

CIVIL INSIGHT

**TRIPP Moment: Potential for Abkhazia
as a Transit Corridor**

**Georgia in November:
Politics, Economy, Narratives**



1. About us

Meeting challenges by expanding our breadth and focus

You are reading the first issue of Civil Insight, a publication by the network of researchers, journalists and practitioners with deep professional knowledge of the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and Central Asia regions.

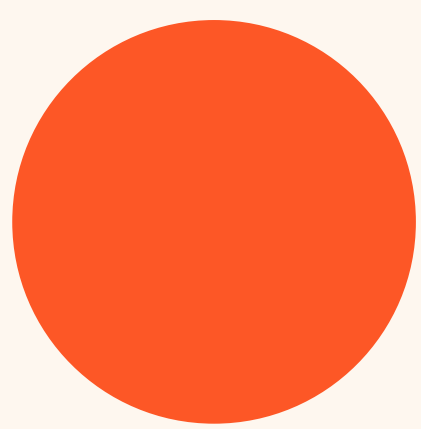
The publication is born from the professional network created by **Civil Georgia (Civil.ge)**, the leading Georgian English-language outlet, its networks and alumni from some 25 years of operation.

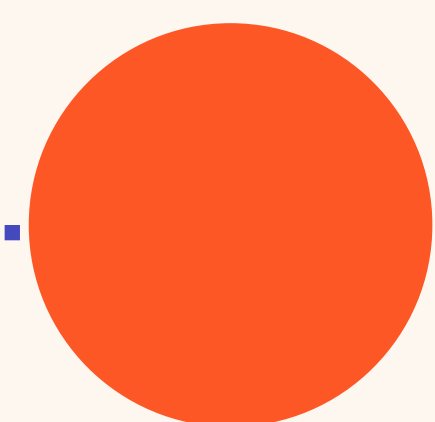
Civil Insight brings you an actionable perspective on the politico-economic context and trends. It is intended for policy-makers and as a reference accompaniment to the field practitioners.

Our mission is to contribute to informed decision-making, and we strive to tap into the best possible expertise available on the ground.

For each issue of the insight, we conduct meetings, interviews, and cross-check our Main Insight with active professionals who review and comment the initial draft.

This is the first report in the cycle. We will be happy to hear your comments.





2. Main Insight

TRIPP Moment: Potential for Abkhazia as a Transit Corridor

What is happening

On November 18, US State Department Senior Advisor **Jonathan Askonas** met Georgian officials, marking a rare official interaction since the relations of Tbilisi with the Western allies have hit the low point. Askonas was on a mission to South Caucasus to advance work on “Trump Route” (TRIPP), reconciling political and economic interests of Armenia and Azerbaijan. While the details of discussions are unknown, a push to implement TRIPP has advanced speculations on the strategic importance of transit through Abkhazia.

This conversation was further fueled by the completion of the customs facility on Enguri reported earlier in October. Abkhaz online sources, including groups with radical anti-Georgian stance and reportedly linked directly to the Kremlin, made positive noises about the potential re-start of the through-traffic in goods.

Tbilisi made no official comment. Yet, it would come as no surprise if an increasingly undemocratic Georgian Dream government decided upon this matter without public discussion or consultation.

Significance

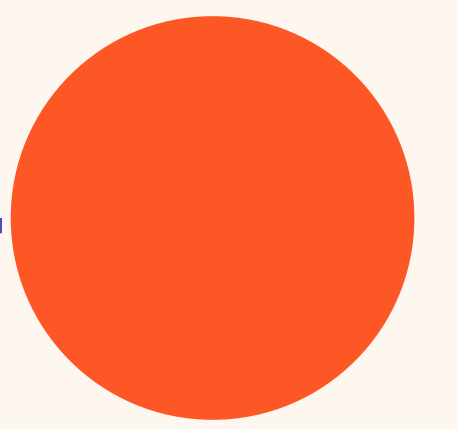
Transit through Abkhazia holds strategic significance as a South-North corridor linking Russia with the South Caucasus and – given technical adjustments for rail transport - further to Turkey and the Middle East.

As such it offers Moscow an alternative, overland trade route thus creating trade and investment opportunities, crucial under sanctions.

From Georgia’s narrower perspective, the project may serve as a security guarantee, increasing the country’s attractiveness as a transit hub and acting as a catalyst for conflict transformation.

At the same time, there is a substantial risk that by restoring traffic through Abkhazia, Russia would bind Georgia even closer to its political and economic orbit.

Transit through Abkhazia holds strategic significance as a North-South corridor linking Russia with the South Caucasus and beyond.



Potential impact

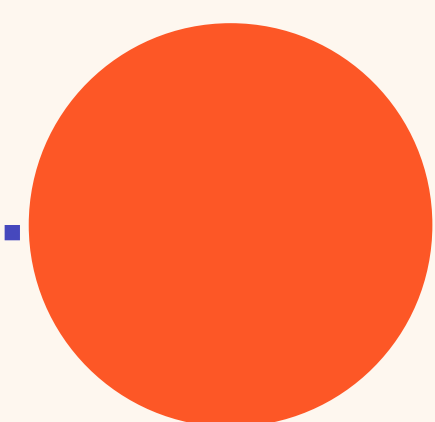
If Russia and Georgia agree on reopening transit,

- Russia will gain an additional, more efficient logistics route in the South-North corridor and thus increase its influence in the region, amid the continuous confrontation with the West;
- Abkhazia will *de facto* participate in regional economy and trade, potentially improving its socio-economic situation through taxation and reducing its dependence on Russia's financing;
- For Georgia, the short-term economic importance of the reopened Abkhazia route will be limited, yet important. It would redistribute goods currently passing through the sole open Larsi customs checkpoint with Russia and provide overland option to goods currently transported by sea from Turkey to Russia. Additional flow may also counterbalance some potential loss of freight traffic from Central Asia to Turkey once TRIPP becomes operational.
- Politically, the route through Abkhazia could serve as a step forward in confidence-building and peaceful conflict resolution by encouraging ties between Sokhumi and Tbilisi.
- Georgian Dream may use progress on this matter as a way to bolster its legitimacy.

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Analysis

After the August 2008 Russia-Georgia War, Abkhazia was gradually integrated into Russia's political, military, and socio-economic space.

Yet, unlike Tskhinvali/South Ossetia, which became fully isolated from the rest of Georgia and the international community after 2008, commercial activities across the dividing line with Abkhazia persisted with varying degree of intensity. From Tbilisi's point of view, most of this trade is illegal.

Background: regional dynamics push sides towards softened stance

Until the early 1990s, the railway route through Abkhazia to Georgia and further to Armenia was an integral part of the Soviet Transcaucasian corridor, facilitating the movement of people and goods across the region. However, the 1992–1993 armed hostilities and the subsequent conflict between Tbilisi and Sokhumi effectively brought these transport links to a complete halt.

Currently, Russia's trade with and through Georgia primarily relies on the road connection via the Larsi checkpoint, which is often congested and poses significant logistical challenges due to its mountainous nature, especially in winter. A secondary maritime route connects the Georgian port of Poti to Novorossiysk, a link that recently gained media attention due to a recent supply of Russian oil to the Georgian refinery.

Reopening a transit route through Abkhazia could offer a more reliable and safer alternative for commercial exchanges not only between Georgia and Russia, but also between Russia on the one hand and Turkey, Armenia, and Iran on the other.

Traditionally, Armenia actively advocated for reopening the railway transit through Abkhazia, seeing it as a strategic means to overcome isolation. With TRIPP running, Yerevan may hope to gain assurances of stability at the crossroads of geopolitical interests if the Abkhazia route were opened up.

The nature of trade relations across the boundary line has been changing over the years. In 2007, the de facto Abkhaz authorities introduced an embargo on trade with the rest of Georgia, leaving hazelnuts as the only product eligible for "export".

In 2008, shortly after the war, Georgia adopted the Law on Occupied Territories, which, together with other restrictive measures, prohibited any economic activities in the occupied regions without prior written authorization from the Georgian government, only leaving few exceptional clauses.

Despite the official bans, trade continued – including through involvement of the Russian, Turkish and, to a much lesser degree, Chinese actors - with both sides ignoring these "irregularities."

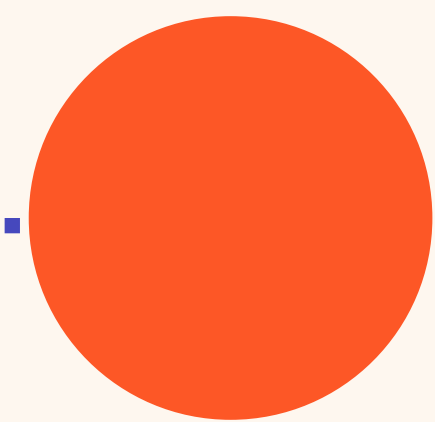
GD pursuing détente

After coming to power in 2012, the Georgian Dream (GD) softened approach towards both Russia and the occupied territories.

A Special Representative of the Prime Minister for relations with Russia was appointed immediately after the 2012 parliamentary elections to negotiate with Moscow on economic, cultural, and humanitarian issues.

This regular informal "Abashidze-Karasin" dialogue resulted in a gradual increase in trade, which spiked after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine from USD 500,000 in 2012 to over USD 2.5 million in 2024.

After coming to power in 2012, the Georgian Dream softened approach towards both Russia and the occupied territories.



Analysis (...)

GD also softened its rhetoric toward Sokhumi and Tskhinvali and dropped the term “reintegration” for “reconciliation” in the name of the government agency responsible for engagement. Officials emphasized the importance of dialogue across the administrative boundary line (ABL), including non-politicized engagement with the de facto authorities, and softened posture on third country engagements in trade.

In 2018, Tbilisi adopted a new peace initiative “A Step to a Better Future,” which, for the first time, foresaw not only facilitating trade across the dividing lines, but also introduced specific status-neutral mechanisms for this purpose.

Simplified procedures were established for the identification of persons through a special personal number, allowing its holder to access a full range of services for economic and business activities, such as registering as an entrepreneur, registering as a taxpayer, receiving state grants, and using banking services.

Holders of the personal number can also be granted a special taxpayer status and can conduct cross-ABL economic activities with certain tax preferences. While this possibility exists in theory, less than ten people have availed themselves of the opportunity.

A special funding instrument, the Peace Fund for a Better Future, was established, which operates based on international contributions and provides grants of up to GEL 50,000 for small entrepreneurial activities, excluding service-related projects, with the sole requirement that the activity includes a cross-ABL component for confidence-building.

According to official information, several dozen such grant projects have already been financed and implemented with funding from Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The accelerating rift with the Western partners led to cessation of most external support to this Fund. The funding from the budget may be problematic, not only due to dearth of resources, but also as Abkhaz beneficiaries may be reluctant to accept money coming directly from the Georgian government.

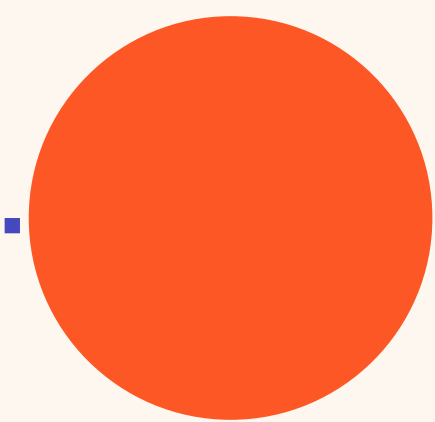
Russia sanctions push Sokhumi towards opening

The peace initiative also stipulated access to the international market through the preferential trade opportunities available for Georgia, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU, while applying status-neutral solutions wherever feasible. This particular aspect of the initiative has remained largely on paper so far, as its implementation requires active engagement with the de facto authorities – something that the Government of Georgia, despite its stated readiness, still tries to avoid fearing potential domestic political fallout.

When it comes to Abkhazia, every political leadership in Sokhumi has approached the issue of “legalizing” trade with the rest of Georgia very cautiously. Attempts to change the situation were often framed as a betrayal of the Abkhaz national interests and cooperation with the “enemy.” The 4th de facto president of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba, expressed cautious support for the “legalization” of the cross-ABL trade, arguing that it was necessary to properly register all goods entering the region from the Georgian-controlled territory. Yet, no concrete steps were made.

His successor, Aslan Bzhania, appeared more flexible, publicly advocating for dialogue and the development of trade and economic relations while putting aside existing political disagreements. Bzhania made some concrete steps, particularly relevant in the context of sanctions imposed on Russia, which led to shortages in certain goods. In 2022, a Duty-Free shop was opened in the vicinity of the ABL, supplied from the territory of Georgia proper, which continues to function. One year later, the construction of customs terminal near Enguri Bridge started and has recently been completed.

In 2023, Bzhania partially lifted the embargo on goods from the rest of Georgia for physical persons, formally leaving the regulations for commercial transfers unchanged. This was explained by the necessity for agricultural development.



Analysis (...)

Towards transit trade?

In addition to supporting cross-ABL trade, Bhzania also openly advocated for benefiting from transit opportunities through Abkhazia. In 2022, a working group on transit was established in Sokhumi, headed by the deputy head of the *de facto* presidential administration, Valery Papba.

An expert meeting with Abkhaz, Georgian, and Russian participants was even held in Turkey, specifically to discuss the feasibility of the transit. However, as the Abkhaz participants later publicly shared, the Georgian side was hesitant to continue these discussions, given the political sensitivities in Tbilisi.

The Russian side has also expressed its interest in reopening the railway transit through Abkhazia.

In 2023, Sergey Katyrin, the President of Russia's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told Rossiyskaya Gazeta that the revival of the railway is under discussion within the context of International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) connecting Iran to Russia. Georgia's TV Pirveli channel also cited Russian MP Leonid Kalashnikov as floating the idea of restoring the Abkhaz railway.

Is railway link feasible and profitable?

- An International Alert study from 2013 said USD 251 million was needed to restore the Psou-Enguri segment (190 km), with the additional USD 26.5 million for the restoration of the railway (6 km) and bridges from Enguri to Zugdidi. The report expressed scepticism about the economic profitability of railway freight given its expected volume, with even the most optimistic scenario not exceeding four million tons of cargo per year.
- According to the 2022 International Crisis Group report, the rehabilitation cost has increased to EUR 1.5-2 billion, an estimate provided by the Russian side that may include a substantial "corruption fee". Though given global inflationary processes, the costs have definitely increased since 2013.

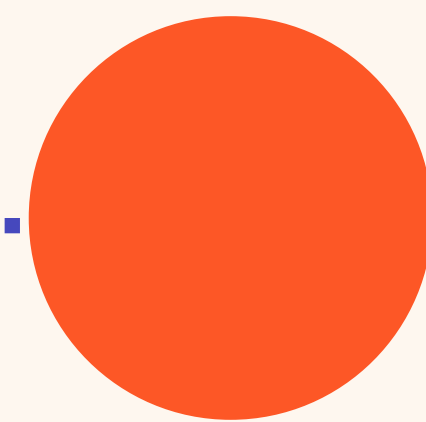
- The promoters of the transit idea in Abkhazia, based on the Russian Railways, claim that the cost of reconstruction of railway gap, mainly from Ochamchire to Zugdidi, would range between USD 600 and 700 million.

The economic profitability of the railway transit through Abkhazia is difficult to predict, given the rapidly changing security, political, and economic dynamics in the region. Russia's trade relations with Georgia, Iran and Turkey remain on the rise.

However, trade turnover with Armenia has nearly halved, largely due to the deterioration of political relations and Armenia's turn towards the EU and the US. The effective operationalization of the TRIPP corridor will further accelerate this trend.

The profitability of the railway through Abkhazia is difficult to predict.





Analysis (...)

Certainly, the opening of the railway is not the only potential solution.

The road infrastructure is in good condition on both sides of the ABL and can be used for through-traffic if the political decision is made. Georgian economists point to several immediate economic benefits for Georgia, such as job creation, increased trade turnover with Russia, growing transit flows through its territory, and opportunities for new investments.

However, they emphasize that should the lifting of sanctions from Russia become realistic, the project would gain greater economic significance.

But given the uncertainty surrounding its short-term economic viability, Abkhazia transit project should be viewed primarily through the prism of security, strategic importance, and conflict transformation rather than purely from a commercial or economic perspective.

A functioning trade channel

As Abkhaz social media users report, and observation supports the evidence, nowadays, cross-ABL trade continues to grow, with cars and minibuses daily transporting various goods from Georgian-controlled territory into Abkhazia, including agricultural and domestic products, sanitary ware, and machinery parts.

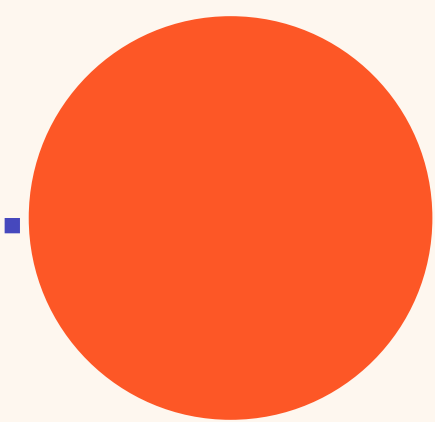
- This “shadow” transit channel is partially serving Russia, potentially violating the sanctions regime. The Government of Georgia lacks the capacity and political will to conduct formal, comprehensive inspections of all goods entering Abkhazia.
- Politically, deploying the full-fledged inspection equipment along the occupation line could be perceived as “borderization,” implying de facto recognition of the “state” border with Abkhazia.
- Blocking the passage of goods through the Enguri Bridge would be detrimental both to the improvement of relations with Russia, which the Georgian Dream government pursues, and the reconciliation efforts with Abkhazia.

In the absence of clear evidence that the goods are intended for Russia, halting their transportation will result in the unintentional discrimination of residents in the occupied regions, including Georgian citizens living in the Gali district.

An official transit route, operated in a status-neutral manner with proper administration and monitoring, could mitigate the risks of illegal trade flows.

So far, this matter is primarily discussed within expert circles, rarely entering official policy debates. However, this will require from Tbilisi opening negotiations with Russia and some level of engagement with de facto authorities – a process that cannot remain covert or informal indefinitely.

An official transit route, operated in a status-neutral manner with proper administration and monitoring, could mitigate the risks of illegal trade flows.



Analysis (...)

Trump Route – an impetus for a breakthrough?

In Abkhazia, the idea of the transit continues to be actively discussed across various social media platforms, including by groups with radical anti-Georgian sentiments, some of which are reportedly directly linked to the Kremlin.

These discussions particularly intensified following the agreement on the “Trump Route” (TRIPP) in the South Caucasus, which is believed to have the potential for reshaping regional transit dynamics.

By participating in regional transit routes, Sokhumi wants, on the one hand, to reinforce its *de facto* “independent” status, and on the other, to reduce its financial dependence on Russia by generating its own transit revenues. Notably, according to data published by the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, duties at the Enguri checkpoint have periodically been collected on large-scale “imports”, even though the trade is officially deemed illegal.

By participating in regional transit, Sokhumi wants to reinforce its status and reduce financial dependence on Russia.

Common interest?

Supporters of increased transit in Abkhazia point to common interests with Tbilisi, arguing that while Georgia continues to prioritize its political ambitions and cherishes the illusion of a blockade on Abkhazia, the real benefits are flowing to other corridors, and if Tbilisi keeps ignoring this opportunity, alternative would emerge without its involvement.

This argument is only partially valid. Until recently, when Armenia and Azerbaijan were in conflict, most regional transport routes, including oil and gas pipelines, passed through Georgian territory.

The potential emergence of TRIPP may see Azerbaijan build road and rail lines bypassing Georgian territory, linking Baku with the Azerbaijani exclave Nakhichevan (and onwards to Turkey) through Armenia.

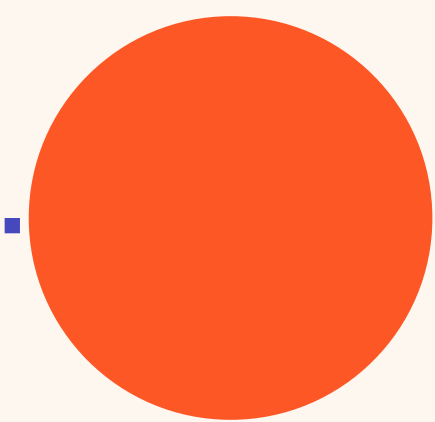
- Some argue that TRIPP will diminish Georgia’s transit role and revenues.
- Others think that a more peaceful South Caucasus with diverse interconnections would boost overall trade volumes, which is in Georgia’s interest.

Yet both points seem to miss the mark. A transit through Abkhazia can only be complementary to TRIPP as it primarily serves the South-North routes leading to Russia, as opposed to TRIPP’s East-West connection.

May Russia step in?

This brings us to the interests of Russia, which may have geopolitical, political and economic interests to help launch the Abkhazia corridor.

- The Kremlin has a tradition of “mirroring” the White House in its actions. Moscow may reassert its symbolic parity by copying the TRIPP premise – settlement of a long-lasting conflict based on trade – especially since Trump’s close engagement in Armenia-Azerbaijan solution, which excluded Putin as a power broker, is chafing for the Kremlin.
- Increasing trade with Turkey is of political and economic interest to Russia, which uses multiple channels to bypass or alleviate sanctions. According to some unvalidated reports, Enguri checkpoint already serves for transiting dual-use goods from Turkey and could benefit from expanding the transit capacity of that avenue.
- So far, the Kremlin always promptly dampened down GD innuendos that some kind of deal on Abkhazia was forthcoming in exchange for GD loyalty to the Kremlin policies. But if and as GD comes under increased stress internally and externally, this may change.



Analysis (...)

Can GD get away with this?

For Georgia, Abkhazia's participation in regional transit has widely been perceived as potentially undermining the country's non-recognition policy. For the Georgian Dream this remained the third rail of regional politics, too tempting to exploit, but too dangerous to make serious steps.

The stated readiness for the direct dialogue has never materialized. A trade agreement with Russia within the WTO was not pursued. Bidzina Ivanishvili's mention of an apology to South Ossetia during the 2024 election campaign did not go down well. Yet, the situation is changing.

GD has gone too far in its confrontation with the West, and it has faced dogged popular opposition to its Russia-friendly policies at home. As GD managed to severely undermine all institutional centers of opposition at home (media, CSOs, opposition parties and, currently, universities), it needs to score a popular victory.

On top of that, Tbilisi has a dormant tool in its disposal, which may genuinely help reach its political objectives without at least formally undermining the tenets of non-recognition policy.

Tbilisi has a dormant tool at its disposal, which may help it reach objectives.

Dormant status-neutral framework

A status-neutral framework has long been used in the informal cooperation between Tbilisi and Sokhumi established around the Enguri Hydropower Plant, where Georgians and Abkhaz have effectively collaborated for years. The transit opportunity can be framed in a similar way, offering tangible benefits to both Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. Some steps in that direction were taken more than a decade ago but never implemented.

- On 9 November 2011, in Geneva, the

Governments of Georgia and the Russian Federation signed the Agreement on the Basic Principles for a Mechanism of Customs Administration and Monitoring of Trade in Goods, within the framework of negotiations on Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), mediated by the Swiss side.

- The Agreement provides for trade between Georgia and Russia, including through the occupied regions in addition to the Larsi checkpoint.
- The Agreement envisaged the creation of three predefined trade corridors on the territory of Georgia, including one passing through Abkhazia. The trade corridors are defined by geographic coordinates rather than by place names, which helps avoid potential disputes over terminology and reduces a possible stumbling block in negotiations.
- At the entrance and exit points of these corridors, both contracting parties were to establish terminals staffed by international monitors to oversee all goods entering or exiting the corridors. A Swiss company, Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS), was selected as a neutral third party to ensure effective monitoring.

Although the Agreement does not, per se, create new transit possibilities, the trade corridors it envisages can serve as a foundation for new economic arrangements based on a status-neutral approach, potentially paving the way for enhanced economic cooperation and stronger people-to-people connectivity in the region.

Theoretically, the Agreement covers all land transport, whether by railway or road. In practice, however, it would initially cover only the road transport, given that the cargo railway connection between Russia and Abkhazia was not operational. Nevertheless, with the political will of both signatories, it can be extended to railway cargo as well.

Analysis (...)

Can it be revived?

The agreement never advanced due to multiple factors, including the reluctance of GD at the time to pick up the deal negotiated under the Saakashvili administration.

There were more general concerns that Russia will use the mechanism to bolster the “independent” status of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia.

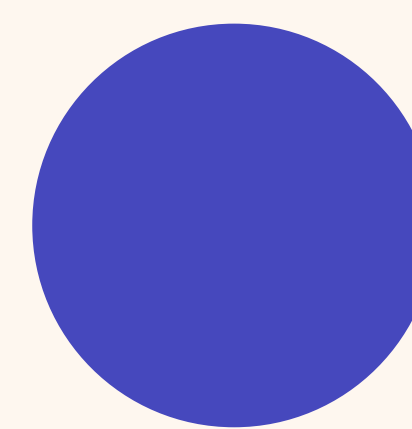
The *de facto* authorities in Sokhumi demanded equal participation and separate agreements with Tbilisi for the corridors to become operational, while Russia was reluctant to share information regarding its trade with the occupied regions.

However, the new realities may render these concerns nil. In particular:

- Affected by international sanctions and political isolation, Russia can now abandon the narrative that it maintains a separate trade regime with the so-called “independent state” of Abkhazia;
- In exchange for economic and certain political dividends, Sokhumi can stop demanding equal participation. First, expanded trade is objectively in the Abkhaz interest, particularly as a means of reducing Russia’s financial leverage and potential for blackmail. Second, Abkhazia will avoid escalating relations with its “strategic partner”, acknowledging the importance of this route for Moscow.
- Finally, the Georgian Dream is now less constrained than ever by internal politics. Having embarked on the road of repression of its opponents, and with near-total control of the information space, it can shape the narrative to its advantage.

In this configuration, the mechanism, if implemented, would allow for the transit of goods through Abkhazia serving as a “neutral zone”. Technically, the goods would pass through Abkhazia, but legally, they would be considered as moving through Georgian territory under international supervision.

Despite multiple concerns of all parties, the new realities may nullify the concerns that the parties had regarding the status-neutral transit mechanism.



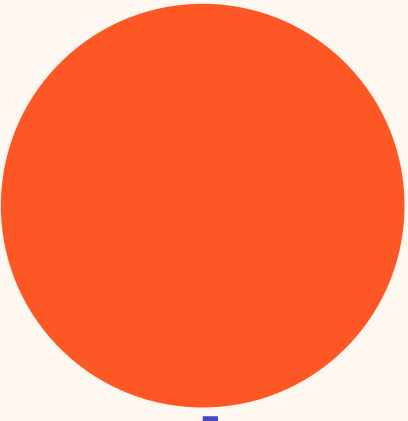
Outlook

In light of Georgia's hostile anti-Western rhetoric, domestic repression, and accompanying continuously worsening relations with the EU, the political tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi, caused by the ongoing occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, are receding.

Decreasing divergence between Tbilisi and Moscow in the foreign policy outlook and domestic political setup opens possibilities for closer relations. At the same time, GD needs to alleviate domestic political pressure, as large swaths of population are unhappy about various aspects of its policies.

Opening up trade through Abkhazia can be presented by GD as a major political breakthrough, a trade-off for abandoning the European integration project to what can be presented as gradual restoration of territorial integrity.

From Russia's point of view, supporting this project would symbolically restore parity with the U.S., politically trap Tbilisi inside its geopolitical orbit, and economically help alleviate some of the sanctions burden.



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3. Context

Georgia in November: Politics, Economy, Narratives

November marked the first anniversary of the non-stop protests sparked by Georgian Dream’s 2024 decision to suspend EU integration until 2028. The month also brought a new wave of political turmoil: opposition leaders faced fresh charges and criminal sentences; the ruling party advanced several controversial bills, including one stripping Georgians abroad of their voting rights; and the crackdown on former Georgian Dream officials and allies continued, though with lower intensity. Tensions with the West persisted, particularly in the aftermath of the EU’s damning enlargement report, while the month’s largest controversy centered on the Emirati “6.6 billion investment.” Anti-government protests continued with regular detentions and police pressure on daily demonstrations. The rallies culminated in a large anniversary march on November 28.

Below is a breakdown of key November developments in Georgia’s domestic politics, foreign policy, media, and economy, along with a glimpse of what to expect.

Domestic politics

The Georgian opposition, and the larger, more mainstream parties in particular, came under renewed pressure in November.

The month opened with prosecutors announcing heavy criminal charges against eight opposition leaders (six of whom are already behind bars) for what the authorities described as “crimes against the state.”

Later, criminal charges were also brought against exiled former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia over actions dating to his tenure as Interior Minister in 2019.

While the new charges did not immediately translate into longer detention for those already behind bars, the pressure mounted as November progressed.

Two opposition figures saw their sentences extended: Nika Melia of *Ahali/Coalition for Change* received an additional year in prison over a water-splashing incident in court, while former defense minister Irakli Okruashvili was ordered to serve over four more years on abuse-of-office charges in a high-profile 2004 murder case.

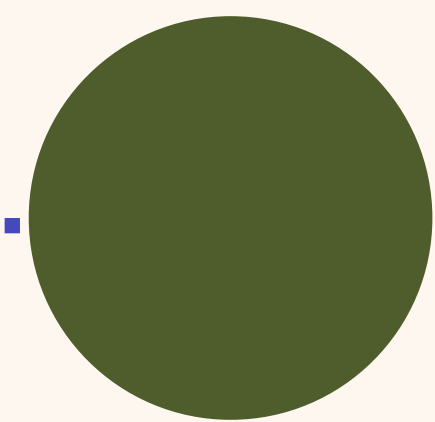
The month culminated with the arrest of Lelo/Strong Georgia’s Aleko Elisashvili on terrorism charges for allegedly attempting to set fire to the court chancellery.

New forces: With major opposition forces under heavy pressure, smaller liberal movements are gaining traction.

One such group, *Freedom Square*, finally succeeded in registering as a political party in November after two earlier rejections. Alongside it, Tamar Chergoleishvili’s *Federalists* and the *Movement for Social Democracy*, a progressive force that emerged from the ongoing protests, have remained at the forefront of the protest. In a recent interview, Georgia’s fifth President, Salome Zurbashvili, hinted at a larger role for these newer formations in the envisioned united resistance front.

New Laws: Georgian Dream has also initiated several controversial bills, the most infamous of which would effectively end voting abroad for Georgian emigrés. The proposal, widely criticized as disenfranchising a significant portion of the diaspora, is moving through Parliament alongside another much-debated bill on juvenile justice.

Georgian Dream’s Purge: Although with less intensity than in previous months, Georgian Dream authorities continued to target former, lower-ranking officials and business allies on corruption charges. Deputy ministers of Justice and Interior were also dismissed. Parliament adopted a new law requiring convicted officials to file asset declarations for 30 years.



November in Review (...)

Protests: In the first week of November, demonstrators still managed to block Tbilisi's Rustaveli Avenue despite stricter laws and a steady stream of detentions. But starting on November 6, police began physically preventing protesters from occupying the roadway. The rallies morphed into marches through downtown Tbilisi, yet detentions continued.

Georgia-EU Relations

The main foreign-policy development of the month was a damning EU enlargement report that described Georgia as a candidate country “in name only.” Notably, Georgian Dream government leaders were in China when the report was presented in Brussels.

Soon after, it emerged that Georgia had also been excluded from the November 18 EU Enlargement Forum, and the EU–Georgia Human Rights Dialogue was postponed indefinitely, a decision later half-confirmed by both Georgian and foreign diplomats. The issue, they suggested, stemmed from the composition of the Georgian delegation, most likely the presence of Deputy Interior Minister Aleksandre Darakhvelidze on the list.

In November, the EU Council also adopted new rules that make it easier to suspend visa-free travel for citizens of third countries. While Georgia is widely rumored to be the most likely target of these measures, the prospect of suspending visa-free travel for the entire country has, despite initial fears, been discussed far less. Instead, Brussels has increasingly hinted at targeting a specific group of Georgian officials with similar restrictions.

Economy

Despite the ongoing political crisis, Georgia has maintained macroeconomic stability. According to official data, external trade increased by 8.6% year-on-year from January to October, with motor vehicles once again dominating both imports and exports.

Annual inflation reached 5.2% in October, driven primarily by higher prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages, health services, and alcoholic beverages and tobacco.

The central bank continued to bolster its reserves, purchasing USD 167.4 million in October and bringing total international reserves to over USD 5.6 billion. Real GDP grew by 6% year-on-year in October. Money transfers also grew, particularly from Western countries, rising 13.4% year-on-year in October, with 63.6% coming from the U.S. and EU member states. Notably, as of 2024, foreign remittances account for 11.8% of Georgia's GDP, more than double the share in neighboring Armenia.

Given the outsized role of Western transfers in sustaining the country, which underscores the importance of Georgian émigrés to the economy, stripping them of voting rights becomes even more controversial.

Main controversy: Isolated from the West, authorities have promised economic prosperity through what they describe as a “USD 6.6 billion investment” from Eagle Hills, an Emirati real estate company. The investment encompasses two large real estate projects near Tbilisi and Batumi, totaling 16,000 homes, with officials projecting billions in economic impact and taxes, and 30,000 new jobs.

But the plan has sparked major controversy in recent weeks. Critics have pressured the government over the deal's commercial secrecy and raised concerns about its environmental impact, particularly on a large, ecologically diverse recreational park between Tbilisi and Rustavi. The ruling party has also faced a separate nativist backlash over what opponents describe as the creation of “two Arab towns,” forcing Georgian Dream to face tough questions from groups normally supportive of its policies.

November in Review

Narratives

The West remained a primary target in the discourse of Georgian Dream and its media allies. Last month, pro-government outlets and later GD politicians even suggested that Brussels was drafting speeches for Tbilisi's protest rallies.

The EU court ruling requiring member states to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere in the bloc sparked fresh anti-EU claims from GD members. The pro-government Imedi TV targeted independent online media in a report coming as part of a series of conspiracy-laden pieces, accusing them of conspiring to undermine the country's economy and alleging shadowy foreign funding.

The report hinted that the State Security Service is studying the files, suggesting that authorities might shift from Anti-Corruption Bureau inspections to criminal investigations to crack down on critical media.

Prospects: Snap Elections?

Speculation has grown that Georgia may face snap parliamentary elections next year, partly fueled by the ruling party's appeal to ban three major opposition parties — all of which won seats in the disputed 2024 vote but refused to take them. The Constitutional Court, widely seen as loyal to the ruling party, has up to nine months to consider the claim.

If it rules in line with GD's request, the decision could serve as a pretext for new elections, giving the ruling party a chance to pursue a constitutional majority. GD officials have dismissed the rumors. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze stated that the next parliamentary election will be held on October 28, 2028, but noted that snap elections would favor the ruling party over the opposition.

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