

Resisting authoritarianism in the Caucasus

Interview with Georgians about their struggle to defend democracy

Friday 7 June 2024, by [ERADZE Ia](#), [KARTVELISHVILI Giorgi](#), [NAKHUTSRISHVILI Luka](#), [Posle Editorial](#), [QEBURIA Tamar](#), [REKHVIASHVILI Lela](#), [Tempest](#) (Date first published: 5 June 2024).

In this joint interview conducted on behalf of Tempest and Posle Media, Georgian activists and scholars Ia Eradze, Giorgi Kartvelishvili, Luka Nakhutsrishvili, Tamar Qeburia, and Lela Rekhviashvili answer questions about the roots, nature, and trajectory of the country's social movements and the future of Georgia.

The country of Georgia, a small nation of 3.7 million people in the Caucasus, has been thrown into a political crisis. In early April, the governing party, Georgian Dream, introduced "a foreign influence law" very similar to the one imposed on Russia in 2012. Vladimir Putin's law helped transform Russia from a so-called managed democracy into an authoritarian state, which has crushed any and all dissent, especially in the wake of its imperialist war on Ukraine.

In Georgia, the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili pulls the strings behind Georgian Dream. He is the country's richest oligarch and possesses a fortune of \$6.4 billion, which is nearly the size of the government's entire budget and a fifth of the country's GDP. He has denounced the influence of Western NGOs and so-called LGBT propaganda to justify passage of the law and a crackdown on democracy so that he can implement a capitalist plan of extractivist development.

Georgians have responded with a mass uprising in defense of their rights for the last two months. Despite their efforts and the veto of the law by the country's president, Georgian Dream has remained determined to carry out the transformation of the government into an authoritarian regime. It has unleashed police to repress the movement. Its parliamentary majority overrode the President's veto and has now enacted the law. Despite these setbacks, the struggle shows no signs of abating as elections approach in October.

Tragically [some on the international Left](#) have [caricatured the protest movement](#) as a so-called color revolution carried out by Western-backed NGOs. Here Tempest and Posle Media interview Georgian activists and scholars, Ia Eradze, Giorgi Kartvelishvili, Luka Nakhutsrishvili, Tamar Qeburia, and Lela Rekhviashvili, to set the record straight against such slander and answer questions about the roots, nature, and trajectory of the movement and the future of Georgia.

Ia Eradze is a political economist, with a research focus on finance in the post-socialist space. She is currently an associate professor at the Georgian Institute for Public Affairs (GIPA) and a CERGE-EI Foundation teaching fellow. She is also a researcher at the Institute for Social and Cultural Research, Ilia State University.

Giorgi Kartvelishvili is a member of the "Khma" (voice) movement. He is a PhD researcher of Modern & Contemporary History and Far East Studies (Tbilisi State University) and holds M.A. in Contemporary East Asian Studies (Duisburg-Essen University).

Luka Nakhutsrishvili teaches critical theory at Ilia State University Tbilisi and is a researcher and project coordinator at the Institute for Social and Cultural Research at the same university. He holds a PhD in Comparative Literature (Tübingen/Perpignan) and an MA in Philosophy (Wuppertal/Prague/Toulouse-le Mirail).

Tamar Qeburia is a PhD Candidate in Eastern European History at Ilia State University and the University of Göttingen. She is an affiliated researcher at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies.

Lela Rekhviashvili is a researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, specializing in political economy and regional geography, with a regional focus on post-socialist Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

Posle & Tempest: The Georgian Dream Party's determination to push through a "foreign influence law" has precipitated a wave of mass demonstrations in Georgia. What is the law? Why has Georgian Dream pushed for it now?

Giorgi: [This foreign agent law](#) is similar to the one in Russia and other post-Soviet countries like Kyrgyzstan. It requires noncommercial non-state organizations, including NGOs and independent media organizations who receive at least 20 percent of their annual income from foreign sources to register with the state as an organization under the influence of foreign powers.

The Russian law is much wider and more oppressive. It impacts not only organizations, but individuals as well. But if we remember in 2012, when the Russian law was first implemented, it looked very much like the one in Georgia, but it was expanded to include nearly any organization and individual purportedly under foreign influence.

We fear that the proposed law in Georgia will be expanded in the same manner. It already has ominous provisions. For example, the law gives the ministry of justice the right to monitor and request information, including private information and personal data, from organizations and individuals.

It does [not exclusively focus on big, Western-backed NGOs](#). Georgian Dream has made it clear that one of its biggest targets is our country's most progressive grassroots movement that emerged in the past 30 years probably—the movement against the [Namakhvani Hydroelectric Power Plant](#).

That movement was not run by any NGO nor foreign funded, but was a grassroots mass movement. This example demonstrates that the government's actual intent is the repression of any and all opposition to its dictates.

Lela: The other part of this law that is so threatening is that it can apply to migrants, especially those who have given up their citizenship to become citizens of different, mostly European, countries. Migrants have supported the Georgian population over the past decades through remittances, and in recent years have begun to support local social movements, like the one against the Namakhvani Plant.

Back in 2021 the Namakhvani movement did an audit of their donors to fend off accusations from the Georgian Dream government that it was backed by foreign powers. It showed that working class people, especially female care-migrants based in European countries, were the main funders of the movement. And they made small donations averaging something like \$10.

So categorizing such support as being under the influence of a foreign agent will cut off a lifeline to local protest movements in Georgia.

Luka: Too much has been made of the NGOs as the target of this legislation. Certainly, there are a handful of powerful Western backed NGOs that are in its sites. And to be honest, they have in general played a negative role in promoting neoliberalism in Georgia.

But they are a small part of the organizations the law targets. It goes after everything from environmental groups to trade unions, who receive support from Western governments and union federations.

Almost all academics in Georgia will be impacted. Why? Because state support for research is almost non-existent, most of us receive support for our research from international funders like the Heinrich Boell Foundation or the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Without this backing, we cannot do our jobs. So we're targets of this law. That's why university scholars have joined in the protests alongside students, who are staging massive strikes.

The logic of increasingly intrusive surveillance is at work. Soon, just as in Russia, we will start being branded as a foreign agent for just posting something on Facebook.

Already the law has been amended to allow the government to inquire about the personal lives of not only employees or board members of organizations considered under foreign influence, but their beneficiaries as well. They can even ask about the sexual life of targeted individuals.

Ia: What Luka is saying is really important about how quickly this law has gotten worse. This right to inquire about people's personal lives was not in the original version introduced in April. This amendment was added during a third reading of the law. So already the logic of intensifying surveillance is in effect.

I want to underscore the stakes of this for university professors. This law will essentially cut off our funding for research and prevent us from being able to do academic work. Working conditions at Georgian universities are precarious and research funds provided by the Georgian government are extremely limited.

Therefore, foreign funding plays a crucial role in conducting research and therefore, literally enables academics to pursue their profession. Me and my colleagues genuinely fear that we will no longer be able to do our jobs and will be forced to leave the country. As a political economist, without the possibility to protect our interview partners' confidentiality, I will not be able to do basic things like interviews, which are the foundation of our research.

Even if we don't leave the country, the law will have a chilling effect on academic freedom. We won't be able to write critically about politics and economics. The government is using this law to forge an authoritarian regime of the kind we see in Russia under Putin.

[T]he law will have a chilling effect on academic freedom. We won't be able to write critically about politics and economics. The government is using this law to forge an authoritarian regime of the kind we see in Russia under Putin.

Posle & Tempest: How does Georgian Dream justify this crackdown? Does it have support among the people?

Giorgi: They have adopted a rightwing populist position like that of Donald Trump, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, and Italy's Matteo Salvini to justify their authoritarian turn. They describe their law as a defense of sovereignty against foreign influence, particularly the Western powers.

They blend this with advocacy of so-called traditionalist values against “LGBTQ propaganda” and standard populist anti-liberal positions. They hope to cultivate and mobilize a conservative base in the country, and they have found some support, but it’s limited.

The majority of the population in Georgia favors democracy, a fact that explains the size of the protests against the law.

Ia: The government has also claimed that they are taking measures, including this law, to prevent Russia from using supposed Western influence as justification to launch another war in Georgia like they have in Ukraine. That has resonated with some people who are understandably afraid of such a possibility.

Posle & Tempest: Is it right to say that the Georgian Dream government, which has been balancing between the EU and Russia, has now decisively tilted toward Russia? Is it trying to scuttle Georgia’s candidacy for membership of the EU?

Lela: We are in a very hard place. Georgia is a specific kind of peripheral capitalism; it is a [transit hub capitalism](#) open to capitalist investment from the U.S., EU, China, Turkey, and Russia.

These capitalist powers have [all invested in infrastructure](#) to turn the country to transport energy and commodities between the EU and China. So Georgia has been balancing between dominant imperial powers and emerging ones.

But now this integration is starting to unravel. Internally, the government has faced popular opposition to their hydroelectric projects. Externally, they face growing geopolitical tensions between their investors.

So to manage the contradictions of this situation, Georgian Dream is turning to authoritarian solutions to push their infrastructure plans against popular opposition. My fear is that, because of Georgia’s significance as a transit hub, all imperial powers will continue to collaborate with an increasingly authoritarian government. And under this law, we will not have the means to resist and challenge Georgia’s development policy.

Giorgi: The U.S. and the EU have been the biggest partners in terms of economy and everything else over the past 30 years. But with the rise of China and the West’s conflict with Russia, a whole new economic and geopolitical situation is developing around Georgia.

As Lela said, Georgia has become an energy and trade transit site between China and Europe. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has disrupted trade through northern transit routes and forced the EU to look for other suppliers of energy besides Russia.

So both China and the EU are seeking to diversify their trade routes and looking more and more to Georgia as part of a middle corridor and key transit site. And they are looking to the development of Georgia’s infrastructure to bring electricity and green energy to Europe.

This is a profoundly different geopolitical position for Georgia, which did not exist when Georgian Dream came to power over a decade ago. Now Georgian Dream is turning to authoritarianism to manage the contradictions of balancing between the U.S. and the EU on the one hand and China and Russia on the other.

And they might even get away with it for a certain period. Remember that Azerbaijan, which has been a major EU energy partner for 30 years, is an authoritarian state without any Western NGOs or democratic pluralism. Georgian Dream hopes to occupy a similar position—running an authoritarian

state balancing between increasingly antagonistic powers.

Georgia is a specific kind of peripheral capitalism; it is a transit hub capitalism open to capitalist investment from the U.S., EU, China, Turkey, and Russia. These capitalist powers have [all invested in infrastructure](#) to turn the country to transport energy and commodities between the EU and China. So, Georgia has been balancing between dominant imperial powers and emerging ones.

Ia: Georgia is in a risky situation. Its [development agenda has been dictated](#) by loans from foreign powers, including international financial institutions like the World Bank as well as U.S., European, and Asian development banks. As a result, 75 percent of government debt is foreign debt, owed to such institutions and banks.

Their loans have bankrolled this transit hub form of capitalism. Georgian Dream is committed to investing in more and more hydropower stations as well as ports for shipping.

The question that I have right now is where the money will come from. It could continue to come from Western development banks. They have been happy to lend to authoritarian regimes.

But Georgian Dream has a backup plan if such funding dries up. They have introduced an offshore law that encourages other sources of capital, including from Russian oligarchs, to flow to Georgia. They have also introduced an amendment to the pension law that enables the government to draw partially on the country's pension to invest in development projects.

So while Georgian Dream keeps following the infrastructure-led development model imposed by western actors, it hopes to diversify funding for transit hub capitalism. They're happy to take capital from the EU, China, Russia, offshore accounts, or even the pension fund.

Posle & Tempest: What is the character of the protest movement? What is its composition? What are its demands? What is its relationship to the opposition parties, especially the United National Movement? What is the movement's relationship to a history of struggle in Georgia?

Giorgi: The protest movement has rallied many sectors of society. Like any mass movement, it includes a wide range of forces from the organized to the unorganized. The big NGOs have played a role. So have mainstream opposition parties, but they cannot play a leading role because people see them as lacking any legitimacy.

Students have played a major role as the entire educational system is at stake. They have shut down whole institutions with strikes. The professors, teachers, delivery drivers and other professionals have joined the movement.

The main demand has been to stop the foreign agents law. I think the demands must be expanded to deepen the reach of the movement.

Tamar: The movement is extremely decentralized. There is no central body of the organizers responsible for organizing it, certainly not the parties and NGOs. Of course, there are certain well organized groups, particularly among the student groups.

People are finding their own voice and own way of organizing, mobilizing, and choosing their strategies. This lack of organization creates a feeling of chaos, but it also prevents the state from identifying and arresting organizers.

The authorities are obsessed with trying to find who's behind the movement. People who have been

arrested report that the authorities ask who's behind the protest, what channels of information do you follow, and who inspired you to join?

They cannot grasp the fact that they are confronted with a rising of huge sections of society that want to preserve our democracy, rights, and livelihoods. The movement has been very inspiring.

It has shown to people who have been atomized and isolated that they are not alone. And it has reaffirmed people's deep opposition to the government. People now feel that we are many and they are few.

Lela:I want to underscore that this movement cannot be reduced to Western backed NGOs as some on the Left have claimed. [Nor is it right to dismiss this movement as bourgeois](#) and claim that it has nothing to do with workers.

It's silly to contend that this movement involves only the bourgeoisie. Frankly there are just not that many bourgeois or middle class people in Georgia. It is a very large movement comprised of whole swathes of our society including workers.

There are teachers, professors, and other kinds of professionals. There are mothers groups. There are ecological groups. There are grassroots movements from peripheral regions that have joined because they see this law as a means for the government to push through extractivist mining and infrastructure projects that are threats to them.

Workers and their organizations and unions have also been in the struggle. In fact, the Georgian Trade Union Confederation and some of its member unions have voiced opposition to the law. Delivery drivers and public transport drivers are showing solidarity.

Most workers, however, are not unionized in Georgia so the workers that have joined the movement are mostly unorganized and often precarious workers. And let's remember that most of the students are in fact part of the precarious working class. And why would we want to dismiss student activists fighting for democracy anyway?

Luka:I want to affirm what Lela just said about students. Some people are trying to provide a definition of working class, which is out of touch with Georgian realities. The tens of thousands of students mobilizing are not bourgeois bohemians.

Many students work night shifts in completely unprotected conditions to pay their tuition fees. This interferes with their ability to attend classes, properly study, and find any kind of healthy balance between work, study, and life.

It's completely dishonest intellectually to counterpose workers to this protest movement. The working class in its diversity is part of this uprising against the government.

[T]his movement cannot be reduced to Western backed NGOs as some on the Left have claimed. Nor is it right to dismiss this movement as bourgeois and claim that it has nothing to do with workers...Frankly there are just not that many bourgeois or middle class people in Georgia. It is a very large movement comprised of whole swathes of our society including workers.

Posle & Tempest:Some on the Left have essentially dismissed the protest movement as another so-called color revolution, as essentially a vehicle for Western imperialism in Georgia. What's wrong with that argument?

Luka:It is completely at odds with reality. First of all, this movement has not been organized by powerful NGOs or opposition parties to carry out some color revolution. This is a vast, national movement in defense of democracy. Second, the attack on our rights is not just against NGOs but all kinds of organizations and individuals.

It's also disgraceful to dismiss an entire movement that is facing severe state repression. The police are threatening people, repressing protests, beating people up, arresting them, and handing out harsh sentences. The state has also unleashed thugs to attack protests.

Shamefully, some on the Left have trotted out a formula of Western imperialism manipulating NGOs to overthrow a government. And some Western readers, who are familiar with the U.S. carrying out such operations in various countries, think that's what's happening in Georgia. It is not.

We have seen this done to Ukraine's struggle for self-determination. Some on the Left have reduced it to an inter-imperial war that has nothing to do with the Ukrainian people.

They are not recognized as agents in their own struggle but reduced to pawns of bigger powers. That is wrong about Ukraine, and it is also wrong about Georgia. We are not marionettes blindly following the orders of others.

Lela:I am frankly outraged that some on the Left have launched a campaign that reduces this dynamic situation in Georgia to the NGO story. By doing so, they distort not just what the movement is about, but also the nature and problems with Georgia's political economy.

It is a disgrace from leftists. These people are doing quite a lot of harm. By caricaturing the protests as an NGO-backed color revolution they have led many on the international Left to balk at extending solidarity.

Even worse, they have weaponized all the criticism that people like ourselves have made for years against the big NGOs and the controversial role they have played in Georgia to malign the current protests. Blaming everything on big NGOs actually makes it harder for us to criticize them, because it makes us sound like we are on the side of the government.

We are in a mass movement in a tiny country against a party backed by an oligarch, who is turning Georgia into his backyard for capitalist profiteering. We are facing down the threat of authoritarianism if not fascism. That some on the Left don't take our concerns seriously and dismiss it is shocking.

Shamefully, some on the Left have trotted out a formula of Western imperialism manipulating NGOs to overthrow a government. And some Western readers, who are familiar with the U.S. carrying out such operations in various countries, think that's what's happening in Georgia. It is not. We have seen this done to Ukraine's struggle for self-determination...That is wrong about Ukraine, and it is also wrong about Georgia. We are not marionettes blindly following the orders of others.

Giorgi:I completely agree with Lela. Many Western leftists are used to applying these vague formulas over and over again to every event happening in the world without any materialist analysis of particular situations.

The real world is simply not reducible to EU or NATO expansion alone. In Georgia's case, our ruling class, its parties, their authoritarian turn, and the whole political-economic model of Georgia is putting all our democratic rights, individual rights, and workers' rights in jeopardy.

Ia:I only want to add two things. First, I find it stunning that some on the Left use the same argument about NGOs as the oligarchic government does to legitimate their foreign agent law. Don't they find that embarrassing?

Second, Lela, I, and many others have written many critiques of NGOs, but we never absolved Georgian elites, parties, and governments of their accountability for all the social and economic misery in Georgia. It is unreasonable to blame it all on the NGOs. It's dishonest.

Lela:That's completely right. You cannot blame NGOs for Georgia's position as a dependent economy with no social welfare state and plagued with poverty. NGOs are a symptom of the problem and have played a role in neoliberalization, but they are not the cause of it.

It's irresponsible for anyone on the Left to reduce this massive problem to NGOs and absolve the Georgian elites and their governments for dismantling the welfare state. It's just not accurate.

Luka:These sections of the Left don't take the threat of authoritarian rule seriously. That threat is most evident in the justice system. Our oligarch has made sure that Georgian Dream has appointed a so-called Clan of Judges, which is completely loyal to him, to run the courts in his interests.

This is just one example of the overall drift into authoritarianism. For the Left not to be concerned about this in Georgia and everywhere else is shocking. To write about the current protest without taking into account this enormous crackdown on democracy is dishonest.

Posle & Tempest:Russian imperialism seized 20 percent of Georgia in 2008 setting in motion its aggression in other former Soviet states culminating in Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and then in 2022 through to today. What impact has Russia's imperialist war in Ukraine and its ambitions to rebuild its former empire had on both Georgian Dream, popular opinion in Georgia, and the protest movement?

Giorgi:Georgian Dream has used the war to adopt this balancing position between the West on one side and Russia and China on the other. They've argued that some "global war party" made up of influential states, corporations, and NGOs have been pushing Georgia toward war against Russia.

They use that argument to justify their foreign agent law and authoritarian turn. Recently they even hinted that they have some kind of solution to Georgian territories occupied by Russia but are prevented from implementing it by NGOs.

Tamar:The government is trying to scare us by saying that if we don't implement this law, we are going to end up like Ukraine. The opposition parties, by contrast, project our future if the law is implemented as Belarusization, that we will become another Belarus, an authoritarian state under the thumb of the Kremlin.

We on the Left have failed to popularize a positive alternative vision of our national and international future. That is our task in the midst of this movement. That is not a simple one given the weaknesses of our Left.

Posle & Tempest:So what position has the Georgian Left adopted in this whole situation? What is its relationship with the political parties both Georgian Dream and the main opposition party, the United National Movement. And what is the position on the imperial rivalry between Russia and the Western powers, the EU, NATO, and the U.S.?

Giorgi:When we talk about Georgian Left, we have to be specific about what we mean by the Left. The Georgian political landscape, just like other post-Soviet countries, does not have a strong Left in

general.

We do not have parties of our own for the most part. We also do not have strong unions and labor movements. The Left consists of scattered individuals, public figures, academics, small groups, some student organizations, grassroots networks, and civil society formations of various kinds. So it's a challenge for us on the Left to play a big role.

Given that reality, how has this Left positioned itself in Georgian party politics? The first thing to say is that the contemporary Georgian Left formed in opposition to Mikhail Saakashvili's United National Movement, its allies in the big NGOs, and their neoliberal policies. So the Left does not support that former ruling party.

The Left's relationship with the Georgian Dream has been problematic and complex. Some leftist groups even joined Georgian Dream in the United Coalition to run against Saakashvili in the 2012 elections. Georgian Dream presented itself then as a reformist project promising improvements in people's lives.

But the "coalition" around Georgian Dream has long collapsed. Georgian Dream has turned to completely monopolizing economic and political power. The social and economic conditions of the majority of the population have not improved and we are still the most unequal country in the region. Of course we should oppose Georgian Dream with its right wing authoritarian turn and monopolistic capitalism.

Our movement "Khma" started precisely against the systemic ills it has produced: predatory banking, hunger in schools, 'cartels' in the pharmaceutical sector, forced evictions, exploitation of strategic natural resources in the interests of big capital and so on. The Left has to find new political shape and provide a positive alternative to the ruling class and their political parties.

Lela: I think the minimum positive program is to assure that local progressive movements have a fighting chance for welfare and protection of their living environments.

That is only the start of providing an alternative to the transit hub development our rulers and their international backers have imposed on our country. Opposing that and defending our democratic rights remain the top priority.

Giorgi: I think one of the duties of the Left is to challenge the notion that we have to simply make a choice between the West and East. While the EU seems appealing, we must remember that Georgia can be a part of the EU without much changing for the better.

Our country could still be unequal, poor, and dependent inside the EU like some of the post-socialist Eastern European states. Of course, a direct drift into the Russian or Chinese camp would be no better and perhaps even worse as it would come with authoritarian rule.

In this situation of heightened imperial rivalry, we have to focus on putting forth the interests of the majority in all questions. Take all the infrastructural development plans for example.

The problem in my opinion about Namakhvani was not that it was a big hydroelectric plant, but that it undermined precisely the sovereignty of the state and did not benefit the majority of our society. The unequal contract between the Georgian state and a private company from Turkey was the main reason that fueled the protest.

We should approach the question of foreign policy in the same way. We should ask: does this benefit the working class and the majority of the society? Does it improve our social welfare? Does it

improve the conditions of life for many Georgians?

Of course, Georgia has the right to choose its geopolitical orientation. But we must always ask what the social character of that orientation is? If we choose Europe, which kind of Europe? That of Viktor Orbán? Rampant neoliberalism? Or the more social and progressive side of Europe?

Therefore, the Left must at all times advocate for the interests of workers and the majority and of course for our democratic rights.

Lela:I think we have to challenge the notion of development pushed by all the capitalist and imperial powers. That impacts how I think the Left should position itself in the current rivalries for capitalist hegemony.

All the powers are pushing an extractivist green capitalism that will have a devastating impact on Georgia's society and ecology. We need to advocate an alternative that will benefit society and preserve the environment and local ways of being.

We must not accept this transit hub extractivist development strategy from either the EU or China. So the Left must strengthen our anti-capitalist politics and reject a simplistic pragmatic politics of picking the lesser evil imperial power.

The scale of Western hypocrisy makes this even more problematic. The same Anthony Blinken that is announcing travel limitations is greenlighting Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Posle & Tempest:The U.S. has turned up the pressure on Georgian Dream and its imposition of the foreign agent law by putting travel limitations on its leading politicians? What should the Left say about this?

Lela:I think it's very problematic for the U.S. to impose a travel ban on Georgian Dream politicians. The government will use these bans to whip up fears of war, legitimate their turn against the West, and double down on their imposition of authoritarian rule.

We should also look at this scenario geopolitically. If the U.S. tries to bring down the government, it could trigger Russia to retaliate in some way, including launching a war.

Luka:I also am worried about members of the European Parliament discussing proposals to suspend visa rights for Georgia. Right now, we can travel without visas for three months in the Schengen zone.

Ending that would play into the hands of Georgian Dream. They would disguise the fact that they are the ones delinking from Europe and moving towards Russia, saying, "look Europe doesn't want us anymore. They have once again betrayed us just like they have many times before."

Tamar:I agree. For now, such threats just confirm Georgian Dream's claims about the West threatening our sovereignty. The only way such travel limitations, visa suspensions, and sanctions would make sense is if there is consensus within Georgia that these politicians are traitors.

For the Western powers to act unilaterally before that consensus develops could backfire. But the potential for that consensus to develop is strong right now. And we, before anyone else, must find a way to hold these politicians accountable and make them pay for their actions.

Lela:The scale of Western hypocrisy makes this even more problematic. The same Anthony Blinken that is announcing travel limitations is greenlighting Israel's genocide in Gaza. That puts us as

leftists in a terrible position. It's hard to be in protests where some people cheer Blinken threatening sanctions on Georgia.

Luka: This is a very tragic situation. It's problematic in the context of Gaza to fight for anything under the EU flag. Israel's genocidal war has exposed the fact that international legal order and how justice is determined by powerful players, particularly the U.S. and EU, and done to serve their interests.

Georgian Dream has responded to Western criticism of its repression of protests by denouncing West as hypocrites. The prime minister has pointed to Biden's repression of Palestine encampments on campuses across the U.S. and similar repression in EU countries.

But this should not lead any Georgian leftists or on the international Left to support Georgia delinking from the Western camp, turning the government into an authoritarian regime, and aligning with Russia and China. We must reject that as completely cynical and nihilistic.

Russia and China offer no alternative. Their advocacy of a multipolar world order, as Boris Kagarlitsky has argued from Putin's dungeons, is rhetorical justification for their imperialist interests and amounts to nothing more than leaving each government to do whatever they please in absence of any common rules.

Posle & Tempest: What can activists sympathetic to Georgia's struggle for democracy and equality do to build solidarity and support to the movement?

Luka: First of all, do not buy into narratives that downplay the authoritarian threat posed by Georgian Dream to people in Georgia. Do not fall for abstract ready-made formulas, in this case spouted by Georgian Dream and parroted by some on the Left, that Western NGOs are carrying out a color revolution.

As I hope we've shown, those formulas do not explain what's happening in our country. Instead, the international Left should extend solidarity to our struggle for democracy and self-determination.

Lela: We're in a very dire situation. People around me are genuinely scared that they will have no choice but to migrate. If this type of authoritarianism is consolidated life as we know in Georgia will dramatically change for many people.

We have already seen this in Russia, Belarus, Hungary. Similar threats of strengthening conservative and far-right politics are looming not only in other former Socialist states, but also in the West.

Faced with social insecurity, unemployment and huge economic inequalities, many citizens have left Georgia in recent years. In 2023 alone, up to [250,000 people left](#), doubling the emigration rate of 2022. The current authoritarian consolidation and attack on political rights threatens to trigger another, and probably large, wave of emigration from Georgia.

So out of basic solidarity the international Left has to take our struggle seriously, and see it as part of a common struggle for democratic rights, equality, and alternatives to extractivist green capitalism.

[O]ut of basic solidarity the international Left has to take our struggle seriously, and see it as part of a common struggle for democratic rights, equality, and alternatives to extractivist green capitalism.

Ia:I totally agree with Lela. Many of us have a feeling that if we don't stop this authoritarian turn now, it's going to take many years to win back our democratic rights. This is an existential crisis in Georgia. If we have to leave our country, it is an open question whether we will ever have the possibility to come back home.

Lela:One of the most important ways of solidarizing with us is to listen to Georgians in the movement, [read our analysis](#), and take it seriously. Only then can we build bonds of solidarity in a common struggle for a better world.

Tempest and Posle Media

Ia Eradze

Giorgi Kartvelishvili

Luka Nakhutsrishvili

Tamar Qeburia

Lela Rekhviashvili

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French.

P.S.

Tempest Mag

<https://tempestmag.org/2024/06/resisting-authoritarianism-in-the-caucasus/>