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May 9, 2024 · 26 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1788588067130896437](#)

In today's #vatniksoup, I'll introduce a Georgian politician & oligarch, Bidzina Ivanishvili. He's best-known launching the pro-Kremlin Georgian Dream party, and for running the government from behind the scenes, slowly shifting Georgia's course from the West back to Russia.

1/25



Ivanishvili was born and raised in a small village in Georgia. Their family was poor but he showed a business mindset from a young age. In 1988, he moved to Moscow and began his first business, importing and selling computers with Vitaly Malkin, a Russian-Israeli oligarch.

2/25



The rapid growth of Ivanishvili's businesses can be attributed to his close ties with government officials. In 1996, he joined Seven Bankers (семибанкирщина), a group of influential Russian bankers who supported Boris Yeltsin's re-election.

3/25



He financed Lebed, a presidential candidate designed to siphon votes from the communists and secure Yeltsin's election. Lebed's subsequent appointment as governor of Krasnoyarsk opened the door for Ivanishvili to engage in extremely shady business deals in that region.

4/25



Later Ivanishvili became a major shareholder of Gazprom, but claimed in a 2011 interview to have sold his entire stake at 100% profit. Nevertheless, in 2018, former Georgian President Saakashvili alleged that Ivanishvili still held a major stake there.

5/25

● Wider Europe

Georgia's Gazprom mystery

Georgian energy minister's flirtation with Gazprom raises questions over transparency in Tbilisi


Tornike Sharashenidze

Commentary · 22 December 2015 · 3 minute read

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A couple of months ago the Georgian public was shocked to learn through the Russian media that their Minister of Energy and deputy Prime Minister was planning negotiations with the Russian gas giant Gazprom. He did not deny this and other top officials started to lecture the public on the necessity of “diversifying energy supplies.” One of these officials went so far as to say that: “politics and economics are different things and they should be kept far apart from each other.”

Like many post-Soviet republics, Georgia has been heavily dependent on Gazprom with all the consequences this entailed. First, the price of Russian gas shot up (in 2005), and then in early 2006 the pipeline from Russia to Georgia was blown up and for some reason it took weeks to repair while Georgia (and Armenia) was freezing in the dark. Georgia was lucky to rid itself of this dependence when the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline was launched soon after. Since then, the country has enjoyed an uninterrupted supply of Azerbaijani gas which is said to be substantially cheaper than Gazprom's. Since then, quite a few Russian think tanks openly lamented the fact that Moscow had lost one of its main instruments for putting pressure on Tbilisi.

Search on Georgia Today

Saakashvili Accuses Georgia's ex-PM of Lying About Gazprom Assets



ODESSA, Ukraine – Georgia's former President Mikheil Saakashvili accused the country's billionaire ex-Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili of lying about his personal holdings in Russian state energy giant Gazprom.

"Ivanishvili is the country's leading pro-Russian citizen as the main private shareholder of Gazprom," Saakashvili said in a televised interview with Georgian media outlet Rustavi-2. He added that Ivanishvili continues to deceive the population regarding his business ties to Russia.

An eccentric oligarch worth an estimated \$5 billion and the founder of the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, Ivanishvili made his fortune in banking, pharmacy, real estate in Russia during the chaotic early 1990s as the country struggled to privatize following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In 2002, Ivanishvili left Russia, first moving to France and then returning to Georgia. He maintained an extremely secretive profile until he entered politics in 2011. When he founded the Georgian Dream Party that year, few Georgians even knew what he looked like.

6/25



Despite avoiding public appearances, Ivanishvili's team facilitated rumors of his philanthropy. He built the large Holy Trinity Orthodox church & provided monthly stipends to notable figures in sports and arts, leveraging their support later to propel his electoral

victory.

7/25



Ivanishvili entered politics in 2011 with an open letter criticizing Saakashvili's "autocratic governance" and worsening relations with Russia. He promised to steer Georgia toward NATO and EU membership while stabilizing ties with Russia and boosting the economy.

8/25

Bidzina Ivanishvili's Open Letter to Georgian Gov't, Politicians, Political Parties, Media Outlets and Georgian Citizens

Civil Georgia, Tbilisi / 12 Oct.'11 / 18:29



Unofficial translation

October 12

Before moving on the main issues I want to say a couple of words about myself.

Key secret behind my success in business is the following: I can assess situation quickly, make a correct decision, select the right staff and achieve the goal quickly through good management.

At the same time, I believe that any business should be done with clean hands based on honest and open relationships with people. That's the way I live, that's way I passed up to these days and this is how I am known both in Georgia and in various countries of the world.

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Georgia election: Rival leaders agree on Nato goal

9 October 2012

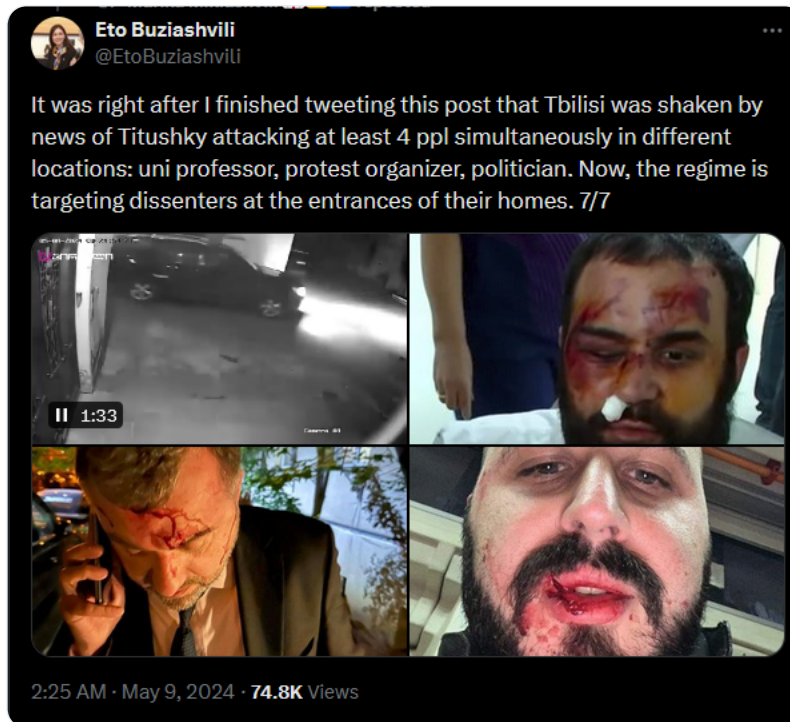


Ivanishvili and his team made promises that now seem outlandish, such as investing \$1 billion in agriculture, and each of Georgia's 6,000+ villages getting 5 million USD. The latter promise was promoted by former Soviet actress, Sopiko Chiaureli.



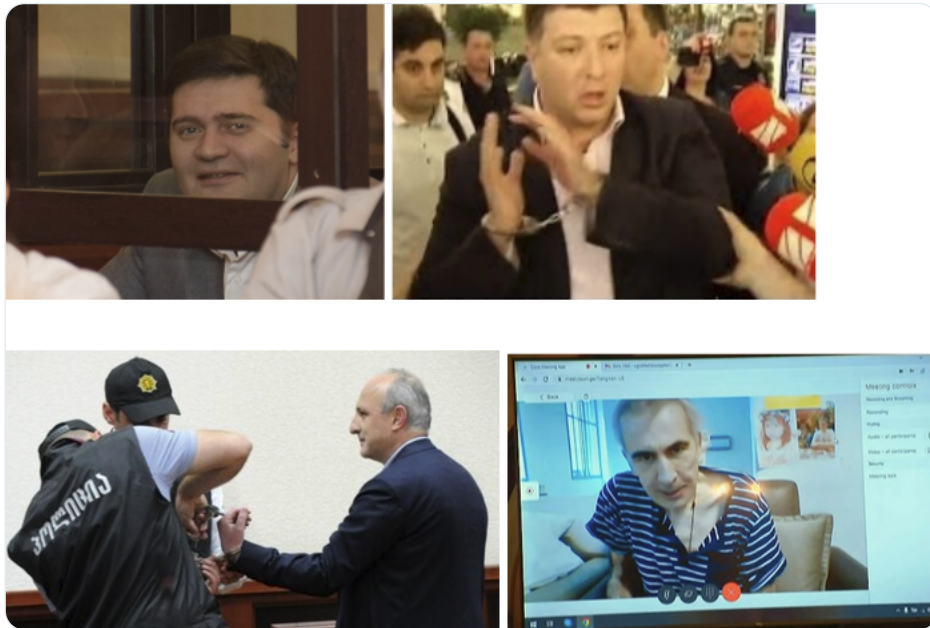
Ivanishvili himself vowed to build a democracy that would "shock" the West and Europe, and to treat political opponents with dignity. This claim now seems the most absurd, given the numerous political opponents who have been arrested, persecuted, or physically assaulted.

10/25



Since taking power, Ivanishvili has pursued politically motivated persecution of his opponents. So far, he's imprisoned several opposition members, including former President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili and other ministers from his party.

11/25



The Observer
Georgia

This article is more than 1 year old

Gaunt and ghostly, Georgia's jailed ex-president nears death in hospital

Mikheil Saakashvili warned of Putin's ambitions 15 years ago. Now he tells of torture by a regime that panders to Moscow

Shaun Walker in Tbilisi

Sun 16 Apr 2023 09:00 CEST

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Georgia's jailed ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili is seen via a video link in February during a hearing to consider a request to release him or defer, over health concerns, his six-year sentence for abuse of power. Photograph: Irakli Gedenidze/AP

As is tradition, Ivanishvili took over Georgia's largest media corporations, turning formerly critical media outlets into pro-government ones. Later he also arrested the former CEO of TV Broadcast, Nika Gvaramia.



NEWS



May 16, 2022

By RFE/RL's Georgian Service

Noted Georgian Journalist Gvaramia Sentenced To Lengthy Prison Term



Georgian opposition journalist Nika Gvaramia is seen in court during his trial on corruption charges.

In one of his interviews, Ivanishvili remarked that the worst thing to happen to Georgians was the opening of borders with EU countries. He explained that seeing how well Europeans lived made Georgians less content with their own lives and more desperate.

13/25



Ivanishvili formally left all political positions in 2013 but continues to be seen as the shadow ruler of Georgian politics. To this day, high-level officials regularly visit Ivanishvili in his "Glass Palace," located in the mountains overlooking Tbilisi.

14/25



All close to him got lucrative positions: his personal assistant became the Prime Minister, his chief bodyguard the Minister of Interior Affairs, and his second bodyguard took over the

state protection. He even made his personal dentist the Minister of Healthcare.

15/25



Throughout the years, Ivanishvili and his family faced multiple scandals, especially his rapper son Bera. A leaked audio captured Bera ordering the head of Special State Protection Service to intimidate teenagers who insulted him online.

16/25



Another leaked phone call audio emerged from March of 2022. When Russians were already killing Ukrainians in Bucha, Kherson and Mariupol, Bidzina Ivanishvili was talking with Russian oligarch Yevtushenkov discussing the ways to help him avoid sanctions.

17/25

Vladimir Yevtushenkov calls to Bidzina Ivanishvili
10.03.2022



E - Vladimir Yevtushenkov



B - Bidzina Ivanishvili

E: “Borinka, my dear friend, how are you?”

Although there were always indications that Ivanishvili’s government leaned towards Russia rather than Europe, this became most evident when the Russian-Ukrainian war started. Ivanishvili’s government did not join sanctions against Russia and even blocked planes meant...

18/25



...to transport Georgian volunteers to fight for Ukraine. This stance led to protests on Georgia’s streets, prompting President Zelenskyy to label the Georgian government’s actions as shameful when addressing protesters in front of the parliament building of Georgia.

19/25

Home / News / Global Europe / Europe's East / Georgia / Georgia's ambivalence towards sanctions on Russia

Georgia's ambivalence towards sanctions on Russia

By Katie Shoshiashvili | Euractiv ⌚ Est. 7min

📅 Mar 29, 2024

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Photo: Shutterstock/Eugene Berman

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Georgia's stance on Western sanctions against Moscow came under scrutiny last year after the Georgian government approved the [continuation of direct flights](#) with Russia, though there is no evidence indicating the country's involvement in sanctions evasion.



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News | Russia-Ukraine war

'Where is the logic?': Georgia will not sanction Russia, says PM

Irakli Garibashvili says Georgian citizens and the nation's economy would suffer if Tbilisi sanctioned one of its largest trading partners.



Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili has been accused of being pro-Russia as Moscow wages war in Ukraine [File: Christian Mang/Reuters]

By Al Jazeera Staff

24 May 2023





But the largest protests erupted when the government reintroduced the contentious "Russian Law," which labels NGOs and media organizations receiving Western funding as "Foreign Agents" — a term considered extremely derogatory in Georgia.

20/25

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What's Behind Georgia's 'Russian Law'?

By Leyla Latypova
Updated: May 6, 2024

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REMEMBER WHO THE REAL ENEMY IS. #ხო ხელგინ ვინაა. #ხო ხელგინ ჩვენია.

I DON'T WANT TO BE ANOTHER BRICK IN THE RUSSIAN WALL #არას ჩვენც კვამლად

Demonstrators hold placards during a protest against a controversial "foreign influence" bill in Tbilisi. Vano Shlamov / AFP

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Hundreds of thousands took to the streets in opposition to the bill. Similar bill's introduction in Russia led to the shutdown of numerous NGOs and TV channels, showcasing its

potentially repressive impact. Essentially, it grants Ivanishvili's government the power to...

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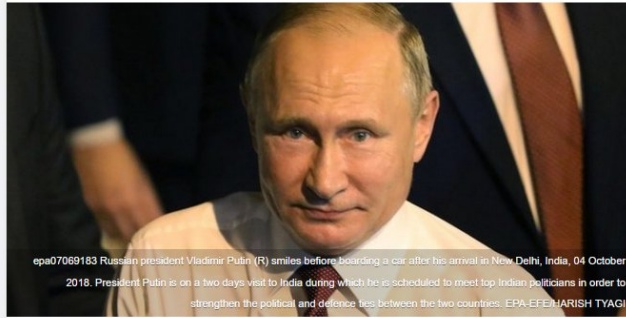
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Russo-Ukrainian War and Georgia – Analysis from security expert Kakha

Russia bans “foreign agents” from participating in elections

by GEORGIA TODAY — May 7, 2024 in Highlights, International, Politics
Reading Time: 1 min read



epa07069183 Russian president Vladimir Putin (R) smiles before boarding a car after his arrival in New Delhi, India, 04 October 2018. President Putin is on a two days visit to India during which he is scheduled to meet top Indian politicians in order to strengthen the political and defence ties between the two countries. EPA-EFE/ARISH TYAGI

Russian lawmakers on Monday passed a bill that bans “foreign agents” from running for any political office in the country, the latest in a series of tightening restrictions against those whom the Kremlin accuses of working in the interests of Western governments.

...target and potentially shut down any NGO or media outlet that doesn't align with their agenda. Alongside the controversial "Russian Law," Ivanishvili introduced the "Offshore Law," enabling the tax-free repatriation of his offshore wealth. Some have speculated that...

22/25

Politics in Georgia

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20.04.2024

"The offshore law" has been passed in the third reading by the Parliament of Georgia. What does this mean?

JAMnews
Tbilisi

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The offshore law in Georgia and Ivanishvili

On April 19, the Georgian Parliament passed a bill in the third reading exempting asset transfers from offshore accounts to Georgia from taxation until 2028. 73 deputies supported the bill, while nine voted against.

The opposition and experts believe that this legislative change serves the interests of Bidzina Ivanishvili, an oligarch who is considered the shadow ruler of Georgia. In 2023, he returned to politics, becoming the honorary chairman of the ruling party "Georgian Dream," which he founded in 2012.

...Ivanishvili is preparing for potential western sanctions by consolidating his capital in Georgia, restricting NGOs' access to Western funds, and becoming the primary funding source within the country. In his latest speech from Apr 2024, Ivanishvili publicly

denounced...

23/25

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How Georgia Sided With Its Enemy

Georgians are angry at the government's pro-Russian turn.

MAY 7, 2024, 2:49 PM

By [Ani Chkhikvadze](#), a Georgian reporter based in Washington D.C.



Protesters attend a rally organized by the ruling Georgian Dream party aimed at countering days of mass anti-government protests over a controversial "foreign agent" bill in Tbilisi, Georgia, on April 29. VANO

..the West as the "Global War Party," blaming it for deteriorating relations between Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia. He attributed the conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia's 2008 war with Russia to Western actions, and also criticized the West for abandoning "traditional values".

24/25

Georgian politician accuses 'global war party' of interfering in Tbilisi's domestic affairs

Aggression of 'global war party' against Georgia caused by its failure to turn country into a 'second front,' says Bidzina Ivanishvili

Burc Eruygur | 30.04.2024 - Update : 30.04.2024



ISTANBUL

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party, accused what he described as a "global war party" of interfering in his country's political affairs, amid the reintroduction of a "foreign agents" bill that sparked protests in the capital Tbilisi.

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For almost a month, Georgian youth have been protesting the reintroduction of this bill, viewing it as Bidzina Ivanishvili's final step in cementing his rule as an ultimate dictator.



This soup was brewed in collaboration with @dachigubadze.

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