

Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

May-June 2026



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Monitoring Period: May-June 2026

Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)

www.tdi.ge/en



The Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI) continues to monitor the environment regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity. This includes monitoring statements and activities by political parties, politicians, public figures, and clergy.

The present report covers **May-June 2026**

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Main Trends

During the reporting period, the protection of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and anti-Western rhetoric once again remained central themes in the narratives promoted by the Georgian Dream (GD) government. The political opposition, civil society organizations, and more broadly, GD's opponents were portrayed as enemies of the GOC and the Patriarch, allegedly seeking to undermine the Church's authority, national identity, and so-called 'traditional values'.

At the same time, the GD presented itself as the principal defender of the GOC, religious faith, and national identity. Particularly evident was the attempt to conflate the State, Orthodoxy, and an isolationist ethno-religious identity. Within this narrative, national belonging is defined by adherence to the government's own construction of "Orthodox" and so-called conservative values.

Following the death of Patriarch Ilia II of All Georgia and during the election of his successor, Shio III, issues concerning the GOC became a particularly prominent vehicle for political manipulation by the ruling party. The GD government and pro-government media outlets portrayed critical questions concerning the patriarchal election, dissenting views, and public discussion of possible political or informal influence over the process as interference in the GOC's autonomy.

From the perspective of secularism and religious neutrality, the expansion of "value-based education" clubs in public schools was particularly noteworthy during the reporting period. This joint programme of the Ministry of Education and the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church provide for the institutional involvement of Orthodox clergy in public schools. Under the label of "value-based upbringing", it brings together religious, narrow ethno-national, and political content, and defines the educational and formative role of public schools through this ideological framework.

Although the programme is formally voluntary and club-based, its scale, State support, the institutional mechanism for training and involving clergy, and its substantive link to "Georgian identity" and "Christian values" as interpreted by Georgian Dream give rise to risks of religious-ideological indoctrination in public schools, as well as the exclusion and discrimination of students with different religious or non-religious affiliation.

As in previous years, 17 May, the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), was marked against the backdrop of disregard for the rights of LGBTI people, incitement to hatred by the GD government, discriminatory legislation, and political homophobia. As in previous years, the Patriarchate of the GOC and Georgian Dream marked the so-called Family Purity Day with large-scale public marches and populist statements. The day was established by the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church in 2014, one year after the mass homophobic violence of 17 May 2013.

GD continued its aggressive anti-Western and anti-European rhetoric, portraying the European Union and Western partners as forces acting against the Orthodox Church, state sovereignty, and national identity. Attacks on diplomats representing EU member states in Georgia also continued.

At the same time, conspiracy narratives concerning the “deep state” and the “Global War Party” were persistently used against the authorities of the EU and the United States.

Overall, the trends described in this report demonstrate that the ruling party is increasingly using religious themes as a test of political loyalty, a means of discrediting opponents, and a tool for marginalizing critical views.

As in previous reporting periods, some clergy condemned Georgian Dream’s repressive policies and spoke actively on social and human-rights issues. They supported children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy and their families, called for the release or pardon of political prisoners, and criticized the risk of restricting freedom of expression under the pretext of combating “hate speech”. Individual clergy members also condemned Russia’s attacks on Ukraine’s religious and cultural heritage, including the bombing of the Dormition Cathedral at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. Taking together, these statements demonstrated that voices within the GOC continue to advocate for institutional autonomy, social responsibility, and human rights, while also condemning the Kremlin’s aggression.

1. Manipulation through Ostensibly Religious Narratives

1.1. The Narrative of a Fight against the Georgian Orthodox Church

During the reporting period, the Georgian Dream government and affiliated actors continued to promote claims of a coordinated campaign against the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). According to this narrative, criticism of the process for electing the Patriarch, meetings of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate, public statements by Orthodox clergy, or individual clergy members and the expression of views about them, does not constitute legitimate public debate. Instead, it is portrayed as a process driven by external forces and aimed at weakening the GOC’s authority and national identity. These messages continued after Metropolitan Shio Mujiri was elected Patriarch.

As in previous reporting periods, the political opposition, civil society organizations, and more broadly, GD’s opponents were portrayed as enemies of the GOC and the Patriarch.

1.1.1. Political Opposition

GD frequently invoked the GOC in order to portray the political opposition as allegedly “anti-Church” and subordinate to “foreign powers”. According to the rhetoric of GD representatives and members of its satellite party, People’s Power, the political opposition, described collectively as

the “Collective National Movement”¹, constantly attacks the GOC and the Patriarch on the instructions of its “foreign patrons”.

They argued that, because the GOC is the principal pillar of the Georgian people’s identity, unity, and spiritual resilience, it has become the opposition’s “main target”. According to this narrative, the campaign against the GOC is intended to weaken an institution that enjoys considerable public authority, undermine religious faith, and erode national identity, traditions, and family values, thereby making society easier to manipulate. GD claimed that attacks against the GOC intensified, particularly after the death of Patriarch Ilia II, in response to the strong sense of unity and resolve demonstrated by the public. In GD’s assessment, the “radical opposition” lacks public trust and support in Georgian society and seeks to sow division within the country.

GD also actively used a [statement](#) by Mikheil Saakashvili, founder of the United National Movement and imprisoned third president of Georgia, for propaganda purposes. In one statement, Saakashvili described the patriarchal election as “a so-called election and a Russian special operation”. GD representatives used this assessment to discredit the opposition. According to them, the “Collective National Movement” had for years deliberately acted against the GOC, the Patriarch, and Orthodox clergy.

[Irakli Kirtskhalia](#), Leader of the GD Parliamentary Majority, 11 May: “The radical opposition attacks everything that represents the country’s identity and faith... When you undermine a country’s identity and try to shake the faith of a believer, that person becomes easy to control... **This is a group of immoral, unpatriotic people who fight against everything that is worthy and valuable for the country.**”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Deputy Speaker of the GD Parliament, 12 May: “The irony and cynicism that constantly run through their [the opposition’s] comments and posts once again show us and remind us that these people will not change their ways. **They are fighting against our religion, because faith is precisely what unites us.**”

[Gia Volski](#), GD MP, 13 May: “...The GOC is regarded as one of the pillars of preserving national identity. This is not only an **attack against the Georgian Orthodox Church; it is an attack against society as a whole**—the society that showed its true character when we mourned Patriarch Ilia II. The attack against the GOC is driven by a dark and pragmatic political objective.”

[Guram Macharashvili](#), MP from GD’s satellite party, People’s Power, 22 May: “What society do they live in? The overwhelming majority of society supports the policy known as family values, which they do not support. The overwhelming majority of society supports faith, the Orthodox Church, and the Patriarch, and **these people are fighting against all of them**. That is why they know they have no public support. As for the disorder they create, that is simply their natural state.”

Statements in Response to Mikheil Saakashvili’s Comments

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 4 May: “We remember the **kinds of campaigns that were waged against the GOC** under that regime. The campaign continued without interruption for nine years. They

¹ By the “collective UNM,” the Georgian Dream party and its leaders refer not only to the United National Movement (UNM) party itself, but also to almost the entire remaining pro-Western and opposition spectrum, critical civil society organizations, media and in general, opponents. In addition, members of the Georgian Dream Parliament, 89 MPs in total, have filed a [constitutional claim](#) with the Constitutional Court concerning the constitutionality of the activities of the political parties “**Unity – National Movement**,” “**Coalition for Change – Gvaramia, Melia, Girchi, Droa**,” “**Strong Georgia – Lelo, For the People, For Freedom!**” and the “**Federalist Party**,” as well as the issue of their [possible banning](#).

themselves handed SUVs to clergy and then launched campaigns over those very vehicles. There were attempts to discredit the GOC in various ways, including blackmail through compromising material and many other abuses under the previous government. **All of that has changed; the approach has changed.**"

[Davit Matikashvili](#), GD MP, 1 May: "Saakashvili, one of the most prominent leaders of the fifth column, knows very well that, as long as the GOC remains strong and spiritual values are held to a high standard, foreign powers have no chance of advancing their interests in Georgia, interfering in domestic affairs or turning Georgia into a proxy state. **A review of Saakashvili's record shows that it has consistently been marked by anti-Georgian and anti-Orthodox actions.**"

1.1.2. Civil Society Organizations

According to the narrative promoted by GD and its satellite party, People's Power, civil society organizations, like the opposition, act against the GOC and the Patriarch through "external funding", referring primarily to support from Georgia's Western partner countries. They also claimed that discussion of the alleged Russian links of the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, who later became the new Patriarch, Shio III, formed part of a campaign against the GOC intended to discredit him.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 21 May: "One of the main reasons we adopted the Transparency Law, which was later labeled the Russian law, was that **European funding and funding from the previous US administration, including money from USAID, NED, EED, and these organizations, was used to finance campaigns of hatred in Georgia.** Campaigns against the government, state institutions, and Orthodox institutions were financed with that shameful money. **The Transparency Law, which they called the Russian law, was adopted precisely in response to this.**"

[Levan Machavariani](#), GD MP, 9 May: "Our Patriarch designated Bishop Shio as Locum Tenens during his lifetime. The attacks against Bishop Shio began from that very moment. Representatives of the radical opposition and wealthy **NGOs launched a campaign claiming that Bishop Shio was playing Russia's game.**"

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 26 June: "...I would once again say that Parliament played a particularly important role in this, especially through the legislation adopted by the Georgian Parliament in recent years. I would place particular emphasis on the Transparency Law and the Law on Grants. These were precisely the laws that enabled us to calm the situation. **You know what foreign grants—grants allocated to so-called NGOs in our country were used for. They were used to destabilize the country, to attack state institutions, to attack the GOC, to attempt sabotage, and so on...**"

1.1.3. Manipulative Use of an Alleged Crime against the Patriarchate

During the reporting period, an alleged criminal incident [took place](#) in the courtyard of the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Footage from surveillance cameras installed in the Patriarchate's courtyard shows a car entering the premises, damaging the barrier and the gate, and colliding with another vehicle parked there. The footage also shows that a cleric present on the premises narrowly avoided being hit by the car. According to [media reports](#), the driver used insulting language towards the Patriarchate and the Patriarch. The Ministry of Internal Affairs arrested the driver at the scene, and an investigation was launched under the article concerning damage to or destruction of property.

Pro-government media and propagandists supporting Georgian Dream linked the alleged crime to a so-called “long-running and coordinated campaign against the Orthodox Church”, naming the opposition, independent media, civil society, and foreign partners as participants in that campaign. Such coverage used a specific alleged crime as evidence of an “anti-Church attack” and thereby reinforced the existing propaganda narrative about a campaign against the Orthodox Church. These statements were made, among others, by [Davit Kartvelishvili](#), a member of GD’s satellite party, People’s Power, and by GD-aligned propagandists [Nino Pochkhua](#), [Davit Chikhelidze](#), and [Gia Abashidze](#).

1.2. GD as a Force Defending the GOC

During the current reporting period, one of the central themes in Georgian Dream’s narratives was the portrayal of the party, on the one hand, as the principal defender of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and ethno-religious identity and, on the other, as a guardian of constitutional secularism.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 17 May: “...Under the protection of God and the spiritual guidance of the Patriarch, **we will firmly defend Christianity, Orthodoxy, and all the values that constitute the essence and substance of the Georgian nation.**”

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 4 May: “Today, relations between the state and the GOC are based on principles. **One of the key principles is secularism.** We intend to continue these relations on that basis. The nature of relations between the government and the GOC today is qualitatively different from the nature of those relations under the Saakashvili regime.”

[Dimitri Samkharadze](#), 17 June: “The principal guarantor of Georgia’s peace, **the protection of our Orthodox Church and future generations is the layman, Mr Bidzina Ivanishvili.** No external or internal force will bring Georgia to its knees under Georgian Dream rule; this has been demonstrated repeatedly.”

1.2.1. 26 May: Celebration of Georgia’s Independence Day and the Non-Secular Use of a National Date

Georgia’s Independence Day [was celebrated](#) on 26 May 2026. This year, the Georgian Dream government linked the official concept of Independence Day to the [1,700th anniversary](#) of Christianity’s declaration as the state religion² (the conversion of the Kartli Kingdom to Christianity). The principal slogan for 26 May: “For 1,700 years, faith has strengthened us—love has united us” presented the Orthodox faith, above all, as the foundation of modern Georgian statehood.

² The designation of 2026 as the “1,700th anniversary of the declaration of Christianity as the state religion” is based on dating the Christianization of Kartli to 326. However, the exact year in which the Kingdom of Kartli converted to Christianity and Christianity was established as the state religion has not been historically determined. Georgian and international historiography offers a range of dates and broader chronological frameworks, including 317, 318, 319–320, 337 and 355, as well as the first half of the fourth century.

Historically, 26 May marks Georgia's [1918 declaration](#) of independence and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. [The Act of Independence](#) defined Georgia's political system as a democratic republic and affirmed equal civil and political rights for all citizens, irrespective of nationality, religion or social status. This vision, grounded in civic equality, was reflected more fully in the [1921 Constitution](#), which enshrined broad civil and political rights and was based on the principles of equality, religious freedom, separation of State and religious institutions, and European constitutionalism.³

Part of society, including religious and ethnic minorities, considers that the ruling party's official message in 2026 overshadowed the ideas of republican statehood, civic equality, and political sovereignty with [a non-secular and non-pluralistic narrative of ethno-religious identity](#).

It is noteworthy that, Georgian Dream allocated separate funds, GEL 5.3 million (approximately €1,759,770) from the Government's reserve fund to the dominant religious organization for the non-secular commemoration of this date of secular, national significance (*[Decree of the Government of Georgia dated 21 May 2026](#)*). The funds are intended to finance events related to the 1,700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the State religion in Georgia. A joint [commission](#) of the Government of Georgia and the Patriarchate was also established, chaired by Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze. The purpose of the commission is to develop and implement the organizational plan for events related to the 1,700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the State religion.

Statements on 26 May

GD representatives delivered [speeches](#) marking the 1,700th anniversary of Christianity's designation as the state religion. Among them, Mikheil Kavelashvili, Georgian Dream-elected president, stated that the date demonstrated "how inseparable our history and faith are".

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of the disputed Parliament, 26 May: "Some still want to destroy our two pillars, to prevent us from standing on our own feet, to make us follow their rules and renounce what is ours. They want us bound by a new golden chain, doing everything they demand, but not being an independent state, relying on others rather than on ourselves. This will not happen. The will of the Georgian people is firm. **Our centuries-long struggle belongs to the autocephalous Orthodox Church and the independent state. This is the formula of Georgia's freedom.**"

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 26 May: "...Today, 35 years after the restoration of independence, every patriotic Georgian can take pride in the fact that Georgia is more independent and sovereign than ever before. It was precisely the strengthening of our independence and sovereignty that enabled our country, despite the most difficult challenges, **to defend the faith steadfastly, preserve peace, and embark on an uninterrupted path of progress and development that will inevitably lead us to the promised land**, the fulfillment of all our national goals, and a united and radiant Georgia."

³ T Jeremy Gunn and Dag Nygaard, *Georgian [Constitutional Values versus Political and Financial Interests: The Constitutional Agreement's Departure from the Georgian Principle of Equality](#)* (Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, 2015)

1.3. Manipulation through Homophobia

As in previous years, the observance of 17 May 2026 took place [against the backdrop of disregard for the rights of LGBTI people](#), incitement to hatred by the GD government, discriminatory legislation, and political homophobia.

17 May is the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT). It is intended to raise the visibility of LGBTI rights and condemn violence. In Georgia, however, since 2014, the human-rights significance of the date has been overshadowed by the observance of the “Day of Family Purity and Respect for Parents”, introduced at the initiative of the Catholicos-Patriarch.

One year before the date was designated as a celebration, violent groups and some Orthodox clergy [attacked and physically assaulted](#) people who had gathered on Rustaveli Avenue to mark the day against homophobia⁴. In 2024, GD [declared](#) 17 May an official [public holiday](#).

As in previous years, the Patriarchate of the GOC [marked](#) “Family Purity Day” with a large-scale public march. Representatives of the GD government took part in the event in both Tbilisi and the regions. The observance of Family Purity Day was actively covered by propaganda media outlets that pursued a pro-government editorial line.⁵

Several recurring tendencies were evident in GD’s statements on 17 May: the conflation of Orthodoxy, the traditional family, and national identity; the construction of a sense of cultural threat against the backdrop of vague “global challenges”; and the portrayal of differing political or social positions as being opposed to national and religious values.

[Mikheil Kavelashvili](#), GD President, 17 May: “...Against the backdrop of the global challenges facing the modern world, it is our duty to protect and strengthen the sacred space in which love, loyalty and the bond between generations remain alive...”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of the GD Parliament, 17 May: “The family is where the future generation grows up; where a child first learns what the homeland is, what goodness, dignity, work, and mutual respect mean. Today, when the world faces many challenges, it is especially important to protect the values that have brought us this far...”

[Guram Macharashvili](#), MP from GD’s satellite party, People’s Power, 17 May: “...When you aspire to be a politician and come to power in a country that is the allotted land of the Virgin Mary, that has one hundred thousand martyrs and countless martyred saints, and you sign up to gay propaganda, this document exists, you must also be prepared to answer for it.”

⁴ [The European Court of Human Rights](#) described the violence directed against LGBTI demonstrators in Tbilisi on 17 May 2013 as “unprecedented” and ordered Georgia to pay EUR 193,500 in compensation. The Court found that the violence, which took place on the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, occurred with the “connivance of the authorities”. It held that Georgia had violated Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, concerning the prohibition of torture, and Article 11, concerning freedom of assembly and association, taken in conjunction with Article 14, which prohibits discrimination.

⁵ Reports by the UK-sanctioned television channel Imedi: [Unity of the Nation and the Clergy](#); [Alongside Independence Day, the Georgian Orthodox Church Marks the 1,700th Anniversary of the Declaration of Christianity as the State Religion in Georgia](#); and [Family Purity Day Is Celebrated in Georgia on 17 May](#). Reports by the UK-sanctioned Post TV: [17 May - Family Purity Day](#); [Family Purity Day](#). Reports by Rustavi 2: [17 May - Family Purity Day](#); [Family Purity Day](#); [Family Purity Day](#).

1.4. The “Hate Speech” Monitoring Unit and Political Censorship

During the reporting period, Georgian Dream continued to restrict freedom of expression and tighten both the regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms. [On 1 June 2026](#), a “Unit for Combating Hate Speech” started operating within the Human Rights Protection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to the Ministry, the Unit proactively monitors publicly disseminated statements on social media and in the media that are insulting, degrading to human dignity, or contain hate speech; identifies alleged offenders; draws up administrative offense reports; and refers cases to the courts.

Despite its name, the practice observed in June shows that the Unit’s work primarily concerned crude and insulting comments posted on social media about GD representatives and other individuals, rather than incitement to hatred, discrimination, or violence against groups on the basis of identity.⁶ By 15 June, the Unit had already referred approximately 60 cases to the courts, while in the second half of June, [citizens were fined](#) between GEL 2,000 and GEL 4,000. Although final decisions are made by the courts, the police identify and initiate cases on their own initiative through monitoring social media.

It should be noted that GD deliberately broadens the concept of hate speech to include personal insults and harsh criticism. Under international standards, hate speech concerns the advocacy or *incitement of hatred, discrimination, hostility, or violence* against a person or group on the basis of their real or attributed identity, including “*race, color, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other characteristics*.” A crude or insulting statement about a politician or public official may be subject to a different form of legal assessment, but its offensive form alone does not make it hate speech. Moreover, because of their position and public influence, politicians are required to display a greater degree of tolerance toward criticism than private individuals.⁷

Human-rights lawyers have assessed that the creation of another policing mechanism in Georgia, one involving a high risk of vague rules, disproportionate sanctions, and restrictive tools, [poses](#) a direct threat to freedom of expression and creates serious risks of political censorship and pervasive control.

⁶ For international standards on the definition of and responses to hate speech, see: Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)16 to member States on combating hate speech](#), adopted on 20 May 2022; United Nations, [United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#), 2019; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), [Rabat Plan of Action on the Prohibition of Advocacy of National, Racial or Religious Hatred that Constitutes Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility or Violence](#), adopted on 5 October 2012, annexed to UN Doc. A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, 11 January 2013; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), [General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on Combating Hate Speech](#), adopted on 8 December 2015 and published on 21 March 2016; United Nations, [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), Article 4; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Resolution 2275 (2019), [The Role and Responsibilities of Political Leaders in Combating Hate Speech and Intolerance](#), adopted on 10 April 2019; and PACE, [Resolution 2144 \(2017\), Ending Cyberdiscrimination and Online Hate](#), adopted on 25 January 2017.

⁷ According to the established case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the limits of acceptable criticism are wider with regard to politicians than private individuals, as politicians knowingly expose their words and actions to close scrutiny by journalists and the public and must consequently display a greater degree of tolerance. See *Lingens v. Austria*, no. 9815/82, ECHR, 8 July 1986, para. 42.

It should also be noted that, in justifying the new mechanism, representatives of GD and People's Power placed particular emphasis on alleged ongoing "hate campaigns" against the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), the Patriarchate, and Orthodox clergy. They identified the opposition, independent media, foreign partners, and civil society organizations receiving grant funding from partner countries as the sources of these campaigns.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), **GD Prime Minister, 19 May**: "...This was a clearly defined line through which foreign interference in our country's political processes was pursued, including the foreign funding of NGOs. Through NGOs, they directly and deliberately funded the entrenchment of hate speech and the incitement of hatred in Georgia."

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), **GD Prime Minister, 21 May**: "We have other examples in which they were not held accountable. I am speaking specifically about the GOC example. They were not held accountable, yet the torrent of hatred directed at the GOC, Orthodox clergy, the Patriarch, the Patriarchate, and the institution as a whole did not stop. The public can clearly see where this torrent of hatred is coming from."

[Guram Macharashvili](#), **MP from GD's satellite party, People's Power, 19 May**: "You may express a different, critical, or even strongly critical position, but that does not mean you may resort to insults, such as insulting the Orthodox Church, which is recognized by the overwhelming majority in Georgia, or its spiritual leader. This is an unfortunate reality. People also enter Orthodox churches and insult icons there, sometimes verbally and sometimes through their actions. Preventive measures should be taken against this kind of conduct."

2. "Value-Based Education" Clubs in Public Schools: The Problem of Protecting Religious Neutrality and Secularism

During the reporting period, the issue of protecting the principles of religious neutrality and secularism in public schools became particularly relevant against the background of the expansion of ["value-based education" clubs](#). The "value-based education" clubs are a joint [programme](#) of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth and the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The programme was launched in [2023](#) and introduced the involvement of Orthodox clergy in students' informal education in public schools. According to public sources, as of June 2026, 175 clubs were operating in [141 schools](#), with 4,375 students participating. According to TV Imedi, the project covers all of Georgia, including occupied Abkhazia, where eight clubs operate online. According to Georgian Dream's Minister of Education, [Givi Mikanadze](#), the programme began with the blessing of Patriarch Ilia II; later, "*Shio III personally took charge of it*" and "*attaches great importance to its implementation*". According to publicly available information, members of the value-based education clubs meet once a week after classes. Participation is voluntary.

According to information requested by TDI⁸ from the Ministry of Education of Georgia, value-based education clubs in public schools are intended for interested students at the basic level of education, grades VII–X. The clubs are led by Orthodox clergy members - teachers, selected through cooperation between the LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development

⁸ Letter MES 9 26 0000131812 of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, 9 February 2026.

and the Patriarchate of Georgia. According to [media reports](#), the National Center for Teacher Professional Development trained 239 clergy members. The content and objectives of the clergy training programme remain unknown, as do the teaching standards and programmes used in schools.

The official and media descriptions of the programme show that it is not limited to general ethical education. For example, in a [TV Imedi](#) report, the programme is presented as a joint project of the Patriarchate of Georgia and the Ministry of Education, the basis of which was laid, according to the Minister, in the new document on the National Goals of General Education. The same report emphasizes that these values are connected to “Georgia”, “Georgianness”, and “our identity”, and states that *“students learn to see Christian teachings and ‘seeds’ in art, literature, and science, so that they can later assess controversial issues from a ‘Christian perspective’.”*

What Changed in the 2024 Document on the National Goals of General Education?

In 2024, the GD [replaced](#) liberal and democratic values in the document on the [National Goals of General Education](#), which serves as the basis for curricula and for the renewal and revision of school textbooks, with an ideology interpreted by Georgian Dream as conservatism. [Unlike the document adopted in 2004](#),⁹ new goals no longer emphasize “liberal and democratic principles”, “universal human values”, or “civic consciousness”. Instead, they focus on raising a “patriotic and state-minded citizen” who has “national-State values” and knowledge of family, Georgian tradition, Georgian history, and culture.

The new document substantively reflects the value-based changes that have frequently appeared in Georgian Dream’s political rhetoric in recent years. Terms such as “democratic values” and “discrimination” no longer appear in the document, while the new goals are often linked to political views formed on the basis of dominant religion and narrow ethnic identity.

This process was preceded by a [statement](#) made by then Minister of Education Giorgi Amilakhvari on 12 December 2023, during the presentation of the new strategy for the development of general education: *“We want a person to be Georgian, to be grounded in Georgian identity, to be raised on patriotic foundations, and to value and know their culture and history.”* At the same event, then Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili stated that, since 2004, children and young people in Georgian schools and universities had been involved in an “experiment to change the Georgian DNA”, and that this experiment aimed to deprive them of their national identity.

⁹ The National Goals of General Education adopted in 2004 said that “the general education system in Georgia aims to create favorable conditions for the formation of a free personality, a bearer of national and general human values,” adding that “along with this, the education system develops the mental and physical skills of the adolescent, provides the necessary knowledge, establishes a healthy lifestyle, forms students’ civic awareness based on liberal and democratic values and helps them to understand their rights and duties towards the family, society and the state.” <https://civil.ge/archives/574134>

Why May the Operation of “Value-Based Education” Clubs in Public Schools Be Incompatible with the Principles of Secularism and Religious Neutrality?

Although the programme is formally voluntary and club-based, this circumstance alone does not resolve the possible problem of violating religious neutrality¹⁰ in public schools. [The Law on General Education](#) prohibits the use of the educational process in public schools for the purposes of *religious indoctrination, proselytism, or forced assimilation (Article 13(2))*. At the same time, students, parents, teachers, and their associations have the right to use school premises and resources on equal terms and without discrimination (*Article 8(1)*). Accordingly, if a club activity concerning religious issues is held in school premises outside regular academic hours, it should be based on students’ free interest and the principle of equal access, rather than on instruction organized, methodically planned, and institutionally supported by the Ministry of Education and the GOC Patriarchate.

The programme and its mode of implementation also create risks of violating students’ right to equality and prohibition of discrimination, as it is carried out in public schools only with the participation of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Public school space and State resources become accessible to one specific religious institution, while other religious communities, students with non-religious worldviews, and students with different identities are not placed in an equal position. Moreover, the content presented as “common” or “national” values is defined on the basis of the dominant religious tradition and the ideological views of the ruling party. There is also a risk of indoctrination, particularly where the programme concerns school students, takes place in the authoritative environment of a public school, and is demonstratively supported by both the Ministry of Education and the Patriarchate.

Thus, “value-based education” clubs cannot be assessed merely as voluntary, informal, or generally ethical school activities. This initiative threatens the secular character of public education, the State’s obligation of religious neutrality, the freedom of religion or belief of students and parents, and the principles of equality and pluralism. This is particularly problematic in a context where religious indoctrination, proselytism, and violations of neutrality in public schools already remain [systemic challenges](#).

3. Election and Enthronement of the Patriarch of Georgia

On 11 May 2026, at an expanded council of the Georgian Orthodox Church held at the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Metropolitan Shio Mujiri of Senaki and Chkhorotsku was elected [the 142nd Patriarch of Georgia](#). Metropolitan Shio received 22 votes; Metropolitan Iob of the Eparchy of Urbisi and

¹⁰ State neutrality here is understood primarily as the *absence of State preference*, a standard concerned with non-discrimination, equal treatment and the avoidance of undue State interference in religious affairs. See Julie Ringelheim, “State Religious Neutrality as a Common European Standard? Reappraising the European Court of Human Rights Approach”, *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2017, pp. 24–47, at pp. 32–33, identifying three understandings of the ECtHR’s neutrality doctrine: neutrality as the absence of coercion, neutrality as the absence of preference and neutrality as the exclusion of religion from the public sphere, and arguing that neutrality as absence of preference best addresses unequal treatment and stigmatisation.

Ruisi received nine votes, while Metropolitan Grigol of Poti and Khobi received seven votes. One ballot was declared invalid. The [enthronement](#) of Shio III as Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Archbishop of Mtskheta-Tbilisi, and Metropolitan of Bichvinta and Tskhum-Apkhazeti took place on 12 May at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, Georgia's ancient capital.

During the reporting period, the process of electing the Patriarch was the subject of active public discussion. Clergy members spoke both about the autonomy of the Orthodox Church and about the risks of possible political or informal influence. Against this background, Georgian Dream presented almost any critical question, journalistic coverage, or dissenting assessment concerning the internal processes of the Orthodox Church as interference in the election of the Patriarch and as an attack on the unity of the Church and "Georgian identity". This narrative was promoted by GD Members of Parliament [Mariam Lashkhi](#), [Tengiz Sharmanashvili](#), and [Davit Matikashvili](#), as well as by GD propagandists [Amiran Salukvadze](#), [Nikoloz Metreveli](#), and [Lado Sadghobelashvili](#).

This narrative was accompanied by the portrayal of the opposition, independent media, and civil society as forces acting against the Orthodox Church, and by the equation of support for a particular candidate with respect for Patriarch Ilia II. The institution of Locum Tenens was effectively presented as conferring a hereditary right of succession, while discussion of other candidates or criticism of the selected clergyman was framed as opposition to the Patriarch's will, the course of the Orthodox Church, and the national interest. Such messages were promoted by the speaker of the disputed parliament, [Shalva Papuashvili](#), and GD representatives [Levan Machavariani](#), [Maia Bitadze](#), and [Nino Tsilosani](#).

Propaganda outlets pursuing a pro-government editorial policy repeated the same narrative and portrayed critical coverage as a "coordinated campaign" and an attempt to discredit the Orthodox Church. Examples included a Rustavi 2 report entitled "[Campaign against the Church](#)" and TV Imedi's coverage under the headline "[The Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Throne and the Synod Made Targets of Attack, and Yet Another Attempt to Discredit the Church](#)".

4. Media Coverage of the Death of Patriarch Ilia II and the Subsequent Period

4.1. Propaganda Media Outlets with a Pro-Government Editorial Policy

During the reporting period, propaganda media platforms pursuing a pro-government editorial policy disseminated Georgian Dream's messages about an alleged campaign against the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). Their reports presented opinions on the process of electing the Patriarch, candidates for the Patriarchal throne, developments within the GOC, and criticism of the religious institution, as part of a process supported by external forces and involving opposition politicians, civil society organizations, activists, media representatives, and some members of the clergy.

UK-sanctioned television channel Imedi	UK-sanctioned POSTV	Rustavi 2
• <i>“Insulting Members of the Synod and Interfering in Church Affairs Is Unacceptable to the Government”</i> • <i>“Attack on the Church”</i> • <i>“Attempt to Discredit the Church”</i> • <i>“The Opposition against the Church”</i> • <i>“Statements by Opposition Politicians Are Assessed by the Ruling Team as an Attack on the New Patriarch and the Church”</i> • <i>“The Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Throne Made a Target of Attack”</i> • <i>“The Ruling Team Describes Insults against the Locum Tenens as an Attempt to Diminish the Candidate and Create Discord within the Church”</i> • <i>“Attacks on the Church by the Opposition Continue”</i> • <i>“Tsotne Ivanishvili Described Insulting Statements against the Church and the Patriarch as Immoral”</i> • <i>“A New Campaign against the Church and Statements Made Ahead of the Patriarchal Election”</i> • <i>“Campaign ahead of the Election of the Patriarch”</i>.	• <i>“Attack on the Church”</i> • <i>“A New Deep-State Tactic—The Hungarian Lesson”</i> • <i>“Pro-Opposition Propaganda against the Church”</i> • <i>“Attack on the Church”</i>; • <i>“Attack against the Church”</i>; • <i>“The Opposition against the Patriarch”</i> • <i>“Who Is Fighting Metropolitan Shio, the Locum Tenens of the Patriarch, Why and How?”</i> • <i>“Attack against the Church”</i>	• <i>“A Coordinated Attempt to Discredit the Church”</i> • <i>“A Coordinated Attempt to Discredit the Church”</i> • <i>“Campaign against the Church”</i> • <i>“Campaign against the Church”</i> • <i>“A Coordinated Attack Aimed at Discrediting the Church”</i> • <i>“A Coordinated Attack Aimed at Discrediting the Church”</i> • <i>“The Second Wave of Attacks on the Church”</i> • <i>“Campaign against the Church”</i>

The propaganda reports presented, in a manipulative manner, public statements by various opposition politicians, as well as personal opinions expressed by individual activists and representatives of the media or civil society concerning Church–State relations, the election of the Patriarch, candidates for the patriarchal throne, or the Patriarchate. Reports built around these statements created the impression that all opposition politicians, activists, media outlets, and civil society organizations constituted a homogeneous and antagonistic force. On one side, GD was portrayed as defending the GOC and traditional values; on the other were all of its opponents,

collectively labeled the “collective National Movement”, who were allegedly seeking to undermine the authority of the GOC through so-called “foreign funding”. Within this narrative, any criticism concerning the GOC was automatically interpreted as foreign influence and anti-national activity.

Most of the reports were based on statements by GD leaders and members of its satellite party, People’s Power. The principal narrative concerning a “campaign against the Church” remained unchanged. The reports focused primarily on explanations provided by GD members, which occupied the overwhelming majority of airtime. GD referred to instructions from [shadowy rulers](#) and a [pre-planned scenario directed from abroad](#), the alleged purpose of which was to [undermine public trust in the GOC](#), [provoke internal confrontation](#), [completely discredit the election process](#), and [damage the spiritual unity of the GOC](#) and its congregation.

Archbishop Zenon Iarajuli of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir also became a target of attacks following [statements](#) he made to TV Pirveli. According to the reports, Archbishop Zenon [criticized the outcome of the Holy Synod meeting on television one week after the meeting and insulted Metropolitan Shio, who had not yet been elected Patriarch Shio III](#).

In some propaganda-oriented, pro-government reports, journalists themselves expressed views consistent with GD’s messages.

[Khatia Kvatadze](#), journalist of Imedi TV’s *Kronika*: “Once again, a section of society, including representatives of the opposition, remained outside the nationwide celebration. Both their attitude and the manner in which they express it publicly are insulting to the countless people for whom today is important.”

[Davit Kakulia](#), presenter of Rustavi 2’s *Kurieri*: “In parallel with the enthronement of the new Patriarch, opposition groups and persons associated with them are continuing a deliberate campaign against the Church. They circulated aggressive posts on social media against the newly enthroned Patriarch. Insulting language, abuse, and attempts to diminish the personality of Shio III, whom Ilia II had distinguished during his lifetime, are only some of the statements being disseminated by opposition activists through social media...”

[Natia Lazashvili](#), presenter of Rustavi 2’s *Kurieri*: “...a new wave and a final offensive against Shio Mujiri, including from within the Church. Clergy members, television channels, and other media platforms have also been drawn into the coordination.”

[Data Gvasalia](#), presenter of POSTV’s *Main News Bulletin*: “An independent and internally united Church is unacceptable to radical political groups and actors associated with them, because their interest is not the protection of faith, but the transformation of the ecclesiastical pulpit into their own political instrument...”

[Ana Ashordia](#), presenter of POSTV’s *Main News Bulletin*: “Speculation concerning the election of the Patriarch and the questioning of the Holy Synod’s decision continue as part of the attack on the Church. At a particularly responsible time for the Georgian Church, when the Synod is preparing to elect the Patriarch, anti-national groups are attempting to discredit the process.”

4.2. Coverage by Media Independent of Georgian Dream

Independent, critical media outlets not affiliated with Georgian Dream actively covered the election of the Patriarch, including by publishing public comments and views from clergy members on the election process and the candidates for the patriarch¹¹.

In their programs and interviews, some clergy members also spoke openly about pardoning citizens detained during the pro-European demonstrations following the 2024 parliamentary elections, including prisoners of conscience.¹² They also expressed support for children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy and their parents in their demand for access to the necessary medication.¹³

The media extensively covered the day of the patriarchal election, the enthronement of Shio III, his first sermon as Patriarch, and the messages conveyed in that sermon.¹⁴

Before Metropolitan Shio was elected the 142nd Catholicos-Patriarch, the media actively covered the views of various respondents concerning the election process and the candidates.¹⁵ This included reports that the diploma confirming the higher education of Metropolitan Iob Akiashvili of Urbnisi and Ruisi, a candidate for the patriarchal throne, had been lost. The media also reported

¹¹ Formula TV aired reports and interviews under the following titles: [“Interview with Archpriest Zaza Tevzadze | Droeba”](#); [“The Programmes of the Candidates for Patriarch - Giorgi Targamadze’s Review”](#); and [“It Is Already Clear That Metropolitan Shio Is a Russian Project - Dorote Kurashvili”](#). TV Pirveli aired reports and interviews entitled: [“We Hope That His Holiness Will Be a Patriarch of Love and Mercy | Metropolitan Saba Intskirveli”](#); [“Metropolitan Anton: Today, the Mother Church Passed the Test”](#); [“The Election of the Patriarch Took Place at a Very High Spiritual Level | Metropolitan Daniel”](#); [“Full Interview with Archbishop Zenon Iarajuli”](#); [“Archbishop Zenon’s Controversial Interview | Will Metropolitan Shio Respond to Archbishop Zenon’s Controversial Statements?”](#); [“His Holiness Shio Also Noted That the Patriarchate Is a Great Honour, but at the Same Time a Heavy Burden | Metropolitan Dositeos”](#); and [“The Election of the Patriarch | Metropolitan Grigol’s Sermon Today”](#).

¹² Formula TV aired reports entitled: [“The Enthronement of the New Patriarch and the Issue of Pardoning Prisoners of Conscience”](#) and [“The Enthronement of the New Patriarch and the Issue of Pardoning Prisoners of Conscience”](#). TV Pirveli aired reports entitled: [“Prisoners of Conscience Awaiting Pardons”](#); [“The New Patriarch’s Plans and the Holy Synod Awaiting Shio III’s Decision”](#); [“Will Georgian Dream Agree to a Request for the Pardoning of Prisoners of Conscience?”](#); [“Bishops Call for Pardons | What Processes Are Beginning within the Patriarchate?”](#); [“Bishops Call for the Pardoning of Prisoners”](#); and [“The Issue of Pardoning Prisoners of Conscience | What Clergy Members Are Saying and What They Expect”](#).

¹³ Formula TV aired reports entitled: [“Shio III to Meet Parents of Children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy”](#); [“Meeting with Shio III and Propaganda by a Georgian Dream Minister”](#); [“The Patriarch Has Given Us a Ray of Hope — Parents of Children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy”](#); [“Parents of Children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Meet at the Patriarchate”](#); [“The Patriarchate Promised to Mediate with the Georgian Dream Government on the Issue of the Medication”](#); [“Children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Are Still Waiting for Medication”](#); and [“Meeting the Patriarch Was a Source of Light for Us — Tako Gogoladze, Parent of a Child with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy”](#). TV Pirveli aired reports entitled: [“Meeting with Shio III — Will the Patriarch’s Involvement Change Georgian Dream’s Position?”](#) and [“The Synod to Discuss the Pardoning of Prisoners and Assistance for Children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy”](#).

¹⁴ Formula TV aired reports entitled: [“How Was the Patriarchal Election Conducted?”](#); [“The Most Important Thing \[Shio III\] Must Do Is Renounce Violence — Levan Sutidze”](#); [“Shio III’s First Sermon”](#); [“The Enthronement of Shio III and Developments within the Church | Professor Giorgi Pareshishvili”](#); [“The Enthronement of Shio III”](#); [“The Patriarch’s First Spring”](#); and [“Shio’s ‘Noise’ - Mate Kirvalidze’s Vlog”](#). TV Pirveli aired reports entitled: [“The Day of the Patriarch’s Enthronement”](#); [“Like a Good Shepherd, I Wish to Be Able to Carry This Heavy Cross | Shio III’s First Sermon”](#); [“The New Patriarch’s First Sermon | What Messages Did Shio III Convey?”](#); [“Georgia Has a New Patriarch”](#); and [“The Path to the Patriarchate — Little-Known Details from the Life of Shio III”](#).

¹⁵ Formula TV aired reports entitled: [“Metropolitan Iob’s Diploma”](#); [“The Question of Metropolitan Iob’s Education”](#); [“Metropolitan Iob Confirms That His Diploma Was Stolen”](#); [“One Day before the Election of the New Patriarch”](#); and [“Church Regulations - The Stolen Diploma | Report by Tinatin Eradze”](#). TV Pirveli aired reports entitled: [“Metropolitan Iob’s Diploma Has Disappeared from the Episcopal Residence ... It Was Most Likely Stolen | Metropolitan Giorgi Jamdeliani”](#); [“Metropolitan Iob Confirms the Theft of His Diploma | What the Bishop of Urbnisi and Ruisi Says”](#); [“The Bishop’s Diploma Has Disappeared”](#); [“The Meeting at the Theological Academy Has Ended | The Council Recognized Metropolitan Iob’s Diploma”](#); and [“Lost or Stolen — What Happened to Metropolitan Iob’s Diploma?”](#)

opinions concerning the internal affairs of the Patriarchate and the risks of possible external interference in the election process.¹⁶

5. Anti-Western Messages

During the reporting period, Georgian Dream representatives and propagandists continued to conduct an aggressive anti-Western campaign. The narrative of “external forces” and their “domestic agents” remained central to their rhetoric. The opposition, civil society, independent media, and other critical groups were portrayed not as independent actors but as agents carrying out the instructions of Western institutions and foreign foundations, whose alleged objective was to weaken and destroy the Georgian Orthodox Church, religious identity, and traditions.

Examples included:

[Mamuka Mdinaradze](#), GD Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for the Coordination of Law Enforcement Agencies, 26 May: “It is regrettable, but not new, that the unity of the Church and the State irritates a group of people who, acting on the instructions of foreign forces, have adopted a strategy of divide and rule as their internal slogan.”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Chairperson of the GD Parliament, 12 May: “There is no opposition whatsoever. In fact, in this case, we should not focus on particular opposition figures. **We should see their foreign patrons behind them. This is the same line—the same line that has been operating against the State and has now been activated against the Church.** It is important that our society remain vigilant.”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Chairperson of the GD Parliament, 8 May: “...we are witnessing attempts, commissioned from abroad, to **create a degree of unrest and confrontation within the Georgian Church** as well...”

[Maia Bitadze](#), GD Member of Parliament, 11 May “...the whole world saw the extent to which a nation can consolidate—a nation that both external forces and the radical opposition, which seeks to present itself as a beacon of democracy, had been making very harmful attempts to divide.”

[Davit Matikashvili](#), GD Member of Parliament, 13 May: “...this once again unmasks them and demonstrates that these forces are acting both of their own volition and with the funding and support of external forces. **They seek to undermine the Georgian Church and spirituality.** They then believe that they will be able to implement their degraded agenda with ease.”

¹⁶ Formula TV aired reports entitled: “[The Ruling Party’s Objective Is to Align the Agenda of the Patriarchate with That of the Government - Armaz Akhvediani](#)”; “[Games for the Patriarchal Throne](#)”; “[The Election of the Patriarch](#)”; “[The Struggle for the Patriarchal Throne](#)”; and “[The Election of the Patriarch](#)”. TV Pirveli aired reports entitled: “[The Day of the Patriarchal Election | Theologians Discuss the Interests of External Groups](#)”; “[The Locum Tenens \[Shio\] Established His Own Election Headquarters | Mirian Gamrekelashvili](#)”; “[Who Is Interfering in the Patriarchal Election, in What Form, and Who Is Lobbying Whom?](#)”; “[Interference in the Patriarchal Election? | What Salome Zourabichvili Says](#)”; “[Interference in the Patriarchal Election?](#)”; “[Blocked Candidates and Influential Groups within the Patriarchate: Tensions Are Rising in the Church](#)”; and “[How Were Candidates for Patriarch Blocked? - Previously Untold Details of the Difficult Synod Meeting](#)”.

5.1. The European Union as a Force Opposing the Orthodox Church and State Sovereignty

During the reporting period, Georgian Dream manipulatively exploited the death of the Catholicos-Patriarch and the process of electing his successor to reinforce its anti-Western rhetoric. [According to GD representatives](#), these events exposed those who were seeking to divide the Orthodox Church, provoke internal confrontation, and turn the Church and society against one another.

The same message was advanced in the GD Prime Minister's [open letter](#) of 19 May to the leaders of the EU's highest institutions. In the letter, clashes between the police and pro-Palestinian activists in [Copenhagen](#) on May 13 were presented without the broader context and used as evidence of the EU's alleged "crisis of values". According to Kobakhidze, the EU no longer protects democracy, human rights, or freedom of expression. At the same time, criticism of the police response was linked to messages concerning migration, the alleged "weakening" of national and gender identities, and the erosion of society's distinct identity. The letter thereby reinforced the narrative of a conflict of values between Europe and "traditional", Christian Georgia.

Shalva Papuashvili, Chairperson of the GD Parliament, contrasted Article 78 of the Constitution, which obliges constitutional bodies to take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure Georgia's full integration into the EU and NATO, with other constitutional provisions. He [argued](#) that Western partners should first respect Georgia's statehood, sovereignty, and the special role of the Orthodox Church, and only then demand compliance with Article 78. Such rhetoric creates the false impression that European integration is incompatible with Georgia's constitutional order, national interests, and religious identity.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia [disseminated](#) the same message to discredit the EU. In response to the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs endorsing a critical [report](#) on the state of democracy, the rule of law, and European integration in Georgia, the [Ministry accused](#) EU institutions of deliberately attacking the Georgian State, societal values, and the Orthodox Church. Criticism of democratic backsliding was presented not as an assessment of the Georgian authorities' conduct, but as a campaign directed against the country's sovereignty, national values, and the Orthodox Church.

"The use of EU institutions for deliberate attacks against the Georgian State, democratic institutions, Georgian society and its values, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, is alarming and grossly violates the religious sentiments of the nation."

During the reporting period, GD also repeatedly attacked Western partners and representatives of the EU and its Member States in Georgia.

Examples included:

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Chairperson of the GD Parliament, 16 June: “Only recently, we saw the position of the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia and the Georgian Church regarding the law on family values: these laws should not be amended or repealed but, on the contrary, should be expanded and strengthened. **When we have to choose whether to listen to Brussels or to the Georgian Church, we choose the Georgian Church.** Brussels may be offended by this, but anyone who is offended can drink some cold water.”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Chairperson of the GD Parliament, 10 May: “There is an attempt to divide society and provoke confrontation. Such moments are therefore a good indicator for identifying those who are hostile to Georgian society, **who seek to divide the Church, provoke confrontation, and turn the Church and society against one another.**”

[Maia Bitadze](#), GD Member of Parliament, 11 May: “...for several years, a deeply shameful campaign to **discredit the Georgian Orthodox Church has been actively pursued, with even foreign politicians involved.** In their view, the Georgian public was supposed to come to believe that the Orthodox Church is an ‘obscurantist mechanism’ for influencing people.”

[Guram Macharashvili](#), Member of Parliament from GD’s satellite party People’s Power, 14 May: “...they began imposing sanctions, both against individuals and more broadly in various areas, as well as launching attacks and **spreading disinformation against State institutions, the Church, and the Patriarchate.** Why? In order to influence society...”

[Vato Shakarishvili](#), Executive Secretary of GD’s satellite party United Neutral Georgia, 1 May: “**The European Union tells you: set aside your dignity, culture, traditions, Christian history, and faith,** and only then knock on my door, and I will decide whether I will even speak to you. At this stage, it is not yet a question of admission, but merely whether they will open the door.”

5.1.1. Resolutions Interpreted as a Campaign against the Orthodox Church and State Sovereignty

On 17 June, the European Parliament adopted a [critical resolution](#) on Georgia. [According to the European Parliament](#), Georgia’s EU accession process had effectively come to a halt, for which the ruling Georgian Dream party bore responsibility. The resolution condemned political repression, called for the release of political prisoners, and supported targeted personal sanctions. It also strongly condemned the role of GD-affiliated media outlets, Imedi, POSTV, and Rustavi 2, in disseminating systematic disinformation, smear campaigns, and hostile propaganda against the EU, and called for sanctions against them. At the same time, the resolution reaffirmed the EU’s continued support for the people of Georgia and their European aspirations, as they continued to struggle for a European and democratic Georgia amid democratic backsliding, growing repression, unlawful detentions, hostile rhetoric, disinformation, and threats.

The resolution [stated](#) that the Orthodox Church remained an influential institution in Georgian society and played an important role in shaping public discourse. In this context, the European Parliament expressed concern that Russia was using religious networks in Georgia as channels for disseminating disinformation and exerting influence, with the aim of weakening the country’s pro-European orientation and democratic resilience. The document also underlined that some clergy members within the Orthodox Church opposed such instrumentalization and publicly criticized both Russian influence and GD policies. It further noted that Georgian Orthodox

diocesan structures and parishes operated within the EU, making particular vigilance against transnational disinformation necessary.

On 24 June, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) also [adopted](#) a critical resolution on Georgia. [The resolution stated](#) that democratic backsliding in Georgia was continuing and that the conditions necessary for free and fair elections did not currently exist in the country. The document expressed concern about repression against political opponents, civil society, and the media; pointed to the risk that political prisoners existed in Georgia; and called on the Government to repeal repressive legislation in full and strengthen democratic institutions.

During the reporting period, when commenting on these resolutions, GD leaders used rhetoric that was critical of and sought to discredit the EU and European states. The substance of the resolutions was interpreted in a manipulative manner to create the impression that they were directed against Georgia's sovereignty, State institutions, traditional values, and the Orthodox Church. According to GD Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, "European Parliament resolutions have lost all value".

GD used the reference to the role of the Orthodox Church in the European Parliament resolution to reinforce its anti-European narrative and undermine the resolution's legitimacy. GD representatives portrayed the assessment as a direct attack on the Orthodox Church by an official European institution and as a dangerous precedent.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 23 June: "Grants were used in Georgia to finance the incitement of hatred and aggression, **attacks against the Orthodox Church, and attacks against State institutions**. This was simply an instrument of gross foreign intervention. [The Law on Grants](#)¹⁷ was adopted to counter this."

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Chairperson of the GD Parliament, 25 June: "... It is now apparent that they [EU] are **moving to the next stage of attacks on the Georgian Church, and the European Parliament, as the most reviled institution, was used to test the ground**. It is therefore important that the European Commission and the EU Ambassador to Georgia immediately distance themselves from such an attack. No one can wash their hands of this disgraceful conduct against the Georgian people and the Georgian Church. Therefore, **failure to distance oneself from the European Parliament's attack on the Georgian Church amounts to endorsing it**, and this is precisely how we will regard such an approach in the future."

[Levan Makhashvili](#), GD Member of Parliament, 23 June: "...they want to fight the principal pillar of our spirituality, our Mother Church, the institution that preserved our language, homeland, and faith through the most difficult centuries. Alongside the Church, they are fighting the family, traditions, and identity. **By attacking the Church and our values, they seek to break the backbone of our national body, because they know that as long as Georgians are sustained by faith and tradition, no foreign agenda can be imposed on them...**"

[Maia Bitadze](#), GD Member of Parliament, 25 June: "...a red line has been crossed, now in relation to religious sentiments and faith. This gives us additional grounds to ask what it is that drives them to use such hostile language towards Georgia and the Georgian authorities, and to address an issue such as our religion and an institution that enjoys one of the highest levels of public trust in Georgia."

¹⁷ Social Justice Center assessment: Amendments to the Law "On Grants" Aim to Destroy Georgian Civil Society: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/grantebis-shesakheb-kanonshi-gatarebuli-tsvilebebis-mizania-kartuli-samokalako-sazogadoebis-ganadgureba-shefaseba>GD's

Significant airtime was devoted to coverage of these resolutions by pro-government, propaganda media outlets, including [Rustavi 2](#) and [Imedi](#). A [report](#) by the UK-sanctioned TV Imedi entitled “Resolutions Co-Authored by Radicals” focused on the reference to the Orthodox Church and characterized it as insulting. The resolutions were described as “unjust”, while their authors were referred to as “Eurobureaucrats” who allegedly made decisions “on the instructions of influential forces” and relied on what the report described as false denunciations by “wealthy Georgian NGOs” and the opposition.

5.1.2. Statements against Poland

During the reporting period, GD continued its hostile rhetoric against Poland. It was prompted by an opinion [expressed](#) by a guest invited to the Georgian-language service of Polish public broadcasting. The guest offered his own assessment of the process of electing the Patriarch and possible Russian influence within the Georgian Orthodox Church. Although this was the view of an individual respondent rather than the official position of the Polish Government, Georgian Dream representatives [portrayed](#) it as an organized attack by the Polish State against the Georgian Orthodox Church. Shalva Papuashvili, Chairperson of the disputed Parliament, accused the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs of creating a “propaganda instrument” and of “attacking the Orthodox Church”.

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Chairperson of the GD Parliament, 10 May: “The Polish Government launched a **propaganda channel** in the Georgian language, and the first thing it did was **attack the Georgian Church**. I do not know whether the Polish Government believes that it has any right to attack the Georgian Church, but that is its major problem, because it fails to recognize its own insignificance in comparison with the greatness of the Church.”

[Guram Macharashvili](#), Member of Parliament from GD's satellite party People's Power, 1 May: “Why should anyone in Poland want to pass judgment on the Georgian Church? ... The events of March, in particular, made it clear that the Church played a major role in Georgia's establishment as a State, which is also reflected in the Constitution. This is precisely why **they are always fighting against the Georgian Church.**”

6. The European Union and the US Government Controlled by the “Deep State”

Georgian Dream and affiliated propagandists systematically repeat the conspiratorial narrative of the “deep state” and the “Global War Party”, according to which the European Union and Western institutions are controlled by a shadowy force referred to as the “deep state”. Under this narrative, [*“the Eurobureaucracy is subject to informal oligarchic influence”*](#), while the West allegedly seeks to drag Georgia into war, bring about a change of government in the country, strip Georgians of their national identity, and weaken the Orthodox Church. It is noteworthy that, as early as 2025, GD propagandists openly stated that references to “oligarchic families” meant Jewish families.¹⁸

One of the disseminators of conspiratorial and antisemitic theories concerning the “deep state” is GD propagandist Zaza Shatirishvili, who also remained active during the reporting period. He [*portrayed*](#) decisions taken by European institutions concerning Georgian pro-government media outlets as attacks by the “deep state” and the “Eurobureaucracy” controlled by it. According to the [*UK-sanctioned television channel Imedi*](#), the European Parliament banned the outlet from operating for one year. The channel also reported that Moldova had refused accreditation to three Georgian pro-government and propaganda broadcasters, TV Imedi, POSTV, and Rustavi 2, to attend a session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

At the same time, Shatirishvili described the European Union as a formally democratic space that is controlled by oligarchic forces, where elections merely create an illusion of choice and citizens are deprived of their national identity through an [*“artificially imposed pseudo-ideology”*](#). Alongside the EU, Shatirishvili also [*claimed*](#) that US President Donald Trump and his administration were controlled by the “deep state”:

“It is a fact that Donald Trump’s supposed war against the ‘deep state’ has proved to be a complete farce. Moreover, it is now clear to everyone that Donald Trump himself is controlled by the ‘deep state’.”

During the reporting period, GD also continued its rhetoric against diplomatic representatives of the EU and its Member States in Georgia. German Ambassador Peter Fischer became the target of another attack after [*describing*](#) the authorities’ messages concerning the “Global War Party”, the “deep state”, and “liberal fascism” as fabricated and false narratives. Representatives of the ruling party [*portrayed*](#) the Ambassador’s criticism of conspiracy theories as a mockery of and disrespect towards Germany, the European Union, and Georgian society.

[*Giorgi Gabunia*](#), GD Member of Parliament, 26 May: “I want to tell this person, who is speaking to us ironically today and pretending that he cannot find the ‘deep state’, one thing: as someone who is carrying out the instructions of his superiors, he should first look for the ‘deep state’ in his own country.”

¹⁸ See TDI reports: https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/freedom_of_religion_or_belief_equality_and_secularity_june2025.pdf, p.9-10; https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/tdi_monitoring_report_forb_equality_and_secularity_august_2025.pdf p.7-8.

[Irakli Zarkua](#), GD Member of Parliament, 23 May: “Fischer had become more sensible for a while, but now he has received a new assignment directly from the ‘deep state’. The same applies to him and to the other ambassador, the EU Ambassador Herczyński, who has nothing whatsoever to do with European values.”

[Eka Sepashvili](#), Member of Parliament from GD’s satellite party People’s Power, 23 May: “...accordingly, Fischer’s statement that he was supposedly unable to find the ‘deep state’ merely demonstrates his helplessness. Fischer has no answers to the questions posed to him by Georgian society and journalists...”

7. Statements by Clergy Members

7.1. Statements by Orthodox Clergy Members Concerning the Election of the Patriarch

The reporting period coincided with an important date in the history of Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox Church: the election and enthronement of the [142nd Patriarch](#).

Before the election, some clergy members expressed their views, during sermons and in comments to the media, on the process of electing the future Patriarch and on the candidates.

7.1.1. Statements on Possible External Interference and on the Inadmissibility of Pressure to Support Any Particular Candidate for Patriarch

As in the previous reporting period, some clergy members voiced secular calls for non-interference in the internal affairs of the GOC and for the inadmissibility of external pressure. Some drew attention to the risks of possible government interference in the process of electing the new Patriarch, while others stated that, based on their personal experience, they had not observed interference by the authorities or by other external forces in the patriarchal election. Some clergy members maintained a neutral tone, stating that the election of the Patriarch would take place “by the will of God” and that it was a “heavy cross and responsibility”, while others expressed support for Metropolitan Shio Mujiri, either openly or indirectly.

Statements concerning possible interference:

Metropolitan [Iob Akiashvili](#) of Mroveli-Urbnisi, 7 May: “[**Pressure and interference**] are not yet being felt. Can you not see it? **The government television channels are doing all of this [pressure and interference]**, nothing more. There is no internal confrontation; there is unanimity, the situation is very good.”

Archbishop [Zenon Iarajuli](#) of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir, 6 May: “If we are to follow this through to the end, we should also say that they are naming a person, one of the businessmen, **who approached several hierarchs and asked them to vote for Metropolitan Shio**. I will not say [who it was]... let those whom he approached say it. I am telling you a fact, one component of it: such cases were recorded.”

Statements concerning non-interference:

Metropolitan [Andria Gvazava](#) of Gori and Ateni, 11 May: “This question makes me smile. I think that when interference takes place, it affects everyone. You and I may talk and share opinions: **I may like one candidate, you may like another. What does that amount to? Is that interference?! No one has spoken to me.**”

Bishop [Saba Intskirveli](#) of North America, 10 May: "Tomorrow is a historic day and we cannot say anything in advance. **Of course, an independent decision will be made.** There has been no interference. **There has been no interference with me personally.** If there was interference with anyone, they will say so themselves. There has been no interference with me personally."

Metropolitan [Nikoloz Pachuashvili](#) of Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo, 6 May: "If we all know it, then I should know it too, should I not? I am part of this 'all', am I not? **Honestly, this is the first I have heard of pressure or anything of that sort.** For example, why could it not have been exerted on me? In the end, it is almost offensive: if they exerted it on everyone, what did I do wrong? They should have exerted it on me too. Truly, no one has exerted any pressure. I am telling you this before God."

Bishop [Dositeos Bogveradze](#) of Belgium and the Netherlands, 1 May: "It is difficult for one bishop to answer this. If a bishop is experiencing any pressure, he is obliged to say so, and this is also necessary. **I have not felt such pressure from anyone,** nor have I heard from other bishops that any pressure was being exerted on anyone."

Bishop [Iakob Iakobishvili](#) of Bodbe, 10 May: "You will see [what happens tomorrow]. I am saying: **there is no interference and there has not been any!** Our Synod is not so weak that someone could interfere in it; do not worry about that."

After Metropolitan Shio Mujiri of Senaki and Chkhorotsku was elected the 142nd Patriarch of Georgia, Orthodox clergy members mainly spoke about the significance of the election of the new Patriarch, the unity of the GOC and society, the need for a peaceful and dignified transition, the new challenges ahead, and the responsibility of Shio III. Some assessed the choice positively, while others maintained a different position but wished the new Patriarch success. These issues were addressed, among others, by Metropolitan [Daniel Datuashvili](#) of Chiatura and Sachkhere; Bishop [Dositeos Bogveradze](#) of Belgium and the Netherlands; Metropolitan [Anania Japaridze](#) of Manglisi and Tetrtskaro; Metropolitan [Grigol Berbichashvili](#) of Poti and Khobi; Archbishop [Zosime Shioshvili](#) of Tsilkani and Dusheti; Metropolitan [Isaiah Chanturia](#) of Nikozi and Tskhinvali; Metropolitan [Ioane Gamrekeli](#) of Kutaisi and Gaenati; and Archbishop [Zenon Iarajuli](#) of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir.

7.2. Statements in Support of Children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

During the reporting period, the continuous protest of parents of children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy continued outside the Government Administration. [They called](#) on the State to fund modern medicines and to create a comprehensive medical care system for patients. The Georgian Dream government initially justified its refusal by referring to questions concerning the safety and [effectiveness of the medicines, as well as budgetary responsibility.](#)

The parents repeatedly requested a meeting with the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church in order to seek support and assistance, including through a written statement, by going to the Patriarchate, and through public appeals. On 8 May, after repeated requests from the parents, a meeting [was held](#) between representatives of the Patriarchate and the parents. On 19 May, Patriarch Shio III [met them](#), while the [GOC expressed its readiness](#) to become involved in the process with a view to finding a solution.

The parents' demands were met with broad public support. For example, within the framework of the [charity campaign](#) organized by the Defend Iliuni movement, more than GEL 2 million was [raised](#) for the children's needs. At the same time, pro-government media and social media platforms saw attempts to discredit the medicines and the solidarity campaign, involving not only [manipulative reports but also fake accounts generated by artificial intelligence](#).

After 45 days of protest, in early June, the [GD Prime Minister met with the parents](#). It was decided that multidisciplinary medical groups and a special working group would be created, which, at the first stage, would work on importing two of the four requested medicines into Georgia. As of 30 June, the procurement process was ongoing.

Throughout this period, some clergy members also responded to the issue in a gesture of solidarity. They spoke about the need to fund the medicines. Some called on the public to support the fundraising marathon launched by Defend Iliuni. Statements of support were made by Metropolitan [Anton Bulukhia](#) of Vani and Baghdati, Metropolitan [Nikoloz Pachuashvili](#) of Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo, Archpriest [Andria Jagmaidze](#), Archpriest [Konstantine Paichadze](#), Archpriest [Giorgi Tserodze](#), and Archimandrite [Iliia Toloraia](#). Bishop [Giorgi Jamdeliani](#) of Marneuli and Hujabi and Bishop [Zenon Iarajuli](#) of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir also called on their congregations to support the fund.

7.3. “Hate Speech” Regulatory Division

During the reporting period, the “division for combating hate speech” announced by Georgian Dream was [established](#) within the Human Rights Protection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and became operational on 1 June. The division's declared function is to proactively monitor publicly disseminated statements that are allegedly insulting or contain hate speech, identify alleged offenders, draw up administrative offence protocols, and forward materials to the courts.

According to human rights defenders, the creation of a police mechanism involving vague norms, disproportionate sanctions, and a high risk of using restrictive instruments, [poses a direct threat](#) to freedom of expression and creates serious risks of political censorship and total control. It is noteworthy that some clergy members also drew attention to the negative aspects of legal mechanisms regulating hate speech and to the risks of their possible abuse.

Archbishop [Zenon Iarajuli](#) of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir, 19 May: “...However, a particular problem is the interpretative nature of the very concept of ‘hate speech’. If it is applied without clear legal criteria, there is a risk that this category will turn into an instrument of political and ideological control, within which critical, dissenting, or government-unacceptable discourse may also be included. This issue is especially sensitive in the context of cultural and religious space, because, in the absence of clear definitions, **there is a risk that critical or dissenting opinion may be interpreted as ‘hate speech’, which will ultimately weaken both academic freedom and the culture of public debate. In this context, the balance that protects both human dignity and freedom at the same time becomes particularly important.** At the same time, Christian ethics rejects the humiliation of a person, hatred, and violence, because the human being is understood as created in the image of God and their dignity is inviolable. However, **Christian tradition is also based on**

freedom of conscience, personal responsibility, and the possibility of freely expressing the truth. This is precisely why, for the Church, both any form of human humiliation and hatred, and any restriction of freedom, are unacceptable.”

7.4. Support for Political Prisoners

During the reporting period, the enforcement of [unconstitutional](#) and repressive [legislation](#) against protest participants continued. On the basis of tightened rules, courts examined numerous administrative cases related to [standing on pavements](#) and sentenced dozens of people to [administrative detention](#).

In parallel with the process of electing the Patriarch and the sessions of the Holy Synod, the issue of pardoning prisoners of conscience detained after 28 November 2024 remained relevant. Some clergy members [supported mediation](#) by the new Patriarch with the authorities, the release of prisoners, and public reconciliation. Their statements were based both on the need to ease political confrontation and on the Christian understanding of pardon. A small number of clergy members openly expressed solidarity with prisoners of conscience and also criticized the actions of the GD government.

Metropolitan [Daniel Datuashvili](#) of Chiatura and Sachkhere, 24 May: “Personally, I think that this [pardon] could be one of the issues [to be discussed], although, again and again, I repeat that this is the Patriarch’s prerogative. We discussed this during the lifetime of Ilia II; the Locum Tenens also spoke about it, and the hierarchs also spoke about it. These discussions are continuing and we hope that we will see a result. Our great wish is for confrontation in the country to end and for peace and unity to be restored. For this, mutual respect is needed from both sides and, in my view, this respect will become the basis. No insults, no disrespect — I think this is the basis, and this is my personal opinion.”

Metropolitan [Anton Bulukhia](#) of Vani and Baghdati, 17 May: “As soon as the Synod is convened, we will raise all issues; we will begin methodically on all issues, the matter of **medicine for the children, pardons, imprisonments**. Of course, we will discuss them.”

Metropolitan [Isaiah Chanturia](#) of Nikozi and Tskhinvali, 12 May: “The position of the Church is that it is **better for a person not to be in prison**. By the grace of God, **perhaps the Church will manage some form of mediation**.”

Metropolitan [Anania Japaridze](#) of Manglisi and Tetrtskaro, 12 May: “Virtue is written down. We must read the book and do what is written there. Personally, as a Christian, of course [I support it]. We must care for every prisoner; that is what is written.”

Bishop [Dositeos Bogveradze](#) of Belgium and the Netherlands, 12 May: “I am only expressing an assumption, since the Patriarchate had such a position, I think that this is not far away, as a thought, an idea, an action. I do not know how this will happen. His Holiness also needs to be given some time. **My position is that Christ’s love must reach everyone. They should be pardoned**. Every issue becomes politicized. We should not do this, we should not act in this way. We should look at this through Christian eyes.”

Bishop [Saba Intskirveli](#) of North America, 12 May: “As one of the hierarchs, I agree that the **prisoners should be pardoned**. Father Andria also noted that, in the future, His Holiness intends once again to appeal to the President regarding a pardon, so that the prisoners may be pardoned. However, we cannot say what the response will be or how it will happen, because this is already the President’s decision.”

Hieromonk [Ieronime Katamadze](#), Secretary of the Georgian Diocese of North America, 12 May: “Among the hierarchs with whom I have had meetings and conversations, **the majority support general reconciliation**. I do not think anything will obstruct it. There is information that the new Patriarch will be able to ensure general reconciliation. There is such an expectation, and relevant information is also being circulated. Any leader, when he becomes the head of a local Church, begins certain changes, and these changes are positive. I believe that among the positive changes there will be general reconciliation, and that, in the polarized environment that exists in our country, the new Patriarch will be a reconciler between all sides.”

At the same time, some clergy members repeated the authorities’ narrative, according to which a pardon should be preceded by the detainees’ [recognition of guilt and repentance](#). Under this approach, pardon was not understood as a means of remedying unjust or politically motivated imprisonment but was instead linked to the detainees’ recognition of the charges brought against them and to their repentance.

Metropolitan [Nikoloz Pachuashvili](#) of Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo, 11 May: “I do not think our authorities are declaring this; **they do not acknowledge that these [prisoners] are imprisoned on political grounds, because most of those who are now in prison have not been charged with political offences, but with criminal or administrative charges. What should we do here? What should they repent of? Where does it happen that a prisoner in prison repents of their offence and is released?** The only thing being discussed here is that we, as clergy, should not have any restriction on going to these people, hearing their confession, giving them communion, and comforting them.”

Metropolitan [Stephane Kalaijishvili](#) of Tsageri and Lentekhi, 11 May: “...I cannot answer on behalf of His Holiness Shio, but I will state my position: **when you are asking for people to be pardoned, you need to have support from those people that the offences that took place are acknowledged**. If I am a mediator, I should not be telling the authorities, ‘release the criminal’; I should speak to this side as well and to that side as well, and I should see repentance from one side and forgiveness from the other, and then reconciliation will take place. How else? If they come out and say: ‘Look, we won, we defeated them,’ who will be the reason for this? The new Patriarch Shio, who arranged such a luxury for them. Then will others not tell Patriarch Shio: what state are these people in? You asked for their release; now look at what they are doing...”

7.4.1. Statements on the Health Condition of Politician Elene Khoshtaria

Some clergy members responded to the health condition of Elene Khoshtaria, the detained leader of the political party Droa,¹⁹ in the penitentiary institution and called on the relevant authorities to transfer her to a clinic. Elene Khoshtaria’s health had [sharply deteriorated](#) over the previous four months. On 29 June, the Director General of the Special Penitentiary Service stated that Elene Khoshtaria would be transferred from Rustavi Women’s Prison to the medical [clinic Vivamed](#).

Archpriest [Giorgi Tserodze](#), 26 June: “A person’s dignity, health, and life cannot depend on their political views or party affiliation.”

Archimandrite [Ilia Jinjolava](#), 26 June: “On a human level, I consider myself obliged to stand in solidarity with her and sincerely wish for her health, strength, and God’s help. May God strengthen her and grant her courage.”

¹⁹ On 24 March, Tbilisi City Court [sentenced](#) opposition politician Elene Khoshtaria to one year and six months of imprisonment for writing “Russian Dream” on an election banner of Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze.

7.5. Statements on Russia's Bombing of the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra

On the night of 15 June, Russia carried out another attack on Kyiv with ballistic missiles and [bombed the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra](#), one of the main monastic complexes of Orthodox Christianity. Some clergy members responded to Russia's war crime and exposed its disinformation propaganda, according to which the Kremlin justifies the war by claiming to defend Christianity and "traditional values", while itself destroying Christian holy sites.

Archbishop [Zenon Iarajuli](#) of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir, 17 June: "The attack against the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra is perceived with particular pain by all those for whom the holy sites of the Church are dear. We believe that damaging holy sites cannot shake the spiritual strength that has united and strengthened the Ukrainian nation for centuries."

Archimandrite [Ilia Jinjolava](#), 15 June: "...what is most difficult is that this is often justified in the name of Christian rhetoric and 'traditional values'. But Christianity is not the destruction of churches, the killing of peaceful people, or the desire to destroy a neighboring nation..."

Archimandrite [Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), 15 June: "Orthodoxy teaches us to love our enemy, and we see how Russia treats not only its enemy, but the very nation it calls its brotherly and co-religionist people. In light of all this, what is Christian in them? Nothing. They are very far from Christ and from a proper understanding of God."