



From Dream to Deception: How Georgian Dream Sabotaged Relations with Germany

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Despite the changed consensus among EU member states, including Germany, on Georgia's EU membership after March 2022 and the European Council's decision to grant Georgia EU candidate status in 2023, the Georgian Dream government has failed to seize the momentum created by the Russian war against Ukraine. Instead of leveraging its historically strong ties with Germany to forge a strategic partnership, it has actively undermined bilateral relations.

The deliberate sabotage of Georgia's relations with Germany by Georgian Dream serves as a compelling case study of its paradoxical behavior. This dynamic is particularly evident in the party's decision to undermine Georgia's EU integration prospects rather than capitalize on a historic opportunity. This downgrade of bilateral relations was part of a broader strategy aimed at two key objectives: consolidating authoritarian control domestically and realigning Georgia's foreign policy in response to the war in Ukraine. By framing this shift as a necessary course correction, Georgian Dream sought to justify its radical transformation of both domestic governance and international positioning while creating a scapegoat for the public. Germany's proactive support for Georgia's democratization and europeanization agenda inadvertently provided Georgian Dream with a convenient target.

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Through a campaign of defamation against high-ranking German officials and diplomats, the ruling party not only weaponized anti-European rhetoric for electoral gains, but also severed ties with the EU's most influential member state, portraying it as part of an alleged conspiracy against Georgia. This policy memo analyzes the motives and mechanisms behind Georgian Dream's deliberate efforts to sabotage relations with Germany, shedding light on the broader implications for Georgia's political trajectory and EU aspirations.

Georgia in the focus of German foreign policy

Germany has shifted its stance on Georgia's EU integration in recent years, playing a crucial role in securing its candidate status. Berlin's proactive support was driven primarily by two factors: the need to safeguard European geopolitical interests and the overwhelming pro-EU sentiment among the Georgian population. At the same time, Germany has been one of the strongest critics of Georgia's authoritarian drift. As early as March 2023, German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock warned of the risks to Georgia's EU integration following Georgian Dream's initial attempt to introduce the "foreign agents law", despite later retracting it (Federal Foreign Office 2023). During her visit to Georgia that same month, Baerbock reaffirmed Germany's strong support for Georgia's EU membership. Berlin was determined to prevent the fragmentation of the Association Trio (Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia), as such a development would have marked a significant setback for EU diplomacy.

Germany also made last-ditch efforts to prevent Georgia's authoritarian shift. Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz explicitly warned against a second attempt to introduce the "foreign agents law" during Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's visit to Berlin in April 2024. Scholz reaffirmed Germany's strong support for Georgia's EU membership, emphasizing that the law is fundamentally incompatible with EU integration. He also underscored the crucial importance of the upcoming parliamentary elections for Georgia's democratic future (Der Bundeskanzler 2024).

However, the subsequent adoption of the "foreign agents law", electoral manipulation, the cancellation of EU accession talks, and the rise of anti-European rhetoric propagated by Georgian Dream provoked a strong counter-reaction from the German government. As a result, German-Georgian political relations are currently at an all-time low.

This is a troubling and frustrating development, as the shifting international order, combined with the rise of far-right forces in Europe, is narrowing Georgia's chances of joining the EU. Recent polls in Germany indicate that a slight majority is against further EU enlargement (Statista 2024).

This was precisely the aim of the Georgian Dream measures, which accelerated the undermining of the country's EU integration and authoritarian course.

Georgian Dream's negative discourse and the widening gap between Tbilisi and Berlin

Germany's strained relations with Georgia were part of a broader discourse shift. Georgian Dream targeted Germany with aggressive rhetoric due to its critical stance. Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze insulted Germany's Minister of State for Europe and Climate, Anna Lührmann, calling her "Kubilius in a dress" in a reference to MEP Andrius Kubilius (OC Media 2024). Leading politicians also attacked the German ambassador, with Kaladze accusing him of election interference and calling him a "parasite" (IPN 2025a), and GD Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze dismissing him as a "so-called ambassador" (Palitraneews.ge 2024). Georgia still has no ambassador in Germany in these challenging times since November 2024. In early March 2025, Kobakhidze accused Germany of interfering in the independence of the Georgian judiciary after the German Foreign Ministry published a statement on the release of a Georgian journalist. In his statement, Kobakhidze made the future of German-Georgian relations dependent on whether the new German Chancellor will be free from the influence of the "Deep State" and the "Global War Party" (IPN 2025b). Georgian Dream framed German officials as part of a global conspiracy, invoking terms like "Deep State" and "Global War Party." The party aligned its rhetoric with Donald Trump's statements about dismantling the "Deep State" (Kempe 2024). This narrative primarily served domestic purposes, creating an enemy image to justify Georgia's growing international isolation due to its authoritarian policies.

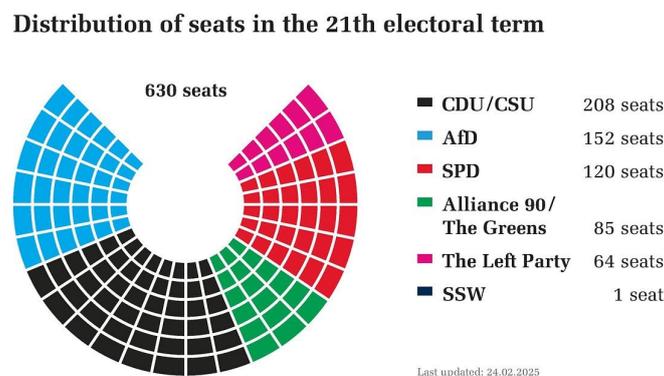
Germany responded to Georgia's authoritarian shift in multiple stages. Following the freeze in EU-Georgia relations in June 2024, Berlin halted a planned legal forum, withdrew financial commitments, and declined to send military personnel to a NATO exercise in Georgia. In reaction to election manipulation and the suspension of EU accession talks, Germany cut development aid worth €237 million (BMZ 2024a). Foreign Minister Annalena

Baerbock condemned Georgian Dream for distancing Georgia from the EU and jeopardizing its partnership with Germany, directly blaming the party for stalling Georgia's EU accession process (Federal Foreign Office 2024). In February 2025, it largely suspended cooperation in education, a long-standing pillar of German-Georgian relations.

However, Germany's political crisis since autumn 2024 and early parliamentary elections shifted Berlin's focus away from Georgia. With the victory of the CDU/CSU (an alliance of the Christian Democratic and Christian Social parties), Chancellor Friedrich Merz must reshape foreign policy while addressing domestic challenges, particularly the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD)'s gains. "The world out there is not waiting for us. We must now quickly regain our ability to act," Merz declared on election night (DW 2025).

The new German government faces a dilemma: prioritize geopolitical interests in the Black Sea region or uphold a value-driven, consistent foreign policy toward Georgia. Balancing domestic and foreign policy challenges will be its first major test.

Diagram 1. Results of the 2025 Bundestag elections (German bundestag 2025)



Authoritarian solidarity: How Georgian Dream and AfD align against liberal democracy

The fact that Georgian Dream is not seeking alignment with democratic forces in Germany, but with far-right, partly extremist parties such as AfD, is not surprising, but a natural process. Autocratic political groups are increasingly converging in their efforts to mobilize against liberal democratic rule, as seen in the alliance between anti-liberal forces in the EU

and Georgian Dream. A key player in this process is the AfD party. Since autumn 2024, AfD members have introduced three resolutions in support of Georgian Dream at both the European Parliament and the German Bundestag. In October 2024, the AfD – known for advocating the lifting of Russia sanctions and Germany’s exit from the EU – responded to a Bundestag resolution by Germany’s governing parties which criticized Georgian Dream’s “authoritarian and anti-European course”. In contrast, AfD’s resolution rejected what it described as a “regime change policy in Georgia” and urged the German government to pressure its “partners” to halt any efforts toward such a goal. By “partners,” AfD was referring to the EU, effectively aligning itself with the narrative promoted by Georgian Dream and the Kremlin. AfD also urged the German government to push for the termination of EU accession negotiations with Georgia, the revocation of Georgia’s visa-free travel with the EU, and opposition to the country’s NATO membership. Unlike the governing parties, AfD refrained from condemning Russia’s occupation of Georgian territory, instead advancing a motion that closely mirrored Russia’s strategic interests in the region. The ideological alignment between Georgian Dream and AfD suggests that official cooperation is only a matter of time.

Economic relations: A win-win situation?

Despite political tensions, German-Georgian economic ties have grown since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, albeit with controversy. Georgia’s refusal to join international sanctions against Russia has fueled suspicions that the Georgian Dream government is aiding sanction evasion, a concern even raised by Chancellor Scholz in a bilateral meeting with Georgia’s Prime Minister (Der Bundeskanzler 2024).

Germany became Georgia’s fifth-largest trading partner in 2024, up from seventh in 2023, largely due to increased Georgian exports to Kyrgyzstan, which is an alleged route for Russia to bypass sanctions. Bilateral trade nearly doubled from €475.1 million in 2021 to €914.8 million in 2023 (Germany Trade & Invest 2024). However, this surge was driven by German exports to Georgia, which jumped from €379.9 million to €815.8 million, while German imports from Georgia saw only a modest rise from €95.2 million to €99 million. (ibid.).

Diagram 2. Trade between Germany and Georgia (Germany Trade & Invest 2024)

Außenhandel Deutschlands mit Georgien						
Warenhandel (Mio. Euro, Veränderung zum Vorjahr in %, Abweichungen durch Rundungen)	2021	%	2022	%	2023	%
dt. Exporte	379,9	20,3	583,5	53,6	815,8	39,8
dt. Importe	95,2	29,1	103,1	8,3	99,0	-3,9
Saldo	284,8		480,5		716,8	

Germany's export surge to Georgia is largely driven by vehicles and automotive components, along with data processing equipment, electronics, machinery, and chemicals. However, data suggests Georgia is a transit hub for vehicles bound for Russia. Cars entering Russia from Kyrgyzstan skyrocketed from 40,000 in 2022 to over 180,000 in 2023 (ibid.). Georgia's exports to Kyrgyzstan also spiked from \$94 million to \$696 million in 2023, with cars making up \$546 million (Forbes.ge 2024). By late 2024, Kyrgyzstan was Georgia's top export destination, with trade reaching \$1.3 billion (Geostat 2024). Although Georgian government banned car re-exports to Russia in August 2023, vehicles from the U.S. and Germany likely still reach Russia via Kyrgyzstan. If Germany takes a firm stance against Georgian Dream, it must address Georgia's role in Russia's war economy – one that ultimately benefits not just Georgia's leadership but also Russia and Germany itself.

Conclusion

Georgian Dream utilized the undermining of German-Georgian relations to accelerate the sabotage of Georgia's EU integration. In addition, the explicitly anti-European rhetoric of the ruling party in Georgia was part of a propaganda offensive to defame Western partners in order to justify its own increasing authoritarianism and appease the expected protest among the population. The intentional renunciation of support from the economic and political heavyweight Germany served as a signal to Georgia's authoritarian partners, who perceive Germany and the EU as systematic rivals.

It is an irony of fate and German-Georgian relations that Bidzina Ivanishvili's party leadership consists in part of people who were educated in Germany on German scholarships. Bidzina Ivanishvili is currently using these people to install an autocracy in

Georgia and enforce Russian interests. When asked why Ivanishvili is pushing the country so vehemently away from the EU, Berlin still finds it difficult to recognize that the Kremlin is behind this endeavour. At first glance, the answer seems too simple, but this is exactly how Russian neomperialism works. Russia doesn't even have to be actively involved in the processes if Georgian Dream is doing the Kremlin's dirty work. Georgian Dream has implemented what Russia has been striving for in Georgia for the last three decades: breaking off EU integration, pushing back NATO integration, turning away from democratic reforms and strengthening cooperation with authoritarian alliances. The new federal government in Germany won't be able to escape the issue of Georgia when it comes to modernizing European security or European economic interests in the wider Black Sea region. If the new government does not deal consistently with the Ivanishvili regime and does not represent a clear Georgia strategy at EU level, Russia will gain the upper hand in Georgia in the long term. Georgia offers a good opportunity for the new German government to demonstrate Germany's potential leadership role within the EU and to test the EU's capabilities as a geopolitical player.

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