

Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity



March 2026



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Monitoring Period: March 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 **March 2026**

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

Pre-election period (2024)

[August 25 to September 25](#)

[September 25 to October 25](#)

Post-election period (2024)

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

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

2025

[February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#), [June](#), [July](#), [August](#), [September](#), [October](#), [November-December](#);

2026

[January-February](#); [March](#)

Cover photo: Georgian Dream's official Facebook page



Contents

Main Trends	3
Context	3
Narratives	4
Political Manipulation Through Pseudo-Religious Narratives.....	5
1.1. The narrative of an “orchestrated attack” on the Orthodox Church	5
Political opposition	5
Civil society organizations	6
Participants in pro-European demonstrations and “radicals” as labeled by GD	6
1.2. Georgian Dream as the “defender of the Orthodox Church”.....	7
2. The issue of interference in the autonomy of the GOC.....	8
3. Media Coverage of the Patriarch’s Death and the Following Period	10
Pro-government media propaganda.....	10
Coverage by media independent of Georgian Dream	11
4. Anti-Western Messages	13
4.1. Discourse against international organizations and institutions	13
The “Moscow Mechanism” as a political instrument of the West	13
Manipulation of LGBT issues	14
Isolationism: Calls to withdraw from international organizations	15
4.2 The West and international partners as forces acting against “traditions and Orthodoxy.”	16
4.3 Manipulation of the patriarch’s death and condolences in an anti-Western context.....	17
Public mourning vs EU support.....	17
Manipulation of the “lack of condolences” narrative.....	17
5. Statements by Clergy.....	19
5.1 Statements by Orthodox clergy regarding the election of the next Patriarch	19
5.2 Statements on the “State Security Service Files”	20
5.3 Statements reflecting narratives aligned with the GD government	20
5.4 Critical statements by clergy on political justice and Church–State relations.....	21
Support for political prisoners.....	21
Church–State relations in the context of political power	21
Criticism of the religious institution and clarification of the Church’s role	21
5.5 Condolences by clergy of different religious communities following the death of the GOC Patriarch.....	22

Main Trends

Context

The reporting period of March 2026 coincided with a turning point in Georgia's recent history. On 17 March 2026, at the age of 93, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of the Georgian Orthodox Church (Ilia Shiolashvili in secular life) [passed away](#). Following his enthronement as Catholicos-Patriarch, he led the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) for nearly half a century. A widely revered figure, Ilia II has consistently [topped](#) approval ratings in Georgia, while the GOC has likewise retained its status as the country's most [trusted institution](#).

This period is also notable because, for the first time in the history of independent Georgia, a new GOC Patriarch must be [elected](#). According to the [Statute](#) of Church Governance, the Patriarch is elected by the Holy Synod through a majority vote. However, there is a risk that the Georgian Dream (GD) party may seek to influence the election of the Patriarch. These concerns have been publicly voiced by [some](#) members of the Orthodox clergy themselves.

[The statement](#) from the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service can be assessed as an apparent attempt at external interference in the Patriarchal election, indicating that Russian intelligence is interested in the decision-making process.

During the reporting period, Georgian Dream stated that the Patriarch should be elected by the Synod and that the government does not interfere in the Church's internal affairs. On the other hand, GD and their propagandists [portray](#) Ilia II's appointment of Metropolitan Shio Mujiri of Senaki and Chkhorotsku, as locum tenens during his lifetime as if it implied the hereditary transfer of the Patriarchate¹. According to their [messaging](#), respect for Ilia II automatically implies support for the locum tenens he appointed, while criticism of Metropolitan Shio is portrayed as a rejection of the Patriarch's own choice.

Concerns about oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's interference in the GOC's internal affairs and alleged attempts to undermine the Patriarch have been voiced by some members of the Orthodox clergy for years. For example, in 2019, the Patriarch's chorbishop, Iakob Iakobishvili, during an appearance on TV Pirveli, [accused](#) the then-Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, the former Prime Minister, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, and the Minister of Internal Affairs of [attempting to remove the Patriarch](#) at the behest of Bidzina Ivanishvili. Two days after making this statement, he resigned from his position as chorbishop at his own request.

In principle, the Georgian Orthodox Church is protected from state interference in its internal affairs by the Constitution of Georgia and the Constitutional Agreement between the GOC and

¹ The locum tenens is a hierarch who assumes administrative authority in the event of the Patriarch's death, resignation, or inability to perform his duties. The role of the locum tenens is a temporary function intended to ensure continuity in the governance of the Church. source: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/746561-ras-nishnavs-ras-ar-nishnavs-mosaqdreoba>

the State. Article 8 of the Constitution recognizes “the special role of the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia and its independence from the state.” However, Georgian Dream attempted to undermine this autonomy at the legislative level. In 2024, prior to parliamentary elections, GD announced an [initiative](#) to amend the Constitution to declare Orthodoxy the state religion.² Some Orthodox clergy themselves warned that this initiative posed a risk of weakening the GOC’s authority as an independent institution and undermining its autonomy. Then GD’s attempt to subordinate the Orthodox Church to the state failed, because it lacked the GOC’s full support.

Moreover, restrictions on freedom of religion or belief by the authorities, possible interference in the autonomy of the Orthodox Church, and illegal surveillance of clergy were revealed by the [leak](#) of the alleged files of the State Security Service of Georgia in 2021. The overwhelming majority of these materials concerned religious matters. The documents suggest that the GD authorities allegedly had been monitoring and wiretapping representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church and other religious organizations for years. Against the backdrop of the GD government’s increasingly anti-democratic and repressive policies, it can reasonably be assumed that illegal surveillance, interception, and potential blackmail may have continued on an even larger and more intensive scale.

Narratives

Statements circulated during the reporting period by Georgian Dream and figures affiliated with its propaganda network indicate that issues related to religion and the GOC are closely intertwined with an anti-Western political discourse. According to this narrative framework, the West and its local partners are attempting to weaken the Georgian Orthodox Church and undermine national identity.

During the reporting period, criticism of individual clergy members, the activities of religious institutions, or the relationship between the state and the GOC was frequently interpreted by Georgian Dream as [an attack on the GOC and as part of an “orchestrated campaign” by external forces](#). These messages intensified particularly after the death of Patriarch Ilia II and amid expectations surrounding the election of a new Patriarch. Moreover, GD used the day of the Patriarch’s funeral and public mourning to advance its own political objectives and attack its opponents.

Overall, TDI’s analysis of the political narratives by the GD, affiliated figures and their propagandists, revealed three major thematic categories: 1) Pseudo-religious discourse surrounding the Orthodox Church, according to which criticism of the relationship between the state and the GOC Patriarchate is framed as an attack on national identity; 2) The construction of anti-Western narratives, portraying the West as an enemy of Orthodox Christianity and national identity; 3) Delegitimization of domestic political opponents and civil society, presenting local actors as operating on behalf of external forces against the GOC and religious faith.

² TDI, Freedom of Religion or Belief report 2024, https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/tdis_forb_report_2024_eng.pdf p.15

Political Manipulation Through Pseudo-Religious Narratives

1.1. The narrative of an “orchestrated attack” on the Orthodox Church

During the reporting period, representatives of the Georgian Dream government and actors affiliated with it disseminated messages claiming that an organized and coordinated attack was underway against the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), a “*religious war*” aimed at weakening Georgia’s spiritual foundation”. According to this narrative, criticism of a religious institution or individual clergy members is not an internal public debate but rather a process supported by external forces whose goal is to undermine the authority of the GOC and national identity. These messages intensified particularly after the death of Patriarch Ilia II.

The following actors were portrayed as enemies of the Orthodox Church and the Patriarch: *the political opposition, civil society organizations, participants in pro-democracy and pro-European demonstrations, and, more broadly, opponents, people whom the GD and its media refer to as “radicals.”*

Political opposition

According to the interpretation advanced by representatives of Georgian Dream and its satellite party People’s Power, the political opposition constitutes one of the forces coordinating “foreign-funded” attacks on the Orthodox Church. According to them, these attacks are aimed at creating division between the GOC and society. Statements emphasize that the Orthodox Church supports the state’s policies, which, according to these actors, is one reason for the opposition’s long-standing hostile attitude and actions toward the GOC. Following the Patriarch’s death, the widespread expressions of respect and sympathy shown by a large part of the population were interpreted as society’s response to these allegedly “hostile” forces.

Through this rhetoric, Georgian Dream and its allies sought to exclude political opposition actors, their representatives, and supporters from the public mourning and funeral gatherings for the Patriarch, portraying those present as their own supporters alone.

Examples:

[Gia Volski](#), Member of the GD Parliament, 24 March: “...Many of them did not dare to act openly now, but there were attempts to associate themselves with those who expressed grief, while they have not forgotten their past sins. They continue to attack the Church because it wants peace in this country. This is the only reason why the so-called opposition has maintained its position for years. The Georgian Church supports the government’s policy. First and foremost, it is the preaching of peace and the daily struggle for that peace. All this irritates and drives the so-called opposition and radicals into hysteria.”

[Rati Ionatamishvili](#), Member of the GD Parliament, 25 March: “Ultimately, this indicates their spiritual decline. At the same time, because they cannot forgive the Georgian Church for standing by the Georgian state and Georgian identity, this is also the main reason and purpose behind their coordinated attacks on the Georgian Church.”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Vice Speaker of the GD Parliament, 24 March: "...We must not forget what their [the opposition's] minor representatives were doing. Those radical politicians, whose hearts we know were filled with no less hatred during these days, refrained from openly expressing it, but no one has forgotten their attacks against the Georgian Church over the years."

Similar messages were voiced by Members of Parliament [Giorgi Kakhiani](#), [Guram Macharashvili](#) (People's Power), [Tengiz Sharmanashvili](#), and [Tornike Paghava](#).

Civil society organizations

Representatives of Georgian Dream and its satellite party People's Power attempted to portray civil society organizations, similarly to the political opposition, as one of the actors coordinating attacks against the GOC, funded "from abroad." According to their statements, foreign-funded NGOs are described as "agents" who "attacked the Patriarch and the Church" and attempted to incite "rebellion" and "disorder" within the GOC. Consequently, according to them, because of their past involvement in campaigns against the Orthodox Church, these organizations were portrayed as unable to express condolences following the Patriarch's death or stand among those paying tribute at his funeral.

Examples:

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 25 March, Imedi Live: "...They are agents; these foreign and local politicians represent an agent network. How could an NGO, inside or outside the country, or any politician express condolences to the Georgian people over the Patriarch's death when they know that tomorrow they will have to join a campaign against the Church? This is the only reason why NGOs did not dare to express condolences to the Georgian people, nor did their friends abroad."

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of GD Parliament, 24 March: "How could we have seen NGOs, who for years were engaged in discrediting the Georgian Church, the Patriarch, and his locum tenens, standing in this line?"

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Vice Speaker of GD Parliament, 24 March: "...If we had not adopted the transparency law, they wanted to use it to fund NGOs that would appear whenever necessary to attack the Patriarch, stir unrest within the Church, and repeat the kind of slander against our Church that we have witnessed over the years."

[Zurab Kadagidze](#), Member of GD Parliament from the Georgian Dream satellite party People's Power, 31 March: "...For decades, thousands of sectarians of various kinds, pseudo-liberals, and political adventurers funded by foreign foundations have deliberately attacked our identity. Their main target has been and remains the Orthodox Church and the unquestioned authority of the Patriarch."

Participants in pro-European demonstrations and "radicals" as labeled by GD

Another target group in the rhetoric of Georgian Dream and its satellite party, People's Power, were participants in pro-European demonstrations. These actors separated protesters from society, describing them as "spiritually fallen" and "detached from time and space," who used the Patriarch's death to insult and demean the nation and the Church. At the same time, individuals critical of Georgian Dream's policies were grouped together under the label of "radicals." In these

statements, “radicals” were accused of “attacking the Church,” “gross interference in the Church’s affairs and discreditation,” and conducting an “anti-Church campaign.”

Examples:

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of GD Parliament, 24 March: “During these days, we saw a spiritually elevated Georgian nation and a spiritually fallen protest group. That was the real picture and the contrast.”

[Rati Ionatamishvili](#), Member of GD Parliament, 29 March: “...The attacks on the Church by radicals are certainly neither accidental nor spontaneous. They are part of a long-term campaign planned by their patrons long ago...”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Vice Speaker of GD Parliament, 31 March: “The natural signature of radicals is gross interference in the affairs of the Church and attempts to discredit it. They tried this during the Patriarch’s lifetime and failed...”

[Dimitri Khundadze](#), Member of Parliament from the Georgian Dream satellite party People’s Power, 28 March: “An anti-Church campaign by radicals is nothing new. They began this as early as 2004 and have now intensified it. They have a clear goal - to separate society from the Church and from faith, making it easier to control...”

1.2. Georgian Dream as the “defender of the Orthodox Church”

One of the main narratives of Georgian Dream is that it protects the Orthodox Church, as well as the country’s national and religious identity, while “external” and “internal” forces seek to undermine and weaken them.

According to this same narrative, all alternative political orientations, including “pro-European” and “pro-Western,” are framed as “anti-Georgian.” As a result, criticism of the Georgian Dream’s political course or the expression of dissenting views is portrayed not as legitimate political discourse but as an attack against the GOC, national identity, and the state, often depicted as being orchestrated from abroad.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 21 March: “In honoring the memory of the Patriarch, **we call upon ourselves to protect what he so faithfully defended - the national and religious identity of our country.**”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of the GD Parliament, 24 March: “These days have confirmed that there is no ‘pro’ orientation other than being pro-Georgian. **Any other orientation, whether pro-European, pro-Western, pro-Russian, or any other ‘pro’ orientation besides Georgian is anti-Georgian.**”

[Mikheil Kavelashvili](#), GD President, 22 March: “...Today everyone saw, both inside and outside the country, that no matter what pressure is exerted on us, the Georgian man will not change. **Our true face is right here: in this cathedral, in this shared grief and reverence.**”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Vice Speaker of the GD Parliament, 24 March: “These days have strengthened our **conviction in the correctness of the decisions we have taken so far**, [referring to the GD’s foreign policy and the laws adopted against non-governmental organizations] **decisions that were made precisely based on the**

Patriarch's teachings and our faith. Once again, we are convinced that if we had not done so, the social fabric and the spiritual and ideological unity that have united the people of Georgia for centuries would have been completely disrupted.”

[Archil Beridze](#), GD MP, 31 March: “...**We defended the faith and the Church** at a time when many tried to undermine it. And it was precisely then that we proved that defending the Church for us is not a choice, but a necessity for the survival of the nation...”

2. The issue of interference in the autonomy of the GOC

Following the death of Patriarch Ilia II, the question of electing the next Patriarch became a central topic in political discourse. Representatives of the GD government stated that political opponents, non-governmental organizations, and the media should refrain from involvement in the process of electing the Patriarch, accusing them of conducting an “anti-campaign” against the Church.

GD portrayed virtually any public discussion related to the future Patriarchal election as interference. This included explanations of the institution of locum tenens, media interviews with members of the clergy, discussions explaining the procedures for electing the Patriarch, media coverage of clerical statements, and individual opinions about specific clergy members. According to GD representatives, the political opposition, their critics, NGOs, actors labeled by GD as “radicals,” and the independent media were attempting to interfere in the election process, create divisions within the Church, and exert pressure on the Holy Synod.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 26 March: “...Of course, the government should not interfere in this [Patriarchal election] process... If anyone is trying to interfere in this process, it is our opponents. They have launched a direct anti-campaign related to the process of electing the Patriarch, which is naturally an absolutely unhealthy phenomenon...”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Vice Speaker of the GD Parliament, 31 March: “The natural signature of radicals is gross interference in the affairs of the Church and the discrediting of the Church...”

[Giorgi Kakhiani](#), GD MP, 28 March: “...They are trying to manipulate the issue of electing the new Patriarch, to turn it into a political process, and this aims to introduce division within the Church and society. The decision regarding the election of the new Patriarch must be taken by the Holy Synod.”

[Gia Volski](#), GD MP, 30 March: “Therefore, attacks on the Church, attempts to create problems within it, and the mobilization of a certain part of society that will constantly oppose the Church have become routine, but these days have shown that the people will not accept this.”

Statements by representatives of the Georgian Dream government suggested indirect support for one of the likely candidates for the Patriarchate, the locum tenens Metropolitan Shio Mujiri.

During the reporting period, support for Shio Mujiri was also expressed by pro-government and propaganda media outlets. For example, according to a report by Rustavi 2 titled “[Attack on the Church](#),” the Patriarchal locum tenens is a target of a campaign directed from abroad against the Orthodox Church. According to the program’s host, secular actors who “*do not recognize the role of the Church and did not consider Ilia II an authority*” are interfering in the process of electing the

future Patriarch, and for these groups, “*the Patriarch’s will expressed through the selection of the locum tenens means nothing.*” According to the report, the goal of the “anti-Church” campaign is to create a precedent whereby the Synod might “*not carry out the Patriarch’s wish*” and claim that “*Ilia II’s influence in Georgia has thereby ended.*”

[Davit Matikashvili](#), GD MP, 29 March: “...The person whom the Patriarch once chose as the locum tenens of the Patriarchal throne is also unacceptable [for them], because they expect that **Bishop Shio will continue precisely this line within the Patriarchate — the unification of the country, respect for national values, and the strengthening of spirituality.** Naturally, all of this contradicts the goals and objectives of radicals and their financiers from outside the country.”

[Gia Gachechiladze](#), GD propagandist, 25 March: “...**Did His Holiness appoint a locum tenens for nothing?** For nothing? Should the Patriarchal seat have been left vacant? [...] **If you ask me, everyone should withdraw their candidacy in favor of [Bishop] Shio. And those who remain and do not withdraw — they are traitors.**”³

[Gia Abashidze](#), GD propagandist, 24 March: “Dirty speculation from the ‘Natsaspits’ [derogatory reference to UNM and in general, opponents] about the future Patriarch and disgraceful mockery of the Synod is certainly not worth attention. **Let us trust the blessed Patriarch Ilia II!** everything will be fine!”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Vice Speaker of the GD Parliament, 25 March: “**This is a deliberate attack on Bishop Shio,** intended to introduce dissonance within the Church. They are trying to meddle in internal affairs in the dirtiest possible way.”

[Davit Kartvelishvili](#), member of the GD satellite party People’s Power, 27 March: “...However, for us — for the majority, even two or three details were enough. On 23 November 2017, **during the St. George’s Day liturgy, the Patriarch preached and openly said that he had made the decision regarding Bishop Shio Mujiri under the inspiration of Saint George...**”

Similar points were made by GD MPs [Irakli Kadaqishvili](#) and [Giorgi Gabunia](#).

The [statement](#) released by Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service may be assessed as an attempt at overt external interference in the Patriarchal election, indicating that Russian intelligence has a direct interest in the decision-making process.

In addition, concerns about interference in the GOC’s autonomy are reinforced by earlier statements from members of the Orthodox clergy alleging that oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili had attempted to arrange [the removal](#) of Patriarch Ilia II.

Furthermore, the weakening of the GOC’s autonomy, as well as attempts to control and subordinate the GOC, are reflected in Georgian Dream’s 2024 pre-election initiative to declare Orthodoxy the state religion - a populist proposal that would, in practice, undermine the GOC’s independence. These concerns are further reinforced by evidence suggesting the alleged spying, extensive surveillance, and wiretapping of clergy members, as revealed in the [leak](#) of anonymously published State Security Service files in 2021.

³ On 27 March, Gia Gachechiladze apologized for this statement: “To be honest, I had not intended to engage in these matters so publicly, had there not been calls and political statements from the very first days, and so on. I lost my nerve. I would like to apologize to you and to the viewers...”

3. Media Coverage of the Patriarch's Death and the Following Period

Pro-government media propaganda

During the reporting period, television channels and media platforms supporting/controlled by the ruling party actively disseminated messages claiming that an organized campaign was underway against the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). In these reports, criticism of the Church was portrayed as a process supported by external actors and involving opposition politicians, civil society organizations, activists, parts of the media, and some clergy members.

Propaganda and pro-government media outlets intensified this campaign after the funeral of Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II. The main informational narrative was framed as a “targeted campaign against the Church,” and nearly every day, news programs and talk shows aired special segments disseminating coordinated propaganda messages with similar content. For example, the [UK-sanctioned TV channel](#) Imedi aired reports titled [Ideological Struggle](#), [Silence of False Friends](#), [Attack on the Patriarch and the Church](#), [The Attack on the Church Continues](#), [The Georgian Orthodox Church as a Target of Serious Accusations and Attacks](#), and [The Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate, and the Locum Tenens as Targets of Attack](#). Reports on the UK-sanctioned POSTV included titles such as [How Propaganda Media Have Fought the Georgian Church for Years and Attack on the Church](#). Rustavi 2 broadcast reports titled [Attack on the Church](#), [Campaign Against the Church](#), [Authors of the Hate Campaign](#), [A New Wave with an Old Scenario](#), and [Campaign Against the Church](#).

These propaganda segments frequently used archival footage manipulatively, showing opposition politicians, activists, journalists, and civil society representatives who had at various times expressed critical views about the Patriarchate of the GOC or GOC-State relations. These statements were presented out of context, creating the impression that all opposition actors, activists, media outlets, and civil society organizations constitute a single, homogeneous, antagonistic force. On the one hand, Georgian Dream was portrayed as defending the Church and traditional values; on the other hand, all opponents were depicted as actors promoting a false or foreign ideology with the support of foreign funding and seeking to undermine the authority of the GOC. Within this narrative, any criticism of the Church was automatically interpreted as foreign influence and anti-national activity.

Most of these reports were based on statements made by GD leaders and members of its satellite party, People's Power. The central thesis was the existence of a “targeted campaign against the Church,” which, according to Georgian Dream, aimed to [damage the Church's reputation](#), thereby [weakening faith among the population](#), [diminishing the role of the Church](#), [dividing a society united in mourning](#), advancing the interests and ideology of certain groups, and ultimately fostering [hostility towards the GOC and the state](#). GD and its allies dismissed positive comments by opposition figures, activists, and media representatives about the Patriarch's role and legacy as [“political hypocrisy”](#) and [opportunistic shifts](#) driven by the overwhelming unity of the population.

In some of the propaganda and pro-government segments, journalists themselves expressed views consistent with statements made by Georgian Dream:

[Irakli Chikhladze](#), Deputy Director General of TV Imedi and host of the program Imedi Week: “The nation and the clergy are mourning, and the **forces that have been trampling national values for years are attacking with doubled energy the institution that serves as the main pillar of our identity and faith.**”

[Natia Lazashvili](#), host of the Rustavi 2 news program Kurieri: “We are **dealing with an aggressive minority** that views everything through the prism of its own political interests, feels alienated from everything Georgian, and does not truly feel its own country or its history.”

[Izi Burnadze](#), host of the Rustavi 2 news program Kurieri: “The threat has been declared, and the actors are known. **Certain groups that have fought against the Church and the Patriarch for years are once again on the front line, now targeting Bishop Shio.** Secular actors are fighting over who will become the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia. Their goal is to gain influence over the Church, but the foreign-funded campaign against the Church has failed.”

[Data Gvasalia](#), host of the POSTV program Weekly Post: “Georgia has bid farewell to its spiritual father. The death of Ilia II and the difficult week that followed united the real Georgia and became a kind of mirror in which we all looked. A mirror that reflected both the overwhelming majority of people united in grief and love, as well as a small but hate-driven group that turned national mourning into a platform for political revenge, cynicism, and dirty propaganda.”

Coverage by media independent of Georgian Dream

Media outlets, independent of Georgian Dream, covered the death of the Catholicos-Patriarch with respect and in a positive context. News reports and programs described the days of national mourning, the continuous flow of people attending memorial services, condolence messages, and public comments. Special segments presented the Patriarch’s life, legacy, and the historical era associated with his leadership⁴.

After the Patriarch’s funeral on 22 March, and in response to high public interest, media outlets began providing information about the procedures for electing the next Patriarch, potential candidates, and the institution of the locum tenens⁵.

In this context, the media actively covered the so-called “State Security Service files” from 2021, leaked recordings allegedly obtained through illegal surveillance by the State Security Service⁶.

⁴ Reports by the television channel Formula included segments titled: [Reflections on the Past and the Future — a Documentary Film about Ilia II](#); [How the Historic Day Unfolded](#); [What Was Happening in the Capital of Georgia](#); [The Recent History of the Georgian Church Is Closely Linked to the Path of Ilia II](#); [Farewell to the Patriarch](#), and [A Continuous Flow of People at the Patriarch’s Memorial Service](#). Reports by the television channel TV Pirveli included segments titled: [The Story of the Patriarch from the Front Line](#); and [Untold Stories about the Patriarch, Quietly Preserved by Those Close to Him](#).

⁵ Reports by the television channel Formula included segments titled: [Who Will Be the Next Patriarch?](#) and [Who Will Become the Patriarch?](#) Reports by the television channel TV Pirveli included segments titled: [Who Will Be the New Patriarch?](#) and [Members of the Holy Synod Await the Difficult Election of the Patriarch](#).

⁶ In 2021, more than 50,000 files allegedly documenting illegal surveillance and wiretapping by the State Security Service were anonymously leaked and disseminated. These leaked classified materials are evidence of large-scale and grave crimes committed by the authorities, pointing to systemic and ongoing unlawful practices. The files contained personal data, private communications, and information reflecting the private lives of specific individuals. The vast majority of the materials were related to religious themes. The leaked materials reveal that for years, the government allegedly has been illegally eavesdropping on and surveilling representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church and other religious organizations, including high-ranking clergy, human rights defenders, members of NGOs working on issues of religion and religious freedom, diplomats, politicians, and journalists. According to information provided to TDI by the Prosecutor’s Office, as of *16 February 2026*, a total of 118 individuals, including 14 clergymen, had been granted the status of victim in connection with the investigation into this crime. However, no criminal prosecution has been

Based on these materials, media outlets discussed possible interference by GD, and specifically by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, in the affairs of the Patriarchate and the process of electing the future Patriarch.

The television channel Formula responded to the GD propaganda and pro-government media with a report titled [*The Patriarch's Authority as a Weapon in the Hands of Ivanishvili's Regime*](#). The report argued that Georgian Dream was attempting to use the Patriarch's name for its own purposes and to label as enemies anyone who had ever expressed a critical opinion about the Patriarchate.

In this context, the report also highlighted oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's past statements about the Patriarch and the Church, including [excerpts](#) from a 2014 statement⁷ in which he said that the "issue of the Church" should not be considered "taboo," because this would be "offensive" to society, and that "even the Patriarch can make mistakes," which others may not necessarily share.

initiated against any individuals, and no one has been held accountable for this offense. The Prosecutor's Office states that the investigation is still ongoing.

⁷ [Bidzina Ivanishvili](#), 2014: "We respect history, traditions, and Orthodoxy. I respect the Patriarch, but society must overcome the barrier that treats this topic as taboo and assumes that whatever is said there is flawless and untouchable. Whether it is the Patriarch or another church servant speaking, this attitude, in my view, is excessively fetishized and exaggerated. It should not be so. Neither the Patriarch nor the Church requires this. The Church has the same problems as society, and no fewer. That is how it should be. Members of the clergy are our fellow citizens; their service is their profession, and they perform their duties there. The prevailing attitude in society that the subject of the Church is taboo is, in my view, offensive to our society and not the correct approach. Mistakes can happen there as well, and negative incidents can occur. There may also be violations and misunderstandings within the Church. Do not be afraid to speak about this. They need criticism, suggestions, and guidance. The Patriarch may also make mistakes. The Patriarch may say something, but we may not share that view. That is normal".

4. Anti-Western Messages

During the reporting period, the concept of “external” and “foreign” forces occupied a central place in the propagandistic narratives promoted by the GD and affiliated actors. In the ruling party’s rhetoric, this category includes Western institutions, the European Union, U.S. government institutions, and related foundations, as well as any external critic or domestic opponent whom they portray as representing the interests of these actors.

The main objective of this narrative is to construct the image of an “external enemy” opposed to Georgia’s national interests. On the one hand, Georgian Dream portrays itself as the force [defending](#) sovereignty, tradition, and religious and national values. On the other hand, it depicts “external” and “foreign” forces as actors promoting a “globalist agenda” and “false ideologies.”

Within this narrative framework, these forces act in a coordinated and deliberate manner to [undermine the authority of the GOC](#) as a highly trusted institution, [weaken national unity](#), and [replace Christian values](#).

4.1. Discourse against international organizations and institutions

During the reporting period, GD’s anti-Western messaging focused on international organizations and institutions. According to GD representatives, these actors, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Venice Commission, and the European Union, act against Georgia, spread disinformation, and serve the political interests of external forces.

The “Moscow Mechanism” as a political instrument of the West

On 29 January 2026, 24 OSCE participating States invoked the [Moscow Mechanism](#) to investigate alleged human rights violations in Georgia. The Moscow Mechanism is a procedure developed by the OSCE that provides for the establishment of an independent expert mission to establish facts and prepare recommendations. Based on the report, international instruments, including sanctions, international judicial mechanisms, and other measures, may be activated. The work of the fact-finding mission focused on developments in Georgia since the spring of 2024. On 12 March, the OSCE Moscow Mechanism [report on Georgia](#) was published. The extensive and critical report highlights a “clear democratic backsliding” and, among other issues, confirms systemic human rights problems and tendencies toward authoritarian governance - concerns that international organizations and local human rights defenders have raised for years.

The authors of the Moscow Mechanism report also issued recommendations to OSCE participating States. On 12 March, 24 OSCE participating States released a [joint statement](#) calling on the Georgian government to fully implement the recommendations of the Moscow Mechanism.

Following the publication of the report, Georgia’s Permanent Representative to the OSCE and international organizations in Vienna, Aleksandre Maisuradze, [expressed](#) “deep concern” on behalf of the government. He stated that the document “goes beyond the mandate of the Moscow

Mechanism” and that “the selective presentation of information and the timing of the report’s publication indicate a tendency toward politicization of the conclusions.”

Leaders of Georgian Dream rejected the report’s findings and recommendations and questioned its credibility. [According to GD Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze](#), the report on Georgia was “written in advance” and “filled with falsehoods.” Georgian Dream also argued that producing a 100-page document within the framework of “14 days of preparation and a two-day visit” represents an unserious and politically motivated conclusion. At the same time, GD representatives raised allegations of a [“conflict of interest”](#) concerning the report’s lead author, Polish professor Patrycja Grzebyk, as well as, according to them, [the links](#) to the United National Movement, which they claimed undermined the report’s impartiality. It should be noted that under the Moscow Mechanism procedure, Georgia had the opportunity to appoint one expert to the fact-finding mission; however, the GD [declined](#) to exercise this right. During its visit to Georgia, the mission met with representatives of Georgian Dream, the opposition, and civil society.

Statements by Georgian Dream regarding the Moscow Mechanism and the report:

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 16 March: “Georgia is a democratic state that **can teach democracy, human rights, tolerance, freedom of assembly, media freedom, media pluralism, political pluralism, democratic elections, and many other things to many OSCE participating States**, including several of the countries that initiated the ‘Moscow Mechanism.’”

[Kakha Kaladze](#), Mayor of Tbilisi, 17 March: “The explanation we heard indicates that the **conclusion had been written in advance by their patrons and that their visit here was a farce**. What could a single person study during a two-day visit? Perhaps Georgian cuisine and Georgian wine. We are proud of our traditions, culture, and history, and we are glad that we are a rich country, but **what was written in the report was absolute nonsense.**”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of the GD Parliament, 12 March: “What matters for us is not the ‘Moscow Mechanism’ or Brussels’ instrument, but the truth. We have already **heard so many lies from Brussels and from other capitals — why should we trust them?** Do you doubt that **this text was written in advance and the rest was simply packaging?**”

Similar statements were made by [President Mikheil Kavelashvili](#) and GD MP [Levan Machavariani](#).

Manipulation of LGBT issues

Georgian Dream responded manipulatively to the report’s critical findings and 46 recommendations. GD representatives deliberately avoided discussing the vast majority of the recommendations and focused only on two issues: legislation concerning so-called “family values” and the “transparency” law. This framing created the impression that the Moscow Mechanism demanded abolishing transparency, the recognition of the right to change one’s gender, and opposition to protecting the interests of minors. By deliberately ignoring the broader content of the report and focusing public attention on LGBT-related issues, Georgian Dream and its satellite parties sought to undermine the report’s legitimacy. At the same time, they used this narrative to discredit European institutions, particularly the OSCE.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 16 March: “The author of the **report calls for the repeal of the law on family values and the protection of minors**. More specifically, she negatively assesses the provisions aimed at preventing the promotion of same-sex relations and gender reassignment. **She also rejects the simple truth that a woman is a woman and a man is a man and demands that the entry regarding gender in identity documents be easily changed according to a person’s own preference**. Such approaches can hardly have much value for Georgian society.”

[Davit Matikashvili](#), GD MP, 15 March: “**In practice, they are asking us to abolish the state**. They are asking us to repeal legislative provisions that **protect minors from LGBT propaganda** and that protect the country from the inflow of foreign black money.”

Similar statements were made by [GD MP Archil Gorduladze](#) and [Dimitri Khundadze](#), MP of the GD satellite party People’s Power.

Isolationism: Calls to withdraw from international organizations

During the reporting period, some satellite parties of GD and affiliated propagandists framed the report produced under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism as an attack on national dignity, traditions, and religious beliefs. In this narrative, they called for Georgia to withdraw from international organizations and agreements, portraying such commitments as instruments aimed at Georgia’s sovereignty and identity.

[United Neutral Georgia](#), a satellite party of GD, 13 March: “Under these circumstances, **we believe that Georgia should withdraw from international agreements and organizations** that have turned into an absolute farce and merely a tool of blackmail. It is interesting how the authorities imagine fulfilling these obligations when we are being asked to renounce our faith, traditional values, and sovereignty, and to bring the agent network back to power. [...] It is necessary to finally rid ourselves of the agreements and obligations imposed upon us.”

[Vato Shakarishvili](#), member of United Neutral Georgia, a satellite party of GD, 13 March: “**Our country must urgently withdraw from such agreements and arrangements — whether it is the OSCE, the European Union, the Venice Commission, or others.**”

4.2 The West and international partners as forces acting against “traditions and Orthodoxy.”

During the reporting period, one of the main targets of GD and its affiliated actors was the West in general, as well as international partners and the European Union. GD also manipulatively used the death of the Catholicos-Patriarch to intensify its anti-Western rhetoric, frequently claiming that Western structures were the main sponsors and orchestrators of what it described as a “deliberate campaign against the Orthodox Church.”

The Speaker of the GD Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, [accused](#) the European Union of attempting to replace Orthodoxy and the Church with pseudo-religious ideologies and compared this effort to Bolshevism: “*This is exactly what the Bolsheviks did. Bolshevism was an ideology which, incidentally, also came from Europe in the form of socialism.*” According to the GD Prime Minister [Irakli Kobakhidze](#), international organizations were also involved in campaigns against the Orthodox Church and the Patriarch. As one example, he named the National Democratic Institute (NDI)⁸.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 21 March: “[...] We sincerely hope that Europe will regain its sovereignty, **Christian identity**, and economic strength before Georgia becomes a member of the European Union.”

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), GD Parliament Speaker, 26 March, Imedi Live: “...What we are witnessing now requires serious reflection. In reality, we see attempts by the **Brussels bureaucracy to gain ideological influence by using the methods of a pseudo-religion**; in this case, the natural competitor is the Church.”

[Zurab Kadaqidze](#), Member of Parliament from People’s Power, a satellite party of GD, 31 March: “...Today, when some bureaucrats are trying to **replace true Christianity with ‘liberal fascism,’** it is we who have become the defenders of the very values on which Europe itself once stood.”

[David Kartvelishvili](#), member of People’s Power, a satellite party of GD, 27 March: “...The fact that Brussels has **instilled in these people [the radicals] their attitude toward the Church** is also evident in the fact that they have no understanding of what the Mother Church means, who the Patriarch is, what faith is, or who God is. How can we, believers, expect any wisdom from people who fight against God?”

⁸ Specifically, he referred to an episode from his time as Speaker of Parliament, when he visited the office of the NDI. According to his account, there was “a single chart” displayed, showing a decline in public trust toward the Orthodox Church from 98% to 94%. Interpreting this data, Irakli Kobakhidze claimed, in a manipulative manner, that an employee at the office was “proud” of the 4% decrease in the GOC’s rating. He then generalized this isolated episode to argue that international organizations, in general, seek to undermine the authority of the Orthodox Church and view such developments positively.

4.3 Manipulation of the patriarch's death and condolences in an anti-Western context

Public mourning vs EU support

The broad public unity surrounding the Patriarch's death was politically interpreted and used as another tool to discredit the European Union. Representatives of GD and affiliated actors attempted to symbolically use the large number of people participating in the mourning process to argue that the Georgian people oppose Western policies, the European Union, and its institutions.

In statements by representatives of the ruling party, the days of the Patriarch's funeral were portrayed as a response to EU policies and to criticism from European institutions. According to this interpretation, projects supported by the West over the years, including trainings, seminars, and civic initiatives, had aimed to shape the Georgian nation according to "externally imposed preferences," but the days of the Patriarch's funeral supposedly "undermined" these efforts.

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), GD Parliament Speaker, 24 March: "...The past few days have shown that the millions spent over the years from abroad on trainings, seminars, brainwashing, and various activities were undone by a single day of the Patriarch's funeral..."

[Guram Macharashvili](#), Member of Parliament from People's Power, a satellite party of GD, 31 March: "...The events of 17–22 March probably require little proof that they answered all the unfair resolutions and statements and demonstrated that the Georgian people will not stand on one leg, waiting with a slave mentality to join somewhere. Instead, standing firmly on both feet, they will wait for hours to receive the Patriarch's blessing to defend their homeland."

[Tamar Chiburdanidze](#), member of People's Power, a satellite party of GD, 21 March: "...As I watch these days, the only thing that comes to mind is that just a few days before His Holiness passed away, Euro-bureaucrats demanded the repeal of the law on the protection of family values. I want to address them — the authors of false democracy: do you see what is happening in Georgia? The Patriarch you were fighting against defeated you even in his death. We do not expect magnanimity from you, that you would at least apologize to the soul of the Patriarch whom you hurt many times, but perhaps you might still try. You made an irreparable mistake by insulting our distinguished Patriarch, you confronted the entire nation, something you did not believe, and hopefully today you are already convinced of it."

Similar messages were expressed in statements by GD Member of Parliament [David Matikashvili](#) and [David Kartvelishvili](#), a member of People's Power.

Manipulation of the "lack of condolences" narrative

In attempts to discredit Europe and the EU, particular emphasis was placed on the narrative as if Western leaders had not sent condolences. Representatives of GD and affiliated actors claimed that European leaders, Brussels, and "Euro-bureaucrats" had failed to find the time to express condolences to the Georgian people following the Patriarch's death.

This manipulative narrative was presented as evidence of a supposed "spiritual and value-based divide" between the West and Georgia. According to GD messaging, "Europe remained silent"

because “our spirituality and values mean nothing to them,” “they are hypocrites who do not care about Georgia’s fate,” they do not understand the emotions “that we have toward our Church and Patriarch,” and they view the Church only through a “political lens.” One of the targets of these accusations also became US Congressman [Joe Wilson](#) and the Helsinki Commission.

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), GD Parliament Speaker, 24 March: “On the other hand, we did not see a single European leader who, when any event happens in Georgia, does not immediately rush to comment. Yet at this moment of mourning, they could not find the words, the time, or the emotion, because they do not understand the feelings we have toward our Church, our Patriarch, and the genuine values on which Georgia stands.”

[Tamar Chiburdanidze](#), member of People’s Power, a satellite party of GD, 26 March: “Europe remained silent — there was not a single letter of condolence or comment regarding the Patriarch’s death. Had only a small number of people come to pay respect to His Holiness, they would have issued numerous statements and criticized the Georgian people.”

[David Kartvelishvili](#), member of People’s Power, a satellite party of GD, 24 March: “The Euro-bureaucrats did not send even a single message of condolence to comfort the Georgian people over the Patriarch’s death, the very people for whom they supposedly express so much concern.”

[Nino Tsilosani](#), GD Deputy Speaker of Parliament, 24 March: “...The silence of those foreign politicians and leaders once again indicates that our spirituality, our values, and our traditions mean nothing to them. Their only interest is to divide this nation, diminish it, fragment it, sow discord, and turn it into a mere executor of their instructions.”

It should be noted that the EU Delegation to Georgia issued an [official message](#) of condolence following the death of Patriarch Ilia II. In honor of his memory, the [flags of Europe and Georgia were lowered](#) at the Palais de l’Europe in Strasbourg. Senior officials from the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and individual EU member states also [expressed](#) condolences in various forms. [Embassies and ambassadors](#) in Georgia expressed condolences on their official Facebook and X pages. Western officials left messages in condolence books placed at Georgian embassies abroad, and several ambassadors attended the memorial service and funeral at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi.

5. Statements by Clergy

5.1 Statements by Orthodox clergy regarding the election of the next Patriarch

Some members of the clergy expressed their views during sermons and in media interviews regarding the election of the next Patriarch. Some clergy maintained a neutral tone, stating that the Patriarch would be chosen “by the will of God” and emphasizing that the position represents a “big responsibility.” Others openly or implicitly expressed support for a likely candidate, the Patriarchal locum tenens, Metropolitan Shio Mujiri. Some clergy also voiced secular appeals for non-interference in the GOC’s internal affairs and warned against external pressure.

Statements supporting Metropolitan Shio Mujiri:

[Metropolitan Stephane Kalaijishvili](#) of the Tsageri and Lentekhi Diocese, 26 March: “From the very beginning I have said that **I support the locum tenens chosen by His Holiness**. I believe that I should vote for the locum tenens, Bishop Shio, and this is my position. I do not need to give interviews about this to anyone, I have already stated it and will not give interviews about it. I trust His Holiness, and I trust the person he has chosen.”

[Archpriest Andria Jaghmaidze](#), Head of the Public Relations Service of the Georgian Patriarchate, 27 March: “When the Patriarch decided to appoint Bishop Shio as locum tenens, he said within a narrow circle that he did so in order to end speculation on this issue, because a hidden testament could create certain anxiety in society. He said that whatever might have been written in the hidden testament, he decided to publicly declare it. Therefore, since 23 November 2017, **when he said that Saint George willed that we should have a locum tenens that day**, almost eight years have passed, and **Bishop Shio has faithfully carried out the blessing of the Catholicos-Patriarch and managed his affairs at the Patriarchate.**”

Neutral statements:

[Metropolitan Saba Gigiberia](#) of the Samtredia and Khoni Diocese, 29 March: “One important thing people do not understand is that everything is decided in heaven. [...] The Patriarchate is a burden, a cross, a way of life.”

[Bishop David \(Makharadze\)](#) of the Alaverdi Diocese, 29 March: “As God blesses it, so it will be. [...] Therefore, we must all pray today that the selected candidate will be worthy, and if he is confirmed, that he will have the divine strength to carry this responsibility.”

[Metropolitan Daniel \(Datuashvili\)](#) of the Chiatura and Sachkhere Diocese, 30 March: “I personally do not intend to nominate my candidacy. As for the issue of age, I will obey the decision of the Synod.”

[Metropolitan Isaiah \(Chanturia\)](#) of the Nikozi and Tskhinvali Diocese, 29 March: “This is a cross that the Lord must place upon a person. Whoever it is entrusted to should probably not refuse and should carry this cross. [...] Therefore, may the Lord choose the one who is needed, the one whom He sees as suitable.”

[Archpriest Iakob Makhnashvili](#), 29 March: “[...] We think that when the Synod begins, it will follow the regulations that exist in the Church, but no one thinks about the fact that the Synod begins with prayer. In this prayer, the members of the Synod ask God, the Holy Spirit, that this matter be guided with grace and through God’s intervention.”

[Metropolitan Dimitri \(Shiolashvili\)](#) of the Batumi and Lazeti Diocese, 29 March: “The united church council will discuss the matter and then the Holy Synod will determine the next Patriarch for the ancient and God-blessed Patriarchal throne of Georgia.”

Statements with secular appeal:

[Archbishop Zenon \(Iarajuli\)](#) of the Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashiri Diocese, 18 March: “I would like to address the authorities and call on them not to allow themselves, under any circumstances, to interfere in the Church’s internal elections, neither directly nor indirectly. This is a fundamental and important principle so that we can independently choose the head of the Church in accordance with canonical law.”

[Bishop Iakob \(Iakobishvili\)](#) of the Bodbe Diocese, 29 March: “We will not allow anyone to interfere with us. I say to the clergy personally: if anyone from outside begins to pressure you, tell me. I will not spare anyone outside.”

5.2 Statements on the “State Security Service Files”

In discussions related to the possible election of the Patriarch, assessments were also voiced regarding the so-called “State Security Service files” released in 2021. Some clergy attempted to downplay the significance of this issue, while others publicly stated that the materials were not important to them. Some statements also reflected attempts to normalize the alleged unlawful activities of the State Security Service and suggested that covert surveillance is a common and lawful practice in many countries.

[Metropolitan Nikoloz \(Pachuashvili\)](#) of the Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo Diocese, 30 March: “**Of course it is normal [for the state to listen to you]; it is like this in every country and everyone knows it.** What is abnormal is publishing it. Recently in Germany there was a very serious debate about whether the SSG recordings should be stored for three months or six months, and people were outraged — how can they be kept for six months when three months is possible... Illegal [covert surveillance] — who determines that it is illegal if the state makes this decision?”

[Bishop Iakob \(Iakobishvili\)](#) of the Bodbe Diocese, 29 March: “I tell every member of the Synod: there must be no tension among us. We watched thousands of absurd things on television. **I am not interested in the State Security Service files, nor in those who are listening to us.** As for those who are listening, I will deal with them as well. we know the names, we know everything. [...] In those files they might say 95 percent truth, and also utter nonsense...”

5.3 Statements reflecting narratives aligned with the GD government

In some statements, the positions expressed by Orthodox clergy corresponded with political narratives promoted by representatives of the GD government. These included assessments related to the ongoing protest demonstrations, as well as issues concerning Western policies and the European Union. Such statements contained rhetoric similar to that heard in the public speeches of GD representatives, including criticism of pro-European and pro-democracy protests and skepticism toward the Western political agenda and Georgia’s European integration.

[Archpriest Shalva Kekelia](#), 23 March: “Could they not have paused this continuous [protest] for a few days? If your father had died, would you go somewhere and stand there? [...] But I think **this is more of a sectarian mindset**. I love everyone who stands at those protests, and that is why I say this.”

[Bishop Jakob \(Iakobishvili\)](#) of the Bodbe Diocese, 15 March: “**We made a mistake** — let us all acknowledge that **when this [EU membership] was written into the Constitution** in 2017, it was a mistake, and let us stop fighting each other over it.”

5.4 Critical statements by clergy on political justice and Church–State relations

Support for political prisoners

As in previous reporting periods, a small number of clergy continued [to criticize](#) and condemn the persecution, detention of activists and opposition figures, and politically motivated justice against them.

During the reporting period, the enforcement of another repressive and [unconstitutional legislative change](#) continued. Under this amendment, a protest participant may be sentenced to up to 15 days of administrative detention for standing on a pedestrian walkway (sidewalk).

At the same time, criminal cases were initiated on various grounds and courts issued decisions in ongoing cases. Against this background, a small number of clergy publicly responded to the propaganda promoted by GD, [expressed solidarity](#) with political prisoners, and [called for their release](#).

Statements reflecting these demands and sentiments were made by Archpriest [Giorgi Tserodze](#) and Archimandrites [Ilia Toloraia](#) and [Dorothe Kurashvili](#).

Church–State relations in the context of political power

In some statements, a small number of clergy critically assessed the relationship between the GOC and political power. Some argued that the public authority of the Church should not be used as a tool to justify or legitimize political power, as this risks undermining its credibility and public role.

[Dorothe Kurashvili](#), Archimandrite, 14 March: “Glory should not be given to the government. Glory should be given to God, to truth, and to righteousness.”

Criticism of the religious institution and clarification of the Church’s role

Some clergy also addressed internal church discourse and broader narratives circulating in society about the Church. According to them, criticism of the GOC should not automatically be interpreted as an “attack on the Church.” On the contrary, criticism of the ecclesiastical hierarchy may represent not an attack on the Church but an effort to protect and strengthen its spiritual mission.

[Giorgi Tserodze](#), Archpriest, 28 March: “When I hear ‘They are fighting the Church,’ ‘Enemies of the Church,’ ‘An attack on the Church,’ I am almost certain that those saying it do not know what the Church actually is... Everything else, criticism of bishops, exposing ecclesiastical bureaucracy, refusing to submit to administrative arbitrariness, or resisting the clericalism that opposes individuality and otherness is not a fight against the Church. On the contrary, it can often be a fight for the Church.”

5.5 Condolences by clergy of different religious communities following the death of the GOC Patriarch

Different religious communities in Georgia expressed sorrow and issued condolence messages following the death of the Patriarch. These included the [Apostolic Administration of the Latin Catholics of the Caucasus](#), [the Evangelical-Baptist Church of Georgia](#), [the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia](#), [the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia](#), [the Pentecostal Church](#), [the Spiritual Council of the Yezidis of Georgia](#), [the Salvation Army](#), [the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia](#), [the Evangelical Church of Georgia](#), and representatives of other religious denominations.

In addition, leaders of various religious organizations in Georgia [paid tribute](#) to the memory of Ilia II at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi.