



# GEORGIA ALERT

ISSUE 40 | November 14 – November 21

JOINT WEEKLY NEWSLETTER BY POLITICAL PARTIES DROA, STRATEGY AGHMASHENEBELI, UNITED NATIONAL MOVEMENT, LELO – FOR GEORGIA, GIRCHI – MORE FREEDOM, AND CIVIL MOVEMENT DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS.

## HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK:

### Further international criticism of the Georgian Dream

On November 16, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee [held](#) a hearing – Assessing US. Policy in the Caucasus. Committee Chairman Sen. Menendez underlined the intimidation of independent media, criminal prosecution against opposition representatives, and stalling of necessary reforms for Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic future. Sen. Shaheen assessed the situation in Georgia as “tremendous backsliding” and suggested that the conditionality of aid for Georgia might prove efficient in securing the accountability of the Georgian government. In addition, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried noted that increasingly vocal anti-Western and anti-American groups in Georgia are closely tied to the government. The hearing differentiated between the Government and the Georgian people.

A critical stance vis-à-vis the Georgian government was also taken by the EPP, which [adopted](#) a resolution calling on the Georgian government for the humanitarian release of ex-President Saakashvili to a third country, release of Nika Gvaramia, and end political persecution against opponents and free media. Most importantly, however, the document [called](#) on partners to impose personal sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili.

### The criticisms add fuel to the Georgian Dream’s anti-Western rhetoric

The Georgian Dream’s reaction to the criticisms once again added fuel to their increasingly familiar anti-Western rhetoric. Irakli Kobakhidze, the Chairman of the GD, stated the [following](#): Shaheen is for America what Kubilius is for Europe; Shaheen was a friend of the UNM until 2012 and still continues to be their friend; that these “unjust assessments” have nothing to do with the allegations of anti-Western rhetoric of the government; that [criticisms](#) from people such as Kubilius, Fotyga, Jukneviene, cannot be of any value as these people have supported the [UNM] criminal regime; that Shaheen’s proposed “reevaluation of partnership with Georgia” is an [insult](#) to the Georgian people and the state. In addition, Kobakhidze [stated](#) that most American funds go to NGOs anyway, so it should only bother NGOs if the US cuts funding for Georgia. As for the EPP resolution, Kobakhidze [called](#) it “of no value” since it “has nothing to do with reality” and is “absolutely unjust.” Speaking about personal sanctions against Ivanishvili, Kobakhidze [noted](#) that it might be more “manly” to be brave and actually impose sanctions on Ivanishvili instead of blackmailing him subtly and implementing informal sanctions only. Irakli Zarkua, a GD MP, [concluded](#) that “stupidities” like those spoken at the Senate hearing are why the Democrats lost the majority in Congress, and personally insulted Sen. Shaheen with derogatory language. Later, he [blamed](#) journalists for airing what was supposed to be an off-camera informal comment and apologized if anyone was offended by the media’s representation of what he said about Shaheen. On a different occasion, Zarkua has [stated](#) that Georgia was blessed to have avoided bloodshed similar to the 2020 elections in the US, inherently demonstrating the unattractiveness of the United States and the hard-earned right of the Georgian Dream to govern Georgia.

## Further attack against the opposition, NGOs, the West

On November 18, PM Garibashvili answered the Parliamentary opposition's question in an interpellation format at the Parliament. Asked about energy security and joining international sanctions against Russia, he [stated](#) that the opposition representatives have no right to speak about either energy security or sanctions because the UNM government welcomed the Russian tourists after the 2008 war and saw no harm in the money these tourists brought. Adding to the government's traditional allegation that the opposition and the West want to drag Georgia into war with Russia, Garibashvili's [stated](#) that the opposition is ready to make a battleground out of Georgia, but that the "time when harmful instructions were implemented is gone," and that they will "listen to everyone, but do what the country needs." It is hard not to read an accusation of the West between the lines about "harmful instructions." [Referring](#) to the wisdom behind the Georgian Dream's Russia policy, Garibashvili [called](#) on the opposition to learn to derive from national interests first and foremost when 20% of Ukraine is now a battlefield and there is no one to stop the war. Garibashvili failed to give specific answers to all questions about the implementation process of the EU's 12 recommendations, resorting to accusations instead.

Most importantly, however, Garibashvili [underlined](#) that the opposition's portrayal of potential failure to obtain the EU candidate status as some sort of tragedy is wrong, as many countries have the status and nothing extraordinarily bad happened to them as they wait for years for the EU membership. This statement inherently underestimates the difficult geopolitical situation Georgia finds itself in, fails to assess the Europe-Russia dichotomy Georgia faces, and derives from a geopolitically more secure perspective as if the country were situated somewhere in the Balkans. Further manipulating the opposition's insistence on the government fulfilling the EU's 12 recommendations, Garibashvili [pointed](#) out that while obtaining the EU candidate status is important, the reunification of the country that the opposition does not speak about is of utmost importance, and that it is opposition itself (as opposed to Russia) to be blamed for the occupation of the country. Despite the failure to obtain the EU candidate status not being a tragedy, Kobakhidze stated that Georgia will [implement](#) all necessary steps by the end of December 2022, and obtain the status in October 2023.

In addition to Kobakhidze's above-mentioned [remarks](#) against NGOs, anti-Western "People's Power" stated that they would [introduce](#) a bill to impose strict supervision over NGO funding. They insist that the bill will be modeled on the US Foreign Agents Registration Act. However, many fear it will rather be modeled on and implemented according to the Russian law on foreign agents. The US Ambassador Kelly C. Degnan has already [stated](#) that the "People's Power" suggestion reminds her of the Kremlin playbook. Considering the "People's Power" forms a Parliamentary majority with the Georgian Dream, the Georgian Dream has stated on multiple occasions that they have no ideological difference with the "People's Power," and the Georgian Dream has been attacking the NGOs increasingly, it is possible that the bill is adopted as a law limiting the NGOs and even outlawing some of them.

## Law on Deoligarchization

The Parliament adopted the Law on Deoligarchization at the second hearing as well, [implying](#) a GD-introduced amendment that the register of oligarchs is drafted by the Prime Minister's office and thus the government instead of the Parliament. The EU Delegation in Georgia [published](#) a statement that the EU once again urges Georgia to consider the opinion of the Venice Commission before adopting and enacting the law. The Georgian Dream has been [rejecting](#) pleas to send the draft to the Venice Commission.

Recently, a former UNM official and a businessman, David Kezerashvili has been named the main oligarch by the GD. According to the governing party, it is Kezerashvili that controls the "radical opposition" and actively tries to gain power.

A picture emerged of Kurt Volker, former US Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations, meeting with Kezerashvili. GD MP Mamuka Mdinaradze [stated](#) that since the country has enemies not only within but also abroad, the picture is the evidence of malign instructions being given [by Volker to Kezerashvili, and through Kezerashvili to the entire "radical opposition" that, according to the GD, plans a violent coup in the country].