

The Concept of Higher Education Reform: (Counter)Reform in Education?

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On October 16, 2025, Irakli Kobakhidze presented a concept² for higher education reform that identifies the main challenges in the higher education sector and proposes ways to address them. The challenges include: “1. Excessive geographic concentration of higher education; 2. Irrational use of resources and uneven quality of teaching in the universities; 3. Lack of a coherent Human Resources strategy; 4. Weak link between teaching and research, including a lack of education programs and textbooks of modern standards; 5. Significant mismatch between higher education priorities and labor market needs and 6. Inefficient funding system.”

This paper analyzes the solutions to each challenge, developed by the government commission, along with their intended goals and outcomes. It also assesses the compatibility of this concept with the Bologna Process operating within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as well as with Georgian legislation and the country's stated goal of joining the Euro-Atlantic community.

Challenge 1: Excessive Geographic Concentration

The concept identifies the excessive concentration of universities in Tbilisi as one of the main problems. According to Irakli Kobakhidze,³ addressing this issue requires establishing two educational centers in the country - one in Tbilisi and one in Kutaisi. In addition, the concept proposes reestablishing regional universities with a relatively narrow focus, primarily combining pedagogical and agricultural programs.

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² The Governmental Commission on Higher Education Reform. 16 October 2025. National Concept for Reforming the Higher Education System. Accessible at:

<https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=14303&lang=eng&csrt=4860272164106828581>

³ TV Imedi. 16 October 2025. Presentation of higher education reform. Accessible at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5nEHZ2sBFs>

The high rate of urbanization in the capital is driven by many social factors. One example is that the country has a single natural economic center, Tbilisi, which, according to 2023 data, accounts for more than 52% of the country's gross domestic product.⁴ The Autonomous Republic of Adjara ranks second in regional GDP distribution, with a 9.8% share, about five times less than Tbilisi's. This imbalance is largely due to weak local self-government and limited fiscal decentralization.⁵ Migration from the regions to Tbilisi occurs for various economic and social reasons. The high rate of urbanization cannot be addressed in isolation through education reform, particularly by artificially relocating students and academic staff from one city to another. Even if we assume that the artificial establishment of universities could stimulate socio-economic activity in the regions, as the concept suggests, this cannot be the primary goal of higher education reform. Such objectives fall within the scope of local governance or fiscal policy. Moreover, the proposed solution is inconsistent with the stated goal of decentralization and deconcentration, as the measures themselves contradict this aim. True decentralization requires strengthening local self-government and genuinely delegating authority from the center, something that cannot be achieved by centrally deciding which academic programs state universities should offer and where.

If the real goal of the reform is to decentralize and deconcentrate education, thereby increasing access and alleviating urbanization, this can only be achieved through genuine political and fiscal decentralization. Competition among cities or regions, which naturally arises under decentralization, would create the need to establish various centers, including educational ones.⁶ A good example is the city of Boston in the state of Massachusetts in the United States, which over time became a university city due to both economic and political incentives. Today, universities in Boston play a major role in the state's economy. According to a 2023 report by the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts (AICUM), which represents 59 universities and colleges in the state, the combined economic impact of these institutions is approximately USD 71.1 billion annually. The number of people employed by universities and colleges exceeds 320,000.⁷

⁴ National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2023. Georgia's Regions Gross Domestic Product by Types of Economic Activities. Accessible at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/23/mtliani-shida-produkti-mshp>

⁵ Khorguashvili, Zviad. 2024. Georgia and Economic Decentralization. Accessible at: <https://gnomonwise.org/ge/publications/opinions/213>

⁶ Hayek, F. A. September, 1939. *The Economic Conditions of Intestate Federalism*. New Commonwealth Quarterly, V, No. 2, 131–49. Available at: <https://fee.org/ebooks/the-economic-conditions-of-interstate-federalism/>

⁷ Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts (AICUM). March, 2023. *Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts Economic Impact Report*. Available at: <https://aicum.org/economic-impact/>

To summarize, this issue cannot be considered a challenge for the higher education system, because, according to the note in the concept, it is clearly aimed at decongesting the capital rather than addressing any specific problem identified within the education reform.⁸

In addition, the concept does not state that the reform will increase access to education or improve the quality of education in individual regions. Even if we assume that such a goal is implied, it remains unclear how access would increase and how regional education would develop under the following conditions:

- a) universities would still be located in only two cities, Tbilisi and Kutaisi;
- b) the state would determine the profiles of regional universities, meaning that a student wishing to study in another field or region would still need to move for education (unless the state intends to assign professions based on regional origin and thereby restrict individual freedom of choice as well).

Challenge 2: Irrational Use of Resources and Inequality of Quality Between the Universities – “One City – One Faculty” 3+1 Model

According to the concept, the duplication of faculties in state universities is identified as one of the challenges. Duplication refers to a situation where, under conditions of natural competition, both Ilia State University and Tbilisi State University, for example, can offer a law program. The commission proposes to address this “challenge” through the principle of “one city, one faculty,” according to which a specific field should be developed at only one state university.

The concept states that academic fields will be “distributed” among state universities according to their historical areas of specialization. However, it does not specify from which point in history the ruling party, Georgian Dream, intends to determine these traditions. For instance, almost all social and humanities disciplines were originally developed at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU). It remains unclear whether, as a result of this concept, Ilia State University or Sokhumi State University would lose their accredited programs and merge with TSU. Conversely, during the Soviet period, nearly all technical disciplines were formed and developed at the State Technical University. This raises the question of

⁸ „More than 85 percent of students in Georgia pursue higher education in the capital. This leads to overcrowding in Tbilisi and active migration of young people from the regions to the city, which should be regarded as a serious challenge to the socio-economic development of the regions.” An excerpt from the National Concept for Reforming the Higher Education System. Accessible at:

<https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=14303&lang=eng&csrt=4860272164106828581>

whether, for example, the computer engineering program at Ilia State University, which is accredited⁹ by the American Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET),¹⁰ would be canceled and transferred to the Technical University.

Another change proposed by the reform concept is the reduction of the duration of a bachelor's degree to three years and a master's degree to one year, with the exception of certain specializations. The justification claims that the current duration of studies is not aligned with the goals of higher education, but it does not specify which particular goal the existing system fails to meet. In the current system, the Ministry of Education does not directly set the duration of studies, although it follows the Bologna Process credit framework.¹¹

When Georgia joined¹² the Bologna Process¹³ in 2005, a series of reforms were implemented to align the Georgian education system with the European model. These included the introduction of a three-cycle system (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees), the ECTS credit system to ensure recognition of academic credits between universities, an independent quality assurance system, university autonomy, and the free mobility of students and academic staff within the European Higher Education Area.

Following these reforms, university autonomy became a constitutionally guaranteed right.¹⁴ A law on higher education was also adopted, defining autonomy as “the freedom of a higher education institution and its main units to independently determine and implement their academic, financial, and administrative policies.”¹⁵ Accordingly, limiting the duration of bachelor's and master's degrees falls

⁹ ABET accreditation is an internationally recognized system that evaluates educational programs in engineering, computer science, information technology, applied sciences, and technology. Graduates of ABET-accredited programs hold degrees that are recognized worldwide and are considered as competitive in any country as degrees from leading universities in the United States, Europe, or Asia.

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. 2023. The bachelor's programs of Georgian state universities have been accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). Accessible at: <https://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=13580&lang=geo>

¹¹ Ministry of Education, Science and Youth. Higher Education System. Accessible at: <https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=131&lang=geo&csrt=1328728911171910634>

¹² European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process. *Georgia*. Accessible at: <https://ehea.info/page-georgia>.

¹³ The Bologna Process is a series of agreements among European countries designed to ensure compatibility of standards and quality in higher education. It established the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which includes 49 countries and operates in conjunction with the Lisbon Recognition Convention to facilitate the recognition of qualifications across borders.

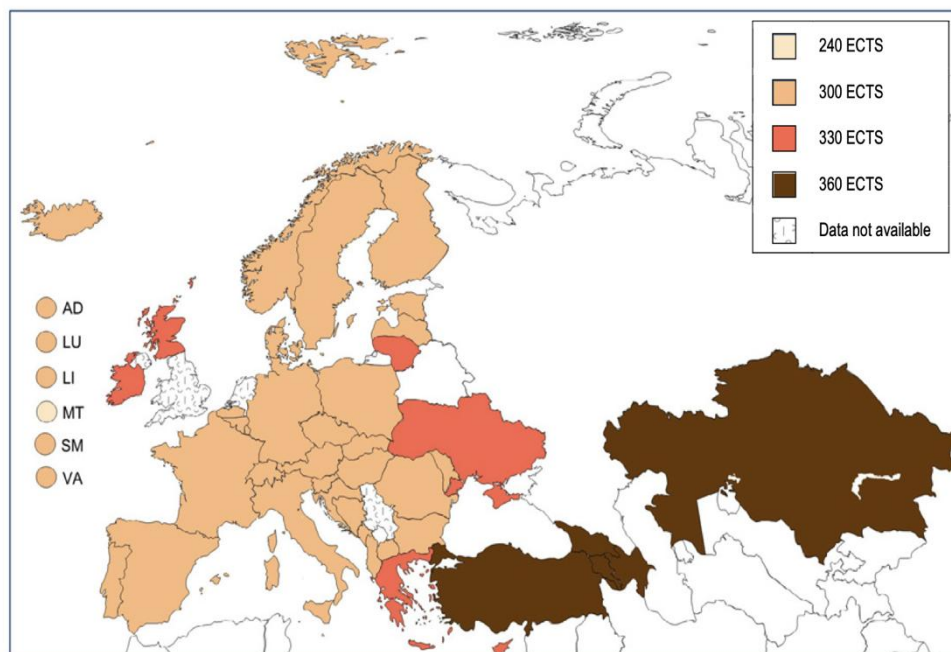
¹⁴ The Constitution of Georgia. Article 27, 3. N786. Herald of the Parliament of Georgia, 31-33, 24/08/1995. Accessible at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>

¹⁵ Law of Georgia on Higher Education, article 2, b). N688, Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2, 10/10/2005 Accessible at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32830?publication=117>

outside the scope of government authority. Academic freedom and university autonomy require that universities themselves determine both the content and structure of their programs.

The Bologna Process established a flexible framework in which a bachelor's degree can last three to four years (180 to 240 ECTS credits) and a master's degree one to two years (60 to 120 ECTS credits).¹⁶ In most European countries, the dominant model is a three-year bachelor's degree followed by a two-year master's degree, the 3+2 model, totaling 300 ECTS credits.

Figure 2.3: Most common total workload of first- and second-cycle programmes, 2022/2023



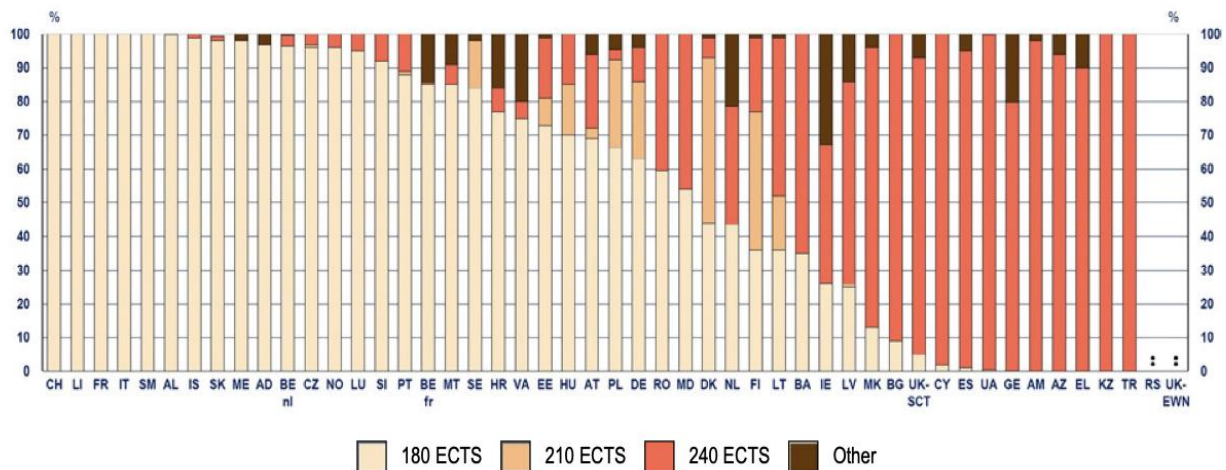
Source: *Bologna Process Implementation Report*, 2024. 55.

According to the 2024 Implementation Report of the European Higher Education Area,¹⁷ a two-year master's degree with 120 ECTS credits is part of the education system in all EHEA member countries and is considered the standard. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom and Spain, a four-year bachelor's degree followed by a one-year master's degree (the 4+1 model) is common, although the total number of ECTS credits still reaches 300.

¹⁶ European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process. *Qualification Frameworks*. Accessible at: <https://ehea.info/page-qualification-frameworks>

¹⁷ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2024. The European Higher Education Area in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessible at: <https://ehea.info/Immagini/the-european-higher-education-area-in-2024-EC0224018ENN.pdf>

Figure 2.1: Share of first-cycle programmes with a workload of 180, 210, 240 or another number of ECTS credits, 2022/2023



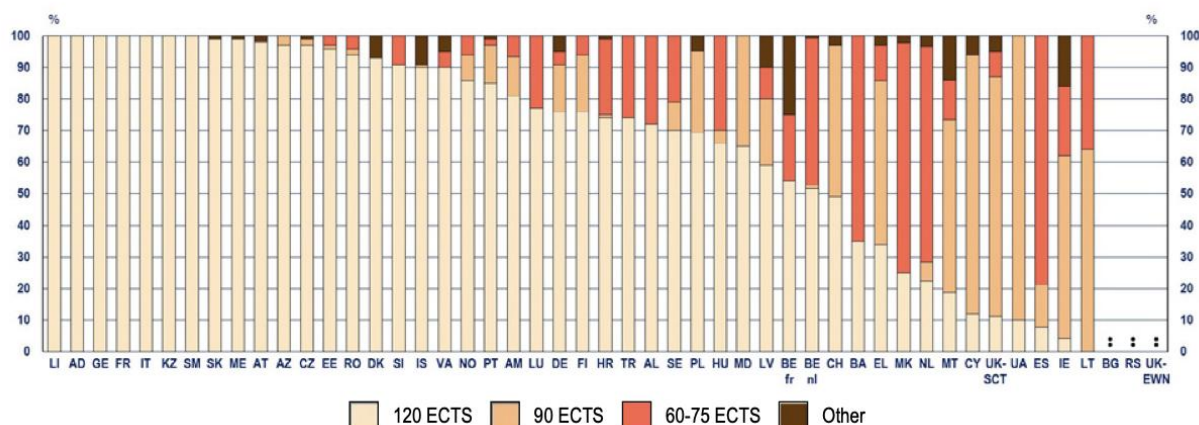
Source: [Bologna Process Implementation Report](#), 2024. 53.

The central principle of the Bologna Process is automatic mutual recognition, but this works only when systems align with Bologna standards, the number of credits corresponds to European norms, and the academic degrees and structures are compatible. Implementation reports of the Bologna Process also note¹⁸ that the incomplete adoption of the three-year bachelor's degree structure remains one of the main challenges in several countries. The 4+2 model (240+120 ECTS = 360 ECTS) currently in use in Georgia was introduced specifically to simplify the automatic recognition of degrees.

One-year master's degrees in Europe exist mainly as exceptions and not as a rule due to the specific requirements of certain fields (see figure 2). Moreover, in the case of Georgia, combining a three-year bachelor's degree with a one-year master's degree, totaling 240 ECTS credits, is likely to create problems with degree recognition at most European universities. In practice, this would represent a step back of 20 years: each degree would need to be evaluated individually, European universities would require detailed documentation, and in the best-case scenario, students might have to complete additional ECTS credits or bridge programs to cover academic gaps. In the worst-case scenario, students' degrees might not be recognized at all.

¹⁸ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020. *The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessible at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c90aaf32-4fce-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Figure 2.2: Share of second-cycle programmes with a workload of 60-75, 90, 120 or another number of ECTS credits, 2022/2023



Source: [Bologna Process Implementation Report](#), 2024. 54

In addition, the transition to a one-year master's degree limits the potential for high-quality doctoral studies and scientific research. The 3+1 model will make it more difficult to train personnel who can produce competitive scientific work at the doctoral level. In Georgia, one-year master's programs are currently accredited only for exceptional specializations, which include at least 60 ECTS credits. However, these programs do not allow students to progress to the next level of education, a doctoral degree.¹⁹ Similarly, most European universities require a two-year master's degree, a master's thesis, and/or research experience in the field for admission to doctoral programs.

It is also noteworthy that, according to Irakli Kobakhidze, the Ministry of Education plans to eliminate the 12th grade and switch to an 11-year school system. Numerous international studies indicate that Georgian public schools face significant challenges in providing students with basic knowledge and skills.²⁰ In most universities, the first year is currently devoted entirely to general education and skills development that should be the responsibility of schools. Combining the abolition of the 12th grade with the proposed higher education reform will further exacerbate the problem. Universities will have limited time to provide students with high-quality specialized knowledge. Transitioning to a three-year bachelor's model would

¹⁹ Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. Higher Education System. Accessible at: <https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=131&lang=geo&csrt=132872891171910634>

²⁰ Nikoleishvili, Tinatin. 14 March 2025. Increasing State Funding and Persistent Challenges in General Education in Georgia. Research Institute *Gnomon Wise*. Accessible at: <https://gnomonwise.org/ge/publications/analytics/251>

be more reasonable once the quality of school education has significantly improved and students enter university better prepared.

Within the framework of Challenge 2, the concept also proposes a revision of the quality assurance system. The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement serves as a balancing mechanism for universities, granting both authorization and accreditation of programs to higher education institutions. The concept claims that intervention in the quality management system is necessary for the state to assume responsibility for ensuring the uniform quality of diplomas across all state universities.

Since 2005, Georgia has had the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, a legal entity of public law under the Ministry of Education, responsible for monitoring the quality of higher education institutions and their programs. Therefore, the argument for state intervention in the quality management system - that the state should ensure uniform diploma quality - is not valid, as this responsibility already exists. If it is not written in the text, but the concept implies a change in the current quality standards, it is important to note that Georgia currently follows European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance. These standards align with international practices and are a prerequisite for participation in the Bologna Process. Fundamental changes in this area could further undermine compatibility with the Bologna Process.

Ultimately, the concept proposes a system in which a student completes eleven years of school education, followed by a three-year bachelor's degree and a one-year master's degree, totaling 15 years—three years less than the typical 17–18 years of secondary and higher education in Europe. The concept also envisions a revision of the quality assurance system. Implementing the reform in this way would significantly reduce student competitiveness, create additional barriers to the recognition of qualifications, and diminish the overall quality of education.

Challenge 3: Lack of a coherent Human Resources strategy

According to the concept, another major challenge is the personnel policy of universities, which, according to the commission, currently lacks structure and logic. The government commission proposes that most academic staff should consist of full-time professors who would lead teaching and research in specific

fields, supported by several associate professors and more than ten assistant professors directly subordinate to them. The concept also envisions a several-fold increase in professors' salaries.

However, the systemic planning of personnel policy by a government commission contradicts the principle of university autonomy and constitutes interference in administrative management. At the same time, it is true that remuneration in the education sector is very low. As of the second quarter of 2025, the average salary in the country was 2,212 GEL, while the average salary in the education sector was nearly half that amount, at 1,367 GEL. The only sector with lower salaries than education is "other services," which includes all activities not covered by the main sectors listed above.²¹

Low salaries are one of the main reasons why full-time work and research at a single university are not sufficient for academic staff. The concept does not specify how or from what sources salaries will be increased several times. It also remains unclear how these funds will be allocated from the budget or according to which criteria the new salary levels will be determined.

Furthermore, the personnel policy model for universities proposed by the government commission essentially reflects the principles that political scientists Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky describe in their study of informal institutions under the centralized career ladder model.²² According to their explanation, informal institutions are created and operate outside formal rules, yet they often determine the actual distribution of power and the real mechanisms of decision-making.

In the commission's view, most academic staff should be full-time professors who lead specific fields and supervise associate and assistant professors. Around fifteen people would fall under the decision-making authority of a single professor, creating a clear vertical hierarchy. Such a structure resembles the centralized career ladder model that Alexei Trochev²³ describes in his analysis of post-Soviet institutions: a system in which promotion, salary, and professional development depend on the goodwill of superiors, reinforces loyalty mechanisms and fosters patron-client relationships.

²¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2025. Average Monthly Nominal Earnings for Employees by Economic Activity. Accessible at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/39/khelfasebi>

²² Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, 2004. *Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda*. Perspectives on politics 2.4: 725-740.

²³ Alexei Trochev, 2018. *Patronal politics, judicial networks and collective judicial autonomy in post-Soviet Ukraine*. International Political Science Review 39.5: 662-678.

To summarize, systemic planning of personnel policy contradicts the principle of university autonomy, as it constitutes administrative interference. The creation of a managerial position within the internal hierarchy of academic staff fosters a “sense of verticality,” which encourages the consolidation of informal institutions within formal structures. Therefore, the proposed model not only fails to reduce the risk of informal dependencies but may also further strengthen centralized control within the academic sphere.

Challenge 4: Weak Link Between Teaching and Research, Lack of Education Programs and Textbooks of Modern Standards

The concept identifies another challenge, stating that the existing separate system of funding scientific research is not properly connected to university education. Academic staff reportedly lack clear tasks in developing educational programs, conducting research, and preparing university textbooks. As a result, most universities do not have high-quality educational programs or textbooks.

According to the concept, a new research funding system should be introduced, and new textbooks should be created for all core and elective subjects, with full-time academic staff playing the main role in their preparation.

However, the development of specific educational programs, research activities, and teaching directions falls within the scope of university academic freedom and should not be subject to government intervention. Moreover, the concept does not clearly explain how the proposed measures address the identified issue - for example, how the new research funding system will resolve problems related to the development of educational programs. Additionally, although a detailed study of this matter may be beyond the scope of the concept document, it is worth questioning whether there is any international practice in which research and innovation are promoted through the creation of standardized textbooks.

The creation of standardized textbooks, despite its formal purpose, conceptually contradicts the idea that a university is a space where knowledge is created and transmitted simultaneously.²⁴ The content of teaching across disciplines cannot be static: in the social sciences and humanities, for example, knowledge is contextual and shaped by theoretical perspectives and interpretive diversity. In technical fields, this

²⁴ Barnett, Ronald. 2000. *Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity*. Buckingham: Open University Press. 37-39.

issue becomes even more apparent for practical reasons - the process of writing or translating textbooks simply cannot keep pace with the rapid development of these disciplines. Furthermore, such an approach confines education within specific geographical and temporal boundaries, since knowledge creation is a continuous process, international literature and findings are constantly evolving, and any individual's access to it in a limited time is finite.

Challenge 5: Significant mismatch between higher education priorities and labor market needs

The concept identifies one of the challenges as the failure of the higher education system and universities to meet the demands of the labor market. According to Irakli Kobakhidze, this explains the country's unemployment rate.²⁵ The concept states that state universities should work to fully satisfy the state's requests. In particular, to address this issue, labor market research will be conducted by the Ministries of Education and Economy, with the involvement of the private sector, and universities will be given limits on student admissions. However, the concept does not specify the scope of the market research or whether representatives of state universities will be involved in the process in any way.

If the goal of the reform is to align education with labor market demands, the current quality standards already require market research. When a university applies for accreditation of a specific program, one of its obligations is to conduct such research to study labor market. This research creates an understanding of the market situation. Therefore, this information already exists. Transitioning to a centralized research model and, based on that, setting admission quotas for universities significantly curtails institutional autonomy and resembles the Soviet-style education model, in which the state was capable to determine all kinds of economic, social, and political needs.

The similarity with the Soviet model is also reflected in the rejection of the principle of interdisciplinarity. The academy combines both the creation and transfer of knowledge. A genuine academy cannot exist where knowledge is only transmitted and not created. For this reason, universities have, from the very beginning, naturally adopted a holistic approach, which later became the foundation of the principle of interdisciplinarity. The world's leading universities, which excel both in academic activity and in the quality of teaching, are distinguished by their wide range of educational programs that bring together different

²⁵ TV Imedi. 17 October 2025. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze on air on "Imedi LIVE". Accessible at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHjV6ERoRF8&t=2794s>

fields. This integration fosters interdisciplinary research and innovative education. It involves the convergence of disciplines that, in theory, might seem to have few points of connection. The results of such collaboration are not only symbiotic outcomes but also the creation of new knowledge and the emergence of entirely new fields of study.

Challenge 6: Inefficient Funding System

According to the concept, the existing grant system should be revised and completely replaced with direct funding oriented toward state needs. The concept does not provide details about the direct funding scheme, whether university tuition fees would increase, whether there would be no grant or voucher system²⁶, or how the university enrollment process would change. The current voucher system, despite its shortcomings (mainly its symbolic value and homogeneity) ensured a minimum standard of competition. On one hand, it increased the motivation of entrants to achieve the best possible score in national exams and secure state funding. On the other hand, it motivated universities to continually improve quality in order to attract as many students as possible. This was also one of the key variables in determining the reputation of universities.

According to data from the 2024-25 academic year, a total of 187,800 students are enrolled in higher education institutions, with 42 percent studying at private universities.²⁷ The number of students at private universities has been increasing year by year. This growth is due to the existing voucher system, which follows students to private universities and ensures both accessibility and student choice. Under the new concept, where funding would no longer be tied to students and would be fully determined by the state's objectives, the center of attraction for universities would shift. After the change, the Ministry of Education would hold the main - financial leverage, since universities would depend not on students but on funding from the ministry.

With the change in the funding model, the nature of the relationship also changes. In the new model, the student's interest is no longer evident. Theoretically, a student may face limited decision-making options because only one state university in a given city will offer a specific program, and private universities will

²⁶ The voucher funding system is a state funding model in which a student with high scores on national exams receives funding that "follows" them to the university of their choice. This system was introduced in Georgia in 2005.

²⁷ TBC Capital, 17 July 2025, General and Higher Education Sector Overview. Accessible at: <https://www.tbccapital.ge/ge/publications/all-publications/singleview/30006988-general-and-higher-education-sector-overview>

no longer receive grant funding. Due to limited places at a state university, the student may have to either a) transfer to another city or b) choose a different program against their will. As a result, the existing relationship between the state, the student, and the university - a triangle - shifts to a two-actor relationship between the state and the university, with the student no longer an active participant.

Restricting the admission of foreign students will also increase the financial dependence of state universities on the government. A significant portion of these universities' independent income comes from the enrollment of foreign students. According to the concept, state universities should accept foreign students only in exceptional cases provided for by law. This approach is problematic both financially and academically. Foreign students effectively help fund the education of Georgian students, as the revenue they provide helps prevent the cost of state universities from rising at a time when prices in other sectors are increasing rapidly.

Restricting the admission of foreign students will make education more expensive for Georgian students, as universities will no longer be able to offset the low tuition fee of 2,250 GEL for Georgian students with the higher income generated from foreign students. As a result, there are theoretically two possible outcomes: a significant increase in tuition fees or a decline in the quality of education. This approach also contradicts European principles of global mobility and internationalization, compliance with which is a requirement for membership in the Bologna Process.

How the EU Integration is Linked with Higher Education Reform?

On November 28, 2024, Irakli Kobakhidze announced that the Georgian Dream party would remove the issue of opening negotiations with the European Union from its agenda until 2028. He added that by the end of 2028, Georgia would be ready to return to the negotiating table and, by 2030, join the European Union. According to Kobakhidze, the ruling party should continue fulfilling its obligations under the agenda set by the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement, aiming to complete more than 90 percent of these obligations by 2028.²⁸

²⁸ Civil.ge. 28 November 2024. *Georgia Aborts EU Accession*. Accessible at: <https://civil.ge/archives/638801>

The Association Agreement,²⁹ signed between Georgia and the European Union in 2014, serves as a roadmap for the country's European integration. To move closer to Europe and eventually join the European Union, Georgia must fulfill its obligations under the agreement. A similar process occurred with visa liberalization in 2012, when Georgia began negotiations for a visa-free regime with the European Union. The European Commission provided Georgia with a specific action plan, and after its implementation, Georgian citizens gained access to visa-free travel and related benefits.³⁰

Similarly, after joining the Bologna Process, Georgian students and academic staff gained the opportunity to study at European universities. For example, under the Erasmus+ project "International Credit Mobility," Georgia has been one of the most successful countries, ranking in the top ten among the 141 participating countries for several years. According to 2020 data, more than 6,500 Georgian students and academic staff participated in exchange programs at European universities through this project. The National Statistics Office of Georgia reports that from 2016 to 2025, over 6,400 students went abroad to study.³¹

Based on the discussion above, the concept may not violate the technical requirements of the Bologna Process, such as the credit system or the 11-year general education, but it interferes with university autonomy and academic freedom, restricts the right to internationalization of education, and contradicts the spirit of the Bologna Process. In 2022, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian and Belarusian educational institutions were suspended from the European Higher Education Area.³² One of the main reasons was a gross violation of values, including the principles of academic freedom, university autonomy, and the free flow of knowledge. Moreover, the participation of Russia in the Bologna Process

²⁹ European Union and Georgia. 2014. Association Agreement between the European Union and European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part. English version: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(02)) Translation accessible at: <https://mfa.gov.ge/european-union/377295-asotsirebis-shesakheb-shetankhmeba>

³⁰ Khutsiberidze, Lika. 12 September 2025. Visa Liberalization Under Threat: The Responsibility of the Georgian Dream and the EU's Legal Mechanisms. Research Institute *Gnomon Wise*. Accessible at: <https://gnomonwise.org/en/publications/analytics/285>

³¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2024-2025. Georgian Citizens Studying Abroad and Foreign Students by Sex. Accessible at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/61/umaghlesi-ganatleba>

³² Bologna Follow-up Group. 2022. Statement by Members and Consultative Members of the Bologna Follow-up Group on Consequences of the Russian Federation Invasion of Ukraine. European Higher Education Area. Accessible at: <https://ehea.info/Upload/STATEMENT%20BY%20MEMBERS%20AND%20CONSULTATIVE%20MEMBERS%20OF%20THE%20BOLOGNA%20FOLLOW%20UP%20GROUP%20ON%20CONSEQUENCES%20OF%20THE%20RUSSIAN%20INVASION%20OF%20UKRAINE.pdf>

had already been questioned due to deteriorating relations with Western countries and massive restrictions on academic freedoms.

As for the Association Agreement, according to Articles 358-360, Georgia undertakes to align its education system with that of the European Union, to promote improvements in the quality of higher education in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process, to encourage and strengthen international academic cooperation and student mobility, and to simplify the recognition of qualifications.

The education concept, instead of bringing Georgia closer to the European Higher Education Area, moves the country further away. It contradicts the Bologna Process and, rather than promoting improvements in the quality of higher education, interferes with the autonomy and academic freedom of universities. Instead of strengthening international mobility, it creates artificial levers that will make it more difficult for students and academic staff to obtain recognition of qualifications in European universities.

Accordingly, a fair question arises: if negotiations with the European Union have been temporarily suspended and the Georgian Dream plans to reopen them in 2028 while continuing to fulfill its obligations under the Association Agreement, why is the higher education reform concept designed in a way that distances Georgia from the European space, despite the Constitution of Georgia³³ and the expressed will of the overwhelming majority of the population for full integration into Europe?

Summary

The higher education reform concept,³⁴ developed by the governmental commission without the involvement of representatives of state universities or education experts, raises a number of questions regarding its true purpose. The concept does not justify the need to implement changes in this manner and, in many cases, instead of improving the quality of higher education institutions, creates additional problems.

³³ The Constitution of Georgia. Article 78, 3. N786, Herald of the Parliament of Georgia, 31-33, 24/08/1995. Accessible at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>

³⁴ Publika. 20 October 2025. The Movement "Georgian Education Under Threat": "Decisions about universities are not made without universities". Accessible at: <https://publika.ge/modzraoba-gartuli-ganatileba-saftrkhesia-universitetebis-gareshe-universitetebe-gadawyvetileba-ar-miigheba/>

If the higher education reform concept is first turned into a draft law and then enacted, Georgia's higher education system will regress decades to a centralized Soviet-era model. The state would control both the form and substance of education, students would be reduced to passive recipients, and academic freedom would be systematically dismantled. If fully implemented, the concept will isolate the Georgian education system from the European academic space and limit students' ability to obtain internationally recognized, high-quality education.

The reform concept contradicts both Article 27 of the Constitution of Georgia, which guarantees the autonomy of universities, as well as the obligations assumed under the Association Agreement and the principles of the Bologna Process which ensure that universities have the right to determine their own academic profile, educational programs, personnel policy, and research directions.