



Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

26 December 2024 - 31 January 2025



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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 the period from December 26, 2024 to January 31, 2025.

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

- *pre-election period* - [August 25 to September 25](#)
- *pre-election period* - [September 25 to October 25](#)
- *post-election period* - [October 26 to November 26](#)
- *post-election period* - [November 26 to December 26](#).

Cover photo: Guram Muradov



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Key Findings

The monitoring of the environment in terms of freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity shows that the Georgian Dream's anti-European and anti-human rights propaganda is largely based on the manipulation of pseudo-religious narratives.

According to the Georgian Dream's narrative, a "global ideology" promoted in Georgia by the party's opponents, including the civil society, media, and the opposition—is attacking faith, "family values," traditions, and national identity. They also claim that Western partners of Georgia are financing "anti-state projects". The statements of GD and their affiliates constantly attempt to discredit pro-European demonstrations, framing them as foreign-orchestrated movements. Protesters are portrayed as "liberal fascists" who are attacking the Orthodox Church, faith, traditions, and state sovereignty.

A positive trend is that an increasing number of the Orthodox clergy have made public statements condemning Georgian Dream's anti-European stance, as well as violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators. They have also expressed support for the resistance movement.

1. Manipulation of Orthodox Identity by Georgian Dream and Its Satellites

Georgian Dream's overarching narrative claims that a "global ideology" is threatening faith, family values, traditions, and national identity in Georgia.

They claim that their political rivals are promoting this ideology, with Western partners backing anti-state efforts. This narrative suggests that the peaceful protests that started on November 28, 2024, are movements influenced by foreign powers. Demonstrators are depicted as "liberal fascists" opposing the Orthodox Church and religious beliefs. Conversely, the Georgian Dream positions itself as the only guardian of faith, traditional values, and state sovereignty.

1.1. Key Narratives and Thematic Messages Observed During the Reporting Period

The "Fight Against Global Ideology" – Reflection of Russia's "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World) Concept

One of the Georgian Dream's most prominent messages is that a "global ideology" is attempting to destroy Orthodox Christianity and family values in Georgia.

This narrative is based on the "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World) concept, which promotes anti-liberal and anti-democratic worldviews. While it outwardly emphasizes the protection of faith and national identity, its real goal is to construct the West as an enemy.

Example Statements:

Mikheil Kavelashvili (Illegitimate President of Georgia), December 31, 2024: *"...We, Georgians, hold strong values—we know what family, language, homeland, and faith mean. These are the treasures left to us by Ilia Chavchavadze, and they form the foundation of our nation. Without these, our nation cannot exist. These values must be protected from the challenges that this so-called 'global ideology' is imposing on us."*

Irakli Kobakhidze (Illegitimate Prime Minister of Georgia), January 7, 2025: *"...There is a **dangerous ideology** spreading throughout Georgia that is pulling people away from faith and God. We must all resist it by defending our beliefs and traditional values. Every single one of us has a role to play in this fight."*

1.2. Anti-Western and Manipulative Messages Regarding Georgia's International Partners

Sanctions Against Bidzina Ivanishvili by the U.S. State Department

When the United States sanctioned Bidzina Ivanishvili (Georgian Dream's honorary chairman and an oligarch), the ruling party framed it as an attack on the Orthodox Church.

Main Message: Sanctioning Bidzina Ivanishvili is the same as sanctioning the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Davit Matikashvili (Georgian Dream MP, Illegitimate Parliament member), December 28, 2024: "...They know very well that sanctioning Bidzina Ivanishvili is the same as sanctioning the construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral (Sameba), as well as hundreds of churches and monasteries that he funded."

Tamar Chiburdanidze (People's Power Party member, Georgian Dream affiliate), December 27, 2024: "...But just look at social media—who is celebrating these sanctions? Those whose families, churches, and country Ivanishvili saved. The majority of the Georgian people recognize and support his contributions, even after 12 years of leadership."

Vladimer Bozhadze (Georgian Dream MP, Illegitimate Parliament member), January 25, 2025: "...Any sanctions—whether on diplomatic passports or other areas—are being used as a tool to blackmail our country, to blackmail Bidzina Ivanishvili, and to blackmail our political leadership. We will not back down because we stand behind our country, our Church, our people, and our families."

Statements on U.S. President Donald Trump's Foreign Policy

Main Message: Anti-state projects, including efforts against traditions and the Georgian Orthodox Church, were financed with U.S. and EU money. However, Trump has put an end to this funding.

On January 20, 2025, by U.S. President Donald Trump's [executive order](#) on reviewing foreign aid, all USAID funding commitments under the Development Objectives Agreements (DOAGs) were paused until a full review of U.S. foreign assistance programs.

Georgian Dream's illegitimate parliamentary representatives reacted to this decision, interpreting it as a shift in the U.S. foreign policy. According to them, the U.S. funding had previously supported anti-state activities in Georgia, including efforts against the Georgian Orthodox Church and national traditions.

Example Statements:

Sozar Subari (Chairman of People's Power, Georgian Dream's satellite party), January 14, 2025: "...There will also be an end to pressure on us to repeal the Law on Family Values and the Protection of Minors, which is great news. I am confident that under the Trump administration, financing for anti-state projects will not continue. These projects include training young people—using American money—on how to stage a coup, burn down Parliament, and fight against traditions and the Church... Even if such funding is not completely stopped, it will be significantly reduced, and that is a very positive development."

Irakli Zarkua (Georgian Dream MP, Illegitimate Parliament member), January 23, 2025: "...The state's interests must come first. That means protecting our religion, Church, Orthodoxy, traditions, and cultural customs. But Trump surprised us—he went even further and cut funding for these rootless NGOs."

Statements Regarding the Policy of the Council of Europe towards Georgia

On January 29, 2025, The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) approved a resolution on Georgia, granting limited credentials to the Georgian delegation until April. The resolution outlines several conditions that Georgian authorities must satisfy by April, among them "the release of political prisoners and the announcement of new elections."

Main Message: The EU institutions are attacking Christian and family values in Georgia and demanding obedience.

Davit Kartvelishvili (People's Power Party, Georgian Dream affiliate), January 30, 2025: "...We have taken another step away from colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the war against traditional, conservative, and Christian values. Strasbourg is now joining Brussels and Washington in demanding that we abandon our Georgian identity, dignity, and Orthodox faith."

Main Message: Radical European politicians are undermining our national values.

Georgian Dream and its representatives frequently issue anti-European statements, both in general criticism of the European Union and as direct attacks on individual Western politicians who criticize them. During this and previous reporting periods, one of their main targets has been Michael Roth, Chairman of the German Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee. Georgian Dream

has portrayed him as an enemy of Orthodox Christianity and has used his name to reinforce their anti-Western rhetoric.

Example Statement:

[Shalva Papuashvili](#) (Chairman of the Georgian Dream Parliament), January 7, 2025:
"Michael Roth has no legitimacy in the eyes of the Georgian people, and that is clear. This man came here and started insulting the Georgian Orthodox Church—what should we expect from him? ... The real problem lies with the opposition and these NGOs, who believe that we should act in the interests of Ukraine, Lithuania, France, or some other country instead of Georgia. Some people can't seem to decide which flag to wave—should it be the Georgian flag, the Ukrainian flag, or the American flag?"

Other Georgian Dream leaders and MPs also made statements on this topic, including [Levan Machavariani](#), [Archil Gorduladze](#), [Guram Macharashvili](#), [Shalva Papuashvili](#), and [Irakli Tcheishvili](#).

1.3. Discrediting Opponents Through Pseudo-Religious Narratives

Main Message: "Liberal fascism" (a term used to describe opponents of the Georgian Dream) is waging war against Orthodox Christianity and the Church.

A common trend in Georgian Dream's propaganda is the use of manipulative tactics to preemptively "appropriate" certain terms that their opponents might use against them. For example, they co-opt words like fascism, Soviet tactics, and repression, and redefine them in a way that links these concepts to ideologies they oppose, such as liberalism. By labeling their opponents as "liberal fascists", Georgian Dream aims to discredit the opposition movement and create an illusion of a values-based conflict in society.

For example, each year, as Christmas and New Year's celebrations approach in Georgia, the debate over the date of Christmas becomes a topic of public discussion (25 December or 7 January). This issue has moved beyond its theological significance and is now viewed in the broader context of Georgia's detachment from Russian influence and closer integration with the Western world.

Both Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and illegitimate Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili have frequently used the public debate over Christmas celebrations as a way to claim that "liberal fascists" are attacking the Orthodox Church.

Example Statements:

Irakli Kobakhidze (Illegitimate Prime Minister, Georgian Dream), January 7, 2025:
"One of the main goals of liberal fascism is to divide society in every possible way, ensuring that nothing unites the people [...] Naturally, an attack on religious holidays is also an attack on the Orthodox Church. The ultimate goal of these actions is to damage the Church's image."

Shalva Papuashvili (Illegitimate Speaker of Parliament, Georgian Dream), January 7, 2025: *"The opposition has exploited what is purely a canonical issue—the difference in church calendars—and labeled the holiday as 'Russian Christmas'."*

Shalva Papuashvili commented about a post he had previously [shared on the social media platform X](#).

2. Statements by Orthodox Clergy Condemning Violence and Supporting Protesters

Some clergy members of the Georgian Orthodox Church continue to publicly criticize Georgian Dream's anti-European course, condemn violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators, and openly express their support for the protest movement.

For example, on January 7, 2025, [Archimandrite Dorothe \(Kurashvili\)](#), together with other clergy members and parishioners of Bethlehem Church, went to Rustaveli Avenue after the Christmas service. There, in front of the First School, they held a prayer service in support of political prisoners of the Georgian Dream government.



Photo: Beka Mindiashvili

Statements by Orthodox Clergy:

[Giorgi Tserodze](#), Priest, January 19 (personal Facebook page): "Anyone who dishonors, insults, or physically assaults an imprisoned person resembles Herod, who beheaded John the Baptist while he was in captivity. In the name of Christ, who was baptized by John, I call on those who commit such acts to repent and never repeat such deeds."

Shio Kvaratskhelia, Archimandrite of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi, January 19 (Sermon): "We all remember how they promised to create a democracy so impressive that even Europe would be amazed. And indeed, they have amazed Europe—but not with democracy, rather with violence, lawlessness, and chaos."

Ilia Jinjolava, Archimandrite, January 10 (Facebook post): "When law enforcement, judicial, and ecclesiastical systems are transformed into tools of ideological and physical enslavement, serving Russian, criminal, and violent forces, it is a gross violation of human dignity and the will of God."

Dorothe Kurashvili, Archimandrite, Head of Bethlehem Church, January 9 (Sermon): "I urge everyone to come to their senses, release the innocent detainees, and listen to the voice of the people. By doing so, they will save not only themselves but also the country." (Archimandrite Dorotheo made similar statements in sermons on January 7, 16, and 19.)

Zenon Iarajuli, Metropolitan of Dmanisi and Agharak-Tashir, December 31 (Facebook post): "Freedom and solidarity to those imprisoned for their love of Georgia. Health and longevity to those who suffer for their devotion to Georgia. Life will reveal who is a father and who is merely a stepfather, who is a brother and who is only a stranger in disguise. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

Christmas Message by Metropolitan Grigol Berbichashvili (Poti and Khobi Diocese)

On January 6, 2025, during the Christmas liturgy, Metropolitan Grigol Berbichashvili of Poti and Khobi Diocese delivered a [Christmas message](#), in which he addressed the challenges facing the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Georgian state.

Key Messages from His Sermon:

- In Russia-Georgia relations, the narrative of shared faith ("*same-faith ideology*") is one of Russia's primary tools for political influence, which has misled a significant part of Georgian society. Historically, many Georgian clerics have sacrificed their lives in the fight against Russia's (Soviet Union's) **false concept of shared Orthodoxy**.
- **The freedom of the Georgian Orthodox Church** in Georgia depends on the nature of the Church-State relationship. A major risk is the "Russian model" of Church-State relations, in which the Church becomes an instrument of the state. In such cases, the Church deviates from Apostolic tradition, as exemplified by Russia's state-sponsored wars, which are often morally justified using pseudo-religious arguments.
- **A new society is being born in Georgia today**—a society that is fighting within the framework of the Constitution for its civil rights and a better future. In contrast, violence, crackdowns, and physical harm against this movement are unacceptable.

- **Free will is a core principle of Christian thought and ancient Georgian culture.** Ignoring free will contradicts Christian doctrine, which instead calls for speaking out against violence and exposing injustice.

Reaction from Georgian Dream’s propagandists: On January 17, 2025, [Goga Khaindrava](#), a propagandist for Georgian Dream, publicly criticized Metropolitan Grigol’s sermon. He mockingly asked: *“Which new society are you referring to, Metropolitan?”* He then slandered this "new society", calling them: *“Charlatans”, “Men dressed in women’s clothing”, “Foul-mouthed youth”, “Blasphemers of Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II and the Georgian Orthodox Church”, “Supporters of European homosexual politicians and propagandists”, “Organizers of anti-state protests”.*

3. Propagandist Statements by Some Orthodox Clergy Regarding the Protests

Certain Orthodox clergy members have publicly expressed their negative positions on the pro-European protests. They describe the demonstrations as a process orchestrated by "anti-Christian Europe" and equate the West with "gay propaganda" and moral corruption.

Main Message: The protests are staged to create disorder and are instigated by the West, which promotes "Sodomite propaganda" and "gay pride" events.

Metropolitan Stephane Kalaijishvili (Chkondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi Diocese) delivered sermons on December [28](#) and January [5](#), [7](#), and [13](#), where he claimed that Western forces are inciting unrest and that the young people participating in the protests are descendants of the militant atheist movement. He also stated that "anti-Christian Europe," controlled by anti-Christian forces, demands the abolition of the Family Protection Law and the recognition of 'Sodomite sin' as a prerequisite for EU integration."

[Bishop Spiridon Abuladze \(Skhalta Diocese\), January 16 \(Sermon\):](#) He described pro-European protesters as supporters of moral corruption, same-sex marriage, and gay propaganda; calling standing alongside them a grave sin. He specifically attacked Mzia Amaglobeli, the founder of media outlets, "Batumelebi" and "Netgazeti", calling the journalists from these outlets "a corrupt generation." He also prayed for the government to stand firm in eradicating this "filthy ideology."

[Metropolitan Ioane Gamrekeli \(Kutaisi-Gaenati Diocese\), January 8 \(Facebook Post\):](#) "Gay parades and similar mass-costumed processions are one of the tools used to establish LGBT ideas and liberal-fascist ideology in society. Such methods serve private political and socio-economic interests."

Manipulative Use of False Information by Certain Clergy

Archpriest Shalva Kekelia spread false information from the pulpit in an attempt to discredit the previous government. He claimed that a journalist developed cancer due to a head injury sustained during the 2007 raid on Imedi TV. On January 4, the [journalist's child](#) publicly refuted this claim, calling it a fabricated story. On January 5, Archpriest Kekelia [apologized for his statement](#).

Discreditation of President Salome Zurabishvili by Some Orthodox Clergy Due to Diplomatic Relations with the West

Archbishop Iakob Iakobashvili (Bodbe Diocese) repeated the Georgian Dream's propaganda narrative, blaming the West and the idea of peace during his sermon on January 27. He questioned Georgia's aspirations toward the EU and NATO, stating:

"Why did we want to join the European Union or NATO? To be protected and to have a successful life in every aspect. But if you're already blocking everything and trying to control us—who are you in the end?"

He was also actively involved in the campaign to discredit President Salome Zurbashvili.

Example Statements:

Archbishop Iakob Iakobashvili (Bodbe Diocese), January 19: *"Whether it's Madam Salome or anyone else, this snitching needs to stop... They should be careful—if the state won't take care of them, we will, one by one. We must not be led by some Baltic, Polish, or German deputies."*

Metropolitan Stephane Kallajishvili (Chkondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi Diocese), January 13: *"I told Salome, I'll thank you if you leave. Just go and leave us alone. Enough with your endless presidency. We already have a president—Mikheil Kavelashvili—and we have a prime minister who does not betray the country."*