

# Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity



October 2025



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Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)



[www.tdi.ge/en](http://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 October 2025

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**

[December 26, 2024- January 31](#)

[February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#), [June](#),

[July](#), [August](#), [September](#)

**Cover photo:** Giorgi Mosiashvili (MOSE)



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## Main Trends

During the reporting period, the Georgian Dream's (GD) aggressive anti-European campaign continued, portraying the European Union as an enemy of Georgia and a foreign force that allegedly undermines state sovereignty, the Georgian Orthodox Church, and national traditions.

The persecution and discreditation campaign against Georgian non-governmental organizations also persisted. In addition, both the propagandist media and the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church targeted an Orthodox cleric, Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili, supporting the pro-European movement.

Georgian Dream adopted new repressive legislative amendments aimed at restricting peaceful protest, banning political activity, and further curbing freedom of expression, and submitted to the Constitutional Court an unconstitutional and internationally non-compliant claim seeking the prohibition of political parties.

A positive trend continued: a small segment of Orthodox and other denominational clergy continued to critically respond to Georgian Dream's authoritarian and anti-European course, as well as its propagandistic rhetoric. They issued statements in support of political prisoners during public speeches and sermons.

### 1. Political Context: General Environment and Georgian Dream's Repressive Policy

#### Mass arrests of citizens and political leaders under the pretext of a "state coup"

On 4 October, local self-government elections were held in Georgia, which were [boycotted](#) by most major opposition parties. As a sign of protest, part of the electorate joined the "People's Assembly" announced by the movement *Rustaveli Avenue*. A group of demonstrators at the rally attempted to [break through the "barriers"](#) on Atoneli Street, near the President's residence, which [resulted](#) in clashes with special forces.

The Georgian Dream (GD) party [labelled](#) the events an attempted state coup and tightened its grip on peaceful protests. As of 28 October, 62 individuals have been [arrested](#) on criminal charges in connection with the events of 4 October.

Notably, the spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Maria Zakharova](#), welcomed the local elections in Georgia, describing them as "transparent and competitive." At the same time, she condemned the "blatant interference" in the country's internal affairs by a "well-known group of Western actors."

#### Severe restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly

New [amendments](#) to the Administrative Offences Code and the Criminal Code of Georgia penalize conduct that is protected by international human rights law, including the wearing of a mask, or the peaceful participation in assemblies deemed unlawful or obstructing roadways, resulting in 15 days of [administrative](#)

[detention](#) (which previously was just an alternative measure to a fine) and, in cases of repetition, up to one year of imprisonment under [criminal law](#). The amendments make imprisonment the default sanction, de facto resulting in disproportionate criminal penalties for the mere exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. As of October 24, more than 90 people have been [detained](#) for merely protesting in front of the Parliament, with the number increasing daily. In case of violation of the rules for holding an assembly or demonstration by an organizer results in “serious consequences”, the penalty may reach four years of imprisonment, as opposed to a fine or house arrest for a term of six months to two years, or corrective labour for a term of up to one year previously.

According to the *Urgent Opinion of the OSCE/ODIHR*, the October 2025 Amendments raise serious concerns about Georgia’s lack of compliance with international human rights obligations and should be repealed<sup>1</sup>. ODIHR noted that the October 2025 Amendments may be used for purposes beyond those permitted under the ECHR, notably to silence or penalize peaceful protesters and civil society activists for legitimate social or political engagement and the lawful exercise of their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, in violation of Article 18 of the ECHR<sup>2</sup>.

### **Banning opposition political parties**

During the reporting period, on October 16, 2025, the one-party parliament, dominated by the GD, adopted a legislative package that [enables the prohibition of political parties](#) and the indefinite deprivation of political rights for individuals associated with them. GD also filed a [claim with the Constitutional Court](#) seeking to ban certain political parties. The claim requests the prohibition of three out of the four parties that crossed the threshold in the 2024 parliamentary elections (the legitimacy of which is widely disputed), namely the parties *United National Movement, Coalition for Change, and Strong Georgia–Lelo*. This claim and repressive laws aim to remove political competitors from the political process, which is unconstitutional, rights-restricting, and inconsistent with international standards.

### **Establishing political control over the education field, restricting academic freedom, and isolating Georgia from the European education system**

On 16 October, Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze presented the new education [reform concept](#), according to which [the duration of studies](#) will be shortened in both universities (3-year bachelor’s and 1-year master’s programs) and schools (an 11-year curriculum). The reform also envisages the geographic deconcentration of the higher education system and the reduction of faculties under the principle “one city – one faculty”; a new state grant program for funding public universities; and exceptional rules for admitting foreign students. According to [lecturers and teachers](#), the national concept for education was drafted without the involvement of the academic community, in a rushed and non-transparent manner. Representatives of the scholarly field [criticized](#) the “reform” as a threat to academic freedom and as a step toward isolating Georgia from the European educational system.

GD and its affiliated groups had already been actively [targeting](#) the education sector, particularly universities, which are outspoken and do not succumb to self-censorship. For instance, on 12 October, the propagandist TV channel *Imedi* aired a [report](#) titled “Extremism Instead of Education.” The report promoted

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<sup>1</sup> See the Urgent Opinion of the OSCE/ODIHR ([FOPA-GEO/564/2025 \[ALC/TN\]](#)), 12 November, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> See the Urgent Opinion of the OSCE/ODIHR ([FOPA-GEO/564/2025 \[ALC/TN\]](#)), 12 November, 2025, para 99.

the propagandistic narrative that academia is a hub of “radicalism” and voiced unsubstantiated accusations against specific lecturers and universities. In the same report, Zurab Kadagidze, a member of Georgian Dream’s satellite party *People’s Power*, used religion manipulatively to discredit certain professors and teachers: “*They spread harmful narratives, such as the idea that the concept of homeland is outdated, patriotism is outdated, religion is outdated...*” Zurab Kadagidze had repeatedly [disseminated](#) similar statements on social media.

## 2. Propaganda Against the European Union and Manipulation Through Pseudo-Religious Narratives

During the reporting period, GD and its affiliated actors continued their aggressive anti-Western campaign, portraying the European Union and the West as hostile forces threatening Georgia’s sovereignty, religious identity, and national values, while depicting GD as the defender of traditions and Orthodox faith.

Non-secular statements were also frequently voiced, equating national and religious identity and disregarding the contributions of other confessions to Georgian culture and politics.

*For example:*

[Mikheil Kavelashvili](#), GD president, 14 October: “[...] In modern Georgia, **we, Georgians**, are imbued with this strength precisely through our Mother Church, through Orthodox faith — this is what makes us so strong, so prominent. **Our faith** has immense power.”

According to GD and its satellites, the European Union, portrayed as run by bureaucrats and agents, does not act in the interests of its own people but follows the dictates of the “deep state”; EU member states are allegedly losing their religious and ethnic identity; and Georgian citizens supposedly face a choice — the EU or the preservation of national sovereignty and traditions. In this narrative, the EU demands not partnership but obedience from Georgia. According to GD’s founder and honorary chairman, [oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili](#), “*certain foreign forces [implying the West], hiding behind the mask of a friend and partner, have now openly admitted that they demand our obedience to their interests!*”

At the same time, in their narrative, European integration is equated with “extremism,” “LGBT propaganda,” and “non-transparent financing.” According to the GD Parliament Speaker, [Shalva Papuashvili](#), “*Brussels must stop downplaying the threat of domestic terrorism and the financing of violent propaganda.*” These messages aim to deepen public distrust toward the EU and discredit the prospect of Georgia’s European integration.

Along with its hostile rhetoric against Brussels, GD consistently attacks international partners, as well as representatives of the EU and its member states in Georgia. On 14 October, the Ministry of Internal Affairs [fined](#) the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Finland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Elina Valtonen, 5,000 GEL (about USD 1,800) for allegedly ‘blocking the road’ on Rustaveli Avenue. She had visited the demonstration in front of Parliament, part of the protest, which has been continuing uninterruptedly since

28 November 2024. According to GD Prime Minister [Irakli Kobakhidze](#), she came to the rally “as the 51st ‘Akatsuki’.”<sup>3</sup>

On 19 October, Germany [recalled](#) its ambassador to Georgia, Peter Fischer, for consultations, citing as the reason the agitation of Georgian Dream leaders against the EU, Germany, and the ambassador personally. According to [Sozar Subari](#), chair of GD’s satellite party *People’s Power*, Ambassador Fischer was promoting “deep-state politics” in Georgia: “Fischer is an enforcer of deep-state policy in Georgia, and he has been doing so openly, shamelessly, and in an unfriendly manner.”

### “The EU as a Threat to Religious and National Identity”

In public statements, GD and its satellites portray the EU as a force hostile to the Orthodox Church and religious identity and traditions more broadly; they claim that the EU imposes the concept of diversity and liberal values on Georgians, values that, according to them, lead to the erosion of national identity. They assert that in European countries, these values have already been “erased.”

*Examples:*

[Irakli Kirtskhalia](#), GD parliamentary majority leader, 8 October: “This is a demonstration that we are a proud nation. A demonstration that we will never deviate from our principles... We value our religion. And a demonstration that Georgia will never be under anyone’s influence.”

[United Neutral Georgia](#), a GD satellite political group, 11 October: “*United Neutral Georgia* once again categorically calls on the Georgian authorities to urgently re-evaluate the so-called EU integration process... To which EU membership do you intend to take Georgia in 2030 — an EU where, by then, neither gender, nor identity, nor nationality, nor religion, nor traditions will exist?”

[Davit Kartvelishvili](#), member of GD’s satellite party *People’s Power*, 13 October: “In Italy, there are small but active ultra-feminist and anarchist groups that gather around universities. They stage performances against the Church or the police, although their public influence is minimal... In conservative Poland, small liberal groups periodically emerge, opposing traditional values and the Church. Their resources mostly come from Western foundations, and they have virtually no public support.”

[Nana Kakabadze](#), founder of the GD satellite movement *United Neutral Georgia*, 10 October: “The majority of Georgian citizens see that the opposition is not taking us to the West where values (justice, democracy, freedom, Christian morality, and equality) once prevailed, but are trying to drag the country into a fascist-liberal West that Europe has already gone through, because they themselves are carriers of fascist ideology, as demonstrated both in power and in opposition.”

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<sup>3</sup> Akatsuki is a fictional criminal organisation in the anime/manga series *Naruto*. They are portrayed as a secretive group of rogue ninjas, antagonists, operating outside of the established order, pursuing radical goals. GD and affiliated media have started labelling protesters and opposition-groups as “Akatsuki”, thereby framing them as an organised, hostile, conspiratorial force bent on destabilising Georgia.

## The EU as a Source of “LGBT Propaganda” and “Depravity”

GD and its satellite groups continue to employ propagandistic reductionism, attempting to narrow down the EU’s requirements, which include human rights protection, fair legislation, and an independent judiciary, anti-corruption measures, and a free political environment, solely to the issue of LGBT rights. They manipulate public opinion using conspiracy theories, claiming that the West has “artificially created the LGBT community”, like the “Jehovah’s Witnesses sect”, to control other countries.

*Examples:*

[Eka Sepashvili](#), member of the GD satellite party *People’s Power*, 15 October: “...Recently, we heard two main demands... The second is the Family Values Law — the European Union was created, strengthened, and developed precisely around Christian values. Now, as we see, the threat to these Christian values has emerged when they adopted a strategy to strengthen the protection of LGBT rights, and those who do not fully comply with this strategy will face certain financial sanctions. ...Let me remind everyone that in the past year the Georgian people have twice voted for the protection of national, Christian, and family values.”

[Guram Macharashvili](#), member of *People’s Power*, 26 October: “...They promote LGBT propaganda, they unconditionally fulfil the tasks of the Deep State, and so on. If Georgia does not do the same, it will not become a member of the European Union.”

[Tamar Chiburdanidze](#), member of *People’s Power*, 9 October: “As for Europe, which today approved its 2026–30 action plan regarding the LGBTQ+ community... The LGBT community was specially created, formed for specific purposes, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses sect, and it is being used to control society and its human rights defenders.”

## The EU as an Alleged Force Controlled by the “Deep State”<sup>4</sup>

GD and affiliated propagandists systematically repeat the conspiratorial narrative of the “Deep State” and the “Global War Party,” according to which the EU and Western institutions are controlled by a shadowy force — the Deep State. This force allegedly seeks to influence and control domestic political processes in other countries. This narrative aims to delegitimize independent civil institutions and portray them as externally directed actors.

*Examples:*

[Irakli Kirtskhalia](#), GD parliamentary majority leader, 7 October: “We have stated many times that today the influence of the Deep State is clearly felt within EU structures, and many Euro-bureaucrats work directly for them.”

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<sup>4</sup> In certain cases, GD propagandists have used political and media platforms to define the “Deep State” as “*oligarchic families of Jewish origin*,” whose alleged goal is the “degeneration” of European countries, including Georgia — politically, ethnically, religiously, morally, and economically. For a detailed discussion, see TDI’s June 2025 monitoring report: [https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_or\\_belief\\_equality\\_and\\_secularity\\_june2025.pdf](https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/freedom_of_religion_or_belief_equality_and_secularity_june2025.pdf)

[Guram Macharashvili](#), *People's Power*, 15 October: “We have repeatedly said that, unfortunately, even an organisation like OSCE/ODIHR, which used to maintain some degree of objectivity, has come under the pressure and influence of the Deep State.”

[Sozar Subari](#), *People's Power*, 20 October: “Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen a very hostile attitude towards Georgia from the leaders of many EU states. To call things by their name, this is the Deep State and the states controlled by it — those who cannot tolerate the sovereign course that Georgia has chosen.”

[United Neutral Georgia](#), GD satellite political association, 11 October: “In the European Union, as we can see, the ugly ideology of the Deep State is beginning once again to have a devastating impact on public consciousness, the identity of states, and the history of nations.”

### 3. Propagandistic Campaign Against an Orthodox Cleric

The discrediting and defamatory [campaign](#) by GD and its propagandists against Archimandrite **Dorothe Kurashvili** continued during the reporting period<sup>5</sup>.

[On 29 October](#), the Mtskheta–Tbilisi Diocesan Commission of the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church published its conclusion regarding Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili. The [commission](#) accused Kurashvili of ‘*slanderous behavior and other actions deemed inappropriate for a priest*’. As examples of such statements, the commission cited remarks allegedly made by Kurashvili, in which he criticised certain Church representatives and spoke about the influence of the secular authorities over the Church. The commission petitioned the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II, to dismiss the priest from the Church of the Nativity of the Savior in Lower Bethlehem and to reassign him as a cleric at the Holy Trinity Patriarchal Lavra. Patriarch Ilia II [approved](#) the commission’s request.

Archimandrite Dorothe was first summoned to the commission on [16 October](#), but he did not appear, stating that he had not been informed of the accusations against him. On 26 October, he issued a public [statement](#) demanding that the Patriarchate hold the session openly and allow journalists to attend; the Patriarchate responded that “holding a commission session in this format was unprecedented and unacceptable.” On 29 October, the archimandrite [arrived](#) at the Patriarchate with other clergy and journalists, but he was not allowed to enter the commission session.

According to Archimandrite Dorothe, the commission was created specifically to punish him: “*They are demanding answers from me about doctrine — so what do they have to hide? Why are they hiding? Let them prove their doctrine, let them prove that what they are saying is correct, let them prove that Russia is our friend, let them prove that Europe is our enemy,*” he stated.

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<sup>5</sup> Kurashvili frequently appears at pro-European demonstrations and repeatedly criticises certain members of the Church leadership, including the head of the Patriarchate’s public relations office, Deacon Andria Jaghmaidze, accusing them of ties to the ruling party.

Alongside the commission sessions and the publication of the Patriarchate’s conclusion, GD politicians, members of its satellite party, and propagandists disseminated numerous insulting, discrediting, and defamatory statements against Archimandrite Dorothe.

*Examples:*

[Gia Volski](#), GD Member of Parliament, 29 October: “...In general, his views are a serious revision of the dogmas of the Orthodox faith... I believe that clergy should discuss their issues in the sphere designated for that purpose.”

[Dimitri Samkharadze](#), GD regional secretary, 7 October: “...We began strengthening the Church under Mr. Bidzina’s instructions, and this man in a cassock, who is just a *natsi* [meaning UNM party member or supporter], ignores at least everything I have listed here and lies to the people!”

[Dimitri Khundadze](#), member of the GD satellite party *People’s Power*, 14 October: “...We saw a clergyman opposing the Church, choosing to stand with the United National Movement and supporting destruction, which is unacceptable and disgraceful.”

[Levan Kochloshvili](#), member of *People’s Power*, 30 October: “Dorothe Kurashvili — a man who disgraces the Georgian Church, calls on other people’s children to stand with LGBT activists, and serves foreign influence groups is neither a priest, nor a father, nor a Georgian!”

[Zaal Anjaparidze](#), GD propagandist, 30 October: “...As I have said before, the promotion of Dorothe Kurashvili and his group onto the public arena is a planned and targeted action against both the state and the Church.”

#### 4. Persecution of Georgian Non-Governmental Organizations

During the reporting period, the [persecution of civil society](#) continued through the Anti-Corruption Bureau and the courts.

In October 2025, dozens of civil society organizations filed appeals in court against letters they had received from the Anti-Corruption Bureau, which demanded extensive information, including personal data on activities carried out from April 2025 to the present.

The recipient organizations informed the Bureau in writing that, following the entry into force of the new repressive amendments to the law, they had neither signed any new grant agreements nor made amendments to existing ones. Therefore, initiating monitoring under the Law on Grants was unlawful. Nevertheless, the Court of Appeals upheld, in almost all cases, the Bureau’s requests in full and obliged the organizations to provide extensive information related to their activities. Similar to the district/city courts, the Court of Appeals copied the Bureau’s reasoning into its rulings without examining either the factual or legal basis, thus refusing to exercise the judicial oversight mandated by law.

Parallel to this persecution, GD continued to discredit the NGO sector through propaganda.

In GD’s narrative, non-governmental organizations are portrayed as “non-transparently funded” agents serving “Euro-bureaucrats” and the “Deep State.” According to this rhetoric, their funding allegedly aims

not only at attempts to overthrow the government but also at waging a battle “against faith, the Church, and our identity.”

*Examples:*

[Kakha Kaladze](#), GD Mayor of Tbilisi and GD secretary-general, 16 October: “We introduced an analogue of the American FARA law, and apparently that is also unacceptable. The conclusion is simple: they do not want such laws in Georgia because then the public would know who finances attempts at state coups, **attempts to overthrow the government, who fights against faith, the Church, and our identity.**”

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), GD Prime Minister, 15 October: “...The only thing they raised was why we allocated a 500-square-meter plot of land to the Patriarchate to build a church — this is the level they have stooped to, presenting it as some sort of compromise material. I don’t know **how godless they are.** In reality, they have not raised a single doubt regarding any decision of the government.”

## 5. Statements by Clergy on Political Repressions and Intolerance

A positive trend persisted during the reporting period: a small number of Orthodox clergy continued to publicly criticize GD’s anti-democratic and anti-European course, as well as its propagandistic rhetoric.

### 5.1. Statements on GD’s Propagandistic Policy, Repressions, and Prisoners

Since 28 November 2024, pro-European protests demanding new parliamentary elections and the release of political prisoners have continued in Tbilisi and other cities. During this period, the GD Parliament enacted several repressive, anti-democratic, and unconstitutional laws, which law enforcement agencies and courts subsequently enforced. As a result, hundreds of people were subjected to administrative liability for various “offences,” while more than 100 were arrested on criminal charges. In this context, a small group of clergy publicly opposes GD’s propaganda and repressions. Their key messages include:

#### **A call for justice and active citizenship grounded in Christian teaching**

Some clergy criticize public passivity and silence in the face of injustice, arguing that silence amounts to complicity in evil. According to them, faith and civic responsibility are inextricably linked; true Orthodoxy demands active citizenship and a commitment to speaking out against injustice. Clergy argue that the Church cannot remain neutral in the face of injustice. Historically, Georgian clergy were involved in national liberation and political struggles; therefore, “non-involvement in politics” is often viewed as a failure to fulfill both Christian and civic duties.

“Say that robbing, impoverishing, deceiving, beating your own people, unjust imprisonment, and killing is service to evil, glorifying a false god, a false prayer. You say it too. Let us say that our brothers do not lie, while the politicians serving evil and their followers do lie. Say it loudly.”— [Grigol Tchejia](#), priest, 31 October.

“It is unimaginable for those who are supposed to fight for truth and justice to remain silent. Teachers, professors, clergy, or other silent figures cannot create, help, or do anything good for the country or for people if they continue closing their eyes to evil and injustice.” — [Leon Gelovani](#), priest, 29 October.

“...Christ stood with the persecuted Paul, not with Pilate’s servants. Pilate’s servants mocked and beat Christ.” — [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), archimandrite, 7 October.

“Christianity is service to the human being and to the idea of freedom!!!” — [Zaza Tevzadze](#), archpriest, 24 October.

“When the Church’s governing body leans toward power rather than justice, it loses Christ, because Christ never stands on the side of power. He always stands on the cross.” — [Zakaria Feradze](#), archpriest, 22 October.

“The situation in the Church is tough — these people have placed themselves in such a position, becoming an extension of the government.” — [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), archimandrite, 16 October.

“Today, the shepherd of the Mtskheta–Tbilisi Eparchy is Bishop Shio. People have been killed, beaten, thrown into prison, and he has not delivered a single sermon to defend his parish.” — [Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), archimandrite, 29 October.

“The Church is not only the temple, hierarchy, vestments, and ritual. The Church is first and foremost conscience, which must stand on the side of truth when the whole world is silent. Silence, when so much injustice is happening, is complicity in evil.” — [Ilia Jinjolava](#), archimandrite, 21 October.

“Great Ambrosi<sup>6</sup> did not apologize to the authorities, and taught us, left us a testament, never to apologize to rulers when you are in the right.” — [Ilia Toloraia](#), archimandrite, 1 October.

“And how many priests have I supported, helping so many spiritually or physically - I do not boast of it, but I feel ashamed when those I helped now remain silent when Christ and the country need even one honest word.” — [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), archimandrite, 21 October.

### Criticism of the Anti-European Path

Some clergy believe that Christian values are compatible with European culture and political tradition. Europe is perceived as a space of law, order, and freedom. At the same time, they argue, the GD government is choosing ties with Russia over those with Europe.

“They have turned the course of the country 180 degrees — a country whose first embassy was that of Germany and which from the day of independence aspired toward the EU, a struggle in which many Georgians sacrificed their lives.” — [Tamaz Lomidze](#), archpriest, 23 October.

“It is not only that we need Europe — Europe and the free world need our proud youth.” — [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), archimandrite, 1 October.

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<sup>6</sup> Ambrosi Khelaia (Patriarch Ambrosi, 1861–1927) was the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church who openly opposed the Soviet occupation. He was imprisoned for condemning the Red Army’s invasion and refused to apologize or recant.

“Respect is given to choice — where you can form your life according to your desire. That is Europe!”— [Giorgi Gibradze](#), priest, 13 October.

“GD, vassals of Russia, are trying to darken the eye of reason that Christ opened for us.” — [Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), archimandrite, 2 October.

“When some collect millions! When some sell their homeland every day! People will not accept the Russian regime!!!”— [Zaza Tevzadze](#), archpriest, 23 October.

### Criticism of Interference in the Georgian Orthodox Church’s Internal Autonomy

Some clergy actively speak out about GD’s attempts to interfere in the internal autonomy and independence of the Orthodox Church, including about illegal surveillance, alleged leak of the [State Security files](#),<sup>7</sup> and the ‘[cyanide case](#).’<sup>8</sup>

It should also be noted that in 2024, GD announced a constitutional initiative to declare [Orthodoxy the state religion](#). In reality, this initiative posed a risk of limiting the Church’s independence and subordinating it to the state. Ultimately, the initiative failed due to critical assessment and a lack of full support from the Church.

Some clergy believe that oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili seeks full control over the Church and the “appointment” of a preferred patriarch.

“He accused Archimandrite Dorothe of being promised the patriarchate by the United National Movement if they came to power. With this, Dito Samkharadze, a face of GD, claims the government can remove the current patriarch and appoint its own preferred candidate. This statement revealed Ivanishvili’s dream. It is now beyond doubt that Ivanishvili’s team intentionally orchestrated the cyanide case to appoint their desired patriarch. Samkharadze’s latest claim is equally insulting to the Holy Synod by implying that the government, not the Synod, can appoint a patriarch, clearing the path for Ivanishvili’s next attack.”— [Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), archimandrite, 8 October.

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<sup>7</sup> 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 topics. 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 February 5, 2025, 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 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.

See more at TDI’s FoRB report 2024, [https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/tdis\\_forb\\_report\\_2024\\_eng.pdf](https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/tdis_forb_report_2024_eng.pdf), p.19

<sup>8</sup> On 5 September 2017, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced Archpriest Giorgi Mamaladze to nine years in prison for attempted premeditated murder motivated by revenge against the secretary-referent of the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II, Shorena Tetrushvili, and for the unlawful purchase and possession of a firearm (Articles 18, 108 and 236 of the Criminal Code of Georgia). [The European Court of Human Rights found](#) that Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to a fair trial, had been violated in two episodes of his case. The Court ordered the State to pay Giorgi Mamaladze 9,418 GEL within three months of the judgment becoming final. He was released in February 2024 after serving seven years of his sentence.

“...It is no news that Bidzina, with his servile system, has always hated the Church and its hierarchy. His ‘charity’ was a calling card to enter politics and implement Russian and his own mercantile goals [...] From his first days in politics, he adopted all the worst practices of previous governments toward the Church. He went further, seeking its full instrumentalization. Security structures, the so-called SSSG, have infiltrated the ecclesiastical sphere, defiled it through manipulation, and turned it into a victim of ideological propaganda serving Russia.” — [Ilia Jinjolava](#), archimandrite, 8 October.

“People who once claimed the sun and moon rose from the patriarch now pray to Bidzina [Ivanishvili].” — [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), archimandrite, 12 October

### Statements on the Judiciary, Enforcement Judges, and Law Enforcement Agencies

Some clergy continue to express support for prisoners of conscience while condemning GD’s repressions and selective justice.

“Apparently, there is such a thing as the occupation of justice. Everything is in your hands — you can twist and bend it as you wish until they arrest you too and stitch you up. Rob the country — you pay and walk free; protest and express yourself — you are imprisoned and will not be released. The country’s robbers at home, its passionate people in jail. Superb!” — [Giorgi Tskitishvili](#), priest, 24 October.

“They imprison living, righteous people, while criminals sit in Parliament and judge others in the courts...” — [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), archimandrite, 20 October.

“It is unimaginable! What kind of country do we live in where we rejoice that a female teacher imprisoned for political reasons was released on bail after torture, suffering, and deterioration of health?” — [Leon Gelovani](#), priest, 29 October

“Nino Datashvili<sup>9</sup>, a teacher, a woman, a mother, whom the regime of evil is keeping in captivity! #FreeTheRegimesPrisoners.” — [Ilia Jinjolava](#), archimandrite, 28 October.

“Nino Datashvili is a victim of violence and unjust treatment!!!” — [Zaza Tevzadze](#), archpriest, 28 October.

### Statements by Clergy of Other Denominations

Bishop **Rusudan Gotsiridze** of the Evangelical-Baptist Church of Georgia actively comments in the media, sharing statements in [support](#) of political prisoners. She also speaks out about unlawful decisions by GD, judges, and law enforcement agencies.

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<sup>9</sup> On 21 June, the court imposed pre-trial detention as a preventive measure on Nino Datashvili. She had been arrested on charges of assaulting a court bailiff in the course of their official duties. The relevant article of the Criminal Code provides for a penalty of four to seven years of imprisonment. Video footage from the incident shows her swinging her hands at bailiffs while being forcibly removed from the building by approximately five officers, though the force of contact remains unclear. [On 29 October, the judge replaced her pre-trial detention with bail](#) after the Prosecutor’s Office submitted a motion to the court, citing Nino Datashvili’s health condition, as she requires two spinal surgeries and follow-up treatment.

## 5.2. Statements Supporting Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili

During the reporting period, GD’s propagandistic television channels continued their discreditation campaign against Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili. At the same time, Andria Jagmaidze, the head of the Public Relations Department of the Patriarchate of Georgia, and the Mtskheta–Tbilisi Eparchial Commission also joined the campaign. Based on the commission’s request, as a punishment, the Patriarchate decided to dismiss Archimandrite Dorothe from the Church of Lower Bethlehem. In contrast, some clergy publicly expressed support for the archimandrite.

[Giorgi Tserodze](#), archpriest, 16 October: “You have exposed many lies (to Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili), as is befitting Christian teaching. You speak in simple and understandable language. Thank you for that. In the search for truth, I stand beside you.”

[Zenon Iarajuli](#), 21 October: “Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili does not need a petition for protection. He is a human being, one who understands humanity, and he stands with the persecuted...”

[Zakaria Peradze](#), archpriest, 22 October: “[...] When a priest is forced into silence, in reality, what they are trying to suppress is conscience. A priest is not an administrative functionary — he is the living voice of the Church, who exposes evil, protects the oppressed, and stands where power rises above the human being.”

[Grigol Tchejia](#), priest, 31 October: “Another thing: Father Dorothe and his brothers will never betray anyone to secure their own future. This is dignity and sanctity—qualities every priest should possess.

[Ilia Toloraia](#), archimandrite, 30 October: “They stripped Father Dorothe of his position as rector, but no one can strip him of the leadership of his word. Everyone knows he was punished for exposing Russia.”

[Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), archimandrite, 28 October: “Those who summon the Father to demand answers are summoning us as well, because we say and preach the same things. We answer questions, and we expect answers to the questions we raise. This is justice. Our solidarity is with Archimandrite Dorothe (Kurashvili).”

Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili, [speaking](#) about being summoned before the commission, stated that he preaches nothing against the Church. According to him, “*Whoever remains silent about the ruin of the country and the attempt to change its course is an enemy of our country’s past, present, and future.*”