	0.25	0.75	0.5
13. Fisheries	0.25	0.75	0.5
14. Transport policy	0.5	0.5	0.5
15. Energy	0	0.75	0.75
16. Taxation	0.25	0.75	0.75
17. Economic & monetary policy	0.25	0.75	0.5
18. Statistics	0.25	0.5	0.5
19. Social policy & employment	0	0.75	0.5
20. Enterprise & industry policy	0	0.75	0.5
21. Trans-European networks	0.5	0.5	0.5
22. Regional policy	0	0.75	0.25
23. Judiciary	-1	0.75	0.5
24. Justice & security	0	0.75	0.5
25. Science & research	0.25	0.75	0.75
26. Education & culture	0	0.75	0.75
27. Environment & climate	0.25	0.75	0.5
28. Consumer & health	0	0.75	0.5
29. Customs	0.25	0.75	0.75
30. External relations	0	0.75	0.25
31. Foreign, security & defense	-1	1	1
32. Financial control	0	0.75	0.5
33. Finance & budget	0	0.5	0.25
Total	4.5 / -2	23	17

Source: Author's calculations based on the European Commission's 2026 reports on Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

above zero, while the political foundations of accession are being undermined.

> ***Georgia's positive overall score risks creating a misleading impression: the arithmetic may remain above zero, while the political foundations of accession are being undermined.***

This helps explain why the gap with Moldova and Ukraine is more than a race between three candidates. Chisinau and Kyiv have treated accession as a strategic priority and used the momentum created by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to advance institutional reforms. Georgia's trajectory suggests a different calculation. Georgian Dream seems to believe that formal candidate status, selective technical progress, and the country's geographical importance might preserve its European prospects even without comparable progress on the fundamentals. The evidence here suggests this is an erroneous, and even risky, assumption.

> ***This is the central weakness in the Georgian government's apparent bet: it treats the country's geopolitical value as if it could offset a failure to meet the political conditions for membership.***

The EU's approach is built around conditionality. Candidate status is not a guarantee of membership, nor is it a permanent place in an accession queue. It invites reforms, with progress assessed against political and legal standards. If those standards are not met, the process can stall regardless of a country's strategic location or the strength of its declared European aspirations. This is the central weakness in the Georgian government's apparent bet: it treats the country's geopolitical value as if it could offset a failure to meet the political conditions for membership.

The danger is that this calculation may only become visible when the opportunity has already narrowed. If the current enlargement wave advances without Georgia, the country could find that its former partners have moved into a new phase while it is still debating whether to resume a process it once claimed as a national priority. The issue is therefore not simply lost time. It is the growing disconnect between the government's stated European objective and the choices needed to make it achievable.

Competing Narratives About Georgia's European Future

The gap between Georgia's declared European ambition and its current course is not only a matter of policy; it is also a matter of how that course is explained to the public.

Georgian Dream has advanced three main narratives to justify its U-turn away from the EU. The first is that EU membership would ultimately come at the price of war with Russia. The second is that, because of the Middle Corridor, the EU needs Georgia no less than Georgia needs the EU and therefore cannot leave the country out of this strategic project. The third is the claim that Georgia's goal remains EU membership by 2030, with implementation of the obligations set out in the Association Agreement presented as one of the main routes toward that goal.

These claims deserve a clear and sustained response. The EU and domestic pro-European actors alike need to explain what the accession process entails, what obligations candidate countries must meet, and why progress depends on democratic standards and alignment with the Union, not on geopolitical bargaining or the assumption that strategic importance can secure a shortcut. Without that explanation, the public debate risks being shaped by claims that obscure the country's real choices. Communication matters, but it cannot substitute for policy change.

A Strategic Choice, Not a Waiting Game

Georgia's EU prospects are not simply a question of when accession talks might resume. The central problem is the gap between the government's declared ambition to join the European Union and the policies it is pursuing. Georgia's strategic location and role in regional connectivity make it an important partner for Europe, but they cannot replace the democratic reforms and political commitments required for membership.

Nor can the country assume that it can return to the accession process whenever it chooses. Rebuilding independent institutions, protecting fundamental rights and restoring trust takes time. Meanwhile, Moldova and Ukraine are moving ahead, and the EU's priorities may change once the current enlargement round is completed. The longer Georgia delays meaningful reforms, the harder it may be to regain its place in the process.

The way forward is clear: if Georgia wants to pursue EU membership, its leadership must demonstrate that commitment through action by strengthening democratic institutions, upholding the rule of law, and aligning the country's policies with those of the EU. Without such a change, declarations of European ambition will remain just that: declarations. The decision rests with Georgia's political leadership, but the consequences will shape the country's future for years to come ■

Sky Is the Limit

Cheap drones have removed the ceiling on what an attacker can afford. Small states like Georgia are discovering that the limits on what they can defend are very real.

The Arithmetic of the New Air Warfare

For decades, air defense rested on a simple logic: expensive missiles for expensive aircraft. A state bought radars, batteries, and interceptors to deter or defeat an adversary's costly warplanes and missiles, and the defense cost roughly matched the threat. Drones have broken that logic. A long-range attack drone of the Shahed type costs an estimated USD 20,000 to USD 50,000. An interceptor fired at it can cost several hundred thousand dollars, and a Patriot can cost several million. Add saturation tactics, low flight altitudes, small radar signatures, and cheap decoys, and the defender faces a losing exchange: every salvo drains stockpiles that are slow and costly to replace, while the attacker simply builds more. This is the defining problem of modern air defense, and it is as much economic as technological. The question is no longer only whether a threat can be shot down, but whether a state can afford to keep shooting.

Recent wars show how the problem unfolds. The lesson arrived first in Georgia's own neighborhood. In the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020, Azerbaijan used armed drones and loitering munitions to hunt down Armenia's air defenses, most of them Soviet-era systems. Armenia fielded individual systems rather than an integrated, layered defense, and lost the war in six weeks. Georgia inherited much the same Soviet legacy. Ukraine has since turned the lesson into a daily reality: mass salvos of drones and missiles, a constant contest between electronic warfare and countermeasures, and the rise of interceptor drones that answer cheap threats cheaply. In the Red Sea, low-cost Houthi attacks on shipping forced the U.S. Navy to expend roughly USD 1 billion in munitions within half a year. And in September 2025, when some 21 Russian drones crossed into Poland, allied jets downed only a few of them, while Romania has repeatedly raised the alarm over drones entering its airspace.



TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI
Contributor

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



Even well-funded states struggle to detect and stop every intruder.

If wealthy alliance members struggle with this, a small state with a modest budget faces an even harder problem.

The Affordability Trap

The usual answer to the drone problem is layered defense: cheap measures against cheap threats, expensive ones kept for expensive threats. That means passive and acoustic detection, electronic warfare, gun systems, interceptor drones and, increasingly, directed-energy weapons. The approach is sound. But for a small state, four obstacles make it far harder than it sounds.

Layers, not platforms. Even inexpensive counter-drone defense requires sensors, command and control, electronic warfare, guns, and interceptors to work together. The cost of integrating them can rival the cost of the hardware.

Scale. A small state cannot buy enough of anything to cover its whole territory and still hold the stockpiles needed to survive a sustained attack. Interceptors run out first, so the economics worsen the longer an attack continues.

Sustainment. Training, maintenance, spare parts, software updates, and skilled radar operators are recurring costs. A one-time purchase is not a defense; a funded, staffed, continuously updated system is.

Opportunity cost. Every GEL spent on air defense is a GEL not spent on land forces, border security, or the rest of the budget. For a small economy, the trade-off is stark.

How Small States Actually Solve It

Small states that have secured their airspace have generally followed one of three models.

1. *Self-reliance through a niche.* Israel built a defense industry around its threats, and Azerbaijan paired large energy revenues with a deliberately drone-heavy doctrine. Both required money and industrial capacity on a scale most small states lack.

2. *Armed neutrality.* Switzerland and Austria have stayed outside alliances, but geography does most of the work: a belt of EU and NATO states shields both, which is why Switzerland can spend only about 0.7% of GDP on defense. And even they no longer go it alone in the air. In July 2023, both signed up to the German-led European Sky Shield Initiative, a joint air-defense procurement scheme. Neutrality works where no aggressor is next door, and even there it now borrows from the collective model.

3. *Collective defense.* The Baltic states, Slovenia and Slovakia do not guard their skies alone. Allied fighters rotate through Baltic air bases, Italian and Hungarian jets cover Slovenia, and Czech, German and Polish aircraft protect Slovakia. Estonia and Latvia bought their medium-range air defense in a joint procurement. All of them feed a shared radar picture, train together and exchange intelligence within NATO's integrated air and missile defense. Finland makes the same point from the other end: it has a capable air force of its own and still chose to join the Alliance in 2023. Above all, these states' deterrence does not depend on their own interceptor count.

The Baltic states are the clearest illustration. Their economies are small, yet allied air policing, a shared radar picture and joint procurement give them coverage they could never fund alone. In the drone age, air defense has become a network good: its value rises with the number of participants, and its cost per participant falls.

> ***The claim is not that Alliance membership guarantees safety. It is that membership lowers the cost of defense and raises the cost of aggression, and for a small state nothing else does both.***

Membership is not a free pass. NATO members have struggled with drone defense too; Article 5 does not mean allied interceptors guard every pipeline from the first hour, and members carry spending and interoperability obligations of their own. The claim is not that Alliance membership guarantees safety. It is that membership lowers the cost of defense and raises the cost of aggression, and for a small state nothing else does both.

Georgia: a Hard Case

Georgia faces every one of these obstacles at once. Its Soviet-era air defense was largely destroyed in the 2008 war and has been only partially rebuilt, with Israeli Spyder systems and, under a 2015 deal worth about EUR 100 million, French radars and short-range Mistral missiles that Tbilisi has since showcased. The country has never had a strong air force, and its defense industry is minimal. Public information on current inventories and recent procurement is incomplete, but nothing suggests that Georgia has built the comprehensive, layered system that modern aerial threats demand.

Geography compounds the problem. Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, about one-fifth of the country's internationally recognized territory, are occupied by Russia, whose forces and air-defense assets cloud Georgia's picture of its own airspace. Drones can be launched from, or routed through, areas Tbilisi cannot monitor.

So does the economy. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and South Caucasus pipelines, the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi, the possible deep-sea port at Anaklia and the wider transit corridor are cheap to target and expensive to protect. What makes Georgia valuable is its role as the link between Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe, and that is exactly what makes it exposed too. Protecting these assets is not only a Georgian concern: their security affects Europe's energy diversification and the resilience of the Middle Corridor.

The Black Sea, long an economic asset, has also become a front line. The war in Ukraine has filled it with naval drones, drifting mines and GPS jamming, and Georgia's coast lies on the same waters. NATO's growing attention to Black Sea security makes Georgia more relevant to the Alliance, yet its limited role in the region's collective security architecture leaves it exposed.

> ***The distinction between partnership and membership matters just as much: cooperation can improve Georgia's capabilities, but only membership brings the collective-defense commitment of Article 5.***

A state in this position cannot close the gap with its own budget. The practical question is who will share the cost. For Georgia, NATO integration is therefore not only a matter of political preference or geopolitical orientation; it is a practical security requirement. Membership would bring collective planning, intelligence sharing, integrated surveillance, joint procurement, training and reinforcement that Georgia could not finance or reproduce alone. The distinction between partnership and membership matters just as much: cooperation can improve Georgia's capabilities, but only membership brings the collective-defense commitment of Article 5.

What Georgia Built

For two decades, Georgia pursued NATO and EU integration with broad public support. At the 2008 Bucharest summit, Allies agreed that Georgia "will become" a member of NATO, though without setting a date or granting a Membership Action Plan. Georgia built a substantial partnership around that promise: the NATO-Georgia Commission, the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package launched in 2014 and refreshed in 2020, and the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center. Georgian troops served in Kosovo from 1999 to 2008. In Afghanistan, Georgia became the largest non-NATO contributor to ISAF, with more than 1,500 troops in 2013, and later the largest non-NATO contributor to the Resolute Support mission. Thirty-two Georgian soldiers died there. Georgia shared the burden of international security long before it received collective-defense protection.

> ***Georgia developed its defense institutions, took part in joint exercises, and steadily improved interoperability with allied forces. It was not merely asking to join an alliance; it was investing in becoming a capable, contributing member.***

Domestic reform supported this effort. Georgia developed its defense institutions, took part in joint exercises, and steadily improved interoperability with allied forces. It was not merely asking to join an alliance; it was investing in becoming a capable, contributing member.

> ***Euro-Atlantic integration is therefore a constitutional commitment, not a policy to be changed at political convenience.***

Public opinion has consistently backed this course. The Caucasus Barometer found support for NATO membership at 60% in 2021 and 57% in 2024, with 16% opposed in the latter year. A January 2025 survey by the Institute for Social Studies and Analysis (ISSA) for the Civil Society Foundation put support at 74.2%. Article 78 of the Constitution, moreover, obliges constitutional bodies to take all measures within their competences to ensure Georgia's full integration into the EU and NATO. Euro-Atlantic integration is therefore a constitutional commitment, not a policy to be changed at political convenience.

The Wrong Direction

That trajectory has now reversed. After the disputed October 2024 parliamentary election, Prime

Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced on November 28, 2024, that the government would not put EU accession negotiations on the agenda until the end of 2028, prompting mass protests and a rupture with Western partners. The decision formally concerned the EU, but it could not be confined to it: both tracks rest on the same foundation of democratic credibility and political trust, and NATO membership has slid into the background along with EU accession. In June 2025, the government moved to liquidate the Information Center on NATO and the EU, the public body that had explained the benefits of Euro-Atlantic integration to citizens since 2005, and to absorb its functions into the Foreign Ministry from July 1, at the very moment when public understanding of NATO and resistance to disinformation most needed strengthening.

The costs are already measurable. NATO's Annual Report for 2025, presented on March 26, 2026, states that Allies reviewed their engagement with Georgia in light of the 2024 elections and their aftermath, and reprioritized elements of cooperation, including aspects of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package. Military-to-military cooperation continued, and a joint exercise went ahead in May 2025, but the political signal was unmistakable. Georgia is no longer on the accession track. NATO's complete disappearance from the Georgian leaders' statements, the ruling party line that NATO integration is to blame for Ukraine's calamities, and the claim that territorial integrity issues must be solved with Moscow have all but removed NATO as a foreign policy priority for Georgia.

Then, on August 4, 2026, Tbilisi Mayor and Georgian Dream Secretary General Kakha Kaladze declared that NATO had deceived Georgia and Ukraine for years with promises of membership it never intended to keep. Such a statement from a senior ruling-party figure is hard to reconcile with the constitutional commitment to NATO integration and with two decades of partnership.

Excuses Disguised as Arguments

The Georgian Dream reasoning appears to be that distance from NATO buys calm with Moscow. Its defenders add that membership was never realistically on offer, that Allies are unwilling to extend guarantees to a country with occupied territories, and that engagement with Moscow is a pragmatic hedge for a small state that cannot count on anyone's protection.

Each of these objections, even if accepted, supports a different conclusion from the Georgian government's. If the door is hard to open, drift removes any chance of opening it. If hedging is prudent, a hedge should add options, not remove the most valuable one. And if alliance integration is the only affordable route to a sustainable air defense, abandoning it does not make Georgia safer. It makes Georgia poorer in the one resource the drone age punishes hardest: shared defense. Membership may not be attainable soon, but preserving the political, democratic and military conditions for it remains a national security interest.

Appeasement also has a poor record in this region. Georgia was invaded in 2008, and Russia still occupies one-fifth of its territory. Distance from NATO did not protect Ukraine, which was non-aligned by law when Russia seized Crimea in 2014, or constitutionally neutral Moldova, where Russian troops remain in Transnistria. Deterrence has held where a credible collective-defense guarantee existed, as in the Baltic states. Neutrality that the neighbor does not respect is a bet, not a policy.

Going alone means exactly what the affordability trap describes: a small budget, no defense-industrial base to speak of, and a drone threat that national resources cannot meet. Without shared early warning, interoperable systems, joint procurement, allied training and intelligence, Georgia's pipelines, ports and corridor remain cheap targets with expensive defenses. NATO integration is not an inexpensive

shortcut and would not automatically protect every asset, but it distributes the burden and opens capabilities that are otherwise beyond Georgia's reach. The government has yet to explain what would compensate for losing them, or how it intends to deter coercion and defend its airspace without reliable partners.

The alternatives are weaker than they appear. Bilateral arrangements and ad hoc purchases lack the collective guarantee that makes deterrence credible. The Ukrainian model, massive Western aid without membership, came only after the invasion and at enormous human cost; no one should choose it. Partnership, meanwhile, depends on political trust. Every year of drift erodes interoperability and relationships built over two decades, and rebuilding them will cost more than maintaining them would have. NATO's decision to reprioritize cooperation shows that the erosion has already begun. It also diminishes what Georgia could contribute to Black Sea security and the wider region.

> ***A June 2025 survey found that even among Georgian Dream's own voters, 50% supported joining NATO and 39% opposed it. A course that distances the country from the Alliance is hard to square with the Constitution and, on the evidence, with the wishes of the ruling party's own electorate.***

There is, finally, a question of democratic legitimacy: whose preference does the current course reflect, the government's or the public's? The polling and the constitutional commitment point one way. A June 2025 survey found that even among Georgian Dream's own voters, 50% supported joining NATO and 39% opposed it. A course that distances the country from the Alliance is hard to square with the Constitution and, on the evidence, with the wishes of the ruling party's own electorate. The government should explain how it intends to restore confidence among Allies, not question the legitimacy of the Alliance itself.

Home Alone?

In the drone age, air defense is a network good. Small states can afford sovereignty in the sky only as part of something larger. Georgia, with its legacy equipment, occupied territories, exposed infrastructure, and small budget, is the textbook case. Its location makes it important to NATO and to the wider Black Sea security architecture, but geography alone does not translate into security. That requires political credibility, military interoperability and sustained cooperation.

NATO integration does not guarantee protection against every threat, and membership is no substitute for national defense. However, it is the most credible framework through which Georgia can combine its capabilities with those of a far larger security community. The country's contributions to NATO operations, joint exercises, and defense reforms showed it can contribute to collective security, not merely benefit from it.

The current government's policies risk squandering that record. By weakening political trust, allowing democratic and institutional standards to deteriorate, reducing the visibility of Euro-Atlantic integration, and questioning NATO's credibility, it undermines the very partnership that could help Georgia meet the security challenges ahead.

"We maintain the peace through our strength; weakness only invites aggression," Ronald Reagan said in 1983. In the drone age, strength is either shared or unaffordable. The sky is indeed the limit, but who is willing to share the burden of defending it sets the limit. Georgia's question is whether it will still be part of anything larger when the next wave of drones arrives ■

The Absent Ukrainian and the Imagined Migrant: How a Labor Forecast Became a Struggle Over Belonging

Ukraine's labor market already extends far beyond its borders. Before 2022, Ukrainians worked on Polish farms, in German factories, and in Italian households. By the end of 2021, 1.57 million Ukrainian citizens held valid residence permits in the EU, the third-largest group of non-EU nationals. Russia's full-scale invasion turned those familiar circuits of labor migration into a much larger and less predictable displacement. By the Center for Economic Strategy's (CES) estimate for January 2026, 5.6 million refugees from Ukraine remained abroad; two-thirds were of working age, and 56% were under 35. Much of the cohort that reconstruction would normally draw on is now putting down roots elsewhere.

Peace will make return conceivable for many; it will not decide the question for them. In late 2022, roughly three-quarters of refugees said that they planned to return. By early 2026, the share was 43%. Nearly four in five still considering return said they would wait for the war to end. CES models suggest that between 1.3 and 2.2 million people may return after it ends, with 1.6 million in the baseline scenario.

Ukraine cannot yet write a final return policy because it does not know the terms on which the war will end. It can nevertheless begin preparing: maintain ties with citizens abroad, recognize the qualifications and lives they have built elsewhere, and make return a credible option rather than a patriotic demand. In a country where people have been counted in mobilizations, departures, injuries, and deaths, prospective workers cannot be treated as an economic abstraction; any talk of future recruitment is heard against the backdrop of Ukrainians' absence from workplaces and communities.



LESIA BIDOCHKO
Guest Contributor

Lesia Bidochko is a Policy Fellow at the European Policy Institute in Kyiv (EPIK) and an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Her research focuses on Ukraine's defense innovation and the political economy of drone production; as a Petro Jacyk Non-Residential Scholar, she examines the governance of Ukraine's decentralized wartime drone economy and its implications for postwar state-building. She has held fellowships at New Europe College in Bucharest and the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), and previously served as Deputy Head of the Detector Media Research Center, where she researched Russian foreign information manipulation and interference. She holds a PhD in Political Science from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, and her work has appeared in The National Interest, Just Security, New Eastern Europe, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, and Ukraine-Analysen.


© GEOPOLITICS

> ***In a country at war, an empty position tends to seem less like a signal from the market and more like a reminder of someone missing – someone at the front, someone who has been displaced, someone who left after losing their home, someone who was killed or injured in the war.***

Arguments about people who have not yet arrived thus become debates about those who have already left. Foreign labor does not enter Ukraine as a simple adjustment to the labor market. In a country at war, an empty position tends to seem less like a signal from the market and more like a reminder of someone missing – someone at the front, someone who has been displaced, someone who left after losing their home, someone who was killed or injured in the war. The question of filling a vacancy becomes inseparable from a harder one: who has borne the cost of keeping the country going?

This is a moral economy of sacrifice, and it yields a reasonable demand: that the state take return seriously and explain openly how reconstruction will be planned. The radical step comes when this unease hardens into a theory of collective replacement. The prospective worker then becomes an outsider who benefits from Ukrainians' losses; the employer, recruiter, or ministry becomes an accomplice. The political debate then moves from discussing the conditions under which Ukrainians could return to excluding those who might arrive.

An Older Radical Repertoire

The radicalization of that moral economy has a history in Ukraine, but not a uniform one. In the late 2000s, migration marked a contradiction within the radical right. One older nationalist current, represented by *Svoboda*, drew more directly on the political vocabulary and historical memory of Ukrainian nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s. Moscow, rather than migration, was the central enemy, though the party's program also included anti-immigration planks.

> ***The radicalization of that moral economy has a history in Ukraine, but not a uniform one.***

The newer activist milieu around *Patriot of Ukraine*, revived in Kharkiv in the mid-2000s under Andrii Biletskyi, who today commands the Third Army Corps, shared parts of that inheritance but drew more readily on transnational far-right narratives, symbols, and repertoires of street mobilization. It placed migrants at the center of a racialized account of national survival and organized anti-migrant actions in Kharkiv. Even then, "the far right" was not one political language.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and its war in the Donbas from 2014 pushed migration to the periphery of nationalist politics. Sovereignty, territorial loss and war became its organizing questions. By 2026, elements of that older repertoire had resurfaced in a society transformed by military sacrifice and mass displacement.

How the Panic Traveled

The anti-migrant rallies of May 2026 were the most visible moment in a story that had been circulating for almost three years. A Texty.org.ua investigation, published in October 2026 and covering Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube material from February 24, 2022 to August 15, 2026, maps a relay, not a single anti-migrant "camp." Pro-Russian platforms, anonymous Ukrainian channels, controversial influencers, military figures, politicians and local officials each played a part in making an imagined migration wave feel like a present political emergency.

> ***Pro-Russian platforms, anonymous Ukrainian channels, controversial influencers, military figures, politicians and local officials each played a part in making an imagined migration wave feel like a present political emergency.***

The first trigger came in July 2023, when Ukraine's Ministry of Economy estimated that future recovery might require 4.5 million additional workers over the next ten years. A year later, in July 2024, the ministry repeated the figure as a preliminary estimate of what annual GDP growth of 7% to 2030 would require. In social-media circulation, a conditional forecast about labor demand became an alleged government plan to bring 4.5 million people from Asia and Africa. The claim moved through Facebook content farms and pro-Russian Telegram channels, alongside figures previously associated with the pro-Russian media network of Viktor Medvedchuk, a sanctioned former Ukrainian politician with close Kremlin ties. At this stage, the prospective migrant was almost secondary: Ukrainians were said to be disappearing, and migration became proof that the state had accepted their disappearance.

By 2024, the narrative had acquired the moral language that made it portable. In May 2024, Yuliia Mazur of Dosta, an anti-mobilization organization associated with "living people" pseudo-legal rhetoric, framed it through sacrifice: Ukrainians were fighting and dying while others would be invited to live on their land. The message traveled easily across audiences. Pro-Russian bloggers used it to discredit the state; conspiratorial voices added Soros and "deliberate replacement"; Ukrainian radicals developed it into an explicitly ethnic argument. The far right was neither the sole originator nor a passive recipient. It supplied a vocabulary of nation, race and ownership to a story already moving through the information system.

In January 2025, reports said a furniture company in Zakarpattia was considering recruiting; the company later put the number at about 30, which became another occasion to warn that Ukrainians were being replaced. When border rules during martial law for men aged 18-22 were eased in late August 2025, and employers reported deeper staffing shortages, Telegram channels revived the same formula: young Ukrainians were leaving, and migrants from India or Bangladesh would take their place. On October 4, 2025, Maksym Zhorin, a former Azov commander and deputy commander of the Third Army Corps – an Armed Forces formation built around the 3rd Assault Brigade, which was founded by veterans of the Azov movement, itself rooted in Ukraine's far right – wrote that people from culturally distant countries should not come to earn money while Ukrainians were fighting. Popular media quickly carried it into a new cycle.

In 2026, AI-generated material gave the old script the appearance of proof. In April, Kyrylo Budanov, head of the presidential office, told a business audience that the foreign ministry and the Security Service had been told to review the list of "migration-risk" countries, an administrative question about entry and legalization with possible implications for labor recruitment, which became another trigger. In May, fabricated video and images made the future seem already present. Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communications counted more than 21,600 anti-migrant posts across nearly 14,000 sources between May 1 and May 10, and Texty dates the peak of the campaign to May 11. Popular Telegram channels circulated a fake video of an alleged Indian worker inviting compatriots to Ukraine because Ukrainian men were at the front. They used fake images to claim that migrants were already arriving on salaries of USD 800, circulated fakes about migrants washing clothes in Ukrainian rivers, and warned of exotic diseases. The official record pointed the other way: in 2025, about 9,500 work permits for foreigners were issued or extended.

Members of parliament, including Dmytro Razumkov, Oleksii Honcharenko, Anna Skorokhod and Danylo Hetmantsev, joined the debate, often using

populist arguments. City mayors Ihor Terekhov (Kharkiv), Ruslan Martsinkiv (Ivano-Frankivsk) and Andrii Sadovyi (Lviv) announced that they would not permit a migrant influx into their cities. On May 19, Terekhov, speaking for the Association of Frontline Cities and Communities, appealed to the government and parliament to prevent the "mass" recruitment of migrant workers. The mayors' motives and language did not match those of nationalist activists or pro-Russian propagandists. Yet their interventions ratified the premise that an influx either existed or was imminent enough to require a public defense.

On May 23, several dozen people gathered at anti-migrant rallies in Kyiv, where the far-right groups *Right Youth* (*Prava Molod*) and *Avangard* rallied on Independence Square, and in other cities. Social media presented them as mass demonstrations; in fact, they were small events with visibility far beyond their size. The slogans "Ukraine for Ukrainians" and "For a White Ukraine" made explicit what the wider campaign often left implied. To date, the episode has produced neither a migration decision nor a durable street movement.

Service, Blood and Belonging

The radical argument begins with a seemingly practical question: if Ukraine eventually recruits foreign workers, what would they owe in return? Its most memorable answer came from Zhorin, who argued in an October 2025 post, which circulated again during the May campaign, that migrants should enter Ukraine "only through the front": military service first, employment afterward.

Taken literally, the formula offers a route into membership. In political terms, it makes that route almost unusable. It says that a person who did not share Ukraine's wartime danger cannot share in its postwar life.

Yet another strand of rhetoric from the same broader milieu removes even this conditional opening. A serviceman of the Third Army Corps wrote in May 2026: "Migrant = internal occupier", and defined the Ukrainian nation as belonging "exclusively by blood." Here, service cannot change the basic category. One formulation appears to make membership conditional on sacrifice; the other renders membership unavailable from the start.

The 3rd Assault Brigade has formed an international rifle battalion, reportedly consisting mainly of English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-speaking volunteers, and continues to recruit foreign citizens. Their presence does not validate the proposition that military service should purchase a place in the nation. But if service is the demanded proof of commitment, what standing does it confer on people who have already served? The radical milieu has not resolved that question because its purpose is not to recognize sacrifice wherever it appears. It is to reserve the political meaning of sacrifice for those presumed to own the nation already.

State Politics, Return and Future Diversity

Ukraine's reaction has a recognizable regional setting. After 2015, parts of Central and Eastern Europe reacted intensely to refugees who were scarcely present: in the year nearly a million people reached Germany, 169 refugees entered Slovakia and only eight asked to stay, as Ivan Krastev pointed out. His useful observation was that the anxiety concerned emigration as much as immigration. Societies depleted by the departure of young people did not see a newcomer merely as a stranger; they saw someone entering a place vacated by a child, neighbor, or co-worker.

The anxiety concerned emigration as much as immigration. Societies depleted by the departure of young people did not see a newcomer merely as a stranger; they saw someone entering a place vacated by a child, neighbor, or co-worker.

The comparison identifies a condition of receptivity rather than predicting that Ukraine will reproduce its neighbors' politics.

Ukraine cannot yet know how many people will return, when they can, or which labor shortages will remain when the war ends. Its policy problem is therefore an unfinished sequence. People have discussed return preparation, labor scenarios, and any future recruitment policy together, making a forecast sound like a decision.

> ***The first stage should be a return architecture, rather than a call to come home. Kyiv, host governments and the municipalities that need people could offer families a reversible route: an exploratory return that does not automatically end their status abroad.***

The first stage should be a return architecture, rather than a call to come home. Kyiv, host governments and the municipalities that need people could offer families a reversible route: an exploratory return that does not automatically end their status abroad; a pre-arranged package of work, a school place and temporary housing in a chosen town; and recognition of qualifications and insurance periods acquired in Europe. The unit of policy is not the refugee in the aggregate. It is a household deciding whether it can move without asking its children, income and security to absorb all the risk at once.

At the same time, the state should publish demographic and labor models as conditional calculations: what follows if one, two or three million people return; where shortages would remain; and what thresholds, if any, would trigger recruitment from abroad. A labor projection with stated assumptions, a review date and public safeguards is far harder to recast as a hidden plan of replacement.

This will not persuade committed radicals to abandon their worldview. It can make their argument less persuasive to people for whom it gives form to a real loss.

> ***War has made Ukraine a diasporic society on a European scale.***

War has made Ukraine a diasporic society on a European scale. Ukraine asks Europe to see Ukrainians abroad as more than a labor reserve or public burden. That claim requires an act of political imagination at home as well. A person from Bangladesh, India, Colombia or Ethiopia cannot be reduced either to the demographic deficit they are said to fill, or to a threat against which a wounded nation defines itself ■

Pool of Our Experts



Olena Halushka

Olena Halushka is co-founder of the International Center for Ukrainian Victory and board member at Ukraine's Anti-corruption Action Center. She previously served as chief of international advocacy at the Reanimation Package of Reforms coalition and as a Kyiv City Council member.



Zaur Shiriyev

Zaur Shiriyev is an independent scholar with fifteen years of expertise in South Caucasus security and conflict resolution. He previously worked as an analyst at the International Crisis Group and Academy Associate at Chatham House's Russia and Eurasia Programme.



Mitat Çelikpala

Dr. Mitat Çelikpala is Professor of International Relations and Vice-Rector at Kadir Has University, Istanbul. He specializes in Eurasian security, energy policy, and Turkish foreign relations, serving as academic advisor to NATO's Center of Excellence Defense Against Terrorism.



Richard Giragosian

Richard Giragosian is Founding Director of the Regional Studies Center in Armenia and Visiting Professor at the College of Europe. He serves as consultant for international organizations including the Asian Development Bank, EU, OSCE, and U.S. Departments of Defense and State.



Mustafa Aydın

Mustafa Aydın is Professor of International Relations at Kadir Has University and President of the International Relations Council of Türkiye. Former university rector, he has held research positions at Harvard, Michigan, and the EU Institute for Security Studies.



Gabrielius Landsbergis

Gabrielius Landsbergis is the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania (2020–2024) and a Visiting Fellow at Stanford University. He previously chaired the Homeland Union party and served in the Lithuanian and European Parliaments. He holds an MA in International Relations from Vilnius University.



Khatia Kikalishvili

Dr. Khatia Kikalishvili is Programme Director for Eastern Partnership at the Centre for Liberal Modernity. She previously advised on Foreign and European policy in the German Bundestag and holds a Ph.D. in European Law from the University of Saarland.



Denis Cenușă

Denis Cenușă is associate expert at the Centre for Eastern European Studies and Expert-Group think tank. Based in Germany conducting doctoral research, he specializes in democratization, geopolitics, and security in the post-Soviet and Eurasian space.



Volodymyr Yermolenko

Dr. Volodymyr Yermolenko is President of PEN Ukraine and Analytics Director at Internews Ukraine. A philosopher, journalist, and writer, he is Chief Editor of UkraineWorld.org and associate professor at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, with publications in major international media outlets.



Natalie Sabanadze

Natalie Sabanadze is Director for Political Affairs and External Relations at the Council of Europe and Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House. A former Georgian Ambassador to the EU and senior OSCE official, she holds a D.Phil. from Oxford and has published widely on post-communist transition, nationalism, and Russian foreign policy.



Ghia Nodia

Ghia Nodia is Professor of Politics at Ilia State University and founder of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. He served as Georgia's Minister of Education and Science and has published extensively on democracy and Caucasus politics.



Hugues Mingarelli

Hugues Mingarelli served as EU Ambassador to Ukraine (2016–2019) and previously led Middle East and North Africa affairs at the European External Action Service. He negotiated the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and established the European Agency for Reconstruction of the Balkans.



Tefta Kelmendi

Tefta Kelmendi is Deputy Director for the Wider Europe programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Her research focuses on EU policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans, particularly EU enlargement and democracy promotion.



Tamara Kovziridze

Tamara Kovziridze held senior positions in the Government of Georgia (2004-2012), including Deputy Minister of Economy. As a partner at Reformatics consulting firm, she has advised governments across Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East on regulatory reforms.



Grigol Mgaloblishvili

Ambassador Grigol Mgaloblishvili is a career diplomat with twenty years in the Georgian Foreign Service. He has served as Prime Minister of Georgia, Permanent Representative to NATO, Ambassador to Türkiye, and faculty member at the U.S. National Defense University.



Eka Tkeshelashvili

Eka Tkeshelashvili is Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the German Marshall Fund and President of the Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies. Former Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Georgia, she led key Euro-Atlantic integration and justice reform initiatives.



Tornike Zurabashvili

Tornike Zurabashvili is a Tbilisi-based researcher focusing on political and security affairs in Georgia and the Black Sea region. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Tbilisi State University and extensive experience in development program management across Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.



Miro Popkhadze

Miro Popkhadze is a Senior Fellow at the Delphi Global Research Center and a Non-Resident Fellow at FPRI. A former Representative of the Georgian Ministry of Defense to the UN, his work focuses on Russian foreign policy and Eurasian security. He is pursuing a Ph.D. at Virginia Tech.



Galip Dalay

Galip Dalay is a senior fellow at Chatham House and a doctoral researcher at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on Türkiye, the Middle East, Russian foreign policy, and relations with the West. His work has been published in outlets like Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy.



Adina Revol

Adina Revol, PhD in Political Science from Sciences Po Paris, is a former spokesperson of the European Commission in France and author of Breaking with Russia – Europe's Energy Awakening (Odile Jacob, 2024). An expert on EU affairs, energy geopolitics, and Russia's hybrid warfare, she teaches at Sciences Po and ESCP Europe and frequently appears in French media.



Hans Gutbrod

Hans Gutbrod is Professor at Ilia State University, Tbilisi, and former regional director of the Caucasus Research Resource Centers. He has observed elections in Georgia since 1999 and holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the London School of Economics.



Arsen Kharatyan

Arsen Kharatyan is the founder and editor-in-chief of Aliq Media. He advised Armenia's Prime Minister on foreign policy after the 2018 Velvet Revolution, worked at Voice of America and GIZ, and holds an MA in Islamic Studies and Arabic, with studies in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.



Teona Giuashvili

Teona Giuashvili is a former Georgian diplomat with eleven years of experience, currently researching European and regional security at the European University Institute. She specializes in multilateral diplomacy, conflict resolution, and Georgia's European integration.



Lesia Bidochko

Lesia Bidochko is a Policy Fellow at the European Policy Institute in Kyiv (EPIK) and an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Her research focuses on Ukraine's defense innovation and the political economy of drone production.



Nadiia Koval

Nadiia Koval is a Policy Fellow at EPIK and a former Counselor in the Political Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She previously headed the Centre for International Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine. Her work focuses on European security, Ukraine's EU accession, and Russia's weaponization of culture.



Sébastien Gobert

Sébastien Gobert is a French journalist who has covered Ukraine and the wider Black Sea region since 2011. He is currently the Ukraine correspondent for the French newspaper La Croix. He has written several books on Ukraine, including "Looking for Lenin," co-authored with Swiss photographer Niels Ackermann, on the country's decommunization.

Credits

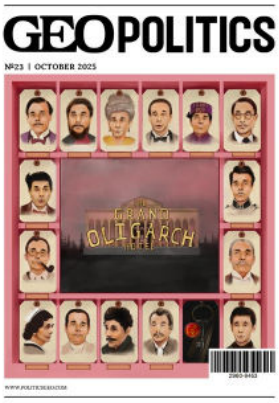
Illustrators

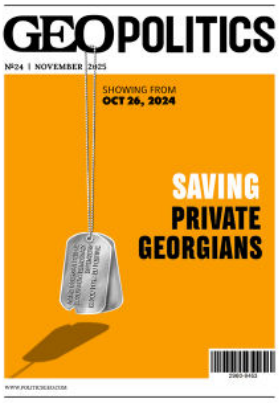
Valeriia Pakharenko
Oleksandra Samkova

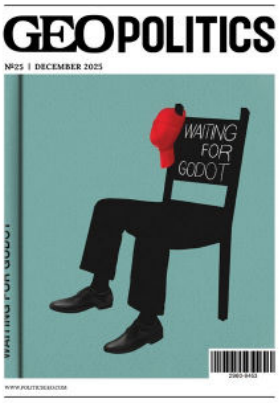
Editorial Designer

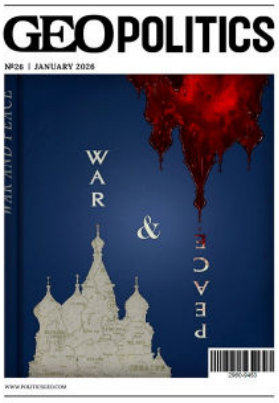
Anna Mirvoda

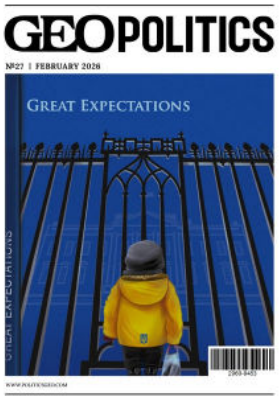
DIGITAL ARCHIVE

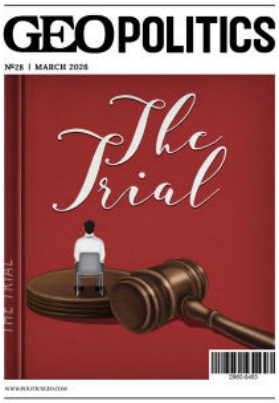






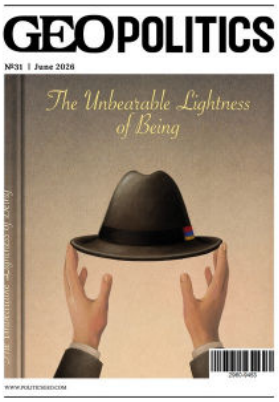




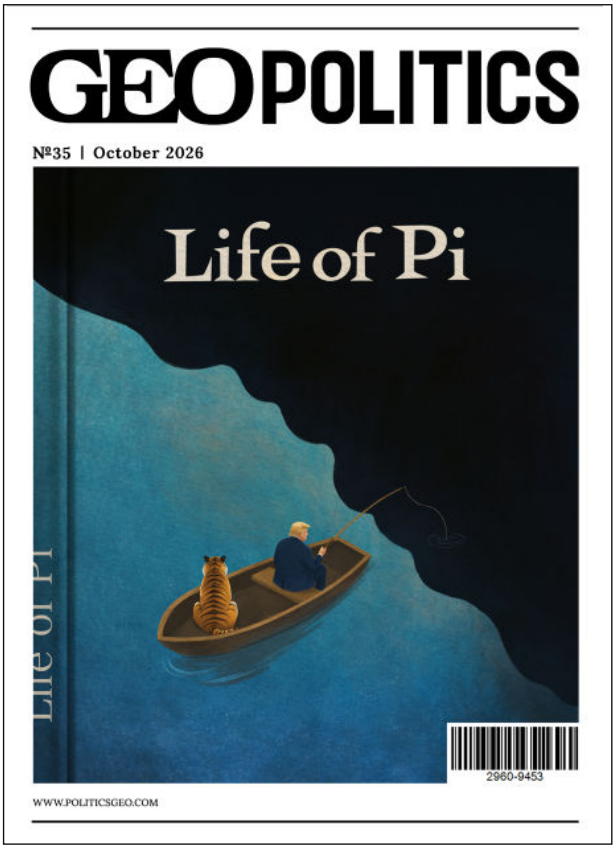


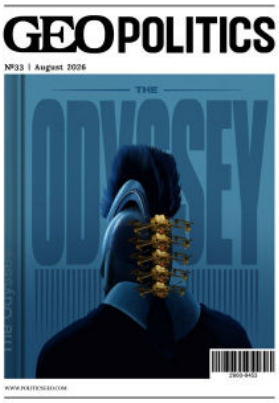


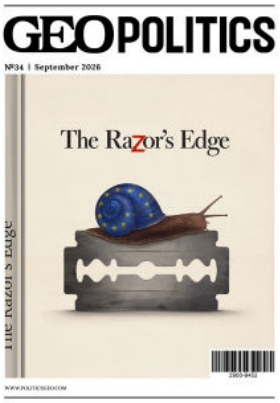












GEOPOLITICS

Issue **№36**
November, 2026