

Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

February 2025



Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

February 2025

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 **February 2025**

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

pre-election period (2024)

[August 25 to September 25](#)

[September 25 to October 25](#)

post-election period

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

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

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

Cover photo: Giorgi Mosiashvili (Mose)



Content

Key Findings.....	4
1. Manipulation of Religion and Identity by Georgian Dream and Its Satellites.....	5
1.1. Georgian Dream’s Pseudo-Religious Narrative on the Protection of Christianity	6
1.2. Anti-Western and Propagandist Messages Regarding Financial Support from Partner States	7
1.3. Discrediting Pro-European Protests in a Religious Context	9
2. Propagandistic and Anti-Western Statements by Orthodox Clergy	10
3. Orthodox Clergy Condemning Violence and Supporting Protesters	12
3.1. Condemnation of Violence.....	12
3.2. Statements on Repression Against Protesters	13
3.3. Statements on the Unlawful Imprisonment of Journalist Mzia Amaglobeli.....	14

Key Findings

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

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

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

Anti-Western and propagandistic messages regarding financial assistance from partner countries have been widespread. For example, allegations have been made that *“USAID used to fund anti-state activities, a fight against the Church, and national traditions,”* and that *“EU financial assistance will be used to fund radicalism and anti-Church activities in Georgia.”* A satellite party of the “Georgian Dream” has further claimed that *“the EU Ambassador in Georgia acts as a viceroy¹, defaming Georgian traditions and the Church while opposing the will of the Georgian people.”*

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

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

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

¹ A high-ranking official who represented the Russian Emperor and had broad administrative, military, and judicial powers over a specific region of the empire.

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

The "Georgian Dream" (GD)² party continues to manipulate pseudo-religious narratives, portraying itself as the protector of Christianity and traditional values. In this context, opponents, human rights defenders, media, and civil society activists are labeled as “enemies of the Church, Orthodoxy, and religion.” According to representatives of the "Georgian Dream," those deemed “enemies of the Church” should be strictly prosecuted under the charge of treason.

During the reporting period, the "Georgian Dream" party fast-tracked the initiation of unconstitutional and [undemocratic repressive laws](#), including amendments to the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Public Service, the Law on Broadcasting, and the Criminal Code. Additionally, changes to the Parliamentary Rules of Procedure [eliminated the mandatory participation of non-governmental organizations \(NGOs\)](#) in decision-making. The "Georgian Dream" parliament also [introduced the "Foreign Agents Registration Act" \(FARA\)](#). According to the [explanatory note](#), "Georgian Dream" wishes to extend this law to non-governmental organizations, with the political objective of severely restricting independent and critical civil society organizations and media, and to impose fines and criminal charges against NGO representatives.

Regarding the introduction of the "Foreign Agents Registration Act" (FARA), the key messages from the leaders of "Georgian Dream" emphasize that foreign states—referring to Western partners—interfere in Georgia’s internal affairs, fund revolutions, and incite hatred - Their goal is to introduce and promote "foreign ideas" under the pretense that these ideas reflect the interests of Georgian society. GD claims that Western countries use NGO funding to implement these agendas. As stated by the Speaker of the GD Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, ["Behind every radical NGO stands a radical donor."](#)

"Georgian Dream" and its satellite groups openly attack a broad range of Western partners, specific European politicians, and diplomats, including the EU Ambassador to Georgia. They claim that in the past, USAID, and now the European Union, have allocated financial assistance to fund radicalism and anti-Church activities in Georgia. This rhetoric serves to portray Western support as a neocolonial intervention, delegitimizing international cooperation and reinforcing the "Georgian Dream’s" isolationist agenda.

² Oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili’s Georgian Dream (GD) party, which has been in power since 2012, is facing significant criticism for its growing authoritarian tendencies and democratic backsliding. Despite Georgia’s official aspirations for European integration, GD has been undermining democratic institutions, suppressing civil society and independent media, and fostering anti-Western rhetoric and policy. GD’s policies increasingly resemble Kremlin-style governance, including the controversial adoption of the “foreign influence” law, restrictive laws on civil society, media and a crackdown on opposition voices. The legitimacy of 2024 parliamentary elections has been widely contested, with [domestic](#) and [international](#) observers raising concerns over alleged electoral fraud. [International reports](#) indicate vote-buying, intimidation of opposition members and voters, and the misuse of administrative resources to secure GD’s hold on power. Georgian Dream has repeatedly attempted to suppress pro-European peaceful protests [violently and unlawfully](#). Hundreds of individuals participating in peaceful protests have been detained, many of them [beaten, tortured](#) and denied access to justice.

1.1. Georgian Dream's Pseudo-Religious Narrative on the Protection of Christianity

"Georgian Dream" seeks to portray itself as a defender of Christianity, while at the same time adopting repressive and anti-democratic laws to punish its opponents and violently suppressing peaceful protests through unlawful methods. "Georgian Dream" and its satellite groups label opponents as "godless," and "enemies of the Church, Orthodoxy, and religion", aiming to discredit the opposition movement in society and create an illusion of a value-based conflict. In their narrative, the "Georgian Dream" represents the political force that protects faith, traditional values, and the sovereignty of the state.

[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), Prime Minister of "Georgian Dream", in an interview with the Swiss weekly magazine *Die Weltwoche*, January 10: *"We are proud that Georgia is one of the first Christian countries in the world, which is why Christianity holds special significance for us. Thus, we do everything to protect our religion. Defending Christianity and religion is part of our history."*

[Mikheil Kavelashvili](#), President of "Georgian Dream", in an interview with the French media outlet *Radio Courtoisie*, February 18: *"...Georgia must no longer allow foreign ministers to interfere in elections and the internal affairs of our country... Our opponents talk to us about human rights, but they have reached a point where an 8- or 9-year-old child can decide to change their gender. We have the resources: we will unite our society as soon as foreign interference stops so that we can rally around our three main principles: homeland, language, and faith... Our Christian faith is closely tied to our identity. The Virgin Mary protects us."*

"Enemies of the Church must be harshly prosecuted under the treason clause"

During the reporting period, the "Georgian Dream" party continued to introduce unconstitutional and undemocratic repressive laws rapidly. One such measure is the [amendments](#) registered by the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority on February 19, introducing an article on "treason" into the Criminal Code. In justifying the need for these legislative changes, they manipulatively invoke the argument of "hostility toward the Church".

[Irakli Zarkua](#), Member of the "Georgian Dream" Parliament, February 18: *"Those who are enemies of their own country, who are enemies of the Church and Georgian interests, will naturally be punished harshly."*

Referencing historical examples to reinforce anti-secular narratives

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of “Georgian Dream” Parliament, February 8: *“King David IV (David the Builder) most clearly and successfully defined the nation as a union of the monarchy and the Church—an integrated people, maintaining diverse neighborly relations, and a political system built on Christian identity. Every generation of Georgia, at any time and place, has a responsibility not only to the present and the future but also to history and our ancestors.”*

1.2. Anti-Western and Propagandist Messages Regarding Financial Support from Partner States

Message: “USAID has funded anti-state activities, a fight against the Church and national traditions.”

During the reporting period, “Georgian Dream” representatives intensified their anti-Western campaign aimed at discrediting NGOs, particularly in the context of financial support from foreign partners. On January 20, following an executive [order](#) by U.S. President Donald Trump to review U.S. foreign aid commitments, USAID paused all new funding obligations under the Development Objectives Agreements (DOAGs). “Georgian Dream” interpreted this as a policy shift by the U.S. and claimed that, until then, USAID had been financing anti-state activities, a fight against the Orthodox Church, and national traditions in Georgia.

[Irakli Zarkua](#), member of the “Georgian Dream” parliament, February 1: *“It has now been revealed that, among others, USAID was funding these schemes with millions—supporting so-called civil society. And we know what kind of support that is. It aligns with Soros’ foundation and its values—teaching people to kill their own parents, reject the Church, Orthodoxy, and traditions, and serve only a foreign country. American taxpayer money was used to fund these traitors, the Gigaurts and Lomjarians, who plot revolutions here.”*

[Vladimer Bozhadze](#), member of the “Georgian Dream” parliament, February 4: *“The politicians, NGOs, and television channels that were funded aimed to fight our state, our Church, and our identity. We have numerous pieces of evidence to prove this. This is precisely why we were being judged—for transparency—so that it would not become clear how, where, and how much money was being spent.”*

[Tamar Chiburdanidze](#), member of the “People’s Power” party, a “Georgian Dream” satellite party February 5: *“For these people, it’s not about principles but financial gain. Don’t be surprised if*

tomorrow, people like Gigaura suddenly present themselves as defenders of traditions, pretending to ‘protect’ the Church, faith, family values, and even the natural relationship between men and women as ordained by God. When you are accustomed to a lavish lifestyle, it no longer matters whose rights you claim to defend—as long as the money keeps coming.”

On February 5, [Sozar Subari](#), leader of the "People’s Power" party, spoke on the propagandist TV channel Imedi, during the program *Imedi LIVE*, about USAID. He claimed that the projects funded by USAID in Georgia, implemented by their "Georgian agents," were intended to strip the country of its sovereignty and attack its traditions and religion. Additionally, he criticized former U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan and current Ambassador Robin Dunnigan, questioning U.S. aid to Georgia. According to him, instead of \$6 billion, the total U.S. assistance since Georgia’s independence restoration amounts to only \$3.5 billion, and *“half of that \$3.5 billion has gone toward anti-state activities and harmful initiatives.”*

Message: “EU funds in Georgia will be used to finance radicalism and anti-Church activities.”

Representatives of the "Georgian Dream" frequently engage in manipulative and propagandist attacks against the European Union, as well as specific European politicians and diplomats.

On February 27, 2025, the EU Eastern Partnership website [announced](#) the launch of a new EU-funded project in Georgia: "Act for Georgia – Strengthening and Activating Civil Society Transformation". In response, "Georgian Dream" officials condemned this initiative, with pro-government media Imedi airing a [report](#) suggesting that the ruling party was convinced the funds would be used to “finance radicalism in Georgia.”

Message: “The EU Ambassador in Georgia acts as a viceroy who insults Georgian traditions and the Church.”

[Guram Macharashvili](#), a member of "People’s Power", a "Georgian Dream" satellite party, targeted American organizations, the European Union, and the EU Ambassador to Georgia. According to him, EU Ambassador Pawel Herczynski: *“No longer represents EU member states but is directly serving the deep state; Not only has the EU Embassy taken over the financial functions of NED [National Endowment for Democracy] and USAID, but it has also assumed political functions; The EU Ambassador in Georgia acts like a viceroy—similar to past imperial envoys—who insults Georgian traditions, the Church, and opposes the will of the Georgian people.”*

1.3. Discrediting Pro-European Protests in a Religious Context

On February 13, the Public Relations Department of the Georgian Orthodox Church Patriarchate [published](#) an official statement on its Facebook page regarding an act of vandalism at Jvari Monastery in Mtskheta. According to [the State Agency for Religious Issues](#), a foreign national was allegedly kicking and dancing against the monastery walls. The pro-government propaganda television channel Imedi amplified the [report](#), portraying the individual as an active participant in ongoing demonstrations in Georgia.

A key component of the “Georgian Dream” government’s propaganda is the discrediting of ongoing demonstrations, portraying protesters as opponents of the Georgian Orthodox Church and Christian values. This narrative seeks to demonize pro-European activists, framing them as threats to Orthodox traditions and reinforcing anti-Western sentiments within Georgian society.

2. Propagandistic and Anti-Western Statements by Orthodox Clergy

Some Orthodox clergy in Georgia continue to use their sermons and public speeches to promote pro-government rhetoric while opposing civil society, human rights, and the European Union. They frame the ongoing pro-European protests, which have been taking place since November 2024, as externally orchestrated and imposed, while equating the West with “gay propaganda” and moral corruption.

Narrative: "The West Was Dragging Us into War"

On **February 10**, Metropolitan [Stephane Kalajishvili](#) of Tchkondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi delivered an anti-Western sermon, claiming:

"We blindly trusted the West, and they have already started executing their plans. We have become trapped like a spider in a web of foreign influence... They were dragging us into a war like the one a vast country like Ukraine is facing."

Narrative: "USAID – The evil machine forcing LGBT ideology on us"

In the same sermon, the Metropolitan alleged that the ongoing protests were financed by foreign forces, aligning with Georgian Dream's propaganda that the West is forcibly spreading LGBT ideology in Georgia:

"What they were imposing on us, over there (in the U.S.), they call 'woke' ideology, the awakening of evil forces... And this entire evil machine is USAID... In South Africa, men who engaged in relationships with other men received financial support from them."

"NGOs Were dictators funded by Europe to betray Georgia"

The Metropolitan also attacked Georgian NGOs and their European funding, claiming that civil society organizations had dictatorial power over the country:

"Now some people are talking about dictatorship, but I don't understand—weren't we living under an NGO dictatorship, where the entire country was entangled in their network? And now these NGOs talk about dictatorship just because some people are no longer funding them... In Europe, they don't give money for free—they fund you so that you betray your country, not because they care about you."

Narrative: "The West is all about same-sex marriage"

On **February 9**, Bishop [Spiridon Abuladze](#) of Skhalta continued his tradition of making anti-Western statements aligned with Georgian Dream propaganda. He falsely claimed:

"Among the 29 or 30 EU countries, all but one have legalized same-sex marriage, which is moral decay and corruption."

In contrast, he praised the "Georgian Dream" and personally blessed oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, portraying him as a defender against "gay propaganda and immorality". He urged his congregation to pray for the government and Ivanishvili.

"Georgia has never had friends or allies"

On **February 8**, Georgian Orthodox Church **Priest [Shalva Kekelia](#)**—known for discrediting the ongoing protests—denied Georgia's long-standing partnerships and foreign assistance:

"We have never had, and never will have, a friendly or helping country. Never. Look back at history, read Georgia's history, and then you will realize—has any country ever helped us? How can we rely on anyone?"

This statement directly contradicts the decades of support from Western partners, including financial aid, security cooperation, and democratic development initiatives, reinforcing a narrative of isolation and distrust toward the West.

3. Orthodox Clergy Condemning Violence and Supporting Protesters

Some Orthodox clergy in Georgia continue to criticize the anti-European course of the Georgian Dream government, condemn violence and repression against peaceful protesters, and openly express solidarity with demonstrators.

3.1. Condemnation of Violence

Example statements:

Metropolitan [Zenon Iarajuli](#) (Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashiri), February 4:
“Mr. Bidzina [Ivanishvili], what are you trying to achieve, or what wrong have we done to you? You have crushed almost everyone in your path. Do you wish to turn this country into a place of suffering for oppressed generations? No, no, no! As Christ said on His way to the cross: ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’ True peace comes from self-sacrifice for the well-being of others. Everything else is an illusion. You do not bring peace.”

Archpriest [Giorgi Tserodze](#), February 3 (Facebook post, open letter to Zviad Kharazishvili, the head of the Special State Protection Service, in charge of violent dispersal and torture of peaceful protesters and those around him): *“Zviad, you sin when you treat protesters with cruelty. Everyone around you who acts this way also sins gravely. Repent, change your actions, and at the very least, bring them within the bounds of the law—ideally, within divine justice. This letter serves as testimony that you knew you were sinning, and if you do not repent, it will be even harder for you to justify yourselves.”*

Priest [Tamaz Lomidze](#) (Georgian Orthodox Church in Munich), February 11:
“Once a government starts deceiving, beating, humiliating, and encouraging violence against its people, its relationship with the people is essentially over. There is no turning back from this. It is astonishing how the fear of losing power blinds governments to the extent that they can no longer see reality.”

Archimandrite [Ilia Jinjolava](#) (Constantinople), February 1:

“A violent, tyrannical regime is taking hold in the country. This is a system that persecutes truth, institutionalizes injustice and tramples human dignity. Such a regime can never be justified in the name of Christ, for Christ stands for truth, freedom, and love, while violence and tyranny are the weapons of evil.”

Archimandrite [Dorothe Kurasvili](#) (Bethlehem Church), February 3: *“I realized that this so-called government is not leading us toward freedom and independence, nor is it truly integrating into Europe... These young people are being unjustly imprisoned. They feel no pity for others' children—what kind of Christians are they? A man was left in prison while his mother was dying. Fine, keep him detained, but at least send someone to care for his mother. If you let a mother die alone, how can you call yourself a Christian? This has nothing to do with Europe or America—this is about basic human decency.”*

Priest [Davit Nachkebia](#), February 1: *“...I always denounce violence... I condemn Russia's occupation, and until I set foot in my own land freely, they cannot be my friend. Russia has blood on its hands, and being left alone with them is dangerous.”*

3.2. Statements on Repression Against Protesters

In response to the Georgian Dream government's repressive legislation and the disproportionate and unconstitutional fines imposed on protesters through police forces, several Orthodox clergy have openly condemned these actions as unjust and oppressive.

Metropolitan [Zenon Iarajuli](#) (Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashiri): Condemning the excessive fines and legal actions against protesters, he described the practice as "a blatant display of inequality and injustice." As a form of protest, he refused to accept any funds from the state budget.

Archimandrite [Ilia Toloraia](#), 16 February: *“The government operates with two different measures—one for themselves and another for the people. They illegally punish and arrest individuals, imposing endless fines, while those who engage in violence, beat young people in the streets, and roam in masks remain untouched. This kind of double standard is detestable before God. Today, we hear that without justice, there can be no peace, and that is absolutely true. Even from a Gospel perspective, truth is the foundation of everything! God is truth, and God is justice! The refusal to acknowledge the truth is the gravest sin of all.”*

Archimandrite [Dorothe Kurashvili](#) (Bethlehem Church), February 23: *“Today, the ruling party proclaims itself as Christian, as the defender of the Church and Orthodoxy... Yet they fine a socially vulnerable person, who barely survives on 60 GEL, with a 5,000 GEL penalty! How do they resemble Christ in any way?”*

3.3. Statements on the Unlawful Imprisonment of Journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli

On January 11, Mzia Amaghlobeli, the founder and director of the online publications *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, was administratively detained and later released. According to Amaghlobeli, during her unlawful detention, she was subjected to inhumane treatment, including verbal abuse, spitting in her face, threats of criminal detention, and attempts at physical assault.

A few hours after her administrative detention, on January 12, she was [re-arrested](#)—this time on criminal charges—for allegedly slapping a police officer. She now faces a prison sentence ranging from four to seven years. The charges brought against her are disproportionate to the circumstances of the case and suggest a clear [political motive](#).

From the moment of her detention, Mzia Amaghlobeli began a hunger strike, which she continued for 38 days, ending on February 18 following numerous calls from journalists and civil society. Mzia Amaghlobeli's case underscores that the judiciary is failing to fulfill its role and is making [politically motivated decisions](#).

Clerical Responses Condemning the Arrest:

Archpriest [Giorgi Tserodze](#) (February 1, Facebook post): *“Reduce the charges against Mzia Amaghlobeli... You know very well that initiating a criminal case and imposing pretrial detention for this act is an act of vengeance, essentially a punishment in itself. (And not only for Mzia Amaghlobeli). Leave judgment to the courts. Remember, anyone who takes upon themselves the right to pass judgment before Christ's return is an antichrist. For a believer, this is destructive.”*

Priest [Tamaz Lomidze](#) (Georgian Orthodox Church in Munich, February 10): *“After so much unchecked and unpunished violence by the state, imprisoning a starving woman over a single slap to an abusive police officer is such an injustice that it will certainly reach the heavens and invoke God's wrath upon those responsible. Know this well—God's eye sees everything!”*

Archimandrite [Dorothe Kurashvili](#) (Bethlehem Church, February 3):
“How is it that a journalist is in prison for allegedly slapping a police officer, while the officer himself remains untouched? A police officer is ‘untouchable’ only when innocent people are safe from police brutality. How can they pass new laws while openly violating the highest law—the Constitution? Why should the people be obligated to obey lawbreakers?”

Archimandrite Dorothe Kurashvili (February 2):
“Our government has nothing to do with Christianity because there is injustice everywhere! The judges are unjust, the rulers are unjust—everything is unjust, from the top down!”