

US President Donald Trump signs an executive order. Photo by Anna Moneymaker / Getty Images via AFP

FOCUS
ON TRUMP'S IMPACT ON GEORGIA
Will Trump's legacy ultimately benefit or challenge Georgia in the years to come?
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When Words Become Crimes: The State's New Monopoly on Dignity

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a move that has sent ripples through Georgia's already charged political landscape, the ruling Georgian Dream party has proposed legislative amendments that would criminalize verbal insults directed at public officials. The government's justification? To enable authorities to serve the people "without obstacles" and to curb alleged sabotage from foreign forces. The opposition's response? An alarm bell ringing against creeping authoritarianism.

But Georgia is far from alone in this experiment. Across history and cultures, regimes have sought to codify "respect" for authority, often using legal frameworks to silence criticism. The question that looms large is whether such measures genuinely protect public order or, instead, stifle democratic discourse under the guise of dignity.

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Demonstrators protest "foreign agents" bill in Tbilisi, May 2024. Photo by Irakli Gedenidze/Reuters

GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
BONDS									
GEORGIA 04/26	94.77 (YTM 7.34%)	-0.0%	+0.5%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+2.8%	-2.0%		
GBAIL 04/28	97.68 (YTM 8.27%)	-0.0%	-0.1%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%		
GBGG 9/12 PERP	97.74 (YTM 9.82%)	-0.1%	-0.5%	TBC Bank Group (TBCC LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%		
SILANET 01/27	100.79 (YTM 7.94%)	+0.0%	+0.2%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.96 (YTM 11.85%)	-0.1%	+0.1%	COMMODITIES					
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.56 (YTM 10.61%)	-0.0%	+0.2%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	77.46	-4.3%	+8.2%		
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 648.54	+0.2%	+2.7%		
INDICES									
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.0%	+4.2%	USD / GEL	2.7230	-0.9%	+1.0%		
FTSE 250	20 817.19	-0.2%	-0.4%	EUR / GEL	2.9705	-1.5%	-0.5%		
DOW JONES 30	43 065.22	+2.6%	+6.0%	GBP / GEL	3.5548	-1.0%	+0.5%		
Russell 2000	2 248.64	+2.5%	+3.0%	EUR / USD	1.0909	-0.6%	-1.5%		
FTSE 100	8 292.66	-0.1%	+0.2%	GBP / USD	1.3059	-0.2%	-0.5%		



Mamuka Mdinardze. Source: gov.ge

GD Introduces Stricter Penalties for Offenses Against Officials

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The ruling party, Georgian Dream, has introduced new legislative rules to make administrative and criminal offenses stricter, including 'insulting officials', 'assaulting police,' and threatening public service workers. The goal of these changes is to impose stricter penalties on offenses often associated with pro-EU protesters. The primary legislative changes are: Increased penalties for administrative violations, including petty hooliganism, vandalism, offending police, and blocking government office entrances. Extended administrative detention, raising the maximum period from 15 to 60 days. Criminalization of insulting public

officials in connection with their work. Stronger punishments for resisting or attacking police, with offenses now reclassified as serious crimes punishable by 5-10 years in prison. Stronger penalties for public calls for violence now carry up to three years in prison, while previously it was fined. New aggravating circumstances for crimes against police and state authorities. Criminalization of threats against public officials and state authorities. Mamuka Mdinardze, GD representative, announced the legislative changes on February 3, claiming that the "ongoing attempt to overthrow the government by agents of the 'Deep State'" is to blame. He noted that these stricter measures are only the first step, and further changes can be expected to "ensure the proper functioning and independence of the state."

Parliament Terminates Mandates of 49 Opposition MPs



BY TEAM GT

Members of the Unity - National Movement, Coalition for Change and Strong Georgia, a total of 49 MPs, had their parliamentary mandates terminated. The results of the vote were greeted with applause by the majority members. The MPs in question had sent in personal applications for their mandates to be terminated in November last year. The Gakharia for Georgia party remains

in Parliament with 12 mandates. Giorgi Gakharia's political union, like other parties, declares the October 26 elections illegitimate and does not participate in parliamentary activities, although they have not written an application on the termination of their mandates. Based on the CEC summary protocol, as a result of the October 26, 2024 elections, Strong Georgia won 14 mandates, the Coalition for Change won 19 mandates, and the Unity-National Movement won 16 mandates. The parliament, which should be represented by 150 members, now has only 101.

Mzia Amaglobeli Marks 25th Day of Hunger Strike, Lawyer Reports Her Resolve Despite Health Concerns

BY TEAM GT

The lawyer for Mzia Amaglobeli, Jumber Katamadze, reported on his client on Wednesday, speaking from the Vivamedi clinic where Amaglobeli was taken for medical tests. February 5 marks the 25th day of Amaglobeli's imprisonment and hunger strike. Although weakened and struggling to move, Katamadze says Amaglobeli remains determined to continue her hunger strike.

Katamadze explained that certain tests were conducted at the clinic, and those tests were scheduled to be repeated the following day. He emphasized that Amaglobeli was transferred to the clinic for routine medical tests, not because of any specific health issue.

Amaglobeli, who is on hunger strike "for all political prisoners," has called on others who are hunger striking in solidarity with her to stop. "Mzia Amaglobeli also told me that the cynical statements she hears from representatives of the Georgian Dream only give her more motivation to continue her hunger strike," Katamadze shared.

Despite pressure from colleagues urging her to end the hunger strike, Amaglobeli remains resolute. Katamadze noted, "I asked Amaglobeli to end her hunger strike, as her colleagues are urging her to do, but she refuses and, at the same time, asks for the issue of her hunger strike not to be brought to the forefront."

Amaglobeli is facing 4 to 7 years in prison for slapping a police officer during her arrest on January 12, an incident that led to her detention. On January 14, Batumi City Court ordered her impris-



Photo by Eka Lortkipanidze for RFE/RL

onment as a preventive measure under Article 353 of the Criminal Code. Human rights organizations and political figures, both in Georgia and abroad, consider her a political prisoner.

Protests demanding Amaglobeli's release have intensified, with journalists and activists calling for her immediate freedom. On February 4, a rally was held outside the Parliament building in Tbilisi, where participants demanded her release and rejected the legislative changes proposed by the Georgian Dream party. Protesters marched to the side entrance of Parliament, where tensions rose between demonstrators and law enforcement. Two individuals were removed by the police, but the rally continued, with a significant police presence in the area.

International concern over Amaglobeli's detention has also grown. On January 31, 14 embassies from the Media Freedom Coalition issued a joint statement expressing alarm over her situa-

tion. They condemned her pre-trial detention as unjustified and called for her immediate release. The statement also referenced the Media Freedom Coalition's earlier position on the excessive use of force against journalists, urging Georgian authorities to uphold the rights of journalists facing police violence.

Regarding Amaglobeli's health, Malkhaz Urtkmedidze, the head of the Special Penitentiary Service's Medical Department, stated on January 31, that "Mzia Amaglobeli's condition is satisfactory and stable. She is being monitored continuously. Laboratory tests are conducted almost daily." However, he also urged Amaglobeli to end her hunger strike, emphasizing that her health and safety remain a priority.

Despite these concerns, the protests continue, with mounting calls for the Georgian authorities to review Amaglobeli's case and to address the broader issues of press freedom and political dissent in the country.

Ukraine Latest: North Korean Missiles Increasingly Accurate, Kyiv Warns

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukrainian military officials have warned that North Korean ballistic missiles fired by Russian forces are becoming significantly more precise. Vladimir Putin's invading forces have been using imported North Korean projectiles since the end of 2023, and their accuracy and performance has changed drastically since then, military sources told Reuters. In the past few weeks, over 20 missiles have hit within 50-100 meters of their intended targets. This not only strengthens Russia's war effort but also boosts North Korea's military capabilities.

At the same time, reports indicate that the Trump administration is preparing to present a peace plan for Ukraine at the upcoming security conference in Munich, with US special envoy Keith Kellogg set to introduce it.

UKRAINE STRIKES RUSSIAN OIL DEPOT, 300 POWS EXCHANGED

A Ukrainian drone attack recently set fire to an oil depot in Russia's Krasnodar region, part of Kyiv's ongoing campaign targeting Russian military infrastructure. Recent Ukrainian drone strikes have ignited fires at Russian oil refineries in Volgograd and a gas processing plant in Astrakhan.

Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine completed a prisoner swap, each exchanging 150 prisoners of war.

UKRAINE DENIES NORTH KOREAN SOLDIERS ABSENT FROM FRONT LINE IN KURSK OBLAST

Contrary to reports that North Korean



North Korean soldiers march in Pyongyang, North Korea, 2018. Photo for illustrative purposes, by Ed Jones/AFP/Getty Images

soldiers have been pulled from the front lines, Ukraine's military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov stated that up to 8000 North Korean soldiers are still active in Russia's Kursk Oblast. Despite a decline in their numbers, the situation remains fluid, Budanov said in an interview with The War Zone magazine published on February 4. Last fall, up to 12,000 North Korean troops were deployed to support Russian forces in Kursk. Reports claim at least 300 North Korean soldiers have died in combat, with another 2,700 wounded. "We have to wait for some time to see if there are any real changes or if this is just lower activity for a couple of days," Budanov noted.

UKRAINE'S STRIKE ON RUSSIAN COMMAND CENTER IN KURSK OBLAST CAUSES MAJOR LOSSES

On February 3, Ukraine's Air Force carried out a precision strike on a Russian command post near Novoivanovka in Kursk Oblast. The attack, which severely damaged the building, resulted in significant Russian casualties. This operation is part of Ukraine's broader strategy to weaken Russian military capabilities by targeting key command centers, including a previous strike in Rylysk on January 31.

Kyiv launched a limited incursion into Russia's Kursk Oblast on August 6, 2024, first capturing about 1,300 square kilometers (500 square miles) of Russian territory. While Ukraine has reportedly lost around half of that territory since then, fighting continues in the region.

RUSSIAN MISSILE STRIKE ON IZIUUM KILLS 5, INJURES 55

A Russian missile attack on the town of Iziyum in Kharkiv Oblast on February 4 left at least five people dead and 55 injured. Three children were among those injured in the attack, including a six-year-old boy and two girls, aged 14 and 16. The 14-year-old is in a serious condition, while the other two children are said to be in a condition of medium severity. A pregnant woman was among those killed. The missile targeted the central area of Iziyum, hitting administrative buildings and residential areas. Governor Oleh Syniehubov noted that no military facilities were located in the targeted area. Iziyum, a town with a pre-invasion population of 45,000, lies in the southeastern part of Kharkiv Oblast, over 100 kilometers from the regional center, Kharkiv, and around 50 kilometers west of the front line.

When Words Become Crimes: The State's New Monopoly on Dignity

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THE POLITICAL ANATOMY OF AN INSULT: WHY POWER FEARS RIDICULE

Throughout history, the political insult has been a weapon of both dissent and satire. From ancient Rome to modern-day social media, mocking those in power has been a fundamental exercise of civic engagement.

Ancient Rome: The poet Juvenal's Satires mocked imperial excess, but his criticisms were tolerated—until they weren't. The emperor Domitian's crackdown on dissent led to a culture of fear, where satire could result in exile or worse.

Absolutist France: The monarchy sought to suppress scandalous pamphlets (libelles) that ridiculed Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, yet these very texts helped fuel the French Revolution.

Soviet Union: The USSR criminalized "anti-Soviet agitation," ensuring that a joke about Stalin could mean ten years in the Gulag.

The lesson from history? The more fragile a government's legitimacy, the more desperately it seeks to outlaw criticism. In stable democracies, public officials endure satire and scorn as part of the political process. In insecure regimes, they criminalize it.

DEEP STATE, DEEP PARANOIA: THE RISE OF CONSPIRATORIAL GOVERNANCE

Mamuka Mdinardze's reference to "Deep State"—an ill-defined but ominous enemy—mirrors global trends in populist rhetoric. The term, which originated in Turkey to describe clandestine mili-



Protesters in Tbilisi, November 2024. Photo by Ezz Gaber

tary influence, has been co-opted by authoritarian leaders worldwide to delegitimize political opponents.

Turkey: Erdogan has used "Deep State" to justify purges against journalists, academics, and opposition figures.

United States: Donald Trump mainstreamed the term, painting intelligence agencies and political opponents as shadowy saboteurs.

Russia: Putin's regime regularly invokes "foreign agents" to justify media crackdowns.

In Georgia's case, this narrative serves a dual purpose: first, to frame dissent as treasonous, and second, to rationalize the expansion of state power under the guise of national security. The criminalization of political insults fits neatly within this framework—if critics are agents of a sinister plot, their words become a form of sabotage, rather than a legitimate expression of discontent.

FROM PROTEST TO PRISON: THE MECHANICS OF REPRESSION

The proposed legal changes go beyond mere fines for offensive language. They escalate penalties for protest-related offenses, increasing administrative detention up to 60 days and criminalizing calls for direct action. The implications are chilling:

China's "Picking Quarrels and Provoking Trouble" Law: Used to target dissidents under the vague pretext of maintaining social order.

Belarus's 2020 Crackdowns: Protesters faced lengthy prison sentences for "disrupting public order" by demonstrating against election fraud.

Russia's "Insulting the Authorities" Law: Fines and imprisonment have been imposed for online posts mocking officials, reinforcing a culture of self-censorship.

In all these cases, laws ostensibly

designed to "protect order" have functioned primarily to suppress opposition. Georgia's new measures appear to be following the same trajectory.

THE IRONY OF STATE DIGNITY: WHO PROTECTS THE PEOPLE FROM THE PROTECTED?

A government that demands legal protection from verbal offense implicitly admits its vulnerability. But in democratic societies, dignity is earned through accountability, not enforced through punitive measures.

Germany's Approach: While German law criminalizes defamation against the president, it is rarely enforced, and politicians endure sharp satire as part of the democratic process.

France's Abolition of "Insult Laws": In 2013, France scrapped its controversial law against insulting the president, recognizing its chilling effect on free speech.

United Kingdom's Satirical Tradition: From Private Eye to parliamentary heckling, ridicule is considered a fundamental aspect of political engagement.

By contrast, in Georgia's proposed framework, dignity is no longer a moral quality—it is a state-enforced monopoly. The very people entrusted with wielding power are shielded from scrutiny, while the public is left unprotected from overreach.

SILENCING THE FUTURE: WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia's democratic trajectory has long been contested, oscillating between aspirations for European integration and post-Soviet authoritarian reflexes. The current legal shift signals a decisive tilt

towards the latter.

The European Court of Human Rights has consistently ruled that public figures must tolerate higher levels of criticism than private citizens. Criminalizing political insult would put Georgia at odds with European legal norms.


Media and Civil Society Backlash: Georgian journalists, activists, and opposition figures have already condemned the proposal as a direct attack on press freedom and civic engagement.

Public Protest as a Last Line of Defense: Given the government's history of suppressing demonstrations, new restrictions risk escalating tensions rather than containing them.

At its core, the move to criminalize insults against officials reveals a government unwilling to engage in the messy, uncomfortable, but essential dialogue that defines a true democracy. A state that fears words is a state that fears its people. And a state that fears its people is already on the path to losing them.


Will Georgia follow the path of democratic resilience, where power is questioned, satire thrives, and the dignity of leadership is proven through actions rather than legal shields? Or will it retreat into the ranks of states where authority is sacrosanct, and criticism is a punishable offense?




The choice is not merely legal or political—it is cultural. It is about whether Georgian society embraces the enduring strength of free speech or succumbs to the fragile ego of power. History has shown that in the battle between censorship and criticism, repression may win battles, but free expression wins the war.




EXPLORE OUR BELOVED CITY FROM THE BIRD VIEW


Xeme restaurant is located on the 31st floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel





The name of the restaurant Xeme speaks for itself, as it means the arctic fork-tailed gull.



29 Rustaveli Avenue, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia / T: +995 322 72 72 72 / Info.bhtg@biltmorecollection.com



A long time ago... Donald Trump and Giorgi Ramishvili of Georgia's Silk Road Group shake hands as they agree to construct Trump Tower Batumi in April 2012. Photo by Todd Heisler/The New York Times

OP-ED BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN, GEOCASE

Donald Trump's second term as president has caused excitement all over the world. Georgia is no exception in this regard.

Such a high register of expectations is naturally explained both by the global role of the US and by Trump's peculiarities as a person. In combination, these two factors can actually - and quite realistically - push one or another stereotypical process in any direction.

IS POLITICS THE SAME AS A BUSINESS DEAL?

Donald Trump's political style has been the subject of many judgments and labels. Despite their multiplicity, perhaps the most important unifying feature is the unusual and unpredictable nature of Trump's handwriting. This is fuelled not only by the campaigning for his first and second term, but also by the very different world in which the 47th President of the United States will have a very powerful word on.

And yes, judging by the statements already made, Trump is promising a 'situational' policy based on an assessment of the particular case and circumstances, without a systemic line. This is equally good and bad: it depends for whom, how, and in what case.

Such 'situationality' - the term 'transactionality' ('business deal') is also often used - requires exceptional agility in a rapidly changing environment; the necessary flexibility to adapt and, if possible, proactive action on the Georgian side.

The reader knows for himself, without my dictation, how much we are capable

of doing so to date. Therefore, it will be better, hoping for a change for the better, to talk about the political variations of Trump and his team, as well as the adjustment of Georgian 'realistic', so-called real, expectations to such variations.

'REWRITING' THE BORDERS: AN UPDATED MONROE DOCTRINE?

Statements on Greenland and the Panama Canal have made an already 'messy' international order even more vulnerable on the face of it.

The risk of vulnerability has been exacerbated by the Russian context of the war in Ukraine and the prospect of equating its political settlement with a 'business deal,' as well as China's claims towards Taiwan. This is the case with regard to the already stated 'major' territorial claims, but as for the relatively 'smaller' or 'hidden' claims, in this case the reader is well aware of the so-called 'Pandora's Box' principle.

What is particularly close and remarkable to us is the inviolability and stability of one of the main principles of the world order - internationally recognized borders. The point is that, for Georgia, as a small/compact country, international legal norms represent an additional protective barrier to ensure its own security and national interests.

Before delving into this issue, I would like to make a few brief clarifications based on the material I have gathered about Trump's updated understanding of the Monroe Doctrine. In particular, the 'updated' version of the Monroe Doctrine is supplemented by a number of principle provisions, namely:

- 1) Securing the interests of the United States in the immediate vicinity and in the closest possible geographical areas;
- 2) Avoiding unnecessary conflicts,

How to 'Adjust' to Trump: Georgia's Real Expectations. Part 1

especially in such remote geographic areas that are either completely unrelated or only superficially related to core United States interests;

3) Restoring faith in the 'bright future' of the United States as a 'strong and great' country in the eyes of Americans - in line with the so-called 'America First' policy.

To summarise all three in one sentence, it is about a realistic and more selective US approach to global problems and crises. And this fundamentally contradicts the country's previously officially declared principle of 'global primacy' of US interests and 'ensuring security in the world by strengthening democracy.'

In a more practical sense, this means that the role of the United States as a caretaker of the world order may be reconsidered. As a result, American interests will be sorted out according to a strict criterion of their priority for the country. Moreover, it will become disproportionately expensive or even impossible for 'peripheries' outside of America's core interests to request US resources to support their own objectives or needs.

If this approach becomes a tough policy line, countries in problematic geographic regions will face a serious dilemma when and if the interests of a particular country cannot or will not coincide with the fundamental national interests of the United States, when one will not be considered an organic part of the other.

Obviously, this approach poses a serious challenge for Georgia's foreign and security policy: How do we become a truly necessary partner? How do we reconcile our interests with the stated handwriting of the Trump administration? How can we not be left out of the spotlight of the country that is crucial to the stability and self-sufficiency of the Georgian state?

Speaking of practicality, I deliberately do not go into excessive theoretical detail. There are two reasons for this: firstly, it would be boring to navigate the labyrinth of theory, and I consider it a useless exercise at this stage; second, the extensive discussion of foreign policy and security topics in contemporary discourse in the academic sphere mainly serves for self-affirmation rather than for finding the necessary answers to questions.

Despite these necessary reservations, I feel it important to make a few brief clarifications to talk about, again, the key issue - Georgia's realistic expectations:

1) The contours of Trump's stated 'America First' policy in international relations are less a matter of statics and more a matter of situational evolution - dynamics. Accordingly, Trump's presidency does not mean the end of the debate between neo-isolationists on the one hand, and those who believe that the projection of American interests on a global scale needs to be rethought on the other, although this does not automatically mean a diminished global role for the United States;

2) In any case, Trump's approach heralds a new 'framework' for US foreign and defense policy, and, consequently, specific decisions will be made within that 'framework';

3) Whatever the theoretical underpinnings of practical politics, two factors have been and will remain the determining factors: power and defense;

4) The proposed line does not imply a claim of 'perfectionism.' It is about Trump's America being a better friend than anyone's friends, or a worse enemy than anyone's enemies. It offers only a business alternative, where 'there is nothing personal.' Among other considerations, the unacceptability of exporting 'American exceptionalism' and imposing it on others it also mentioned;

5) Outside the country, 'America First' is defined as support for US partners or allies who are able and willing to look after their own defense capabilities. Appropriate 'candidates' must, at a minimum, meet the test of intersection with US geostrategic interests. This is a critical criterion that far exceeds the 'values' and 'ethical norms' test;

6) One of the distinctive features of the stated policy is conflict resolution rather than conflict management. In a more radical - and very unfavourable - reading, 'resolving conflicts instead of managing them' is directed towards a new reality, which, incidentally, does not exclude the rewriting of borders.

7) In discussing the rationality of this approach, reference is also made to the fact that 'justice' and 'peace' often have opposite directions: while the pursuit of 'justice' amounts to going in circles, a practical orientation towards 'peace' serves to solve real problems and move forward;

8) According to statements made during Trump's campaign, such an alliance, interstate association or project (such as BRICS or China's One Belt, One Road initiative) would be unacceptable to the new administration, which will hinder the effective implementation of the

'America First' policy as well as jeopardise the dominance of one of the most important instruments of this policy, the US dollar.

FOR ACTUALIZATION OF THE 'GEORGIAN SPACE' IN TRUMP'S AGENDA

Generally speaking, one of the central topics of discussion in US political, academic and analytical circles, is the positioning of the United States in the changing system of international relations. Based on various sources, it seems that the unified security field of our strategic partner is divided into two perimeters - internal and external. Such division is primarily due to a new understanding of US national interests and the proper allocation of resources for them. Instead of the post-Cold War 'America Everywhere' approach that required the United States to respond to every conflict or troubled region, that approach is likely to be adjusted today. In particular, the contours of the US selective policy as an alternative to the above-mentioned policy are already being voiced. The essence of this selectivity is manifested in the prioritization of regional tasks or problems. More specifically, more resources will go to countries in the internal security perimeter of essential national interests - geopolitically important geographic regions, and in a systematic way. In contrast, the outer perimeter, i.e., the less important geographic regions associated with US 'secondary interests,' would be left to settle for a relatively modest role in terms of US contributions of political, military, or economic resources. This approach determines one of the main foreign policy tasks for Official Tbilisi: the preservation of its place in the internal security perimeter of the US as the leader of the Western order and, consequently, its place in the sphere of essential geopolitical interests.

As for the more specific points about the further adjustment to American foreign policy under the Trump administration, we have already discussed this in more detail in this article: in talking to Washington, the Georgian side should focus on the reciprocity of the issue, coincidence of interests, and rational consideration. American partners should be well aware that support for Georgia is not an act of charity, but is equally in line with both US national interests and the agenda of joint Georgian-American interests.

To be continued in next week's GT.

The Trump Impact on Georgia

BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Let's take a closer look at the presidency of Donald Trump, the monumental global-caliber political figure of our time, whose forceful leadership has left a long-lasting mark on both his own country and the entire world. Trump's presidency has brought both benefits and challenges for countries like Georgia, as they navigate the complicated process of reshaping their foreign policies based on his America-First agenda.

For Georgia, Trump's first term had mixed effects. While his reinforcement of US military aid strengthened Georgia's defense capabilities, his focus on bilateral deals sometimes suspended multilateral strategies, which are crucial for small nations balancing between global powers. The main peril lay in the unpredictability of US foreign policy. After Trump's administration signaled shifting commitments to NATO, doubts were raised about the West's determination to protect allies like Georgia, which has, for the past 30 years, heavily relied on Western support to maintain sovereignty and resist Russian aggression.

At the same time, Trump's strong stance

on Russia, specifically through sanctions, put pressure on the Kremlin. The Trump administration also opened doors for stronger US-Georgia ties, raising hopes for increased economic assistance and potential support for Georgia's aspirations to join the EU.

Georgia's economy benefited, particularly through increased investments in sectors like transportation and logistics. The Trump administration also had an indirect, circumstantial effect on Georgia's employment rate, especially in key sectors like agriculture and construction. For Georgia, the changes introduced by the Trump government in international trade relations created both uncertainty and opportunity. As a trade-dependent nation, Georgia felt the ripple effects of these fluctuations. The agriculture sector, particularly its poultry industry, faced challenges due to retaliatory tariffs and export barriers imposed on Russia and China.

Georgia's economy remained relatively robust, but trade uncertainties and immigration policies created difficulties. While Trump's sanctions against Russia provided some reassurance about US commitment to countering Kremlin influence, Georgia's growing tensions with the West, particularly over domestic policies, left the nation in a precarious situation. Democratic principles that under-

pin alliances with NATO and the EU were tested, and Georgia's government faced criticism for its perceived alignment with the renewed Trumpism through nationalist values and anti-LGBT policies.

At the same time, efforts by Georgia's leadership to avoid direct conflict in the wake of the Ukraine war highlighted the delicate balancing act the nation had to perform. Western pressure to align more closely with EU and NATO goals, coupled with public criticism of the Georgian government, revealed fissures that Trump's foreign policy approach was unlikely to patch.

One key intersection of Trumpism and Georgia's current government lies in shared values, such as traditionalism, family-centric ideologies, and nationalism. These overlapping philosophies created a semblance of compatibility between Trump's rhetoric and the ideals of Georgia's ruling party. However, this alignment also exposed Georgia to greater scrutiny from Western democracies concerned about human rights and liberal values.

Domestically, Georgia faced new pressures tied to global narratives of polarization. Trump's divisive discussions on issues like immigration and public protests resonated within Georgia. Moreo-



Image source: commonspace

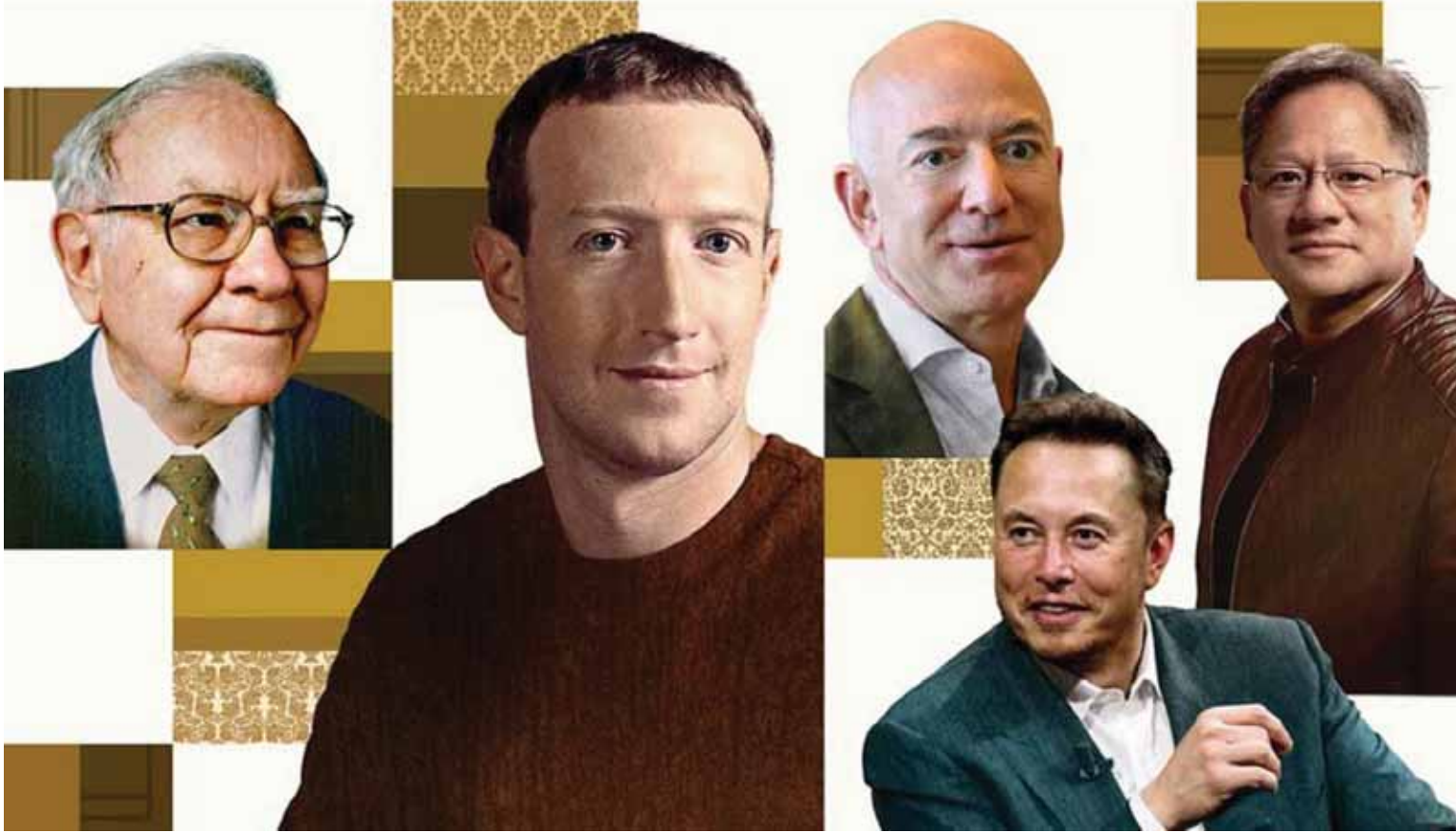
ver, American congressman Joe Wilson's vocal criticism of the Georgian government amplified tensions, forcing the country to navigate between protesting crowds and foreign powers.

Georgia currently faces a mix of territorial integrity challenges, impaired relations with the West, demographic concerns, and the need for accelerated economic development. Georgia continues to grapple with Western pressure amid fears of alienating Russia, growing public dissent, and questions about its

role in the world economy. Trump's presidency unquestionably left a mark on US-Georgia relations, offering both constructive outcomes and sensitive reservations.

Looking ahead, Georgia's success may depend not solely on the policies of foreign powers like the US, but also on how it places itself as a bridge between rapidly changing global interests. Only time will tell whether Trump's legacy will ultimately benefit or challenge Georgia in the years to come.

Beware the Billionaire-A-Saurus Rex: Who Will Keep the Parasitic Oligarchs in Check?



Billionaires- Warren Buffett, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Jensen Huang. Illustration by Yunjia Yuan and Stephanie Cui for Forbes

BY WILL CATHCART

Living under the fist of a billionaire oligarch here in Georgia, and witnessing the violence he has unleashed on those who dare to dissent against his erosion of democracy, and alliance with autocratic regimes, should serve as a stark warning to those in the US. A digital oligarchy is rising—an elite class that has seamlessly abandoned its once-professed values to curry favor with the latest occupant of the White House, regardless of party or ideology.

Georgia, as always, functions as a microcosm of dangerous Western trends, a testing ground, where the mechanics of state capture and democratic erosion play out with unsettling clarity.

While the West may be ahead in culture, fashion, and technology, we in Georgia are, in many ways, a decade ahead in the hyper-accelerated dismantling of democracy. Here, the process is no longer subtle: institutions are hollowed out, media landscapes are reshaped to serve the interests of the few, and public disillusionment is weaponized to entrench power.

We are subject to the unchecked ambitions of an oligarch who operates beyond the reach of accountability, with the rule of law applied selectively based on fealty. Georgia's government serves only one man—he achieved this not through democratic means, but by purchasing the country with a fortune that is paltry compared to the vast wealth of those exhibiting very similar tendencies in the United States.

Watching Russia's oligarchy tear apart this region offers more than a cautionary tale; it provides a lens into a possible future for the United States. The difference is scale. In Russia and Georgia, it's billionaires pulling the strings. In the US, the stakes are higher, with soon-to-be trillionaires poised to dominate, leveraging not just wealth but unprecedented control over digital infrastructures, data, and the very narratives that shape public consciousness. The tools of influence may vary, but the endgame remains the same: power consolidated in the hands of a few, while democracy erodes in plain sight.

From here in Tbilisi, watching American billionaires flock to President Trump's second administration was an alarming experience. Yet it is worth remembering that, just as in biology, parasites can sometimes serve a purpose.

That purpose isn't building rockets or enabling online shopping, just as here in Georgia it isn't creating Bitcoin mining farms or offshore havens for Russian oligarchs. Rather, it's providing a fleeting yet necessary leap in our understanding of enormous numbers and the urgent need to dismantle what they represent.

The more these billionaires surround Trump, the less dangerous he appears in comparison. One might ask: Can he keep them in check? Unfortunately, this scenario is also a textbook example of an oligarchy—one we in the region

know all too well.

The existence of centi-billionaires — those whose wealth exceeds \$100 billion—is not merely a symptom of systemic privilege or exploitation. It represents a flaw, a glitch in capitalism itself: a runaway mechanism of hyper-accumulation that has enabled unimaginable fortunes to balloon in an absurdly short time. In just a decade, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg have grown their wealth from billions to hundreds of billions. At his current trajectory, Musk is expected to become the world's first trillionaire by 2027.

Consider: Centi-billionaires are walking nation-states. They not only possess rockets but are tasked with building them. As Jeff Bezos launches his own fleet into the sky, it's worth noting that the nuclear material to arm such rockets is both cheap and increasingly accessible. In the 80th year since nuclear weapons were developed, they have not been used again since World War II.

So nation-states have avoided nuclear confrontations. But can humanity and the fragile ecosystems of our planet survive the rapid succession of newly minted trillionaires with such capabilities?

There is no historical precedent for such concentrated wealth and power accumulating in so few hands and at such an unprecedented rate. If this is left unchecked, do we truly believe we can coexist globally for the next 80 years of the nuclear age?

In this way, the trillionaire may pose the single greatest existential threat to humanity.

This phenomenon defies all but the most extreme ideologies of free-market capitalism. In 2025, what reasonable economic school of thought can justify the existence of trillionaires as anything other than malignant? What we are witnessing is not capitalism but a systemic cancer. This metastasis has grown so rapidly that no regulatory or legal framework has been able to contain it.

Centi-billionaires are not merely a social anomaly; they are a cultural virus. Their wealth is a self-replicating contagion. These men consolidate media, fund research and shape global narratives, often unconsciously. Like any virus, their accumulation reshapes the environment to sustain itself. But within this very process lies its antidote: the forced reckoning with the concept of a trillionaire — heretofore incomprehensible.

These men (and they are always men) have shown themselves incapable of moral responsibility. As they align with figures like Trump, their primary concern seems to be ensuring their own survival. And for these individuals, survival is synonymous with growth. Their wealth becomes proof of their superiority, their influence a justification for their actions. Yet in this uncharted territory, these men are walking warnings — harbingers of what unchecked hyperaccumulation can do, not only to economies but to the very fabric of humanity.

And yet, in this crisis, they offer us an unexpected opportunity: Centi-billionaires force us to grapple with numbers that were once beyond

comprehension. Their wealth embodies “God numbers” or “Sagan units” like billions and trillions, concepts essential to understanding the vast scale of existence. A few generations ago, millionaires were a rarity, and many still believed the Earth to be only 10,000 years old. Today, centi-billionaires compel us to imagine the 4-billion-year history of planet Earth and humanity's tenuous 200-year experiment with industrialization.

In this way, centi-billionaires serve a purpose akin to that of fossils. Fossils allowed humanity to grasp the deep history of life on Earth, to imagine massive creatures that ruled millions of years ago — and, importantly, to understand the catastrophic extinction events that wiped them out. The centi-billionaire provides a similar lens: forcing us to confront the scale of their destruction and the inevitability of the system that created them becoming extinct.

The only viable future for humanity requires that these men become fossils — relics of a bygone era, studied by future generations to comprehend the absurd scale of their existence and the devastation they caused. Like dinosaurs with tiny brains and oversized bodies, they are capable of immense destruction yet seem unaware of their own impact.

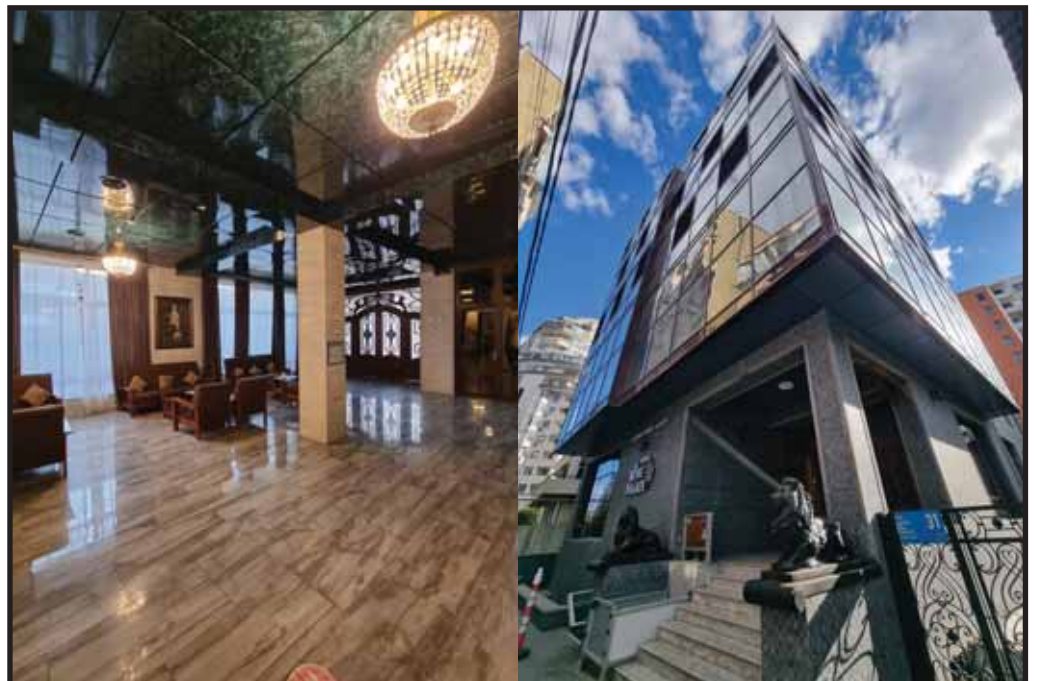
This is not a socialist entreaty to “eat the rich.” But let's at least stop feeding them — no more subsidizing them with tax breaks, government contracts and armed bodyguards.

People are hurting out there. As of last year, the average American household carried \$104,215 in debt. This number grows each year. Meanwhile, Georgians don't even have the luxury of access to debt on such a scale. This is not healthy competition, and the economic theories used to justify such disparities aren't just out of touch—they are absurd, like philosophical exercises never intended for real-world application.

Whether here in Georgia or back in the US, we must take the lessons of paleontology and apply them to the wealthiest among us. Just as the fossilized remains of former reptiles taught us to imagine a world beyond our immediate grasp, we must use the financial scales of magnitude that the existence of the centi-billionaire rex has forced us to confront — to ensure its extinction and our survival.

A version of this article originally appeared in The Hill on January 30th, 2025.

Will Cathcart is an American journalist, producer and war correspondent based in Tbilisi for 16 years.



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"Straight from the Russian playbook" – Emanuelis Zingeris on Georgian Dream's withdrawal from PACE

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Last week, Georgia took yet another step away from Europe—this time by severing ties with the parliamentary arm of the Council of Europe (PACE). The move came after PACE refused to grant full credentials to the Georgian Dream delegation, imposing strict conditions in response to concerns over democratic backsliding. To regain its credentials, Georgian Dream was required to comply with a set of specific conditions by the April 2025 PACE spring session, among which were demands to prepare the environment for new, free and fair elections and releasing all political prisoners. Instead of addressing these demands, the ruling party chose to withdraw from the institution altogether, further isolating itself from Europe.

One of the key figures in the debates leading up to this decision was Emanuelis Zingeris, Lithuanian MP and the longest-serving member of PACE. A veteran of European politics and a staunch advocate for democracy in the post-Soviet space, Zingeris has spent decades working within PACE to uphold human rights, democratic standards, and the rule of law. He has been an outspoken supporter of Georgia's European path, often warning of the dangers of creeping authoritarianism in the region.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Georgian Service spoke to Zingeris in Strasbourg last week to discuss the significance of Georgian Dream's withdrawal, the parallels with past events in PACE, and what this means for Georgia's European future.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS JUST TRANSPIRED? AN EVENT OF WHAT MAGNITUDE ARE WE TALKING ABOUT- WHO WERE THE WINNERS AND LOSERS?

Let me take you back to when Georgia adopted the so-called Russian law. People here, across all parties, were extremely angry about it. It was debated and debated, over and over again, with the Georgian authorities. And yet their responses became more and more surreal. They didn't react, they didn't budge—not even by a millimeter—despite all our demands, our official resolutions, and the votes from all parties in this assembly. So we had no choice but to take it to the final stage.

And still, Georgian Dream maintained



Emanuelis Zingeris. Source: delfi

its iron curtain—this firewall—blocking out everything we told them. Gradually, it became clear: we didn't matter to them. Zero weight. For Ivanishvili and the world he envisions, we are nothing. So if we don't matter to them, if all our discussions have been mere imitations, talks for the sake of talking, then why shouldn't we have drawn the last line?



Over the past 25 years, Georgia has changed its geopolitical stance; it has truly become a part of the Western community

AND YET, YOU GRANTED THEM CREDENTIALS—CONDITIONALLY, YES, BUT STILL. WHAT MADE YOU THINK THEY WOULD FULFILL ANY OF THE CONDITIONS YOU PUT FORWARD?

Two options were discussed: either deny their credentials outright or set conditions. We drew the last line and rejected all of their amendments. Until the very last moment, Georgian Dream was still in the room with us, so to speak. But we made it clear: if they refused to make any concessions, then we could not accept them. And once that became obvious—after the vote—they decided to freeze their participation in the parliamentary side of the Council of Europe.

SO THEY WERE QUITE HAPPY TO JUMP OVER THAT LAST RED LINE YOU DREW.

Exactly. The same thing happened with Tolstoy and Slutsky's delegation, Russia's delegation, before they were expelled. Once they realized they couldn't fool us anymore, they proudly declared they were leaving PACE. It's a trademark maneuver from the Russian playbook. They dismissed us, just as they are dis-

missing the European path altogether.

Now, Ivanishvili apparently has grand plans with Saudi Arabia—big investments, a vision of prosperity under his rule. But I don't think Georgians are as foolish as Ivanishvili assumes them to be. They are committed Europeans. This is not Belarus.

THE COMPARISONS HAVE OFTEN BEEN MADE – IT'S BEEN OBSERVED THAT EVENTS ARE UNFOLDING IN THE SAME VEIN AS IN BELARUS DURING THE 2020 PROTESTS. SHOULD WE EXPECT THE SAME OUTCOME IN GEORGIA?

From my experience, every Georgian sees himself as a king—individualistic, independent-minded. Personality and personal thought come first; this is not a collective society. Replicating Belarus in Georgia will not be easy for Ivanishvili. Over the past 25 years, Georgia has changed its geopolitical stance, its outlook—it has truly become a part of the Western community. The Caucasus might be geographically distant from France, but when it comes to the European mindset, they are not that far apart. Psychologically, Georgia is somewhere between



In 2014, Ivanishvili spoke to us of building a multi-party democracy, where every voice would be heard

Slovenia and Italy. It has become mentally European. It has become one of us. That, among other things, is also what explains the unrelenting wave of protests in Georgia, I think.

But now, that is changing—or rather, it is being forcibly changed. Georgians are being led away from that mindset, step by step. Yet, from what I see, they are unwilling to take those steps, unwilling to move down the path that leads back to the Soviet Union. And that is where the resistance comes in—the resistance against turning Georgia into a gulag for independent minds, into the black-and-white, semi-totalitarian world that exists in Ivanishvili's mind.

WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK RUSSIA PLAYS IN HIS DECISION-MAKING? HOW MUCH OF IT IS DICTATED BY THE KREMLIN AND THE NOTION THAT GEORGIA CANNOT AFFORD NOT TO BE ON GOOD TERMS WITH IT?

I remember Ivanishvili well. He met with Commissioner Kubilius—then the Prime Minister—and me, back in 2014, I think? He spoke of building a multi-party democracy, where every voice would be heard. I asked him directly: how was he going to detach himself from Russia, the place where he amassed his vast wealth? I don't remember exactly what he said to that back then, but he was far from convincing. We knew he was lying. We were unconvinced. And now, here we are and the question has answered itself. Georgia is at a crossroads. Either it will be forcefully shaped into something resembling a Belarus in the Caucasus, or it will remain a free country.

PM Kobakhidze Accuses US Embassy, USAID, and NED of Coordinated Action Against Georgia

BY TEAM GT

The US Embassy, USAID, NED, and other institutions acted in a concerted manner against the Georgian people and state, – Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze stated in response to a journalist's question regarding US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's statement on USAID's activities.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Wednesday told an official with the United States Agency for International Development that foreign aid was "the least popular thing government spends money on" and had become increasingly difficult to defend, according to a transcript of a private embassy event.

Mr. Rubio sought to explain his support for the Trump administration's systematic dismantling of USAID during a question-and-answer session he held

at the US Embassy in Guatemala City, one day after thousands of agency workers overseas learned that they were being placed on administrative leave and must return home to the United States.

The Prime Minister expressed hope that "the new administration would usher in a shift in the US Embassy's approach towards Georgia, thereby putting an end to the detrimental coordination that has existed between the Embassy, USAID, NED, and other relevant entities."

"We anticipate that these changes will have a broader impact, affecting not only USAID and NED but also the Embassy's activities as a whole," Irakli Kobakhidze said.

"We are hopeful that under the new administration, the US Embassy's approach towards the Georgian people and state will undergo a significant transformation, and the harmful coordination between the Embassy, USAID, NED, and other entities will cease to exist," he added.



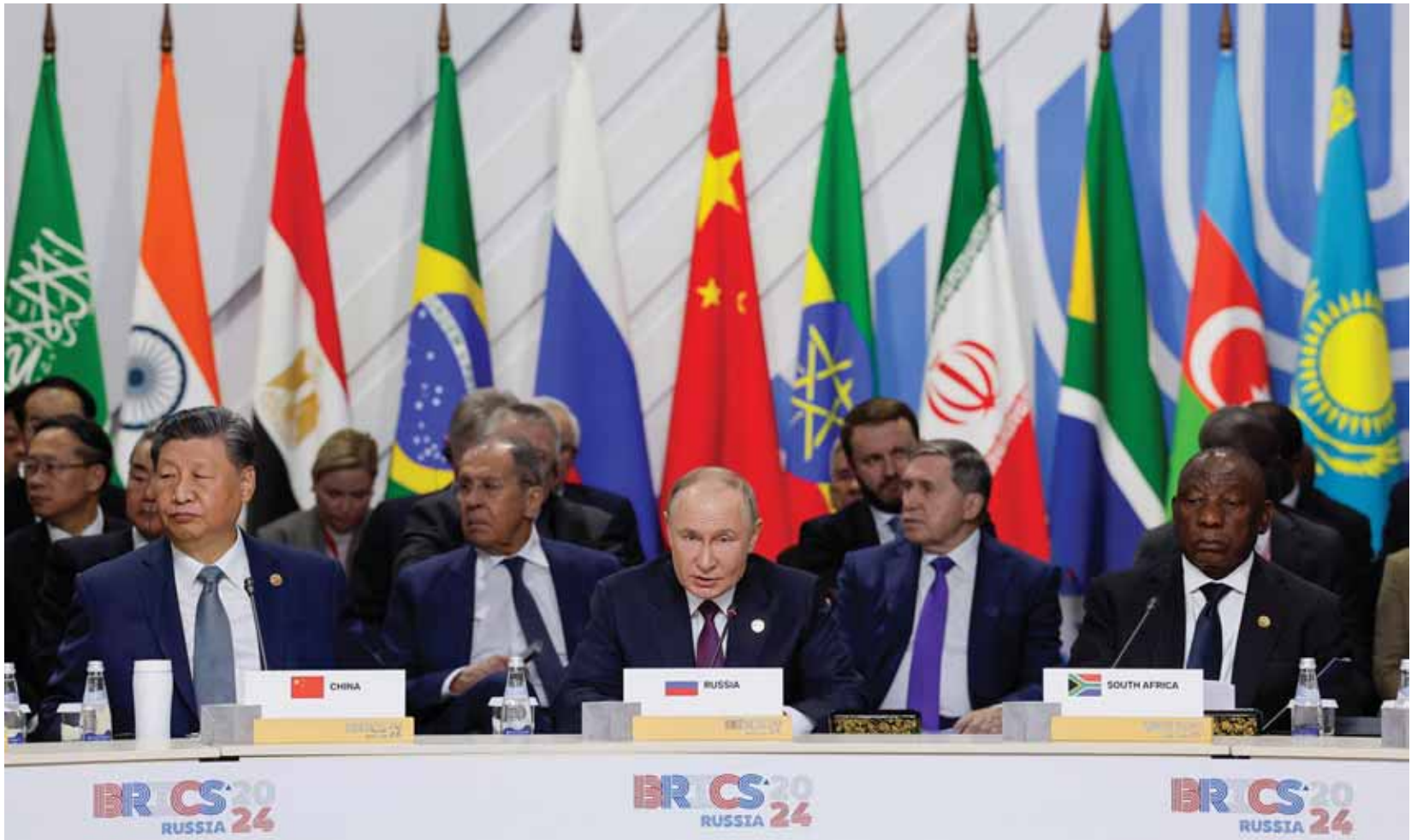
Will Georgia Join BRICS?

OP-ED BY SAAHIL MENON

A month after being voted back into office on October 26th, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party decided to freeze EU membership talks for at least four years amid mounting pressure exerted on them by the supranational bloc to repeal a controversial, Kremlin-inspired “foreign agents bill” and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that flew in the face of European values. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze’s rationale behind opposing premature EU admission was that Georgia was perceived as a freeloading, beggar state and was thus being robbed of its dignity. Kobakhidze also claimed that Tbilisi would reject EU subsidies and grants in the interim period so as to afford GD greater manoeuvrability and autonomy on the international relations front. Georgia’s inevitable foreign policy reconfiguration might lead to closer alignment with BRICS, if not full-fledged membership.

With the exception of re-opening diplomatic missions, bilateral Russo-Georgian ties are, for all intents and purposes, on the mend. The reinstatement of direct flights in mid-2023, coupled with the mutual abolition of visa requirements shortly thereafter, means citizens of Russia and Georgia enjoy unfettered access to each other’s countries for de facto indefinite stays. The ease of back and forth travel has not just given rise to heightened commercial dealings, but also the widespread dissemination of Kremlin-fuelled propaganda and talking points by local Georgian broadcasters, including Imedi TV, the “Alliance of Patriots” party’s PR wing Obieqtivi, and the now-defunct Alt-Info. Over and above their warped characterization of the Collective West as a “Global War Party,” GD’s pledge to avoid a second conflagration with Russia that the United National Movement (UNM) would have sleepwalked into if elected did resonate strongly with Georgian commoners outside the urban centers. Being affiliated with BRICS is simply an extension of this appeasement strategy.

Prior to the House of Assad’s sudden collapse in Syria last December, Türkiye was considered a frontrunner for BRICS candidacy. However, in addition to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reigniting tensions with both Russia and Iran by openly backing the Hayat Tahrir



The 16th annual BRICS summit, October 2024. Source: cfr.org

al-Sham (HTS) lightening offensive and ensuing power grab, bad blood still persists between Ankara and other existing BRICS members. India would almost certainly have vetoed Türkiye’s membership bid as a result of the latter’s outspokenness on the dire humanitarian situation in Kashmir and its favoritism towards arch-rival Pakistan. The Emirates and Egyptians are no friends of the Turks either, owing to Erdogan’s unflinching support for the Muslim Brotherhood movement that poses a clear and present danger to dictatorships across the Arab World. Georgia, on the other hand, would be a far more palatable BRICS invitee, and would have no trouble securing the seal of approval of all 10 participants. China, in particular, is bound to welcome the South Caucasian country with open arms. Multi-faceted Sino-Georgian cooperation underpinned by the ‘Middle Corridor’ will scale new heights if Tbilisi ends up acceding to BRICS and abandoning its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

As an illiberal, non-functioning democracy, by no means would Georgia be a misfit or outlier amongst fellow hybrid regimes that are part of BRICS like India, Brazil and Indonesia. Moreover, GD’s ‘pay-to-play’ approach renders their leadership an easy mark for external actors looking to buy influence in the Black Sea nation. The UAE announcing a record \$6 billion investment in Tbilisi, Batumi and Gonio, an amount equivalent to 20% of Georgia’s GDP, during Kobakhidze’s working trip to Abu Dhabi last week is a case in point. This unprecedented capital injection against the backdrop of growing internal strife and social polarization is being packaged and sold to GD’s domestic audience as a tangible benefit derived from looking beyond Europe. In light of Western funding fast drying up, the availability of low-interest credit lines from the Asian Development Bank and BRICS’ New Development Bank (NDB) for infrastructure development could turbocharge Georgia’s eastward pivot. The construction of a new “ultra-modern” international airport on the capital’s outskirts is symptomatic of GD’s determination to fully leverage their country’s enviable location and tap into key emerging markets instead of focusing disproportionately on Europe.

Needless to say, Tbilisi is situated within a one-to-five-hour flight radius of four legacy BRICS capitals, namely Abu Dhabi, Moscow, New Delhi and Tehran, as well as the northwestern Chinese city of

EU lawmakers have contended themselves with paying mere lip service to the noble cause Georgian youth are putting their lives on the line for

Ürümqi, to which direct routes exist. The same argument holds for post-Soviet “partner states” like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Belarus, whose national carriers fly regularly to Shota Rustaveli International Airport and, on a seasonal basis, to Batumi. From GD’s standpoint, enhancing air connectivity and fostering people-to-people exchanges with the Global South is conducive to ridding Georgia’s so-called “Erasmus Generation” of their Eurocentric world view. At the same time, inbound arrivals from neighbouring, non-EU jurisdictions are a much-needed cash cow for Georgia’s tourism-dependent economy. In stark contrast to predominantly budget-conscious European visitors, holidaymakers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), for instance, spend more lavishly on accommodation, excursions, dining, and other travel-related incidentals.

By virtue of buying into Putin’s narrative that the EU is an irrelevant body entirely at the United States’ mercy, GD essentially ran out the clock on Joe Biden’s presidency in order to get back in the West’s good graces. Donald Trump has a penchant for singing the praises of and getting along famously with like-minded strongmen such as CCP Chairman Xi Jinping, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) and Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban. Yet, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party and, in par-

ticular, its reclusive billionaire founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, do not feature prominently on the current US administration’s radar. The fact that Salome Zurbishvili was invited to Trump’s inauguration after forcibly stepping down as president reflects a lack of political will on the part of Washington to breathe new life into the scrapped US-Georgia strategic partnership. Kobakhidze’s hopes of resurrecting this agreement will likely be further dampened by Cuban-born Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is a staunch human rights advocate and especially hawkish towards China and Russia. GD’s overtly pro-Kremlin leanings are therefore set to remain a major stumbling block going forward, notwithstanding the Republicans’ shared abhorrence of the decadent postmodernism supposedly plaguing most Western societies.

Already out of favor with the White House, Georgia will not be deterred from throwing its hat into the ring by Trump’s repeated threat to impose “100% tariffs” on allies and foes alike that join BRICS. After all, Indonesia, the group’s newest entrant, faced no such punitive action upon making the cut earlier this year. If anything, and given Trump’s preference for dialogue with Iran as opposed to waging a “maximum pressure 2.0” campaign, Georgia could position itself as a potential peace broker if a ‘Grand Bargain’ with the Islamic Republic is ultimately sought. It is worth recalling that Kobakhidze frequented Tehran twice last summer for the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi’s funeral and the subsequent inauguration of his replacement Masoud Pezeshkian. Moreover, the Hamas-instigated ‘Operation Al-Aqsa Flood’ lay bare chief mediator Qatar’s tendency to deliberately drag out discussions on the release of Israeli hostages for self-serving purposes. Georgia, in this regard, could be looked upon as a good-faith interlocutor compared to the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms that are less altruistically-driven and more consumed with elevating their international stature by acting as go-betweens or arranging prisoner swaps.

Meanwhile, Brussels’ fecklessness and horse-trading when it comes to the enforcement of targeted, watertight sanctions risks sucking the oxygen out of ongoing, pro-freedom demonstrations. EU lawmakers have contended themselves with paying mere lip service to the noble cause Georgian youth are put-

ting their lives on the line for. Their recent decision to rescind visa waivers for diplomatic and service passport holders is the latest example of hollow virtue-signalling, not least since all Georgian public servants, including GD officials, also have ordinary passports and are still able to enter the Schengen Area freely in a private capacity. Equally frustrating for Georgia’s overwhelming Europhile populace was the sheer length of time Ivanishvili had to withdraw and stash away his ill-gotten wealth from Western financial institutions before being blacklisted by the United States. Bracing himself for the same fate, Tbilisi mayor and GD functionary Kakha Kaladze followed suit by closing all his European bank accounts.

It is high time Europe wised up to the fact that they are in a bidding war with ‘Greater Eurasia’ over Georgia’s future and took draconian measures to ensure GD sees the light and reorients itself towards the West. The EU needs to do some serious soul-searching on whether locking up peripheral aspirants in the waiting room and throwing away the keys is the way forward. Gone are the days of candidate countries blindly bending to Brussels’ will and entertaining its maximalist demands. With alternative, up-and-coming associations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) willing to bypass bureaucratic hurdles and absorb newcomers in short order, the sooner the Eurocrats realise they are no longer the only show in town, the better.

It is high time Europe wised up to the fact that they are in a bidding war with ‘Greater Eurasia’ over Georgia’s future

The UAE’s \$6 billion investment, against the backdrop of growing internal strife and social polarization, is being packaged and sold to GD’s domestic audience as a tangible benefit derived from looking beyond Europe

The Causes and Consequences of Ukraine Halting Russian Gas Transit to Europe

BY MARIAM MATCHARASHVILI
FOR GFSIS

On January 1, 2025, a historic shift took place in European energy politics—Ukraine officially ceased the transit of Russian natural gas to Europe. The Ukrainian authorities ruled out any chance of extending the agreement, signed in 2019 between Gazprom and Naftogaz Ukrainy, which expired on December 31, 2024. This move marked the end of decades of reliance on Soviet-era pipelines, and symbolized a major step towards Europe's energy independence from Russia. The pipeline running through Ukraine, constructed to transport Siberian gas to European markets, was Russia's most significant gas link to Europe after the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany was sabotaged in 2022—potentially by Ukraine—and the route through Belarus to Poland was shut down.

The cessation of Russian gas flowing through Ukraine is both a consequence of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and a milestone in Europe's ongoing transition away from Russian fossil fuels. "We won't allow them [Russians] to earn additional billions off our blood," President Zelenskyy said in December 2024. Meanwhile, Russia's Foreign Ministry was more direct in advancing a long-standing Russian conspiracy theory: that the U.S. had orchestrated the entire situation at the expense of both Europe and Russia. Based on this, our blog delves into the causes and consequences of this pivotal development.

CAUSE: NATIONAL SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Ukraine's decision to halt gas transit came after a key agreement with Russia expired on December 31, 2024. In a statement, Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko explained that the decision was taken "in the interests of national security." Given the ongoing war with Russia, which invaded Ukraine

in 2022, Ukraine has sought to distance itself from any agreements or infrastructure that could be exploited for political leverage by Moscow. For years, Russia has been accused of using its gas supplies as a geopolitical tool to exert pressure on Europe, and Ukraine has said it no longer wishes to participate in this process, particularly as it involves enriching Russia while Ukraine suffers from its invasion.

CAUSE: EUROPE'S GROWING ENERGY INDEPENDENCE FROM RUSSIA

The decision to cut the gas flow comes after years of Europe's efforts to reduce its dependency on Russian energy. In 2023, Russian gas accounted for only 8% of Europe's natural gas imports, a significant drop from over 40% in 2021, before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. To replace Russian gas, the EU has turned to alternative sources, such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports from the U.S. and Qatar, as well as gas from Norway. Furthermore, the destruction of the Nord Stream pipeline in 2022, and the shutting down of other key Russian pipeline routes, have made it increasingly impractical for Europe to rely on Russian gas. Therefore, Europe's decreased reliance on Russian resources strongly encouraged Ukraine to take this crucial step.

CAUSE: FINANCIAL MOTIVATION AND LOSS OF TRANSIT REVENUE

Ukraine's decision also carries economic weight. The country will lose up to \$1 billion annually in transit fees from Russian gas. However, this loss is deemed acceptable in light of the national security benefits. Additionally, Ukraine has increased domestic gas tariffs for consumers, attempting to offset some of the financial losses. While Ukraine's economic pain is real, the government prioritizes its sovereignty over maintaining revenue from Russia's gas transit. In addition, the cessation of gas transit does not directly affect Ukraine's energy security, as the Russian gas passing through Ukrainian territory is not used within the Ukrainian market.

CAUSE: POLITICAL SYMBOLISM AND STRATEGIC MESSAGING

The decision to end the gas flow is not only practical but symbolic. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called this move "one of Moscow's biggest defeats," framing it as part of the broader struggle to weaken Russian influence in Europe. For Ukraine, this is an opportunity to sever one of Russia's key mechanisms of political manipulation and ensure that Europe does not remain complicit in Russia's war effort, even indirectly.

CONSEQUENCE: IMPACT ON ENERGY SUPPLIES TO EUROPE

Ukraine's decision to stop the flow of Russian gas will have a limited immediate effect on Europe's energy supply. The gas transported via Ukraine represents only about 5% of the EU's total gas imports, and much of this has already been replaced by alternative supply routes, including pipeline gas from Norway, LNG from the U.S., and the Turk-Stream pipeline under the Black Sea. However, analysts have warned that the cessation could cause a brief spike in European spot gas prices, although a repeat of the chaotic price surges seen in 2022 is unlikely. EU member states have been preparing for this scenario for over a year; still, the disruption highlights Europe's vulnerability to energy crises, particularly during colder months when demand is higher.

CONSEQUENCE: POSSIBLE IMPACT ON UKRAINE

Aside from the economic losses mentioned above, Ukraine's decision risks weakening its strategic position as an energy partner for Europe, including its role in providing gas storage. Furthermore, Ukraine's gas infrastructure, which remains largely intact for now, could become a military target if Russian gas is no longer flowing through its pipelines.

CONSEQUENCE: ENERGY SHORTAGES IN MOLDOVA'S BREAKAWAY REGION

While Europe as a whole seems prepared for the gas cut-off, neighboring Moldova

faces a more immediate crisis. The breakaway region of Transnistria, which has long relied on Russian gas flowing through Ukraine, gas which also powers the MGRES power plant supplying the majority of Moldova's electricity, has already reported power and heating outages. Further, the Moldovan government has accused Russia of using energy blackmail, threatening to stop supplies if the transit deal is not renewed. While Moldova can rely on gas imports from Romania, the situation in Transnistria remains dire, affecting hundreds of thousands of residents.

CONSEQUENCE: STRAIN ON RUSSIA'S GAS REVENUES

For Russia, the cessation of gas transit via Ukraine is a significant financial blow. Gazprom, Russia's state-owned energy giant, is expected to lose around \$5 billion in revenue from gas exports to Europe, exacerbating its economic woes. Gazprom's revenue from European gas sales has already diminished substantially in recent years, as Europe diversifies its sources and invests in cleaner energy alternatives. This loss also underscores Russia's diminishing leverage over Europe, particularly as its invasion of Ukraine continues to alienate former customers.

CONSEQUENCE: POLITICAL FALLOUT IN EUROPE

While some European nations, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe, have welcomed the end of Russian gas transit, the move has sparked political controversy. It is important to note that Austria, which was dependent on Russian gas through the Ukrainian transit route, was better prepared, as it stopped receiving gas deliveries via Ukraine in early 2024 due to the disruption of Russian gas supplies to Europe following the escalation of the war in Ukraine. However, Slovakia and Hungary—countries that still rely on Russian gas, even post-Ukraine war—have voiced concerns over potential price increases and the financial burden placed on their citizens and industries. The share of Russian gas in Hungary's imports is 47%, and Slovakia's is almost 90%. Slovakia's Prime

Minister Robert Fico, in particular, has criticized the decision, claiming that it will disproportionately affect EU countries, while Russia will suffer minimal consequences. However, these countries have already been working on diversifying their energy supply and will likely rely on alternative sources to make up for the deficit.

CONSEQUENCE: A STRATEGIC BLOW TO MOSCOW'S ENERGY INFLUENCE

More broadly, Ukraine's decision represents a further diminishing of Moscow's ability to use energy as a tool for political leverage. With the European Union's commitment to ending reliance on Russian fossil fuels by 2027, this decision could accelerate Europe's transition to cleaner, more diverse energy sources. In the long run, this may result in the weakening of Russia's dominance in the European energy market, forcing the country to look for new markets or face declining revenue from its energy sector.

Ukraine's decision to halt the transit of Russian gas to Europe on January 1, 2025, is a transformative move with far-reaching implications for both regional security and global energy politics. This shift, driven by national security concerns, the ongoing war with Russia, and Europe's broader quest for energy independence, marks a critical step in reducing reliance on Russian fossil fuels and diminishing Moscow's geopolitical leverage. While the immediate impact on European energy supplies is manageable, with alternative sources already in place, the disruption highlights Europe's vulnerability and the financial strain on Russia's energy sector. As Ukraine sacrifices significant transit revenue for the sake of sovereignty, it also strengthens its position within the European energy landscape, aligning with the continent's efforts to transition to more diverse and sustainable energy sources. In the long term, this decision could accelerate Europe's decoupling from Russian energy and signal a decline in Russia's ability to use energy exports as a tool of political coercion, further isolating it on the global stage.



Photo: Woodway Energy.

Adjar Energy to Invest \$460 mln in Georgia's Renewable Sector

BY MARIAM RAZMZADZE

The Georgian Government Administration announced on Tuesday that Adjar Energy, Turkish-based Exim Holding's subsidiary, will partner with the Georgian government and invest \$460 million to develop five wind farms and one solar power plant.

The project is predicted to begin this

year gradually in multiple phases, and aims to achieve a total installed capacity of 360 MW, which will enhance Georgia's renewable energy sector and its standing on the global market.

After the meeting between Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and company executives, officials emphasized the encouraging investment environment in Georgia, which continues to attract foreign investors.

Adjar Energy has so far invested over \$200 million in Georgia, constructing two hydroelectric power projects.

Green Energy Corridor Joint Venture Registered in Romania



BY MARIAM RAZMZADZE

The Green Energy Corridor Power Company (GECO POWER COMPANY), a joint venture of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Romania, and Hungary, has been officially registered in Bucharest, Romania, the Ministry of Economy announced.

The company will oversee the Black Sea Submarine Cable Project, a 1,155 km, 525 kV transmission line connecting Georgia and Romania to strengthen regional energy security. A feasibility study confirmed its viability, with completion expected by 2030.

GECO POWER COMPANY is equally owned by the national energy operators of all four countries. The project has been submitted to the European Commission for recognition as a Project of Common Interest.

Georgia's Electric Gamble: How a Small Nation Became a Silent Power in the Global EV Trade



An Electric Vehicle. Image source: freemalaysiatoday

BY IVAN NECHAEV

At the close of 2024, Georgia's roads pulsed with a quiet but undeniable transformation. The number of registered electric vehicles (EVs) had surged to 7,777, marking a record 2,725-unit increase in just one year. Yet, beneath the sleek exteriors of Teslas and newly arrived BYD models, a far more complex economic and geopolitical reality was unfolding.

Georgia is not just buying EVs—it's flipping them. The country's import-reexport cycle reached record heights: 4,711 EVs were imported from January to November 2024 at a staggering cost of \$91.5 million, an 82.7% increase from

the previous year. But a quarter of these cars never stayed in Georgia, instead finding new owners across Central Asia and beyond. This raises a compelling question: is Georgia becoming the Amsterdam of electric vehicles, a crucial stop on a new global trade route where cars don't settle, but move?

FROM HORSE CARTS TO LITHIUM BATTERIES: GEORGIA'S ROLE AS AN EV CONDUIT

To understand why Georgia, a nation with a population smaller than Berlin's, is suddenly at the center of a billion-dollar electric vehicle trade, one must step back and look at the mechanics of global commerce. The price of EVs in Georgia has been dropping fast: from an average of \$26,894 in 2023 to \$19,442 in 2024. This decline isn't just about affordability—it's

about opportunity. Georgia sits between high-cost Western markets and emerging economies hungry for clean technology. Here, EVs are not just vehicles; they are a high-margin commodity.

Historically, Georgia's geographical position made it a crucial corridor for trade—first for silk, later for oil, and now for lithium-powered vehicles. Its ports and highways are the connective tissue linking European, Chinese, and American EV manufacturers with post-Soviet and Middle Eastern buyers. Georgia's low import tariffs, simplified customs procedures, and trade agreements make it a perfect launchpad for reexport. The result? A thriving second-hand and near-new EV market, where vehicles enter the country only to be resold weeks or months later to Central Asian buyers eager to electrify their streets.

WHO'S SELLING AND WHO'S BUYING? THE GLOBAL CHESSBOARD OF GEORGIA'S EV TRADE

The statistics reveal an electric economy shaped by shifting geopolitical alliances. Top Sources of Georgia's EV Imports are: United States – 2,800 EVs (\$47.4 million), China – 764 EVs (\$19.5 million), Germany – 154 EVs (\$10.2 million), Japan – 785 EVs (\$5.3 million).

The dominance of the United States and China tells a clear story: Georgia is capitalizing on the global EV price war. American EVs, often second-hand, flood in from auctions, while China's aggressively priced models carve out a growing share of the market. Germany's presence at the high end—where the average imported EV costs \$66,000—indicates a rising demand for luxury models. But where do all these cars go?

Top Export Destinations from Georgia are: Kyrgyzstan – 343 EVs (\$9.3 million), Kazakhstan – 200 EVs (\$5.6 million), Armenia – 144 EVs (\$5 million), Azerbaijan – 51 EVs (\$1.6 million), Czech Republic – 6 EVs (\$1.1 million). Central Asia, long reliant on Russian oil and gas, is in the midst of an energy transition. Countries like Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, with their aging fleets of diesel-powered vehicles, see EVs as a chance to modernize. Georgia, strategically positioned and flexible in trade, has become their preferred supplier.

THE NEW SILK ROAD, ELECTRIFIED

Georgia's record-breaking EV reexport growth of 158.5% in 2024 is not just a

financial trend—it's a sign of shifting global power dynamics. The old model of automotive trade, where production hubs dictated supply, is giving way to a decentralized network of trade players. And Georgia is one of them.

Yet, for all its success, the country stands at a crossroads. Georgia's domestic EV adoption is rising, but its charging infrastructure is woefully behind. Without major investment, the country risks becoming a mere pass-through point rather than a serious player in the clean energy transition. Reexport is lucrative but limited. Georgia has an opportunity to shift from middleman to manufacturer, assembling or refurbishing EVs for regional markets. Can it take the leap? Much of Georgia's EV trade depends on import duty exemptions and friendly trade agreements. If these policies change, or if Central Asian nations develop direct supply chains with China, Georgia's golden era of EV trade could disappear overnight.

This isn't just about cars. Georgia's EV boom is a microcosm of a larger global shift—one where fossil fuel economies are being challenged, where trade corridors are being redrawn, and where small nations can punch far above their weight in the world economy. The big question is: will Georgia evolve into a leader of the green transition, or will it remain a temporary middleman in the shifting sands of electric commerce? The answer will determine whether this surge in EV imports is a lasting transformation—or just a flash of lithium-fueled speculation.

SOCIETY

European Court of Human Rights Annual Report and Statistics for 2024: A Focus on Georgia

BY TEAM GT

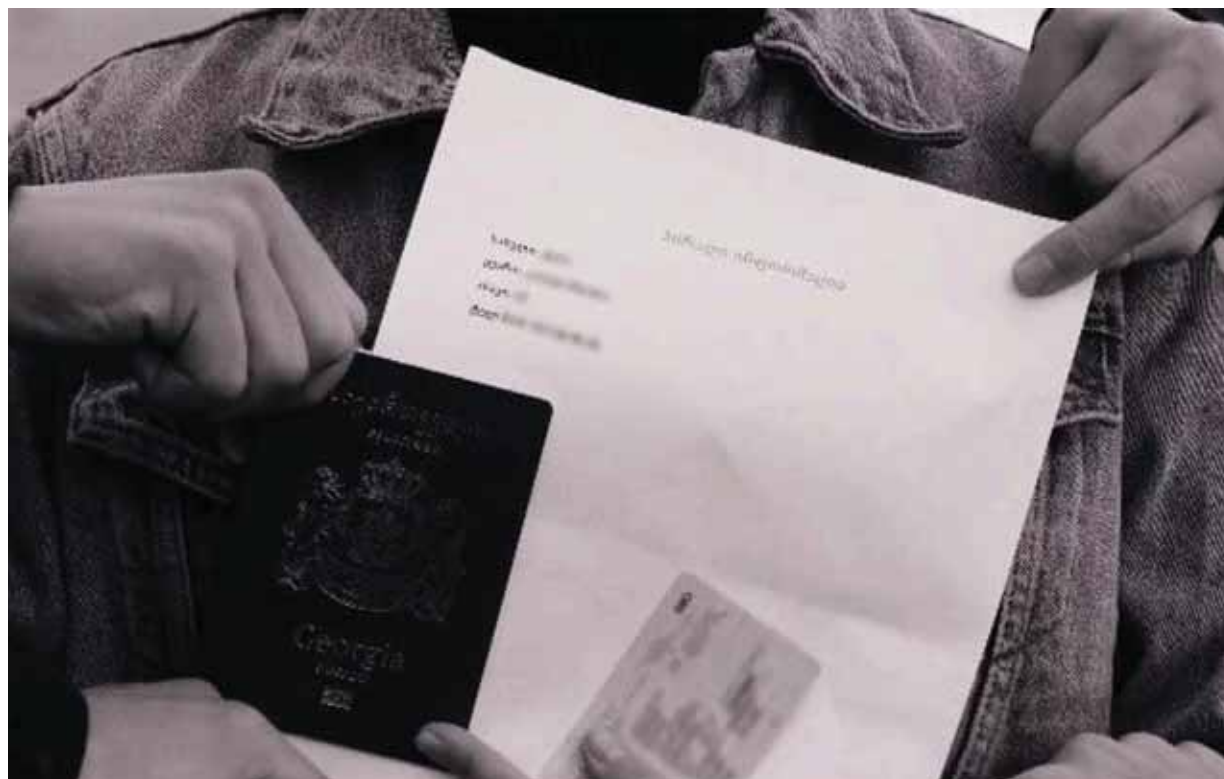
The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has released its annual report for 2024, highlighting key reforms, statistics, and notable developments in the Court's activities. While the number of pending cases remains significant, the report reflects the progress made through reforms over recent years. The total number of pending applications has decreased by 8,100 (11.8%) since the end of 2023, and 14,300 (19.2%) since the end of 2022, bringing the total number of cases pending before the Court to 60,350 as of December 31, 2024.

However, nearly three-quarters of these pending cases are concentrated in just five countries: Türkiye, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, and Greece, with these nations making up a substantial portion of both the total and priority applications. Notably, 80% of pending priority cases come from the same group.

The Court's impact strategy has shown significant results, with the number of impact cases falling to 181, down from 429 in January 2023—a 57.8% decrease. Since January 2021, the Court has completed 388 impact cases. The Court also made a notable decision to stop examining applications or requests for interim measures in the Russian language starting in September 2024.

GEORGIA'S ROLE IN THE ANNUAL REPORT

The report touches on Georgia in the context of ongoing inter-state cases before the Court, particularly those related to the conflict with Russia. On April 9, 2024, the Court delivered a judgment in the case of Georgia v. Russia (IV) (applica-



Source: eunighbourseast

tion no. 39611/18). This case is one of 14 inter-state cases currently pending, including disputes involving Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. Notably, these inter-state cases are often accompanied by individual applications, with approximately 10,500 individual applications linked to these conflicts.

Georgia also features in the report in relation to judgments regarding domestic and gender-based violence. This category of cases remains a significant focus for the Court's work.

KEY STATISTICS FROM 2024

In 2024, the Court allocated 28,800 new

applications to judicial formations, marking a decrease of 17% from 2023. This decline is attributed to fewer cases against certain countries, including Türkiye, Hungary, and Belgium. For Georgia, 151 new applications were allocated to judicial formations in 2024, slightly down from 156 in 2023 but consistent with previous years.

In terms of case distribution relative to population size, Georgia saw 0.4 new applications per 10,000 people in 2024, which is close to the European average of 0.34 applications per 10,000 people. Other countries with higher case loads relative to population size included

Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

When it comes to decisions made by the Court, Georgia's performance in 2024 was mixed. The Court issued judgments on 27 applications from Georgia, with violations found in 16 of those judgments. In comparison, 121 applications were declared inadmissible or struck out.

The Court also dealt with 1,630 requests for interim measures, a 38% decrease compared to 2023. Priority applications, which are treated with urgency, decreased by 34% by the end of 2024, with many of these cases coming from Russia due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

JUDGMENTS AND VIOLATIONS

In total, the Court delivered 1,102 judgments in 2024, addressing 10,829 applications. Of these judgments, 1,000 (91%) found at least one violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Countries with the highest number of judgments resulting in violations included Russia (302 out of 302 judgments), Ukraine (153 out of 158), and Türkiye (67 out of 73). Romania and Italy also had significant numbers of judgments finding violations, with 49 and 51 respectively. For Georgia, the Court issued 18 judgments in 2024, of which 16 found violations of the Convention. This indicates that a large portion of the cases involving Georgia resulted in a determination of human rights violations.

The ECHR's judgments highlight ongoing issues concerning various rights, including the right to fair trial, protection from torture, and freedom of expression, among others. In Georgia's case, as with many other nations, these judgments represent important legal decisions that could have broad implications for domestic law and practices.

PENDING APPLICATIONS

By the end of 2024, Georgia had 198 pending applications, a slight increase from 185 in 2023 and 155 in 2022. This indicates a slow but steady accumulation of cases, reflecting ongoing issues requiring the Court's attention. The majority of pending applications in 2024, however, continue to originate from just a few countries, with Türkiye leading with 21,600 cases pending.

Overall, the report highlights both the progress made by the Court in processing applications and the significant challenges it still faces, particularly in relation to countries with ongoing conflicts or political tensions.

Torch Bearers

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Back up to Svaneti at last, for a dip into long-missed proper winter! Tbilisi's two mild frosts so far have given me some wonderful ice detail photos in puddles... but no snow as of yet. The mountains, of course, are buried in the stuff.

I got to Samtredia (which means "three doves") by train, then checked into a guest house pre-arranged by a couple of my Dutch friends, who flew into Kutaisi with another couple of their countryfolk and met me there. Next morning, a driver was found to take us as far as Zugdidi...



Photo by the author's house guests.

but we negotiated with him to continue as far as our door in Etseri, meaning that our considerable baggage had one less change to make.

Additional shopping in Zugdidi, for a few days' fruit and vegetables, then onward and upward. The road into Svaneti was completely clear of ice or snow for most of the 90 or so km we had to take, only adding a bit near our village. But the last 1 km, from the highway up to our house, was a different story, almost all ice from tire-compacted snow. Insufficient show plowing has led to this. And if, at the usual couple of points, there are cows meditating on the road and you have to stop, you may not be able to restart your ascent on such a surface and angle. For us, however, on tires far from winter-certified, even the cows were unnecessary to slow us to a stop on the ice.

We unloaded the car; I helped him turn around, with getting stuck as part of the process and local men shoveling him out of that. Then I heard that the four Dutch people had been given a lift right to our house by a kind neighbor in a better car, with all of the gear, so that made things immensely easier. The driver from Samtredia was only too eager to get back down and home, so off he went, and I walked up to the house to open the door. Shoveling of snow was already happening in the yard.

I had asked a friend in Tbilisi to make me a couple of very special snow shovels, which we brought up for this trip, to help neighbors on their roofs (ours is nice and snow-slippery). And now, as I

write this, it's the beginning of two days' forecast snow, so I hope we will get to use the new shovels. Eight more people from 'Youth with a Purpose' will join us in a few days, and then is Lamproba, the holiday with burning torches, in which we are all here to participate.

Because each male who can walk needs his own birch torch, we need eight of them from my house and guests. This year is the first time that I arranged to cut these myself, and all four Duchies joined me yesterday on this expedition, armed with a battery circular saw, hand-saw and ax.

The trudge of roughly 5 km was mostly in snow which was mostly too soft at sunny midday to support us, making progress slow. But we had footsteps to walk in and guide us to where we had been told to go. Near the top, high above the abandoned hamlet of Ughvali, I surged on ahead to scout out the birches and give the two couples a chance to rest in case we were astray. Not having seen any white trunks thus far, I was most relieved to soon find three of them, which was plenty. The others joined me for cutting.

One of the men and I climbed a tree each, to reach straight branches of the proper diameter. I had the circular saw, he the hand one, and soon we had all eight needed limbs off the trees, leaving plenty to spare and survive. The ladies dragged them to the other man, who looped off all extraneous smaller branches and twigs with the axe. Then back down towards home, by a shorter route via the main road.



Photo by the author's house guests.

At our village's SPAR shop, we stopped for drinks and a food stock-up, and a neighbor generously drove us and all our wood up home, we five all standing in the back of his little Japanese pickup truck: a great help indeed. We reached home "dirty, tired and happy". Now the birch branches are drying out near the big Svan stove, in preparation for the 9th. We'll be ready; more details of that event next article.

All photos by the Dutch people this

time. I was shooting video mostly.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

The MAC Georgia & Chai Khana Disability Short Film Competition Awards

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

The Short Film competition initiated by MAC Georgia and partnering with Chai Khana concluded with a powerful awards ceremony that not only celebrated exceptional filmmaking, but also provided an important platform for the stories of individuals with disabilities and their families. With 39 films submitted, each showcasing unique perspectives on the challenges and triumphs of living with a disability, the competition was a reminder of the power of storytelling to promote inclusion, empathy, and change.

A jury selected the top 15 films from the submissions, which were then shown to the audience at the award ceremony. This year's competition also featured a significant prize pool, with the first-place winner receiving 14,000 GEL, second-place winner being awarded 9000 GEL and the third-place winner earning 5000 GEL. These prizes underscore the competition's dedication to supporting filmmakers who create authentic, diverse, and impactful narratives that challenge perceptions of disability and highlight the human experiences behind these stories.

All of the selected films are now available for viewing online, providing wider access to the powerful stories that were celebrated at the event. These films can be found on MAC Georgia and Chai Khana's Facebook pages, as well as the Chai Khana YouTube channel, where viewers can enjoy them along with their synopses to better understand the context and themes behind each story.

FIRST PLACE: 'PURPLE, PINK AND BROWN' BY KRISTINE GOGALADZE

The first-place award went to Purple, Pink and Brown, a deeply emotional film



During the Q&A session. Photo by the author.

directed by Kristine Gogaladze. The film follows 8-year-old Saba Dzandzava, one of 28 children attending the Center for Development and Wellbeing, "Home of the Future." In this center, children with disabilities come together to learn, create, and explore, but they also experience isolation, fear, and vulnerability. Purple, Pink and Brown explores the emotional complexity of these children's lives, shedding light on both their joys and their struggles. Through Saba's journey, the film paints a poignant picture of the challenges faced by children with disabilities in a world that is not always understanding or accommodating.

SECOND PLACE: 'SABAWITHWHEELS' BY NINIKO LEKISHVILI

In second place, Sabawithwheels tells the story of Saba, a 30-year-old stand-up comedian who has been living with a disability for the past nine years. Directed by Niniko Lekishvili, this film captures

Saba's life through his comedic monologues, offering an honest, humorous, and thought-provoking look at the challenges faced by wheelchair users in Georgia. Saba's wit and humor shine through as he addresses topics like accessibility, social attitudes, and the everyday barriers that individuals with disabilities face in their daily lives. Through his personal experiences and sharp observations, the film offers a unique perspective on the intersection of disability and comedy, demonstrating how humor can challenge perceptions and encourage empathy.

THIRD PLACE: 'THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS' BY SALOME SAGHARADZE

The third-place award went to The Language of Birds, directed by Salome Sagharadze. This film follows Mindia, a young boy who has the unusual ability to understand birds but refuses to communicate with people. His strange behav-

ior causes tension within his family, as his parents struggle to understand what his future holds. As their fears mount, the family's emotional distress deepens. However, when it seems as though there is no hope for resolution, a surprising sign from the world helps the family find reconciliation and a new beginning. The film delicately explores themes of communication, fear, and the transformative power of empathy, offering a heartfelt exploration of how family dynamics can evolve when understanding is embraced.

A CELEBRATION OF INCLUSIVE CINEMA

The Short Film Competition on Disability has proven to be a significant moment for inclusive cinema, bringing together a carefully curated selection of films that challenge perceptions and celebrate the human experience. The competition, which featured a distinguished panel of jurors, sought to spotlight filmmakers who are telling authentic and diverse stories about disability. This year's winners exemplified the competition's commitment to rewarding excellence in filmmaking, with each of the top films offering unique insights into the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. The prize pool awarded to the three winning films highlights MAC Georgia's dedication to supporting and nurturing talented filmmakers who contribute to the growing conversation around disability and inclusion.

Through these films, MAC Georgia and Chai Khana have created a powerful space for voices that are often under-represented, amplifying their stories and fostering greater understanding and inclusion. The competition serves as a reminder of the importance of diverse narratives in the film industry, and it has provided a platform for filmmakers who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to share their stories with a wider audience.

At the conclusion of the awards cere-

mony, the event featured a Q&A session that provided the audience with an opportunity to engage directly with the filmmakers. This interactive segment allowed attendees to ask questions about the creative process, the inspiration behind the films, and the filmmakers' visions for how their work could contribute to changing societal perceptions of disability. The filmmakers offered valuable insights into the challenges and rewards of creating inclusive cinema, sharing personal stories and reflections on their experiences in the industry. The Q&A session created an open dialogue between the filmmakers and the audience, encouraging deeper understanding and appreciation of the stories being told.

WATCH THE FILMS

For those who missed the award ceremony or would like to revisit the films, all the selected films are available for online viewing. Visit the Chai Khana YouTube channel or the MAC Georgia and Chai Khana Facebook pages to watch the films, each accompanied by a detailed synopsis. These films not only offer artistic and emotional depth but also challenge audiences to reconsider their perceptions of disability, accessibility, and inclusion.

Through the Short Film Competition on Disability, MAC Georgia and Chai Khana continue to create a space where stories of people with disabilities are not only heard, but celebrated. The collaboration between these two organizations plays a pivotal role in raising awareness, breaking down barriers, and creating a more inclusive world where everyone's voice is valued.

As the competition continues to grow, it promises to be an essential platform for filmmakers who are pushing boundaries, telling diverse and impactful stories, and contributing to the movement for greater representation and inclusion in cinema.

The Torn T-Shirt and the Medal of Art: How Demna Gvasalia Redefined Fashion's Highest Honors



Demna Gvasalia receives the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati. Source: IG

BY IVAN NECHAEV

When French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati fastened the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres onto Demna

Gvasalia's torn T-shirt, it was more than just a moment of recognition. It was a performative contradiction, a ritual both of inclusion and disruption. The Georgian-born designer, who fled war-torn Abkhazia as a child, has spent his career dismantling the very institutions that now honor him. And yet, there he stood in Paris—fashion's most rebellious auteur,



Balenciaga. Source: gq.com

anointed by the establishment he so often satirizes.

This paradox is the essence of Demna's creative identity. A refugee who became the architect of luxury's new nihilism; a self-exiled Georgian who reimagined Western high fashion through the raw textures of post-Soviet aesthetics; a designer who sells dystopia as couture, making Paris itself bow to the disheveled glamour of the displaced. But what does it mean for an enfant terrible to receive an official seal of approval? Has Demna's revolution become an institution, or has he simply redefined the institution itself?

FROM EXILE TO EMPIRE: FASHION AS A MEMORY MACHINE

Demna Gvasalia's trajectory—escaping war, moving between cultures, and forging an identity in exile—is central to understanding his aesthetic. He was born in 1981 in Soviet Abkhazia, a region that would soon become a flashpoint in the violent post-Soviet collapse. When war broke out in 1992, his family fled to Tbilisi, and then to Germany, uprooted by forces beyond their control.

Fashion, for Demna, is not merely an industry, but a deeply personal act of memory. His work at Vetements and Balenciaga channels the visual language of displacement: oversized silhouettes that swallow the body, fabrics that recall survivalist pragmatism, and an unrelenting interrogation of luxury's artifice. The tattered hoodie, the trash-bag handbag, the exaggerated shoulder pads—they are not just aesthetic choices but echoes of migration, of people carrying their world on their backs.

In this sense, Balenciaga under Demna is more than a brand; it is a conceptual space where trauma, nostalgia, and social critique intertwine. It takes the debris of the past—whether Soviet tracksuits or counterfeit market culture—and repackages it as high fashion. For Demna, exile is not just a personal history; it is a design philosophy.

FASHION'S PRANKSTER OR ITS PROPHET?

Since taking over Balenciaga in 2015, Demna has waged an ongoing war against fashion's sacred cows. He has transformed runway shows into spectacles of bleak absurdity, from dystopian flooded landscapes to sterile corporate boardrooms. He has courted controversy with his subversion of taste, from €2,000 versions of IKEA bags to the now-infamous luxury "trash pouch." His critics call him cynical, his defenders call him visionary. The truth is, he is both.

This is where his work intersects with the great traditions of avant-garde art and philosophy. Demna's approach to fashion echoes the ethos of Dadaism—a movement born in response to World War I's devastation, rejecting aesthetic norms in favor of absurdity and provocation. His deconstruction of clothing recalls Derrida's concept of *différance*: a refusal to settle on fixed meanings, always playing between subversion and homage. And like Guy Debord's Situationist critique of capitalism, Demna turns fashion into a stage for social commentary, selling us the very mechanisms of consumerism that he exposes as hollow.

But where does irony end and complicity begin? When Balenciaga's distressed sneakers sell for \$1,850, is Demna criti-



Balenciaga. Source: hypebeast

quing the absurdity of wealth, or merely cashing in on it? When he appropriates the aesthetics of poverty, is he challenging the system or profiting from its spectacle? This tension—between rebellion and profit, between critique and participation—is what makes Demna both the most celebrated and the most controversial designer of our time.

GEORGIAN ROOTS, FRENCH RECOGNITION

Despite his meteoric rise, Demna's relationship with Georgia remains fraught. While his work frequently references his homeland—Soviet school uniforms, Georgian script, Orthodox crosses—he rarely visits, estranged from parts of his family due to his sexuality. In a country where LGBTQ+ rights remain a battleground, Demna's global success is viewed with both admiration and unease.

Yet his Georgian identity is impossible to untangle from his work. His love for exaggerated proportions can be traced back to the Soviet aesthetics of his childhood. His rejection of conventional glamour mirrors the raw, pragmatic fashion of Tbilisi's street markets. Even his Balenciaga couture—often austere, monastic, almost Byzantine—carries echoes of Georgia's ancient ecclesiastical traditions.

France's recognition of Demna, then, is layered with meaning. It is not just an award for a designer but an acknowl-

edgment of how exile and displacement shape art. The child who fled Abkhazia now stands at the heart of European culture, receiving one of its highest honors. But is it a homecoming, or just another station in the life of a perpetual outsider?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE REVOLUTION WINS?

The Ordre des Arts et des Lettres was once awarded to Yves Saint Laurent, a designer who revolutionized fashion by putting women in tuxedos and making haute couture political. Today, it is pinned to Demna's torn T-shirt—a sign that fashion's hierarchy has shifted. The very man who turned the fashion industry upside down is now its most powerful figure.

But what happens when the rebel becomes the establishment? Can Demna still be an outsider when he sits atop one of fashion's most elite institutions? Or has he succeeded in bending the institution to his will?

One thing is certain: Demna has not lost his ability to provoke. By accepting the award in a ripped T-shirt, he reminds us that fashion, at its most powerful, is never just about clothing; it is about symbols, contradictions, and the narratives we construct about who belongs where. And in that sense, Demna remains fashion's greatest disruptor—even when the establishment pins a medal on his chest.



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

