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Freedom of religion or belief, equality and secularity in February, a report of a Georgian NGO

[TDI](#) (18.03.2025) - During the reporting period, the “Georgian Dream” parliament [rapidly initiated new repressive laws](#), marking another step toward consolidating authoritarian rule in Georgia.

The “Georgian Dream” continues to manipulate pseudo-religious narratives, portraying itself as the defender of Christianity and traditional values while labelling its opponents—NGOs, critical media, and the political opposition—as adversaries of Georgian traditions, religion, and national identity.

When justifying the necessity of repressive legislative changes, the Georgian Dream and its affiliated groups also exploit the argument of “hostility toward the Church” in a manipulative manner.

Anti-Western and propagandistic messages regarding financial assistance from partner countries have been widespread. For example, allegations have been made that

“USAID used to fund anti-state activities, a fight against the Church, and national traditions,” and that “EU financial assistance will be used to fund radicalism and anti-Church activities in Georgia.” A satellite party of the “Georgian Dream” has further claimed that “the EU Ambassador in Georgia acts as a Viceroy, defaming Georgian traditions and the Church while opposing the will of the Georgian people.”

A central component of Georgian Dream propaganda remains the discrediting of ongoing pro-European demonstrations, attempting to depict protesters as forces opposed to the Church and Christian values.

As in the previous reporting period, a positive trend is the increasing number of statements by Orthodox clergy expressing strong support for pro-European demonstrators, political prisoners, and individuals fighting for freedom. From a Christian perspective, they emphasize human dignity, equality, and freedom, condemn political repression, and advocate for Georgia’s European integration.

Meanwhile, certain Orthodox clergy continue to promote rhetoric in support of the “Georgian Dream” government while opposing civil society, human rights, and the European Union in their sermons and public speeches.

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The present report covers **February 2025**

You can also access the 2024-2025 reports on monitoring the pre-election and post-election environments regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity:

pre-election period (2024)

[August 25 to September 25](#)

[September 25 to October 25](#)

post-election period

[October 26 to November 26, 2024](#)

[November 26 to December 26, 2024](#)

[December 26- January 31, 2025](#)

About the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church after the elections

A new 21-page report by the Georgian [Tolerance and Diversity Institute](#) covering the period [26 November – 26 December](#). See also [Pre-election Reports 25.08-25.09.2024](#), [25.09-25.10.2024](#) and [26.10-26.11.2024](#)

[TDI](#) (06.01.2025) – Following the alleged massive falsification of the 26 October parliamentary elections, on 28 November, Georgia's illegitimate Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, declared that Georgia's European integration and negotiations with the EU on the accession process would be halted at least until 2028. This sparked immediate public protests and continuous demonstrations across Georgia. Georgian Dream has repeatedly attempted to suppress peaceful protests violently and unlawfully. Over 500 individuals participating in peaceful protests have been detained. Among them, more than 300 have been subjected to beatings, torture, and inhuman treatment. The court found all individuals arrested under administrative procedures guilty of offenses and imposed severe sanctions against them. Meanwhile, not a single member of the police officers has been held accountable.

Meanwhile, the demonstrations have transcended the immediate goal of safeguarding Georgia's Western path and EU integration process, becoming a broader struggle for freedom and the foundations of democracy, statehood, and justice.

Monitoring the environment regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity indicates that the Georgian Dream's anti-European and anti-human rights propaganda heavily relies on manipulating religious narratives. Leaders of the Georgian Dream actively try to discredit peaceful protests, persist in anti-Western propaganda—particularly in the context of Christianity—and use the support of the Georgian Orthodox Church to legitimize themselves. To blur the lines of values, Georgian Dream and its affiliates employ various manipulative techniques, including preemptively "claiming" terms that opponents might use against them (e.g., fascism) and associating these terms with ideologies they oppose (e.g., liberalism).

The propaganda of the illegitimate government is reinforced by the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church, certain Orthodox clergy, and the government-controlled propaganda media. During the reporting period, the most notable examples were coordinated and orchestrated misinformation campaigns portraying peaceful, pro-European demonstrations as "Red Terror" and labeling demonstrators as "Bolsheviks" fighting against the Orthodox Church. All these narratives are characterized by an anti-Western context, framing Europe as the antithesis of Christianity, spirituality, and national values.

The attitude of the Georgian Patriarchate towards the demonstrations was also significant. Throughout this period, neither the Patriarchate nor its Public Relations Department expressed clear support for individuals who were beaten and tortured by law enforcement. They limited themselves to issuing general statements condemning violence. These declarations demonstrated loyalty to the illegitimate government and perpetuated a false narrative of internal social hostilities and "violence from both sides."

To be noted, the Georgian Orthodox Church endorsed the ruling party's policy before the October 26 vote, while Patriarch Ilia II congratulated the Georgian Dream with "overwhelming election victory."

During the protest period, alongside the use of the Orthodox Church for populist-propagandist purposes, the illegitimate government continued transferring state property to the Patriarchate.

The National Agency of State Property of Georgia transferred ownership of non-agricultural land plots (in total, 19,023 square meters) and buildings to the Patriarchate for a symbolic price of 1 GEL through direct sale. These properties are located in the town of Manglisi, Kutaisi, the village of Chogha in Chkhorotsku Municipality, and the town of Bakuriani in Borjomi Municipality. Additionally, a non-agricultural land plot measuring 3,877 square meters in the village of Pirveli Maisi in Khobi Municipality was granted for a term of 99 years under an usufruct agreement without charge.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia provided financial assistance of 140,000 GEL (one hundred forty thousand GEL) to the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church's Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary.

Main Propagandistic Narratives on Identity and Religion by Georgian Dream and Its Satellite Party People's Power

Open Anti-Western Messages

- The European Union uses financial aid as "blackmail" against the Georgian Dream;
- The West is godless;
- The politicization of children (referring to youth participating in protests) is funded by the West, where faith and family values are undermined;
- Radical European politicians trample on our national values.

Manipulating National Interests and "People's Legitimacy"

- The law against "LGBT propaganda" [legislation restricting fundamental human rights] reflects Georgian national interests, and the Orthodox Church and the majority of society support it.

Manipulation of Identity to Discredit Liberals

- Georgian Dream opponents are followers of the ideology of "liberal Fascism" and are enemies of the Church.

Demonization of CSOs Using Religion and the Patriarchate

- NGOs, with support from foreign states, fund radicalism and extremism, attack the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch, faith, and traditions.

Discrediting the President in an Anti-Western Context

- President Salome Zurbishvili insults the Church and is controlled by foreign powers.

Discrediting Pro-European Protests in a Religious Context

- The goal of young demonstrators is not to protect the European path but to insult faith.
- Comparisons with the "Red Terror": Demonstrators are modern Bolsheviks attacking the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Narratives of the Patriarchate and Certain Orthodox Clergy

The Georgian Patriarchate and its Public Relations Department issued multiple statements about the violence at pro-European demonstrations, none of which explicitly condemned the beating and inhumane treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement.

The Georgian Patriarchate reinforced the Georgian Dream propaganda about the "violence from two sides" and the polarization of society; it urged the protesters to respect the boundaries of expression and called on law enforcement to show more "patience."

After hundreds of people were beaten and subjected to degrading treatment, on December 13, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II broadly condemned violence against all individuals without identifying or naming the victims. The Patriarch emphasized the need to strengthen a "European-type national state" based on traditional values.

Discrediting Pro-European Demonstrations in an Anti-Western Context:

Certain Orthodox clergy in their discourse often use the technique of a false dilemma, forcing people to choose between preserving their identity and aligning with Europe. These narratives aim to discredit pro-European demonstrations by framing them within an anti-Western context.

During the reporting period, under this category, the following thematic messages emerged:

- The West is a restless "friend" (with connotations of being an enemy);
- Protest is an anti-Christian uprising orchestrated by the West.

Manipulating Religion to Portray Protesters as Blasphemers:

During one of the protest performances where demonstrators burned a coffin and effigy symbolizing Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Georgian Patriarchate's Public Relations Department and other Orthodox clergy, using religious manipulation, accused protesters of blasphemy.

Equating Protesters with Bolsheviks Attacking the Georgian Orthodox Church:

The Patriarchate and some Orthodox clergy (alongside the Georgian Dream and propaganda media) engaged in a campaign of exaggeration and misinformation, comparing demonstrators to Bolsheviks.

Statements by Other Orthodox Clergy and Different Religious Communities

Notably, certain Orthodox clergy issued critical statements about the Georgian Dream's decision to abort EU accession and condemned violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators while expressing support for them.

The members of the Council of Religions under the auspices of Public Defender also condemned the brutal violence against demonstrators, highlighting the importance of Georgia's European integration, guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia.

On 7 and 25 December, leaders and representatives of different religious and ethnic communities in Georgia marched on Rustaveli Avenue to protest violence and show solidarity with tortured and beaten demonstrators. Various religious leaders also made several public statements in different formats.

[READ THE FULL REPORT HERE](#)

() In 2024, during the pre-election period in September and October, the government transferred ownership of 11,062 square meters of non-agricultural land and buildings to the Orthodox Church, along with granting 217,008 square meters of agricultural and non-agricultural land under a 99-year usufruct agreement free of charge. In the post-election period, from November to December, the government transferred ownership of 29,341 square meters of non-agricultural land and buildings to the Orthodox Church. Additionally, it granted 28,451 square meters of agricultural land under a 15-year usufruct agreement and 3,877 square meters of land under a 99-year usufruct agreement free of charge.*