

## **“Georgian Dream’s” Damaging Policy - A Threat to the De-occupation Strategy**

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### **Introduction**

The restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity is a core national interest, reflected in the Constitution and other strategic documents. For instance, the country's [National Security Concept](#) ranks ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity, with the de-occupation of occupied territories, as the foremost national interest. Similarly, in its [Foreign Policy Strategy](#), Georgia's primary goal is declared as the consolidation of sovereignty and the peaceful restoration of its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders.

Since 2008, Georgia has pursued a policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia as independent states. From 2010, this was complemented by the “State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation” and its corresponding Action Plan. In 2018, a new legislative and legal package, “A Step to a Better Future”, was added to the engagement strategy.

According to the [statute](#) of the Georgian Dream party, one of its stated objectives is to strengthen Georgia's independence and restore its territorial integrity. However, the party's implemented policies not only fail to support this goal but actively undermine it. Specifically, (1) discussions on the August War and the revision of its causes within the "Temporary Investigative Commission" should be seen as an attempt to rewrite history; (2) anti-Western policies and the suspension of Georgia's path toward EU integration; (3) alignment with Russian narratives and a pivot back toward Russia's orbit.

These actions damage Georgia's non-recognition and engagement policy, reduce the likelihood of a peaceful resolution, and ultimately obstruct the realization of the country's declared objective: the restoration of its territorial integrity. This article analyzes the threats that the rhetoric, political actions, and foreign policy shifts of Georgian Dream pose to the issue of territorial integrity. Given the sensitivity of the occupation issue, not all related initiatives and projects are public. Therefore, the conclusions

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presented are based on publicly available documents, state reports, official statements, and public opinion surveys.

### **Russia's Growing Influence in Georgia's Occupied Territories**

After recognizing the independence of Georgia's occupied territories in August 2008, Moscow systematically strengthened its influence, effectively [integrating](#) Abkhazia and Tskhinvali into Russia's legal, financial, and political spheres. On September 17, 2008, the de facto authorities of Abkhazia and Russia signed the "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance", which granted Russia the right to deploy military bases in Abkhazia. Beyond security, the treaty also deepened economic relations and financial assistance.<sup>2</sup>

On April 30, 2009, Russia and the separatist regime of Abkhazia signed an agreement on the joint protection of Abkhazia's border, assigning control to Russian armed forces until Abkhazia's own border agencies were established.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, on October 16, 2010, they signed an agreement on cooperation in the customs sphere. The "Treaty on Alliance and Integration", proposed by Russia to Abkhazia on October 13, 2014, significantly curtailed Abkhazia's so-called sovereignty by requiring legislative changes in foreign policy, defense, and security, and the creation of a joint economic and customs space.<sup>4</sup>

In November 2020, based on the 2014 project, Russia and occupied Abkhazia approved a program on the "Formation of a Common Socio-Economic Space". This action, which [envisages](#) the harmonization of Abkhaz legislation with that of Russia, can be regarded as the de facto annexation of Abkhazia.

A similar agreement was signed in 2015 between Russia and separatist South Ossetia: the "Treaty on Alliance and Integration" provided for the incorporation of certain units of the so-called South Ossetian armed forces into Russia's military and security structures. The agreement also [envisioned](#) the "integration" of the separatist region's customs services into Russia's customs service, the payment of separatist officials' salaries from the Russian budget, and the approximation of legislative frameworks.

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<sup>2</sup> Lasha Senashvili (20 November, 2014). Paata Zakareishvili does not adequately assess the scale and significance of the "Treaty on Alliance and Integration" between Russia and occupied Abkhazia. Fact-Check. Via Link: <https://factcheck.ge/ka/story/15310-paata-zakareishvili-rusethsa-da-okupirebul-aphkhazeths-1-shoris-mokavshireobisa-da-integratsiis-shesakheb-khelshekrulebis-masshtabs-da-mnishvnelobas-sathanadod-ver-aphasebs>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

One of the key policies of integration with Russia has been “passportization”, which [simplifies](#) the process for residents of occupied territories to obtain Russian citizenship. More recent examples of integration include the Russia-Abkhazia investment [agreement, treaty](#) on the recognition and enforcement of judicial and arbitral decisions in economic matters, the [transfer](#) of the “Bichvinta dacha” (resort estate) to Russia, and the planned reopening of the Sokhumi airport, which is [closed](#) under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). At the same time, Russia continues its “borderization” policy along the administrative boundary lines with Georgia, erecting fences and barbed wire. This shifts the de facto boundary deeper into Georgia-controlled territory, consolidates Russia’s positions, and restricts international monitoring missions, such as EUMM, from entering the occupied territories.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that such an increase in Moscow’s influence threatens Georgia’s non-recognition and [engagement](#) policies. The current policy of Georgian Dream not only fails to neutralize these threats but, on the contrary, exacerbates them. In practice, Russia has already carried out the de facto annexation of Georgia’s regions and integrated them into its own sphere.

### **The Non-Recognition Policy and “A Step to a Better Future”**

Since 2008, the non-recognition of the so-called independence of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region has been one of the declared priorities of Georgia’s foreign policy. The policy of non-recognition is based on deepening bilateral relations and partnerships with countries that recognize Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity as the principle of cooperation. The United States and the European Union are among the strongest supporters of this non-recognition policy. Currently, apart from Russia, only four states recognize the independence of the occupied territories: Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Nauru. It is noteworthy that Vanuatu (in 2013) and Tuvalu (in 2014) have since [revoked](#) their recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Additionally, the “International Domino Federation” remains the only international platform to recognize Abkhazia’s so-called independence; [no other](#) international organization or institution recognizes the so-called independence of Georgia’s occupied territories. In June 2025, the United Nations once again confirmed the right of internally displaced persons to return to their homes from Georgia’s occupied regions. This vote was significant because the number

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<sup>5</sup> EU Neighbours East (March 15, 2022). The European Union does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework of the so-called parliamentary elections held in Abkhazia. Via Link: [https://www.eumm.eu/en/about\\_eumm](https://www.eumm.eu/en/about_eumm)

of supporters of the resolution (which Georgia has been submitting to the UN since 2008) increased, while the number of opponents decreased, with Syria [abstaining](#) from voting.

Since 2010, Georgia has implemented the “State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation”. In 2018, a new legal and legislative [package](#) - A Step to a Better Future - was added to this engagement strategy.

The first part of the package is a trade-promoting initiative. The strategy [includes](#) several components: access to services, the existence of a relevant economic space, the establishment of a preferential tax regime, simplified trade operations, and the development of financial and legislative instruments. In 2018, the Government of Georgia approved a grant program, “Produce for a Better Future”, which aimed to promote trade and economic activity along the dividing line. It seems that this competition was held only in 2019, as it is not mentioned in any other subsequent reports published by the minister’s office. In 2019, a second financial [instrument](#), “Peace Fund for a Better Future”, was created. The fund was financed by Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom through cooperation with international organizations. However, due to new laws adopted by the Georgian Dream party, the fund’s financing has been suspended.

The second peace initiative under the A Step to a Better Future strategy is the “Development of Educational Opportunities for the Population of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia”. Within this initiative, an after-school preparation program was launched for young people living in Georgia’s occupied regions. From 2020 to 2024, with state funding, an average of 200 students were admitted annually to higher educational institutions in Georgia without entrance exams. In addition, the so-called "1+4" program for Georgian language preparation [continues](#). Overall, the initiative to develop educational opportunities for the population of the occupied regions has been largely successful.

The third initiative of the A Step to a Better Future strategy is to ensure access to various state services for the population living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. In 2019, all the legal procedures necessary for implementing the A Step to a Better Future strategy were completed. As a result of these changes, several instruments of the peace initiative came into effect, including status-neutral registration with a personal number,<sup>6</sup> the ability to operate under the status of a special enterprise, the

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<sup>6</sup> The status-neutral identification mechanism entails registration with a personal number based on existing documents and does not require the registered person to obtain any official document. Registration with a personal

granting of tax benefits, and special permits for conducting activities in the occupied territories. Within the framework of the peace initiative, a marketplace, a House of Justice, and a hospital were established in the village of Rukhi. Residents from the occupied regions are able to participate in various healthcare programs and access services at medical institutions located in five territories under the control of the central government of Georgia, even if they do not possess a Georgian passport or identity card. Services are free of charge and include coordination of transportation in emergency medical cases. The facilitation of access to healthcare services was [achieved](#) through the launch of the State Program for Referral Services.

### **International Peace Processes**

On August 12, 2008, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Georgia and Russia through the mediation of the European Union, which led to the creation of the Geneva International Discussions format. The negotiations involve Georgia, Russia, and the de facto representatives of Tskhinvali and Sokhumi. The United States participates in the meetings, while the process is co-chaired by representatives of the European Union, the OSCE, and the United Nations. In this format, all participants have individual status. The [negotiations](#) are held in two parallel working groups. One group discusses security issues, such as achieving a non-use of force agreement between Russia and Georgia and establishing international security mechanisms in Georgia's occupied regions. The second group addresses the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as other humanitarian issues, including violations of human rights such as access to education in one's native language, protection of cultural heritage, freedom of movement across the occupation line, etc.

Initially, the Geneva discussions were more productive than they have been in recent years. For example, in February 2009, during the fourth round, the parties reached an agreement on the establishment of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). The main purpose of the IPRM is to review daily incidents on the ground and ensure an operational response. The meetings are co-chaired by the Head of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia and representatives of the UN and OSCE. A hotline also operates within the framework of the IPRM. In Tskhinvali, the IPRM functions without interruption, while

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number does not imply the granting of Georgian citizenship and serves solely the purpose of identifying and registering a person residing in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

in case of Abkhazia, IPRM meetings have been [suspended](#) since June 27, 2018, when the Russian and Abkhaz sides [left](#) the format in protest over the so-called Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list.

On June 25-26, 2025, the 64th round of the Geneva International Discussions took place. As with several meetings in previous years, it ended without tangible results. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representatives of Russia and the occupation regimes usually [leave](#) the negotiations before the issue of the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes is discussed. Thus, although Georgia has an international negotiation format, it is not a peace format - the negotiations do not address the status of the occupied territories or conflict resolution.

One of the main international mechanisms, operational since September 15, 2008, is the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). The mission carries out 24-hour patrols. Its mandate includes stabilization, normalization, trust-building, and reporting to the EU to inform European policymaking structures and support the EU's future engagement in the region. According to its mandate, the EUMM covers the entire territory of Georgia within the country's internationally recognized borders. However, the de facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia still [refuse](#) to allow observers to enter the territories under their control.

### **How the Policies of Georgian Dream Threaten Prospects for Restoring the Country's Territorial Integrity**

From the very beginning of the non-recognition policy, its main instruments have been (1) Georgia's international legal position, which frames Russia as the aggressor and Georgia as the victim of occupation; (2) bilateral diplomacy and relations based on the recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity; (3) strong support of influential international allies to ensure the successful implementation of the non-recognition policy. Under the domestic and foreign policies of Georgian Dream, all three of these instruments are disappearing, which in turn undermines the non-recognition and engagement policy, reduces the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution, and ultimately hinders the implementation of Georgia's declared goal: restoration of its territorial integrity.

#### [Georgian Dream Has Never Presented Territorial Integrity as a Serious Issue or a Priority in its Agenda](#)

It is interesting to see how society perceives the country's most significant challenges and how this perception connects with the priorities on Georgian Dream's political agenda.

Naturally, in 2008, the issue of territorial integrity ranked among the top challenges for the majority of the Georgian population. However, this trend has gradually diminished and, according to the most recent data, has shifted into the background.<sup>7</sup>

The decrease in the number of people who name occupation as one of the key challenges may be partly explained by the passage of time. On both sides of the occupation line, generations have emerged who did not witness the wars of 1992-1993 or even the war of 2008. Therefore, the issue is no longer perceived as highly significant since other problems have become more acute in people's everyday lives. Public opinion surveys show that respondents most frequently name three main problems: rising prices, poverty, and lack of employment opportunities, which naturally push the occupation issue into the background.

Another important factor is the indifferent attitude of politicians and decision-makers toward the issue. For a topic to gain prominence, it must either "flow upward" - from public narratives to political narratives - or be "shaped from above" by politicians and transmitted to society. Representatives of Georgian Dream have long removed the issue of occupied territories from the political agenda.<sup>8</sup> Although points concerning occupied territories can still be found in Georgian Dream's statutes and electoral programs, in practice, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region have never been a priority. The issue of de-occupation has mainly been used for political purposes, namely to discredit opponents. For example, on September 14, 2024, during a pre-election campaign in Gori, Bidzina Ivanishvili [stated](#):

"Immediately after the elections on October 26, when the instigators of the war are tried, when every criminal responsible for destroying Georgian-Ossetian brotherhood and coexistence is held accountable under the strictest law, we will certainly find within ourselves the strength to apologize for the fact that, under orders, the treacherous "United National Movement" engulfed our Ossetian brothers and sisters in the flames of war in 2008."

This statement was positively received by the leaders of the occupied territories and Russia. They welcomed the Georgian side's apology and even [expected](#) practical steps. Russia's Ministry of Foreign

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<sup>7</sup> Irina Gurgenashvili (27 September, 2023). In Russia's Shadow - Why Do We "No Longer Care" About the Occupied Territories?! Gnomon Wise. Via Link: <https://gnomonwise.org/ge/publications/opinions/146>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Affairs also emphasized these conciliatory statements made by Georgian officials towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the 2024 election campaign in the context of the 63rd Geneva Discussions.<sup>9</sup>

It can be said that, ahead of the 2024 parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream used the issue of the occupied territories as a tool of manipulation. They claimed that, given the geopolitical situation, there was a high expectation of the peaceful return of the temporarily occupied territories, which would require relevant constitutional amendments in Georgia. The de facto side immediately responded to this message, saying they would gladly await an “apology” but categorically ruled out any reconsideration of the 2008 decisions. The ruling party ignored this statement and insisted that the process was real, arguing that any attempt to obstruct it was orchestrated by the “collective United National Movement.”<sup>10</sup> These examples indicate that Georgian Dream’s domestic and foreign policies undermine the non-recognition policy and engagement strategies.

#### *Georgian Dream Undermines Relations with International Friends*

The anti-Western rhetoric and actions of Georgian Dream directly threaten the proper implementation of the non-recognition policy, which is based on healthy relations with international partners. Calling representatives of Europe and the United States a “global war party,” “enemies of Georgia,” and “agents of destabilization campaigns” aligns with Kremlin narratives<sup>11</sup> and benefits only the occupying forces.<sup>12</sup> In addition to its anti-Western rhetoric, Georgian Dream's repressive laws and their impact on Georgia’s international cooperation are equally alarming. In 2024, remarks by opposition politicians questioning whether the international isolation caused by the so-called “foreign agents law” posed a threat to the non-recognition policy irritated Georgian Dream representatives. In response, Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili stated:

“When we speak of non-recognition, this is not a policy - this is international law. We have nothing to either thank anyone for or be blackmailed with... It apparently depends on whether countries respect international law... [Apparently] international law has neither

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<sup>9</sup> Civil.ge (March 4, 2025). 63rd round of Geneva Discussions. Via Link: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/667720>

<sup>10</sup> Tamar Ketsbaia (October 21, 2024). “Georgian Dream’s” Pre-election Campaign and a Position of Rule of Law in its Election Program. Gnomon Wise. Via Link: <https://gnomonwise.org/ge/publications/policy-papers/224>

<sup>11</sup> Davit Kutidze (2023). Government of Georgia’s Public Rhetoric. Central European Journal of Communication, issue 16. Polskie Towarzystwo Komunikacji Społecznej. Accessible at <https://journals.ptks.pl/cejc/article/view/485>

<sup>12</sup> Sergi Kapanadze (July 8, 2025). The Doomsday Scenario - Back to the USSR? GEOpolitics. Accessible at <https://politicsgeo.com/article/162>



primacy nor supremacy, and someone supports Georgia's territorial integrity not because it is one of the fundamental principles of international law, but rather because this or that government and its policies may or may not be comfortable for them."

That non-recognition is indeed a policy is confirmed in Georgia's state documents. What is particularly noteworthy, however, are the statements of Georgian Dream representatives themselves regarding the policy of non-recognition. For example, on February 2, 2024, the chair of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Nikoloz Samkharadze, stated: "de-occupation of Georgia's territories and the non-recognition policy remain our main foreign policy priorities." He also noted that to promote the non-recognition policy, it was necessary, together with the European Union, to develop "a mechanism that will prevent recipient countries of EU assistance from recognizing the so-called independence of Georgia's occupied territories."<sup>13</sup> In April 2025, Samkharadze further stated that the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly was also being used to largely strengthen the non-recognition policy, and that meetings were being held with representatives of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in order to reinforce this policy.<sup>14</sup>

It should also be noted that since 2017, U.S. appropriations acts have explicitly prohibited the United States from providing assistance to any state that recognizes Russia-occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region as independent states.<sup>15</sup> At the time, the Government of Georgia [assessed](#) this as one of the major achievements of the U.S.-Georgia strategic partnership. Therefore, the statement by a Georgian Dream representative claiming that non-recognition is not a policy but merely a matter of international law directly contradicts their own previously stated positions.

In addition, Dimitri Tskitishvili, who served as Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on International Relations from 2016 to 2019, emphasized that confronting Russia's recognition campaign on the international stage had been a long process, carried out with great efforts by Georgia's diplomatic services, the Permanent Mission to the UN, and international partners, to ensure that "we would not lose control of the situation with individual countries." Tskitishvili also recalled a specific example in which,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Public Broadcaster (April 5, 2025). Nikoloz Samkharadze - We use the Inter-Parliamentary Union to strengthen the policy of non-recognition, where we meet with representatives of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Via link: <https://1tv.ge/news/nikoloz-samkharadze-msofluo-saparlamento-kavshirs-araghiarebis-politikis-gamtkicebistvis-viyenebt-aq-vkhvdebit-aziis-afrikis-latinuri-amerikis-qveynebis-warmomadgenlebs/>

<sup>15</sup> US Congress. (March 23, 2018). H.R.1625 - Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018. Accessible at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1625/text>

through the involvement of France and Germany, Burkina Faso [refused](#) to establish “official” relations with Sokhumi.

It is also significant that Georgian Dream no longer actively participates in international forums. On January 29, 2025, in response to the adoption of a critical resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Georgian Dream withdrew from participation in PACE. The issue of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity has been [raised](#) repeatedly on the PACE agenda, but the chances for such discussions have been significantly reduced since Georgia’s withdrawal.

Another important case is the Porto Declaration and Resolutions adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which included several points concerning Georgia. The OSCE document reaffirms Georgia’s territorial integrity and calls on the new government of Syria to revoke its recognition of the so-called independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Nevertheless, Georgian Dream refused to support the resolution because it also contained critical remarks and a call for new elections.<sup>16</sup> This action by Georgian Dream is a clear manifestation of placing party interests above national interests, thereby undermining the successful implementation of the non-recognition policy.

It is also evident that Georgian Dream is not actively working with Syria’s new government on the issue of revoking its recognition of the occupied territories. This may be linked to the crisis caused by the “reorganization” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after which many experienced employees and diplomats either resigned or were dismissed. This “reorganization” reduces the chances of Georgia achieving success in building bilateral relations, which in turn undermines the non-recognition policy.

#### [Georgian Dream Weakens Georgia’s International Legal Positions on the August War](#)

The international community has always had a firm stance on the legal issue of the occupation of Georgia’s territories. Following Russia’s aggression, Georgia lost control over Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, which remain illegally occupied by Russia to this day. This legal foundation is the reason the international community does not recognize the so-called independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, in recent years, Georgian Dream has sought to rewrite history for domestic political purposes, blaming the

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<sup>16</sup> Lela Kuntchulia (July 5, 2025). Why did not Georgian Dream support provisions related to territorial integrity in the OSCE PA declaration. Radio Liberty. Via link: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33464950.html>

Georgian side for starting the war and, as noted above, even expressing willingness to apologize for the outbreak of the August War.

In 2023, Irakli Kobakhidze directly [accused](#) the Georgian side of starting the war, stating: “The Council of Europe resolution states that on August 7, Saakashvili started the war, and in response to this, on August 8, came Russia’s reaction.” In reality, the Council of Europe resolution does not mention who started the war. Nevertheless, the resolution has often been used as a basis for manipulation and disinformation.<sup>17</sup> In 2024, during the pre-election period, Georgian Dream made the prosecution of the “criminal regime of the United National Movement” its main promise, [claiming](#) that: “these people deliberately staged the gravest provocation in 2008 and knowingly carried out an anti-state order received from abroad.”

In the spring of 2025, Georgian Dream translated its war-related rhetoric into practical action and established a temporary parliamentary investigative commission. One of the main mandates of the commission was [defined](#) as the “investigation of the acknowledgment of the outbreak of the August 2008 war” and “assigning war crimes to Georgian soldiers.” In discussing this issue, Tea Tsulukiani repeatedly claimed that Russia had not started the war. For example, [according](#) to her: “If you start a war, the main objective must be victory, and that victory must be well prepared. Otherwise, no step should be taken that will lead to unjustified losses, sacrificing both soldiers and civilians.” Georgian Dream justifies its position by arguing that responsibility for the start of the war lies not with Georgia and the Georgian military, but with the “United National Movement” and specifically Mikheil Saakashvili. However, framing the issue in this way, when it concerns a war between two countries, is unequivocally incorrect. Any statement that blames Georgian politicians for starting the war automatically absolves Russia of responsibility.

Thus, Georgian Dream’s rhetoric, along with the creation of a temporary investigative commission to examine the outbreak of the August War, directly contradicts the policy of non-recognition and undermines the legal and just arguments that confirm the August War was the result of Russian military aggression.

### [Georgian Dream Deprives the Engagement Strategy of Financial Resources](#)

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<sup>17</sup> Fact-Check (November 18, 2022). [Resolution 1633] It is a treacherous, anti-state text. Via Link: <https://shorturl.at/2TpDE>

Implementation of the Engagement Strategy requires significant financial resources. Projects developed around the issues of the occupied territories were mainly funded by the European Union and its member states. However, distancing from the EU, anti-Western policies, and repressive laws have had a direct impact on such funding and on the activities of organizations working on peacebuilding between the occupied territories and the areas under Georgia's control.

The newly adopted laws on the transparency of foreign agents and on grants not only complicate the work of organizations but also place some of them under the threat of closure. For example, in April 2024, the civic platform For Peace, which unites organizations and experts working on peace issues, issued a statement condemning the re-initiation of the so-called Russian law. According to the platform: "Its member organizations and experts make a significant contribution to reconciliation and confidence-building among conflict-divided communities, as well as to the socio-economic support of populations living along the dividing line, those affected by conflict, and IDPs. This serves not a foreign power, but first and foremost the interests of the Georgian people and peace policy."<sup>18</sup> In November 2024, the platform issued another statement condemning Georgian Dream's decision not to include the opening of membership negotiations with the European Union in the agenda until the end of 2028. The platform once again reminded Georgian Dream that Georgia's successful process of European integration represented the main axis for the peaceful resolution of conflict in the country. According to the 2018 peace initiative A Step to a Better Future, "the goal of the Government of Georgia is to share with the residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia the benefits derived from political association and economic integration with the European Union, including visa-free travel to the Schengen area."

Therefore, in recent times, the anti-Western policies pursued by Georgian Dream have caused great damage to the prospects of rebuilding trust between communities divided by the occupation lines and to the prospect of reunifying the country.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the repressive laws obligate organizations to disclose information about their beneficiaries, which, on the one hand, violates their right to the inviolability of personal data, and on the other hand, endangers the trust and personal security of those individuals.

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<sup>18</sup> JAMnews (April 12, 2024). "The Draft law undermines democracy" - Civic Platform for Peace on the "Russian Law". Via Link: <https://jam-news.net/ge/kanonproeqti-dzirs-utkhris-demokratias-samoqalago-platforma-mshvidobistvis-rusul-kanonze/>

<sup>19</sup> Publika (December 4, 2024). Civic Platform for Peace to the "Georgian Dream": Stop Sabotaging the European Integration. Via link: <https://publika.ge/samoqalago-platforma-mshvidobistvis-ocnebas-shewyvitet-evrointegraciis-sabotadji/>

Under such conditions, citizens will, in practice, no longer be able to benefit from the services previously offered by these organizations.

### Summary

Although Georgia's Constitution and national security strategies declare the safeguarding of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and peaceful de-occupation within internationally recognized borders as a priority, the ruling party's actions contradict these goals.

For a peaceful resolution of the conflict, several elements must coexist. First and foremost, a strong state is necessary - both socio-economically and in terms of security. Under the current geopolitical conditions, this cannot be achieved without EU membership. Georgia must be able to create incentives for Abkhazians and Ossetians to reconsider their approaches and seek closer ties with Georgia to gain greater benefits. Yet, the current policy of Georgian Dream offers no such incentives to the populations of the occupied territories and fails to compete with Russia in this regard. Moreover, Georgian Dream's anti-Western rhetoric discredits the European Union in the eyes of Abkhazians and Ossetians. Distrust toward the Georgian side is growing among populations living in regions "beyond the so-called border". By accusing the "collective United National Movement" of opening a second front, Georgian Dream in fact fuels fears among Abkhazians and Ossetians of a renewed armed conflict.

The domestic and foreign policies of Georgian Dream, including its discourse on the August 2008 War, its anti-Western stance, and alignment with Russian narratives, undermine the policies of non-recognition and engagement. This approach reduces the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution and ultimately hinders Georgia's main goal: the restoration of territorial integrity.

Russia's influence over the occupied territories has grown significantly since 2008, expressed through military and economic integration, the policy of "passportization" that ties local populations to the Russian system, and "borderization" efforts that extend de facto boundaries and restrict the access of international observers, including the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), to the occupied territories. The current policies of Georgian Dream not only fail to mitigate these threats but, in fact, exacerbate the situation.

Despite strong international support for the policy of non-recognition, Georgian Dream's rhetoric and actions obstruct its successful implementation. The so-called independence of the occupied territories is

not recognized by international organizations, and aside from Russia, only four states (Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Nauru) extend recognition. Yet isolationist policies weaken this diplomatic achievement.

The engagement strategy “A Step to a Better Future”, launched in 2018, has had largely successful results. Noticeable progress has been achieved in (1) developing educational opportunities - with hundreds of applicants from the occupied territories enrolling annually in Georgian higher educational institutions; (2) improving access to state services, including healthcare and simplified citizenship procedures. However, residents along the occupation line are already facing challenges, as the “Peace Fund for a Better Future” and other engagement initiatives have encountered funding disruptions due to new laws adopted by Georgian Dream.

Furthermore, international peace processes, such as the Geneva International Discussions, have shown no tangible results for several years. Although the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) has achieved certain successes, negotiations often end without concrete outcomes, particularly on such critical issues as the return of internally displaced persons. The EU Monitoring Mission, deployed to stabilize the situation, continues to face restrictions from the de facto authorities regarding access to the occupied territories.

In conclusion, the actions and rhetoric of Georgian Dream stand in sharp contradiction to the declared national interests and existing strategies on de-occupation and territorial integrity. It is also noteworthy that the number of states recognizing the so-called independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has not increased for only one reason: in recent years, Russia has shifted its policy toward attempts at outright annexation. On the other hand, Georgian Dream fosters the illusion that “normalizing” relations with Russia will facilitate the return of the occupied territories. This is an impossibility. If Georgia decides to move closer to Russia to resolve the issue of the occupied territories, the country’s sovereignty will be placed in jeopardy. The likelihood will increase that an isolated Georgia, cut off from the West, will fall entirely into Russia’s sphere of influence and lose the independence that Russia had already deprived it of for nearly two centuries.