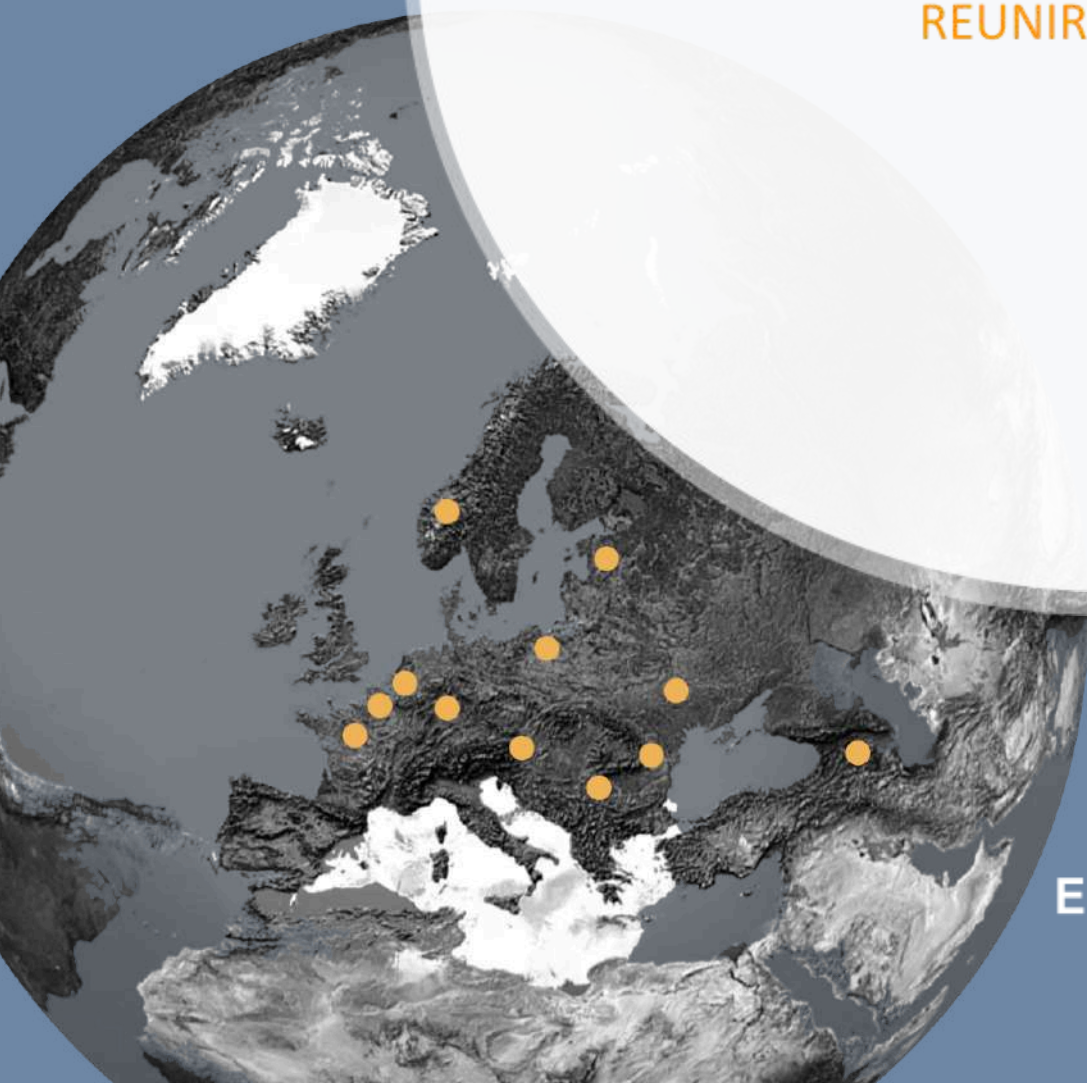




CONFLUENCE OF NARRATIVES: RUSSIAN INFORMATION STRATEGIES AND ANTI-EU RHETORIC IN GEORGIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s Georgia has formally chosen European integration as its foreign policy priority. With commitments embedded in the European Union (EU) - Georgia Association Agreement¹, enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia², and consistent reflection of public opinion support towards EU integration, it has become a strategic priority for the country. Although the EU granted Georgia candidate status in 2023³ the pro-European trajectory has been disrupted by Georgian Dream (GD) government's decision to abort the EU accession process in November 2024⁴. This move has been accompanied with a gradual consolidation of authoritarianism with Russian-style political practices, including the consolidation of power, weakening democratic institutions, selective justice, and the adoption of repressive laws⁵. These are developments that directly impact Georgia's domestic political environment, foreign policy orientation, and EU integration prospects.

The following trends are also increasingly reflected in public opinion polls, which show rising public skepticism about the feasibility of successful EU accession. Recent polling data⁶ confirms this shift: while roughly 74% of society state that they would vote for EU membership if a referendum were held, a growing share of respondents doubt that Georgia is politically ready for membership or that the government is willing or able to implement the required reforms. In addition, polling data indicates a significant decline in public trust in the EU within Georgian society, decreasing from 66% in Spring 2024 to 49% in Spring 2025⁷. This suggests that, although pro-EU sentiment remains high, public support for European integration is becoming more conditional and increasingly vulnerable to political manipulation and information influence.

Despite formal orientation, recent years have also witnessed a noticeable shift in government rhetoric toward the EU. The ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party and its senior leadership increasingly deploy language that portrays the EU not as a strategic partner, but as a source of instability, moral threat, or political coercion⁸.

¹ Publications Office of the European Union. (2021). *Association Agreement with Georgia* (Summary of: Association Agreement between the EU and Euratom and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part). EUR-Lex. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/association-agreement-with-georgia.html>

² Legislative Herald of Georgia. (2018). *Constitution of Georgia*. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=36&=>

³ Civil.ge. (2023). *BREAKING: Georgia granted EU candidate status*. Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/archives/574502>

⁴ Civil.ge. (2024). *GD Aborts EU accession*. Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/archives/638801>

⁵ European Commission. (2025). *Communication on EU enlargement policy – 2025 report (extract about Georgia)*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/2024-communication-eu-enlargement-policy-extract-about-georgia_en?

⁶ European Union Neighbours East. (2025). *Most Georgians support EU membership, according to latest opinion poll*. <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/opinion-polls/most-georgians-support-eu-membership-according-to-latest-opinion-poll/>

⁷ JAMnews. (2025). *Trust in EU among Georgians drops by 9% – Eurobarometer survey results*. JAMnews. <https://jam-news.net/trust-in-eu-among-georgians-drops/>

⁸ Civil.ge. (2025). *Kobakhidze accuses West of 'indirectly' backing 'overthrow and violence' after October 4 unrest*. Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/archives/705565>

This reframing coincides⁹ with targeted Russian anti-EU disinformation campaigns conducted by Kremlin-linked state and non-state actors, aimed at eroding trust in Western institutions and creating political ambiguity in neighbouring countries such as Georgia. In the Georgian context, these narratives do not always appear as explicit foreign propaganda. Instead, they are often domesticated and legitimised¹⁰ by local political elites, pro-government media and affiliated civil society actors, whose strategic or ideological interests converge with the Kremlin's preferred geopolitical framing.

The implications of this trend extend beyond Georgia. For the European Union, Georgia's rapid democratic backsliding and discursive shift could represent a strategic loss of credibility in its enlargement and neighbourhood policy¹¹. This weakens the EU's normative influence in the South Caucasus and creates space for rival authoritarian actors such as Russia, China and Iran¹². For Georgia, the costs include losing the window of opportunity for EU membership, democratic erosion, international isolation, stalled reforms, economic vulnerability and the risk of long-term geopolitical marginalisation¹³.

Given these escalating political and strategic costs, this paper examines the core Russian-origin anti-EU narratives evident in Georgian political discourse. It identifies the actors by whom these narratives are transmitted and analyses the mechanisms through which they are effectively circulated and normalised in the Georgian context. The analysis highlights the extent to which information influence has become a decisive factor in Georgia's gradual drift toward strategic ambiguity.

2. HOW ANTI-EU NARRATIVES SPREAD AND WHY GEORGIAN DREAM FINDS THEM EFFECTIVE

Information influence has emerged as a significant mechanism shaping Georgia's political discourse on European integration. Russian state officials and Kremlin-aligned media have been increasingly

⁹ International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. (2024). *Russian information operation in Georgia supporting the ruling party and discrediting the EU*. <https://www.isfed.ge/eng/sotsialuri-mediis-monitoringi/rusuli-sainformatsio-operatsia-saqartveloshi-mmartveli-partiis-sasargeblod-da-evr-okavshiris-tsinaaghmdeg?>

¹⁰ Wilkinson, I., & Dekanosidze, T. (2022). *Georgia must bolster resilience to information warfare*. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/03/georgia-must-bolster-resilience-information-warfare>

¹¹ Kardava, E. & Chelidze, G. (2024). *Features of EU Enlargement Policy: A Vision from Georgia*. TalTech Journal of European Studies, 14(1), 2024. 141-159. <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjes-2024-0007>

¹² Ergun, A., & Valiyev, A. (2024). *EU's actorness in the South Caucasus: Uneasy alliance of normative power with conflict resolution and peace-building*. Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi, 23(Özel Sayı), 175–198. <https://doi.org/10.32450/aacd.1439788>

¹³ Darchiashvili, D., & Bakradze, D. (2025). *The EU Eastern Partnership Initiative and Georgia: Context and Perceptions, Experiences, and Prospects*. Politeja. <https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.16.2019.62.07>

vocal in their anti-EU disinformation, which have found their way into the rhetoric of Georgian political elites, particularly with GD and its affiliated actors - satellite political groups, such as “United Neutral Georgia”¹⁴. These narratives are often adapted to Georgia’s domestic context but they share key similarities with Russian strategic communication¹⁵.

The transmission of these narratives into Georgian public discourse occurs through a multilayered media and political ecosystem. Anti-EU discourse is circulated within Georgia by a complex constellation of political actors, media outlets and digital platforms¹⁶. However, the most influential vector is the political communication of GD officials, whose statements shape the agenda of pro-government media outlets and large amounts of online networks¹⁷. While television remains a primary tool for disseminating anti-EU rhetoric to older and rural audiences, the social media outlets, particularly Facebook, is another platform for spreading misleading information¹⁸.

These communication channels reinforce one another and intensify shared messaging. Stations and accounts with close ties to the ruling party highlight messages of European instability, moral erosion, echoing the themes widespread in Russian state officials and media¹⁹. Coordinated networks of pages, partisan commentators, and online influencers deploy emotionally charged content that blends political messaging with moral panic. Algorithmic amplification further enables these narratives to reach highly targeted audiences, increasing their resonance and persistence in the public sphere²⁰.

Beyond political and media actors, the Georgian Orthodox Church plays a critical role in legitimising and normalising anti-EU narratives²¹. As one of the most trusted institutions in Georgian society, the Church’s messaging carries significant authority and social influence. High-ranking representatives of the Patriarchate have repeatedly expressed criticism of “foreign forces,” particularly the EU, which

¹⁴ 1TV (Georgian Public Broadcaster). (2025). *United Neutral Georgia* – In the process of forming a new world order; Georgia should have a national security strategy where national interests will be reflected. 1TV.

<https://1tv.ge/news/ertiani-neitraluri-saqartvelo-akhali-msoflio-wesrigis-formirebis-processshi-saqartvelos-unda-hqondes-erovnuli-usafitk-hoebis-strategia-sadac-dafiqsirebuli-igneba-erovnul/>

¹⁵ JAMnews. (2025). Georgia’s neutrality: how new pro-Russian political project is taking shape. JAMnews.

<https://jam-news.net/georgias-neutrality-how-new-pro-russian-political-project-is-taking-shape/>

¹⁶ Tsuladze, L., & Abzianidze, N. (2025). *Polarisation through deviation discourse: strategic usage of Europeanisation by political and media actors in Georgia*. *East European Politics*, 41(2), 294–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2025.2491139>

¹⁷ Sikharulidze, V. (2025). *Russian influence operations in Georgia: A threat to democracy and regional stability*. Foreign Policy Research Institute.

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/03/russian-influence-operations-in-georgia-a-threat-to-democracy-and-regional-stability/>

¹⁸ Tughushi, L. (2024). *Georgia*. In *Disinformation Resilience Index in Central and Eastern Europe in 2024* (pp. 99–114). East Center. https://east-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/DRI_2024_edition.pdf?

¹⁹ Glas, O. (2020). *Russia’s influence on Georgian media*. Myth Detector.

<https://mythdetector.ge/en/russia-s-influence-on-georgian-media/>

²⁰ Kakachia, K., & Kakabadze, S. (2024). *Beyond cyber and disinformation: Russian hybrid warfare tactics in Georgia*. In N. Nilsson & M. Weissmann (Eds.), *Russian warfare and influence: States in the intersection between East and West* (pp. 131–148). Bloomsbury Academic. DOI: 10.5040/9781350335257

²¹ TDI. (2025). *Freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity: July 2025* (Report).

https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/freedom_of_religion_or_belief_equality_and_secularity_july_2025.pdf?

they portray as a threat to Georgian traditions, identity, culture, and religion. When such messages are echoed and disseminated by political actors and affiliated media, they acquire heightened credibility and emotional resonance. This strengthens anti-EU messaging and its appeal beyond political audiences.

2.1 The European Union as a Threat to Georgian Values

The Kremlin often advocates that the EU promotes liberal norms, particularly liberal democracy and LGBTQ+ rights that according to them undermine traditional social structures. As illustrated in *figure 1*, some of the examples of this were statements shared by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov in 2024 and 2025. The statement from the latter also touched upon Georgia and GD's role in countering Western influence in the country. Russian leaders speak of the danger of losing identity and ancestral traditions due to Western influence. Sergey Lavrov references Georgia's Soviet past when he equates Russian traditions with Georgian ones." This messaging serves a dual purpose: it delegitimises European integration as a political goal and simultaneously frames resistance to Western norms as a defence of national identity.

In response, Georgian political figures and particularly GD officials have also adopted similar rhetoric, constructing a dichotomy between "European liberalism" and "Georgian traditional values". For example, *figure 1* illustrates the patron of GD, oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's statements that coincide with the Russian style anti-EU disinformation message and warns Georgian citizens of foreign forces (referring to the West) who would like to abolish Georgian Christian values. By mirroring Kremlin narratives, GD strategically leverages preexisting cultural and religious sentiments to strengthen its political legitimacy and consolidate support.

This narrative frames the value-based reforms advocated by the European Union as culturally unacceptable and morally harmful. Consequently, is also propagated and reinforced by the Georgian Orthodox Church²². Given that the majority of the Georgian population identifies as Orthodox Christian²³, anti-EU statements spread by the high-level clergy resonate well among certain segments of Georgian society and secures support for GD²⁴.

²² 1TV. (2025). *Patriarchate: EU's recent recommendations raise serious concerns among Georgian public and church*. 1TV. <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/patriarchate-eus-recent-recommendations-raise-serious-concerns-among-georgian-public-and-church/>

²³ Bladadze, S. (2022). *A monopoly over Georgian national identity: Unfair to Georgian Muslims?* GeoCase. <https://www.geocase.ge/en/publications/697/a-monopoly-over-georgian-national-identity-unfair-to-georgian-muslims>

²⁴ Kandelaki, S. (2021). *Political Radicalization in Georgia: The Role of the Orthodox Church*. Caucasus Analytical Digest, 123, 8-12. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000507160>

Figure 1

Russia	Georgia
<p><i>"If we do not rely on our traditional values, we simply will not exist. Russia will simply lose its identity. And that's extremely dangerous for the country's future".</i></p> <p>15 June 2025, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia²⁵</p> <p><i>"Imposing an LGBTQ+ agenda and liberal democratic values on countries like Georgia contradict the roots and traditions of our ancestors".</i></p> <p>6 September 2024, Sergey Lavrov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia²⁶</p>	<p><i>"This day does not belong to specific individuals or any single political party; the main architect of October 1 is the Georgian people, who remain faithful to the teachings of our ancestors, our traditions, and Christian values, and who have never bowed their heads to internal or external enemies"</i></p> <p>1 October, 2025, Bidzina Ivanishvili, Honorary Chairman, Patron of GD²⁷</p> <p><i>"LGBT propaganda is a super-modern weapon of conquest"</i></p> <p>21 October 2024, Bidzina Ivanishvili, Special Advisor, informal leader of GD²⁸</p>

2.2 The Crisis in the EU - "Uncontrolled Migration and Declining Europe"

Russian leaders and president Putin often talk about the "crisis of Europe" - meaning the internal fragmentation, economic stagnation and uncontrolled migration²⁹. The objective is to challenge the EU's credibility as a model for governance and integration. **Figure 2** illustrates how Putin attacked the EU in October 2025 in one of his interviews and said that Europe is declining and does not exist as it used to be in the past anymore referring to uncontrolled migration.

²⁵ Afonin, A. (2025). "Putin stated the danger of losing traditional values for Russia". <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2025/06/15/26037986.shtml?>

²⁶ TASS, (2024). "Lavrov said that the West's imposition of an LGBT agenda does not suit the Georgian people" <https://tass.ru/politika/21789471>

²⁷ InterPressNews (2025). "Bidzina Ivanishvili releases a statement on the 13th anniversary of "Georgian Dream" coming to power", InterPressNews. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/142736-bidzina-ivanishvili-releases-a-statement-on-the-13th-anniversary-of-georgian-dream-coming-to-power>

²⁸ JAMnews, (2024). "Ivanishvili on banning the opposition and LGBT rights", JAMnews. <https://jam-news.net/ivanishvili-on-banning-the-opposition-and-lgbt-rights-interview-inedi/>

²⁹ Rahn, W. (2019). Putin: Liberal idea has 'outlived its purpose'. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/vladimir-putin-interview-liberal-idea-has-outlived-its-purpose/a-49384176>

Just a few days later, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze repeated his narrative in Georgian media saying that there is a catastrophic migration crisis in the EU. He brought the example of Berlin and naming Mohammed to newborns, highlighting that the migration took away the traditional German names from German society and instead, got replaced by Mohammed, the foreign name. This rhetoric presents the EU to Georgian citizens as a place where migrants could bring danger to the country. By echoing Russian-style framing, Kobakhidze strategically taps into anxieties about cultural change and strengthens the perception of the EU as a socially destabilising force.

Figure 2

Russia	Georgia
<p><i>The Europe that we loved does not exist anymore...it is consumed from inside, by uncontrolled migration and things will not get any better"</i></p> <p>2 October 2025, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia³⁰</p>	<p><i>There are catastrophic tendencies in Europe, including migration, we see what happens...Last year, Mohammed was the most commonly used name for newborns in Berlin"</i></p> <p>15 October 2025, Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia</p>

Among other contributing factors, limited media literacy in Georgia may affect citizens' ability to differentiate factual reporting from manipulative content, such as Kobakhidze's statement on migration to the EU³¹. Particularly, large parts of the population living in the regions outside of capital Tbilisi are exposed to such content. This vulnerability is increased with information environments dominated by partisan media and limited access to diverse perspectives, which together increase the emotional impact and persuasive power of anti-EU messages³².

2.3 EU Conditionality Taking Away Sovereignty

Another recurrent anti-EU Kremlin talking point suggests that the EU accession and associated conditionality mechanism infringe upon national sovereignty. **Figure 3** illustrates Vladimir Putin's

³⁰ Realpolitika. (2025). *How Prime Minister Kobakhidze's rhetoric about the European Union resembles Vladimir Putin's statements and assessments regarding the state of the EU*. Realpolitika.
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1397189175027575>

³¹ Basilaia, E., & Danelia, N. (2022). *Mapping and needs assessment of media literacy practices in Georgia*. Council of Europe.
<https://rm.coe.int/-en/1680a5789e>

³² CRRC-Georgia & MDF (2025). *Survey on media consumption and disinformation in Georgia*.
https://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//CRRC-MDF_Report_ENG_28.07.2025.pdf

statement that the EU countries have lost the sense of sovereignty and independent decisions. Russian officials use this narrative to portray it as if the EU does not allow its member states to act independently and defend their national interests. This framing delegitimises the EU as a model for governance while simultaneously providing a template for domestic actors to question external recommendations as coercive or threatening.

About a year later, when Georgian ruling elites picked up and invoked similar claims portraying the EU recommendations on judicial reform, governance and media freedom as unacceptable interference in internal affairs. For instance, GD published an official statement in 2024 saying: *“We are not going to trade the sovereignty and security of our country – no blackmail can force us to take a step against our country!”* which was followed by a series of ongoing attacks on the EU from senior GD leaders³³. By echoing Kremlin-style sovereignty rhetoric, GD reframes EU conditionality as coercion, making compliance appear as submission to foreign authority and reducing domestic support for necessary reforms³⁴.

Figure 3

Russia	Georgia
<p><i>“Generally speaking, Europeans, in my opinion, have lost the gene for independence, sovereignty, and national interest. The more they get hit on the nose or the top of the head, the more they smile wider,”</i></p> <p>14 March 2023, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia³⁵</p>	<p><i>“Today, the opposition essentially proposes relinquishing sovereignty by suggesting that foreigners should appoint judges in Georgia...the state of Georgia does not matter to them; they want us to be a cog for others”</i></p> <p>26 February, 2024, Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament</p>

Historical experience and political memory create sensitivity to narratives about external control or threats to the Georgian nation and its sovereignty³⁶. Even when highly distorted, claims that foreign

³³ Georgia Today. (2024). *Georgian Dream: we are not going to trade the country’s sovereignty and security*. Georgia Today. <https://georgiatoday.ge/georgian-dream-we-are-not-going-to-trade-the-countrys-sovereignty-and-security/>

³⁴ Kakachia, K., Lebanidze, B., & Kakabadze, S. (2024). *Transactional hedging versus value-based hedging: how small frontline states balance between European integration and Russian influence*. *European Security*, 33(4), 594–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2024.2388638>

³⁵ RBC. (2023) *“Putin stated that Europeans lost the “gene of independence” and “sovereignty”*. RBC. <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/6410d33d9a7947b61a56cf8c?>

³⁶ Maisuradze, G. (2022). *Politics of memory in independent Georgia: Key trends in recent history*. Heinrich Böll Foundation Tbilisi Office – South Caucasus Region. https://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/maisuradze_eng.pdf?

partners seek to “govern Georgia from abroad” tap into long-standing anxieties. This is also related to the fact that a substantial portion of Georgian society’s trust in international institutions and non-governmental organisations is fragile³⁷. As a result, anti-EU narratives framed around sovereignty resonate strongly, not merely because of the content, but because they intersect with historical perceptions of external domination and societal vulnerability.

In addition, although the EU has actively sought to counter anti-EU messages in Georgia, its efforts have often been technical, reactive, and thus insufficient³⁸. In contrast, the ruling party and Kremlin-linked sources employ a sharp, emotive, and highly targeted messaging. The combination of emotionally charged narratives and repetitive exposure enables GD to shape public perception effectively and create a feedback loop in which a significant segment of society increasingly relies on party-aligned media for political interpretation³⁹.

2.4 EU Provoking to Open Second Front in Russia Neighbouring Countries

A widely circulated narrative in Georgia, originated by pro-Kremlin sources, portrays the EU as attempting to provoke Russia into initiating a conflict in Georgia, effectively opening a 'second front' within its military aggression against Ukraine⁴⁰.

Figure 4 illustrates when Sergey Lavrov accused the EU of its attempts to open a second front with Russia, referring to the war in Ukraine. He also used this opportunity to applaud GD leaders who, according to him, show a responsible approach not to engage with the EU’s schemes in the interests of Georgian people. In 2025, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze repeated the same narrative by suggesting that the Western actors pressured Georgia to open a “second front” during and after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. He asserts that the European Union leverages its entire bureaucratic apparatus, including the conditionality of visa-free travel, as a strategic instrument to pressure Georgia into initiating a so-called 'second front' against Russia⁴¹.

³⁷ Mataradze, T., & Kaplanishvili, A. (2023). *Youthful Perspectives: National Identity Trends in Georgia’s Gen Z*. Georgian Scientists, 5(4), 226–252. <https://doi.org/10.52340/gs.2023.05.04.21>

³⁸ De Agostini, L., & Ditrych, O. (2025). *Digital Echoes: Countering adversarial narratives in Georgia and Armenia*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/briefs/digital-echoes-countering-adversarial-narratives-georgia-and-armenia>

³⁹ Amoris, L. (2025). *They don’t want us in: misrecognition and Georgia’s contested departure from Europe*. East European Politics, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2025.2604504>

⁴⁰ European External Action Service. (2025). *Statement by the Spokesperson on disinformation*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/georgia-statement-spokesperson-disinformation_en?

⁴¹ Lebanidze, B., & Kakachia, K. (2023). *Bandwagoning by stealth? Explaining Georgia’s Appeasement Policy on Russia*. European Security, 32(4), 676–695. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2166404>

Figure 4

Russia	Georgia
<p><i>“The West has tried to drag the Georgian leadership into creating a so-called second front, but the current Georgian leaders “show a responsible approach,” which is based on the fundamental interests of their people, and “reject this kind of schemes”</i></p> <p>14 April 2023, Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia⁴²</p>	<p><i>“The desire to open a second front in Georgia is so strong that the Global War Party has pushed the entire European bureaucracy into attack mode against Georgia, and they see abolishing visa-free travel – the last trump card in their hands – as leverage”.</i></p> <p>18 July 2025, Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia⁴³</p>

Such accusations from GD trigger the political polarisation, which strengthens disinformation and creates an informational overload. In a fragmented media landscape, partisan actors weaponize messages to delegitimise opponents, creating an environment in which anti-EU rhetoric becomes a tool of mobilisation in favour of anti-EU perceptions⁴⁴.

All of those pro-Kremlin anti-EU disinformation are not random. They align with Russia’s strategic objective to discourage integration by delegitimising the EU’s normative appeal and portraying engagement with Western partners as risky or destabilising.

At the same time, the effectiveness of Russian-origin anti-EU disinformation within Georgia cannot be explained solely by their dissemination. Their resonance is amplified by structural characteristics of Georgian society, such as historical sensitivities to external interference, polarised political loyalties, and reliance on party-aligned media, which GD elites skillfully exploit to reinforce anti-EU disinformation.

⁴² TASS. (2023). “EU isolates itself by dividing world basing on attitude to Russia, China — Russian mission”. TASS. <https://tass.com/politics/1609417?>

⁴³ Civil.ge. (2025). “Kobakhidze says ‘Global War Party’ uses EU visa threat to open second front in Georgia”. Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/archives/693168>

⁴⁴ Anti-EU Propaganda in Georgia: Analysis of Mass Media Sources. (2025). *Georgian Journal for European Studies*, 7(7). <https://gies.tsu.ge/index.php/gies/article/view/63>

3. IMPACT OF THE ANTI-EU DISINFORMATION ON GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION

The cumulative impact of the anti-EU disinformation has led to a gradual erosion of Georgia's previously firm societal consensus on European integration. Nominal support for EU membership remains high, however, attitudes have become more conditional and susceptible to domestic and foreign manipulation⁴⁵. This shift reflects a growing fragmentation within Georgian society, where enthusiasm for EU values coexists with increasing skepticism fueled by targeted misinformation campaigns⁴⁶. This erosion creates political space for the GD to pursue a more ambiguous foreign policy, characterised by rhetorical commitment to European integration without practical alignment with EU priorities⁴⁷. For instance, despite the government's declared pro-European rhetoric, key steps required by the EU, such as comprehensive judicial reforms and adoption of democratic standards, have repeatedly been delayed or only partially implemented⁴⁸. Recent legislation, including the controversial "foreign agents" law, has drawn strong criticism from international watchdogs and EU institutions, underscoring a gap between official declarations and actual policies⁴⁹. This stance not only undermines the credibility of Georgia's European aspirations but has also been formally recognised by the EU, as reflected in official statements and European Council conclusions. In response, the EU has taken concrete measures, including suspending the enlargement process and noting that Georgia's status as a candidate country exists "only in name," highlighting the tangible consequences of domestic political developments on the EU integration process⁵⁰. Such ambiguity closely aligns with Moscow's strategic interests in Georgia and the broader South Caucasus region⁵¹. By obstructing a clear path towards integration, creating (self)isolation and uncertainty⁵², anti-EU narratives help maintain Georgia within a geopolitical "grey zone" where it neither aligns with

⁴⁵ Tsuladze, L., & Abzianidze, N. (2025). *Polarisation through deviation discourse: strategic usage of Europeanisation by political and media actors in Georgia*. East European Politics, 41(2), 294–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2025.2491139>

⁴⁶ Chkhikvadze, V. (2024). *Servabo Fidem – Dissecting the Georgian population's high support for the EU*. GEOPOLITICS. https://politicsgeo.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Servabo-Fidem_Chkhikvadze.pdf

⁴⁷ Kakachia, K., Lebanidze, B., Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze, R., & Samkharadze, N. (2024). Bridging the divide: Georgia's alignment with the EU's foreign policy (Policy Paper No. 42).

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch. (2025). "Georgia: Drop repressive 'foreign agents' bill". Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/26/georgia-drop-repressive-foreign-agents-bill>

⁴⁹ Shyrokykh, K., & Winzen, T. (2025). "International actors and democracy protection: preventing the spread of illiberal legislation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia". Democratization, 32(7), 1774–1796. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2461463>

⁵⁰ Jozwiak, R. (2025). *EU calls Georgia candidate "in name only" after backsliding on reforms*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-georgia-candidate-backsliding-reforms-ukraine-moldova-serbia/33581352.html>

⁵¹ Nagy, S. (2025). "Narrating Geopolitics: Strategic Narratives of Georgia's EU Candidacy". Geopolitics, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2560476>

⁵² Kakachia, K., & Bechná, Z. (2025). The costs of Georgia's self-isolation (PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 935). PONARS Eurasia. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-costs-of-georgias-self-isolation/>

Western partners nor openly takes the pro-Russian foreign policy orientation⁵³. This grey zone effectively serves as a buffer area that allows Russia to exert influence by exploiting Georgia's internal divisions and limiting Western engagement. This strategic shift weakens the EU's leverage, diminishes conditionality and could enable GD to fully consolidate authoritarianism⁵⁴. As a result, the prospects for further democratisation of Georgia and the EU's ability to promote stability and security in the region is significantly compromised⁵⁵.

4. CONCLUSION

Russian-origin anti-EU disinformation and domestic narratives propagated by Georgian Dream have significantly reshaped Georgia's political landscape. These messages are not merely rhetorical, but they also shape public opinion, influence political behaviours and substitute Georgia's foreign policy environment. Through their adoption, GD manages to gain legitimacy in its voters by managing to embed it in mainstream political debate.

Societal support for the EU integration remains positive in Georgia, however, it has also become conditional, vulnerable to manipulation and fragmented. GD's strategic adoption of Kremlin-style rhetoric, backed by party-aligned media and the Orthodox Church delegitimises EU conditionality, reframes European norms as threats to Georgian sovereignty and values, and intensifies political polarisation.

This environment enables the government to maintain pro-EU rhetoric but delay and obstruct concrete reforms, creating a grey zone, which aligns with Moscow's geopolitical objectives. As a result, Georgia risks a form of self-isolation, distancing itself from international partners due to its inconsistent policy implementation. The cumulative effect undermines the EU's leverage, diminishes the effectiveness of its conditionality, and facilitates the gradual consolidation of authoritarianism in Georgia. Unless addressed through comprehensive, proactive measures to counter disinformation, strengthen democratic institutions, and rebuild public trust, Georgia's democratic trajectory and European aspirations face long-term erosion.

⁵³ Fraser, C., & Seskuria, N. (2024). *Georgia at a crossroads: Can the West still compete?* Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/georgia-crossroads-can-west-still-compete?>

⁵⁴ Panchulidze, E., & Youngs, R. (2025). "The Source of Georgia's Democratic Resilience". *Journal of Democracy* 36(1), 123-134. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2025.a947888>.

⁵⁵ BM.GE. (2025). *EU warns Georgia candidate status at risk amid democratic backsliding*. <https://bm.ge/en/news/eu-warns-georgia-candidate-status-at-risk-amid-democratic-backsliding?>

ABOUT REUNIR

REUNIR, a Horizon-funded project with 12 partners from across Europe, examines how the EU can strengthen its foreign and security toolboxes to bolster the resilience and transformation of (potential) candidate countries in a new age of international relations. REUNIR's foresight approach takes the fundamental uncertainty and openness of alternative futures seriously. Adding the effects of 'protean power' unleashed in unforeseen circumstances to a multi-disciplinary approach to the research of the EU's 'control power' in relations with strategic rivals, REUNIR empirically assesses foreign threats to the military, socio-economic and democratic resilience of nine neighbouring countries, determines capability shortfalls, maps local perceptions of the EU's support and political perspectives inside the EU on neighbourhood relations. Outlining scenarios up to 2035, REUNIR offers evidence-based policy recommendations to mitigate malign foreign interference and contribute to strengthening the EU's external action.

