



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Is the scenario from Ukraine repeating itself in Georgia?



There are many similarities between the events in Ukraine just over a decade ago and today in Georgia. However, are these similarities sufficient to compare the fate of the political crisis in Georgia with the earlier turmoil in Ukraine that eventually led to the Russian military invasion?

Thousands of Georgians, through persistent street demonstrations, demand the annulment of the official results of the parliamentary **elections** held on 26 October, believing the government of the Georgian Dream Party, which is taking a significant turn towards Russia, falsified them.

The authorities use police force to suppress the protests and arrest dozens of activists, who are aggrieved that the country is openly and rapidly abandoning its path to EU membership, despite the overwhelming support of around 80% of citizens for the European cause.

Everything is reminiscent of the turmoil in Ukraine in 2013, when the then pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich **refused** to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. Similar to Ukraine in 2013, Georgia finds itself at a crucial juncture where the process of EU integration is rapidly approaching irreversibility.

In both cases, Moscow has recognised the "danger" posed by the countries it regards as its backyard, pursuing a path of no return to the West. In a fortnight's time, it will have been a year since the EU recognised Georgia's status as a candidate country.

## Stopping the road to the EU

However, this small anniversary passes without any significant progress on Georgia's path to EU membership.

Moreover, the government in Tbilisi formally halted the integration process this week in protest at the European Parliament's harsh assessment of the recent parliamentary elections, which it labelled "neither free nor

fair."

Mr Irakli Kobakhidze, the president of the pro-Russian government in Tbilisi, **said** that his government's decision was aimed at showing "European politicians and bureaucrats, completely devoid of European values, that blackmail is not the way to address Georgia, but respect is."

## Moscow has no reason to change its strategy towards Georgia or to radicalise its interference

Similar to Yanukovich, the former president of Ukraine, who declined to sign an agreement with the EU, this tone meets with a positive response in the Kremlin. Moscow has no reason to change its strategy towards Georgia or to radicalise its interference, as long as Mr Kobakhidze and the leader of his party, the pro-Russian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili govern the country.

One of the most important aspects of the Russian strategy of subjugating the surrounding countries, originating from the former USSR, is the imposition and preservation of puppet regimes.

Such a situation prevails in Georgia today, just as it did in Kyiv just over a decade ago. After President Yanukovich's overthrow and exile in Russia, Moscow's actions became increasingly radical and militarised, first in Crimea in 2014 and then throughout Ukraine in 2022.

Ultimately, the first goal of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was to rapidly enter Kyiv and install a pro-Kremlin government.

## Little prospect of military intervention

Moscow will therefore not take more offensive measures against Georgia as long as the government there has the unrest under control, even if this means using massive force against the pro-European opposition and

citizens.

But as pro-European mass street protests and other forms of resistance continue in the post-election period, the stability of the government in Tbilisi remains questionable.

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- PM Irakli Kobakhidze

The almost three-year war in Ukraine has led to a maximum strain on Russia's military potential, including its manpower. For the war in Ukraine, Moscow has already withdrawn some of its troops from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian regions occupied by Russia in the 2008 aggression.

Moscow also withdrew after the conflict in another disputed Caucasus zone, Nagorno-Karabakh, and transferred around 2,000 of its soldiers to the Ukrainian front.

Finally, the "import" of thousands of North Korean soldiers to fight alongside Russia speaks to the Russian Army's completely different ability to carry out offensive actions in its neighbourhood than was the case a decade ago.

## Disharmony in the West

On the other hand, the EU and NATO—the

bloc from which a large proportion of Georgians expect support to keep the country on a pro-European course—are fully focused on Ukraine and do not have the resources and potential to side more decisively with the European forces in Georgia.

The pressure that the EU has exerted on the pro-Russian government in Tbilisi this year has brought only limited results. Given the highly controversial election results, Ivanishvili and his pro-Russian bloc have shown their determination to crush the opposition pro-European movement, just as Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko **did in 2020**.

The escalating crisis in Georgia coincides with the recent establishment of a functional EU Commission and, more importantly, with internal political conflicts dominating the governments of Germany and France, two key members of the bloc. In addition, the US cannot be more supportive of Georgian resistance to the strengthening of the repressive pro-Russian government in light of the ongoing change of government, which is expected to last until the end of January.

## Circumstances do not give much chance for a repeat of the scenario from Ukraine a decade ago in Georgia

Circumstances therefore do not give much chance for a repeat of the scenario from Ukraine a decade ago in Georgia. The situation remains uncertain until the new presidential administration takes office in Washington, the German parliamentary elections finish in February, and the subsequent establishment of the government.

The next few months will be crucial for Moscow, as it will support its allies in the Georgian government to counter the protests of pro-European forces. This will be an easier and cheaper way for Moscow to maintain its influence in an important Caucasus and Black Sea state.

The direction in which the country will move

in the long term depends above all on the perseverance of the opposition bloc and its willingness to withstand the pressure of the coming months.