



# Georgian Political Parties in the European Context: Challenges and Opportunities



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## Summary

Over the past few years, Georgia has been gradually moving away from the European path of democratic development. The government has not demonstrated sufficient will to carry out fundamental reforms necessary for European integration, and reacts to Western criticism of the country's democratic development in a confrontational manner. The ruling Georgian Dream party, seeking to retain power for a fourth term in 2024, is rapidly losing ties with Europe. This disturbing dynamic culminated in March 2023, when the EU group of European Socialists proposed revoking membership of the Georgian Dream party. However, the Georgian Dream left before it could be expelled, citing the lack of sufficient support from European friends as the reason for its decision. (PES 2023b; Georgian Dream 2023). Given this turmoil, it is important for Georgia's opposition parties to integrate into European party families to keep Georgian politics connected to western institutions and the political area.

The opposition in Georgia, however, is weak and fragmented. Parties currently does not have sufficient resources to balance the one-party rule of the Georgian Dream, given growing authoritarian tendencies in the country. Several recent sociological surveys suggest public confidence in parties is not high (CRRC 2023a). Given the deteriorating relations between the ruling party and Brussels, the Georgian opposition needs maintain close relations with the European political elite in order to save Georgia's European perspective on the political level. One way to accomplish this mission is to intensify Georgian parties' interactions with European political groups. This policy paper explores how Georgian parties operate today in the international arena, the challenges and opportunities for Georgian parties to integrate into Europarties, and how they can best leverage their relationships with European party alliances. The study made use of both desk research and interviews with Georgian party members, representatives of European party alliances, and experts. The policy paper concludes with recommendations on how Georgian opposition parties can better utilise their affiliation with European party alliances.

**Key words:** Political parties; European party alliances; European integration; Democracy; Elections.

## Introduction

The Georgian state has experienced significant setbacks in recent years in terms of both European integration and democratisation (Freedom House 2023). Relations with European leaders, traditionally seen as supporters of Georgia's European integration, have deteriorated. Due to undemocratic tendencies, amid criticism from the West, in March 2023, the issue of excluding Georgian Dream from the European Socialist Party was put on the agenda, which was preceded by the Georgian Dream itself leaving the European Socialists family (PES 2023b; Georgian Dream 2023).

Association with and membership in European party alliances is a crucial platform for Georgia which maintains that European integration is a foreign policy priority. The further distancing of the ruling party from the European political elite has created a serious vacuum in communicating with Brussels and mobilising political support for Georgia. To ensure Georgia does not lose its relevance to Brussels, therefore, it is necessary for parties to strengthen their membership or affiliation with European party families and to use this resource to fortify their own parties.

## One More Broken Bridge Between Tbilisi and Brussels

European party alliances represent the main axis of the European political elite and form party links to the various EU institutions (Van Hecke 2010). Such alliances are families made up of national parties united by ideology and values and form respective party groups in the European Parliament, where debates on EU policies, including enlargement, take place. Therefore, European party families can also be referred to as "*invisible mediators of European integration*" (Öhlén 2023). There are 18 alliances of European parties in seven political groups (European Parliament n.d.) in the European Parliament today. Georgian political parties are linked to the two largest European party groups – the European People's Party (EPP) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

The Georgian Dream often lashes out against European politicians who criticise the Georgian government. Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze recently claimed both the United National Movement (UNM) and European Georgia influence the position of the European People's Party (EPP), which, in Kobakhidze's words, explains the EPP's critical statements (Kobakhidze 2022). The rhetoric of the Georgian Dream is noticeably uncompromising towards the largest party federation of the European Parliament, which is evident in the pathos that "*a friend of the National Movement cannot be a friend of Georgia*" (Kobakhidze 2022). Moreover, in

various statements of the leaders of the Georgian Dream (Tsulukiani 2022, Volsky 2022) the actions of the EPP are seen as a fight against the state. The Georgian Dream has escalated its narrowly partisan political confrontation with the United National Movement into a confrontation with a political group that includes the leaders of Sweden, Austria, Finland, Greece and other countries (EPP n.d.a. Annex 1)<sup>1</sup> with whom constant friendly communication should be the function of any ruling force. The trend is similar in relation to another European party alliance, ALDE, which also periodically criticizes the shortcomings of the Georgian Dream's democratic reforms (ALDE 2022).

The confrontation with European politicians reached a peak when relations deteriorated between the Georgian Dream and the European party alliance with which it was affiliated (Party of European Socialists (PES). After Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili voiced anti-democratic sentiments on various international platforms in the spring of 2023 (Samkharadze 2023), the issue of the exclusion of the Georgian Dream was raised in the PES, and as Kati Piri, Vice President of the PES S&D Group, noted: *“There is unanimity in the political union about the suspension of the status of the Georgian Dream and no one supports the Dream (Formula 2023).”* Importantly, under the leadership of the new Swedish president of the Party of European Socialists, Stefan Löfven, the party is placing special emphasis on democratic standards, and it was Stefan Löfven who raised the issue of revising the status of the Georgian Dream in March (Lavrelashvili 2023). Under the new leadership, the democratic decline of the Georgian Dream would have potentially been a serious setback in its relations with the PES. Therefore, the Georgian Dream responded with a more radical decision and left the group of European Socialists, hurling counter-accusations of ‘absence of support’ for the GD as an observer member party in PES Georgian Dream 2023).

The ruling party thus voluntarily surrendered access to important European politicians, such as Sven Mikser, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Georgia; Marina Kaljurand, a MEP and traditional friend of Georgia, and; the heads of governments of several countries such as Olaf Scholz, Pedro Sánchez, Mette Frederiksen, and others. (PES n.d. Annex 1). The Georgian Dream no longer has any friends within the PES, the European alliance with which the party had been ideologically and institutionally associated for more than 10 years (Kakachia 2023).

It is not expected that the Georgian Dream will join another political group in the future. If the Dream does decide to try to join another political group, it will find the task difficult, though this may not be the case with alliances with right-wing parties which are already sceptical of EU enlargement. It is premature to discuss whether the Georgian Dream could join the European conservative group, though it is possibility (Jozwiak 2023). The party itself is experiencing a serious reputational damage and losing the trust among the European counterparts, but this damages also country's European perspective, especially when the opinion of member states on Georgia's candidate status is being formed (Kakachia 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Annex 1: Distribution of EU member state government leaders in European party alliances.

Therefore, Georgia has a government which is no longer associated with any European political group, has limited access to the European political process and has a significantly tarnished image in Brussels. It is thus all the more important for Georgian political parties which maintain their political ties in Europe to strengthen these connections, and to strategise about how to effectively leverage these ties.

## Who Has Friends Left In the West? Georgian Political Parties In European Party Groups

Affiliation or, better, membership in European party groups is of great importance for parties of non-EU states. Especially if that state that has set European integration as a declared foreign policy objective (Legislative Herald of Georgia, 1995). European alliances generally follow domestic political developments in Georgia closely, and assess the direction of the country's development in various formats (Burgess 2023, Fomenchenko 2023). Thus, it becomes doubly important for both Georgian parties and the state to integrate more intensively within the European political environment.

Georgian parties were quite widely affiliated with European party families until 2023. At different times, nine various Georgian parties were united into four large groups of European parties (Table 1). Early on, in 2007, the Republican Party of Georgia joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and in 2008, the United National Movement became affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP). After 2012, seven more Georgian political parties became members of the alliances of various European parties.<sup>2</sup> This number rose most significantly in 2022: three Georgian opposition parties joined ALDE, which suggests that the prospects of Georgian political opposition to enhance closer ties with the European political elite are increasing. Following the Georgian Dream's exit from PES, seven Georgian opposition parties continue their affiliations with European party groups.

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<sup>2</sup> The Conservative Party of Georgia has not been considered among ACRE's members for the past several years.



*Table 1: Georgian political parties in European party alliances*

European party alliance	Georgian political party	Becoming a member/ affiliation	Status
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	Republican Party of Georgia	2007	Affiliated <sup>3</sup>
	Free Democrats	2012	Affiliated
	Lelo for Georgia	2022	Full
	Girchi More Freedom	2022	Affiliated
	Strategy Aghmashenebeli <sup>4</sup>	2021	Full
European People's Party (EPP)	United National Movement	2008	Observer
	European Georgia	2017	Observer
Party of European Socialists (PES)	Georgian Dream	2012	Observer / left
Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE)	Conservative Party of Georgia	2014	Left

*Source: Compiled by the author*

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) has the most inclusive approach regarding parties from the non-EU states. It is the most liberal in assigning high status to them (Alde n.d.a; Burgess 2023), which gives Georgian parties an opportunity to enjoy the advanced position of full membership and to have more access to European politics. It is noteworthy that compared to other European Party Alliances the largest number of Georgian opposition parties - five parties - are members of ALDE, and it is here that Georgian parties have obtained full membership (Table 1; Alde n.d.b). Within ALDE, even if a party does not represent a member state of the European Union, it can be a technical participant in the work of the European group within the European Union. For example, a committee member who simultaneously represents the Lelo party participates in the creation of appeals (Burgess 2023; Gegelia 2023). ALDE allows such partners to participate in the process even when the alliance is dealing with the political issues of the EU itself, in addition to enlargement.

<sup>3</sup> Different European parties have different rankings of membership or affiliation. ALDE has full and affiliated members; EPP has full and observer members; Statuses in both parties mainly determine the degree of participation in decision-making;

<sup>4</sup> Strategy Aghmashenebeli and United National Movement united into an alliance on 20 July 2023; It is unclear how this will affect their membership in European parties; The same goes for Droa! and Girchi More Freedom.

The Georgian parties that are members of ALDE are mostly small, with few resources and a small electorate. Financial capacity remains an important challenge to party membership: the annual membership fee of the party, depending on the status, can range from 2,000 to 5,000 euros. This affected the Free Democrats who had to downgrade their status because of funding issues. On the other hand, the Lelo party is more able to cover membership dues (Gegelia 2023).

The second party with which a number of Georgian parties are associated, the European People’s Party (EPP), was initially completely closed to non-EU parties. Until 2004, Brussels knew little about local parties from Ukraine, Georgia, and other countries. (Fomenchenko 2023). Although parties from Council of Europe member states can become observer members of the EPP, non-EU member state parties are given limited access to European politics when compared to the ALDE. The EPP is vocal in its criticism of Georgia’s democratisation: one of the best examples in this regard was the EPP’s resolution in May 2022 to demand sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, considered an oligarch by Georgian civil society and international partners (EPP 2022; Juknevičienė 2023).

In the pre-election period, the domestic configuration of Georgian parties in various alliances and the continuation of relations with European parties will be important. For example, the United National Movement and the Strategy Aghmashenebeli announced the creation of a common political platform to consolidate voters within the country (United National Movement 2023). In addition, Girchi-More Freedom and Droa! are cooperating. At this stage, it remains to be seen how such alliances will affect the parties’ activities in the international arena, including in European party groups.

Alliances between Georgian and European parties is also interesting from a comparative perspective, when looking at similar trends in Ukraine and Moldova. Until the Georgian Dream left the PES, Georgia’s performance was impressive compared to that of Ukraine and Moldova (Table 2). Today, Ukraine has eight parties associated with European party alliances, while Moldova has five. One important difference in this respect, which has clearly separated Tbilisi from the European political elite, is that the ruling party in Georgia (unlike in Ukraine and Moldova) today is not officially affiliated with any European political alliance.

*Table 2: Political parties of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova in European party alliances*

	EPP	ALDE	PES	Total
Georgia	2	5	X	7
Ukraine	4	5	X	9
Moldova	3	2	1	6

*Source: Compiled by the author*

Reasons why Georgian parties choose to affiliate with particular Europarty diversify according to different factors. Most of Georgian parties choose alliances with European parties who strongly match their values. There are parties for which ideological compatibility and basing the political agenda on a specific ideological framework is of fundamental importance. These are the parties of a pronounced liberal vector - the Republican Party of Georgia and the Girchi - More Freedom party (Samnidze 2023). On the other hand, one of the Lelo's motivations to associate with the ALDE party is how ALDE itself positions strategically: *ALDE opposes bipartisanship in Europe as a 'middle' force between the conservative right and socialist forces*. Lelo has the same ambition on the national level: it identifies itself as the key balancing point in severely polarized bipartisan Georgian politics (Gegelia 2023). UNM and GD are the dominant actors on the national level, and they have been associated with either EPP or PES respectively. This is why Lelo decided to associate itself with ALDE as the Europarty which balances the EPP and PES on the European level (Gegelia 2023).

Interviews conducted for the study show that it is difficult for Georgian parties which are members of European party alliances to fully utilise this privilege for various reasons. Membership in European party alliances for non-EU parties can be a strong empowerment mechanism if such parties fully utilise this status and its benefits. At the same time, it is important that Georgian parties keep the issue of Georgia's EU integration in European political debates as much as possible, especially on the platforms of European party alliances.

## The Importance of European Party Alliances for Georgian Parties: From Narrow Party Benefits to National Interests

For Georgian political parties, affiliation with European party alliances can be useful in various capacities, from furthering narrow party benefits to advancing national interests. From this perspective, the following main issues can be considered: (1) *Partners in Europe*; (2) *Consolidation of the ideological identity of Georgian parties*; (3) *Internal democratic strengthening of Georgian parties*; (4) *Nation-wide issues in the European political arena*.

***Partners in Europe***: One of the important benefits that Georgian political parties can gain from membership in European parties is the possibility to establish or deepen direct and close relations with the European political elite.

European party congresses, meetings, and discussion forums are much more direct formats for establishing personal ties than the format of official visits, summits, or delegations. European party unions are a kind of alliance in which both parties and politicians must have similar values, which gives international political relations more immediacy and which is the most important value in the conduct of international relations. Such platforms allow Georgian

politicians to establish personal and direct links with high-ranking European leaders and raise various important issues in the direction of European policy and Georgia-EU relations. At the same time, Europe may see a certain political group from Georgia, which in the long run can be entrusted with governance and with whom successful governmental co-operation can be carried out (Gegelia 2023).

The five Georgian parties that are members of ALDE have great opportunities. ALDE unites the leading parties of the European Union, old and traditional democracies (ALDE n.d.b; Gegelia 2023), including the ruling parties of France, Holland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Germany, Estonia, more than 100 MEPs, six European Commissioners, President of the European Council Charles Michel (ALDE nd). Political ties at this level often translate into effective relationships in other European institutions as well. For example, this factor can contribute to debates in the European Parliament. For their part, large European unions such as the EPP have groups in various organisations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe where they are active, and this is a way for non-governmental parties from smaller countries to influence European politics (Burgess 2023; EPP n.d.b.).

On the other hand, a party that joins or intensifies its affiliation with a strong European political group has the opportunity to speak out on important domestic political issues in the international arena and have this reflected in official documents. For example, shortly after joining ALDE, Lelo managed to ensure that the European party resolution included criticism of the politically motivated decision to revoke the mandate of party leaders Badri Japaridze and Mamuka Khazaradze (Gegelia 2023; RadioTavisupleba 2022). Furthermore, at the EPP Congress in Rotterdam in 2022, the then-chairman of the United National Movement, Nika Melia, addressed the Congress, which is a high platform for the articulation of the party's concrete challenges (Civil.ge 2022). At such a time, a party can count on the support and loyalty of its European partners, including in the struggle on the domestic political field. An example of such loyalty can be seen in ALDE's public support for Nika Gvaramia, the then-imprisoned head of the opposition Mtavari Channel, so his arrest was seen by the international community as a step against the media freedom (ALDE 2023).

***Values and ideological sustainability of parties:*** Affiliation or membership in European parties in itself imposes ideological affiliation on the party. However, studies show that instead of for ideological affiliation, Georgian parties join with European parties for more pragmatic purposes (Shubladze 2018). Georgian political parties rarely have ideological and substantive platforms, which is considered one of the weaknesses of Georgian political culture. Although one of the criteria for membership in European parties is that the party is compatible with European alliance ideas, they are based more on values than on a specific ideology, though these values themselves certainly fit into the framework of a particular ideology.

In the case of ALDE, which has the largest number of Georgian parties as members, the liberal family is quite broad and widely interpreted in different countries depending on their culture.

Therefore, it becomes doubly difficult to develop regular monitoring mechanisms by European parties. The ALDE has the practice of sending a mission to a particular country where there are certain doubts and concerns that a member party does not abide by the ideological values of a particular European family with its own political strategy (Burgess 2023). However, it is difficult to measure and monitor how compatible the ideological stability of member parties is. It is clear that a member party's programme should be consistent with the basic principles of the alliance, although mechanisms to monitor this are not among the priorities of European parties (Burgess 2023).

***Party institutional building and internal democracy:*** for Georgian political parties it is important to strengthen party structures and intra-democracy by associating with European party alliances and integrating into their activities. The experience gained in European party groups can be of significant help in the institutional building of Georgian parties (Kakhishvili 2018). Building a network of partner parties in Europe is important in terms of sharing good practice. Different democracies have different cultures of fundraising or door-to-door campaigning, and parties less experienced in this respect can learn from this (Burgess 2023). A positive example from the Georgian example – the Republican Party held one of its first congresses digitally after joining the European party, something it decided to do thanks to knowledge gained from the European experience (Samnidze 2023). In order to successfully share this experience, it would be particularly useful if Georgian parties prioritized establishing closer links with members of European party alliances that face similar challenges. Such an approach would make the experience sharing much more efficient. Georgian parties can initiate intra-party platforms, e.g., together with Ukrainian and Moldovan parties, both to share experiences and work together, or to initiate joint resolutions or even create thematic working groups.

From the point of view of democracy promotion, Georgian parties should use the formats of consultations and mediation that European party alliances actively offer to various members. This opportunity was used by The Republican Party of Georgia, in the process of leaving the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, had the insights of ALDE about the democratic backsliding of the GD party of which it could make use when deciding to leave the party (Samnidze 2023). The European Party Alliances also have positive influence on interparty consultations on the national level. (Fomenchenko 2023). The EPP tried to contribute when it offered a mediation format to two of its member Georgian parties, the United National Movement and European Georgia, before the 2018 elections to support the common candidate in the second tour of the presidential elections (Krevaux-Asatiani 2023; Daul 2018; Civil.ge 2018). Although it proved less effective in practice, in order to overcome radical polarisation, especially during the election period, this cooperation can be an important resource for Georgian political parties in planning and implementing relations with other parties.

In order for parties to make effective use of such resources, it is important to overcome a number of challenges in terms of mobilising specialised and authoritative human resources

within parties on similar issues. In the case of most Georgian parties, it is difficult to identify a structural unit within the parties responsible for international relations. Parties like the Republican Party of Georgia, United National Movement and Lelo have the most structured system in this regard (Gegelia 2023; Samnidze 2023; Krevo-Asatiani 2023). In most cases, the centre of gravity of relations at the international level is only the party leader. This is a technical challenge as it prevents intensive bureaucratic communication with European parties. Added to this is the fact that the party's communication channels - websites or other public platforms - lack a relevant strategy or information on internal structural details, which makes it difficult to create an overall picture of what the international relations of a particular party are, how this area is managed and regulated in the party, and what objectives are served by membership in the European alliance in the case of a particular party.

*National interests in the European political arena:* Various mechanisms exist for parties to put national issues on the agenda in European party alliances. All parties belonging to any European family can work individually with the heads of EU institutions, members of the European Parliament working on Georgia, leaders of European states and heads of government (Annex 1).

Three parties represent Georgia as full-status members in ALDE. This means that voting on various changes in official documents, as well as making various proposals, is available to them as full members, including Georgian parties (Burgess 2023). This gives Georgian parties a significant opportunity to play a role in the formation of European political agenda to the country's national interests. Often the declarations of European party alliances can be much bolder and more demanding than the official Brussels declarations adopted at the EU level (Fomenchenko 2023). In the hands of a local political party, it is an additional tool to raise the issue of Georgia's European integration as much as possible when adopting various resolutions, declarations and documents. Importantly, such documents are usually joined by individual European leaders who sign certain declarations adopted by the European party alliance. Therefore, such a document can often earn more media coverage than official EU resolutions (Fomenchenko 2023).

The various European party groups themselves in a number of cases unite around important issues and express similar positions. While Georgian parties, especially the ruling Georgian Dream and the largest opposition United National Movement, are considered the extremes of radical polarisation, European party alliances publish shared criticism: for example, in 2019, when the Parliament dropped the draft law on the transition to a proportional electoral system, the European People's Party (EPP) and the Group of Socialists (S&D) independently published criticism of the same content (Civil.ge 2019). This approach creates a favourable environment for Georgian politicians to consolidate more on nation-wide issues.

For their part, both political groups in which Georgian parties participate note that they are always actively involved not only in discussions on issues of interest to Georgia, but also on

global political changes. Increasing European support for the country's European integration is undoubtedly at the top of the Georgian parties' agenda. However, they are also actively engaged in geopolitical debates. Consequently, Ukraine has recently become an important issue that often dominates their agenda (Burgess 2023; EPP 2023). The Georgian Dream often voices the criticism that the fact that the country is unable to move forward towards European integration is not because of a failure of democracy, but because of an "irresponsible" opposition that lobbies against Georgia to prevent the country from obtaining candidate status (Kobakhidze 2022; Garibashvili 2023). It should be noted that Viola von Kramon, a member of the European Parliament and a politician actively interested in Georgian problems, does not share this point of view and stated that such negative messages from Georgian colleagues are not received in Brussels (Von Kramon 2022).

Given that communication between the ruling party of Georgia and European political leaders is fraying, the work of other Georgian political parties with European partners is of particular importance. On the one hand, this should ensure that the issue of Georgia remains relevant among European leaders, and on the other hand, it should help foster a healthy political culture within the country. If the parties are successful in this task, they can increase trust and party support among Georgia's clearly pro-Western voters, especially in the year before the elections.

## Credibility of Parties In Society: An Additional Link To the Electorate

Establishing close relations with European party alliances and mobilising international support in this regard can help strengthen the image of parties at the local level. More than 80 per cent of the Georgian public consistently supports European integration (CRRC 2023b), and in addition, parties in Georgia see that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, foreign policy has become even more relevant and topical for Georgian society (Gegelia 2023). Thus, Georgian political parties are experiencing a crisis of confidence in society, which is consistently confirmed by numerous polls (CRRC 2023a). The majority of voters cannot identify themselves with any party, and the reputation of political parties in society has been undermined. It is logical to assume that Georgian society has much more trust in Western political actors. Given all this, there is reason to believe that having strong party ties in Europe will help build trust and increase electoral support.

Importantly, both the EPP and ALDE make clear their support for the Georgian parties associated with them in various capacities. Taking care to strengthen such public support can increase the legitimacy of particular parties in the eyes of voters. Some parties also realise this: they see that "*the public knows European politicians by name and surname*", and their opinions on current political processes in Georgia and Georgian parties are of interest to the masses (Samnidze 2023).

However, it is telling that such links are rarely used by Georgian parties when communicating with the general public between elections or during election campaigns. One of the important parts of a strategy to strengthen the credibility of parties in the eyes of voters can be the activation of these issues: inviting parties with similar challenges to Georgia, organising various events to exchange experience, mobilising unified support for various important international events. Such work could contribute creating a feeling among voters that the party they should vote for has the support of European partners.

In order for a political party to convey this sentiment to voters, it is important for Georgian parties to invest more intellectual and financial resources in activating social media. The role of parties' technological communication channels becomes especially important when it comes to creating the most direct platform between their voters and European partners. Typically, Georgian political parties have little experience in this direction: the practice of political blogging, online conferences, organised websites, online surveys, online feedback mechanisms are weak (Kakachia, Pataraiia 2013). It would therefore be interesting to exchange experiences in this respect with different European parties.

Thus, proper communication with voters and European friends, especially a year before the next parliamentary elections, may even give an advantage to some opposition parties that continue to work with European parties and groups. Such parties should be interested in strengthening communication with voters about their European connections and experiences. The intensification of activities of the parties in this direction will bring them additional trust, electoral advantages and support in the domestic political field. Therefore, it is time for Georgian parties to more actively use their affiliation with European families as a mechanism of communication with voters.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent years the Georgian Dream ruling party has jeopardised its declared goal of European integration and is losing partners in the West. The party intends to retain power for a fourth term. Opposition parties, which are supposed to offer the public an alternative, suffer from a severe lack of public trust and intra-party democracy. The activation of Georgian political parties in European party alliances can be one of the important tools to break this deadlock and mobilise resources for the elections.

A rapprochement with European political actors can help Georgian parties to increase their credibility in the eyes of voters. In addition, direct access to European leaders enables parties to put issues of national importance more firmly on the European agenda. However, in terms of utilising this resource, a number of tools and strategies need to be activated both by Georgian



parties themselves and by European party alliances. Therefore, the presented policy paper offers recommendations to the various actors based on this study:

*To Georgian political parties that are members of European party alliances:*

- Create an independent strategy on international relations, especially European integration, in Georgian parties, form an appropriate structural unit in the party and appoint a responsible member (where there is none), which will ensure regular professional liaison with European party alliances;
- Political parties should introduce specific best practices of relevant member parties of European party alliances in order to improve ideological identity, platform, internal party structure as well as procedural issues;
- Political parties should actively use their affiliation with European groups in election campaigns by publishing success stories or short, visually understandable reports;
- Political parties, in addition to election campaigning, should regularly use social media platforms to communicate with the broad masses of voters. In this direction, they should conduct active campaigns to exchange experiences with mature and developed European parties within the framework of an alliance of specific European parties;
- In order to mobilise financial resources necessary for status in European party alliances, carry out targeted fundraising in society precisely for the purpose of working, being active in European party alliances and putting forward national interests of the country at this level;
- Within a special format (memorandum or strategic co-operation), initiate relations with specific parties whose co-operation can be particularly useful for Georgian parties (in Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltic States). As a result, this would create a concrete circle of special friends for Georgian parties;
- Propose to the European party alliances an annual party conference which would host members of the European party alliances, including high-level European leaders, in Georgia, to discuss the challenges faced by a specific group of parties (e.g. the parties of the associated trio countries) and to share experiences;
- In small (branch) subdivisions of European party groups, such as research, women's and youth sub-structures, have appropriate representation and be active in relevant thematic sub-projects;

- Where and when possible, proactively use the credibility of European party alliances to deal with internal crises, for example in the form of inter-party mediation.

*To European party alliances and individual member parties in Europe:*

- Establish mechanisms to assess the ideological sustainability of member parties, at least in states with hybrid democracies and poor party cultures;
- In particularly difficult cases, instead of excluding a party, develop additional conditionality levers, such as an intra-party sanctioning mechanism, which would enhance the accountability of a member party;
- Plan periodic summits or other types of small congresses, working groups and thematic conferences in non-EU countries where specific parties will be able to host high-level guests even when they are not in power;
- Facilitate informal associations and co-operation of parties within European party alliances on different grounds - geographical, similar strategic interests, thematic work or other criteria;
- Plan an independent strategy to increase activity in the non-EU states to cooperate with local parties about raising awareness of European party politics among local citizens;
- During the elections, actively and publicly (often through visiting) support Georgian parties that are affiliated with a certain European group;
- If necessary, maintain a critical tone towards member party in violation of policy, which can be an important component of conditionality; And increase their credibility in the eyes of the general public.

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## Annex 1:

Distribution of EU member state government leaders in European party alliances.

EPP	ALDE	PES
Croatia	Belgium (2 parties)	Denmark
Ireland	Cyprus	Germany
Austria	Denmark	Malta
Romania	Estonia	Portugal
Sweden (2 parties)	Finland	Spain
Finland (2 parties)	France	Romania
	Germany	Belgium
	Ireland	
	Lithuania (2 parties)	
	Luxembourg	
	Sweden	
	Netherlands (2 parties)	

## Annex 2: Interviews

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Kvashilava, Bakur. Professor, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Communication in person, March 10, 2023;

Gegelia, Grigol. Member at Lelo for Georgia party. Communication in person, March 17, 2023;

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