

Expert briefing: Georgia's Political Landscape in Focus: A critical point for democracy **Key takeaways from a parliamentary panel discussion, 11th November 2025**

On 11th November 2025, the Foreign Policy Centre convened a parliamentary roundtable on Georgia's democratic crisis, examining the country's rapid authoritarian backsliding, the resilience of civil society, and the scope for international support, particularly from the UK.

The event was chaired by **Joe Powell MP** and featured expert insights from: **Eka Gigauri**, Executive Director, Transparency International Georgia; **Nino Evgenidze**, Executive Director, Economic Policy Research Center; and **Professor Stefan Wolff**, Professor of International Security, University of Birmingham and FPC Senior Fellow.

Speakers reflected on the Georgian Dream regime's growing alignment with Russian interests, the systematic dismantling of democratic institutions, and the wave of repression facing journalists, protestors, and NGOs. They also examined the impact of targeted sanctions, the limits of EU engagement, and how the UK can leverage financial and diplomatic tools to support those resisting from within.

This briefing outlines key themes and insights from the parliamentary roundtable discussion:

1. A bleak outlook

The Russian proxy government in Georgia has quickly reversed decades of democratic reform through the strategic infiltration of political, economic, and judicial institutions; 'every single branch of the government, every single state institutions is corrupt, destroyed from the within and no longer serves the people, but the interest of the pro-Russian oligarch Georgian dream regime [...] the Kremlin proxies in power are dismantling brick by brick, what remains of the country's democracy and the European future'. The trajectory of the country can be traced back to Putin's comments at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, suggesting 'the goal was always to derail Georgians from their pro-western pro-democracy path'.^[1] Crucially, all of this has been achieved through non-military means since 2008.

The last year was described as 'a wave of political repression and a chilling embrace of Russian influence'.^[2] Over 300 people have been tortured and threatened with sexual violence.^[3] Over 70 journalists have been assaulted.^[4] 'It's not law enforcement, it's state terror', they concluded.

2. Impossible conditions for civil society

New laws and powers to clamp down on opposition are stifling civil society. NGOs are being monitored by Georgia's Anti-Corruption Bureau under new Foreign Agent Laws.^[5] Activists, journalists and politicians are being arrested on new administrative charges, and organisations are using all of their resources to defend themselves.^[6]

The majority of independent media outlets have been forced to close due to financial and regulatory pressure and 'it will be impossible in a couple of months time for the free media to operate'.^[7] There are currently over 60 political prisoners, including the majority of the opposition leaders who refused to appear in front of a commission held by the self-proclaimed parliament.^[8] Charges continue to mount, reportedly 'to ensure they will never leave prison'.

Despite this pressure, the protests are not going away; people are protesting every day in 5 or 6 of the biggest cities.^[9] This resilience speaks both to a deep popular commitment to democratic values and the 225 year history of Georgia's resistance against Russian control.

3. Sanctions work, but only if they are strategic and sustained

Speakers highlighted how sanctions have exposed the regime's deep ties to Russian interests. Evidence shared included the growing economic and institutional penetration of Russian actors in Georgia, from a surge in Russian business registrations and bank deposits to a sharp increase in energy imports from Russia, and trade volumes with countries used to evade sanctions.^[10] Specific examples included oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's assets and the establishment of shell companies linked to Russian intelligence operatives.^[11]

To date, over 230 individuals involved in repression, torture, and disinformation have been sanctioned, making government affiliation increasingly toxic.^[12]

But the regime is adapting and forging new ties with authoritarian allies like Iran and China^[13]. Sanctions must therefore remain agile and coordinated across allies, targeting not just individuals but also financial enablers and disinformation networks that underpin the system.

4. EU integration is a distant prospect

Despite Georgia's formal EU candidate status, the Georgian Dream have suspended accession negotiations until 2028. Within Brussels, divisions over enlargement and fear of importing "Trojan horse" regimes are growing. While the EU has condemned Georgia's democratic backsliding, its ability to influence change remains limited.^[14]

Recent progress reports acknowledge technical reforms, but political and civil rights have sharply deteriorated. In the current climate, the EU's role is more symbolic than catalytic, particularly as only 8 member states have imposed sanctions.^[15]

5. The important role of the international community

Georgia's experience underscores the urgency of meaningful international engagement. Beyond new sanctions, priority actions include naming political prisoners, supporting legal defence, and sustaining independent media. Statements of support for civil society are insufficient without concrete support that reaches those directly at risk.

Ensuring accountability for human rights violations, torture, and corruption must remain central to any response. When trying to counter foreign interference and democratic backsliding around the world, we must recognise the warning signs identified from Georgia's experience guided by the insights of those on the ground.

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