

FROM PROMISE TO DISPARITY: TWO YEARS OF GEORGIA-CHINA STRATEGIC RELATIONS

Expectations vs Realities of Bilateral Relations

Since July 2023 (signing the Georgia–China Strategic Partnership), regardless of robust premises for strengthening cooperation across four domains: political, economic, people-to-people/cultural, and international, bilateral relations appear to have evolved into a disproportionate arrangement rather than a mutually beneficial partnership.

- Officials from the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party have held frequent meetings with representatives of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), consistently expressing their interest in learning about the Chinese development model. However, political relations remain largely asymmetrical, as Georgia does not receive the anticipated diplomatic support from China on international platforms, including the UN.
- Chinese companies continue to dominate the infrastructure sector, while renewable energy is emerging as another area of engagement (more Civic IDEA’s report: [“Chinese Companies in Georgia”](#)).
- Chinese investments in Georgia remain limited, while bilateral trade has grown largely due to increasing imports from the PRC (more Civic IDEA’s report: [“Georgia’s Investment Landscape”](#)).
- Chinese soft power activities in Georgia have reached a qualitatively new level, with the Chinese language being introduced in schools and Georgian universities diversifying partnerships with PRC institutions (more Civic IDEA’s report: [“Sino-Georgian Strategic Partnership: Cooperation in Education”](#)).

Political Domain: Strengthening Party-to-Party Ties with the CCP

Since 2023, the highly anti-Western rhetoric of GD has increasingly been accompanied by pro-Chinese narratives. Georgian officials have repeatedly praised Xi Jinping, his political vision, the development model of the People’s Republic of China, and China’s “peaceful rise” in international relations. Thus, strengthening political relations with China has been actively promoted by the ruling party, which appears to be seeking to offset its growing isolation from the West through deeper engagement with Beijing.

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“Strengthening partnership with China, that’s key foreign policy priority for us. It is crucial for Georgia. China is also a role model for modernization, for progress, for economic development and China is also a fair player in global politics. So, that’s why strengthening ties with China is very promising for us and we attach very special importance to this cooperation...” (extract from Irakli Kobakhidze’s Interview with CGTN’s program – “Leaders Talk”).

Given Georgian Dream’s political objectives, the party has been particularly eager to promote a positive image of China in Georgia by supporting various initiatives. In 2025, Georgia’s Minister of Education, Givi Mikanadze, in an interview with China Daily, highlighted the positive implications of educational cooperation for strengthening political relations and facilitating the long-term coordination of the two countries’ foreign policies, stating:

“When there is an understanding and respect for each other, then it comes to the most important issue, that there is confidence-building. There is a trust to each other, and it gives opportunities to the new and future generations to have more ties with each other, to cooperate, and to be as one joint power on an international level and representing some political interests jointly, which is, of course, interests for both countries.”

According to the Strategic Partnership agreement, both parties consider bilateral relations “a priority of their foreign policies.” The partnership envisages high-level political consultations and enhanced cooperation between legislative bodies as well as central and local governments.

The political domain has been the most visible part of the Sino-Georgian strategic partnership. Against the backdrop of anti-Western rhetoric, GD officials increased political and diplomatic exchanges with the PRC representatives. Among the official engagements, the following developments are particularly noteworthy:

Meetings Between Legislative Representatives

GD party delegation paid two official visits to the PRC in 2024-2025.

1. The first [visit](#), in January 2024, was led by the party’s then-chairperson Irakli Kobakhidze. The delegation held high-level meetings with representatives of the National People’s Congress, the International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and the Development Research Center of the State Council.
2. The second [visit](#), in July 2025, included meetings with the officials from CPC, the National People’s Congress, the Center for Language Education and Cooperation, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, the Shenzhen municipal government, and several technology companies. According to GD officials, the visit aimed to consolidate party-to-party mechanisms and promote multi-sector development of the China–Georgia strategic partnership.

Visit of the GD Prime Minister to China

In November 2025, GD’s Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze paid an [official visit](#) to the PRC at the invitation of Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

The Georgian delegation brought together an unusually large number of ministers, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Infrastructure.

Following the meeting between Kobakhidze and Li Qiang, six cooperation agreements were formalized between the respective ministries. These included memoranda of understanding covering free trade cooperation, the Air Silk Road initiative, artificial intelligence, environmental protection, agriculture, and food product exports.

Political Consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs

On July 21, 2025, the ninth round of political **consultations** between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the PRC was held in Beijing. The parties discussed further deepening the strategic partnership and explored avenues for expanding bilateral cooperation.

Notably, officials from the GD party provide minimal information regarding the agenda and specifics of such consultations. The opacity surrounding these meetings elicits serious concerns, particularly considering the Strategic Partnership document, which states that “the two sides will strengthen coordination and collaboration in regional and international affairs.”

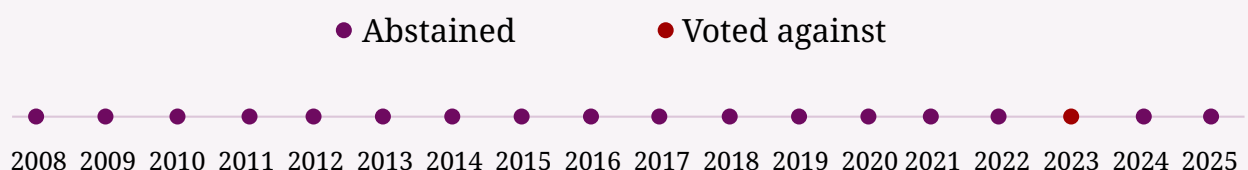
Meetings with the Chinese Ambassador

Officials from the GD government have also held frequent meetings with the Chinese Ambassador to Georgia, Zhou Qian. Between 2024 and 2025 alone, Prime Minister Kobakhidze **met** Ambassador Zhou five times, reflecting the growing intensity of diplomatic engagement. This trend is further evidenced by numerous additional meetings held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Parliament, and other state institutions.

China: Strategic Partner, Yet No Support at the UN?

According to the Strategic Partnership document, “the two sides reaffirm their respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries”. Additionally, the sides aim to strengthen “coordination and collaboration in regional and international affairs.” Despite these formal basis, Georgia has not enjoyed China’s diplomatic backing in the international arena. **Consistently, including in 2023–2025, Beijing abstained from supporting the annual UN resolution on displaced persons from Georgia’s occupied territories** - just as it has in every previous year. Even after Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, China voted against the Georgia resolution.

China’s voting record on Georgia’s sovereignty at the at the UN:



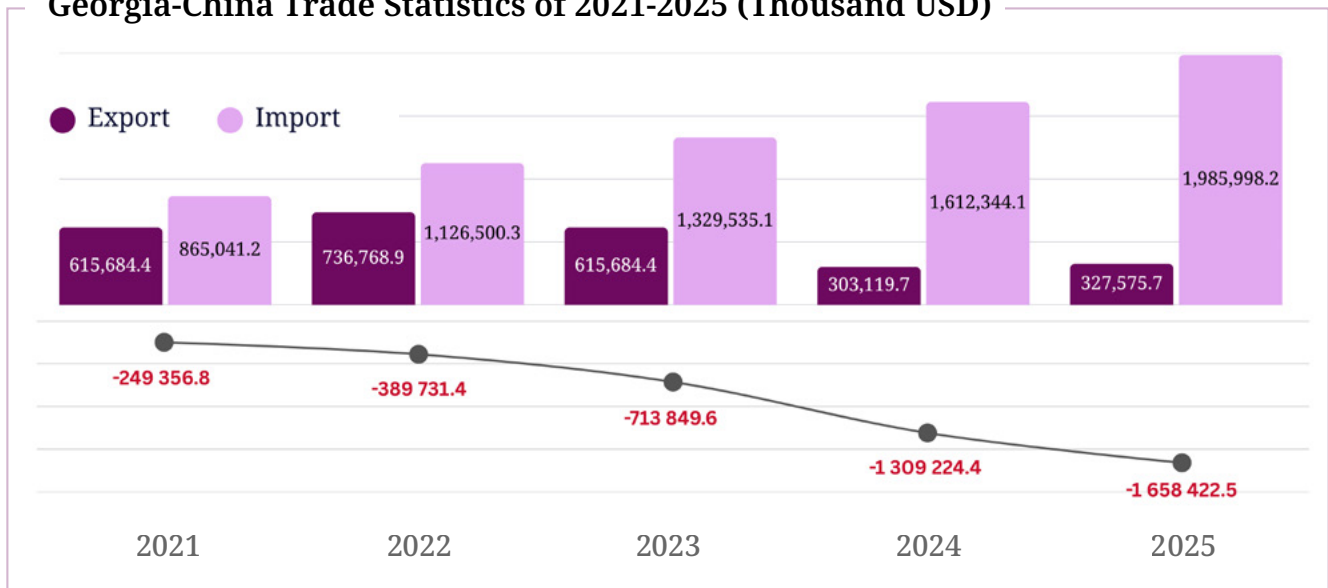
Economic Domain – “Mutually Beneficial” Cooperation or Asymmetry?

The disproportionate nature of the Sino–Georgian Strategic Partnership is most evident in trade, particularly through the growing export of Chinese goods to the Georgian market. Meanwhile, China remains a cautious investor in Georgia, lagging behind Georgia’s European partners.

Bilateral Trade – More Chinese goods, fewer Georgian exports

Bilateral trade between the two countries has been characterized by a steady increase in Chinese exports to Georgia alongside declining Georgian exports to China, resulting in a widening trade deficit. In 2025 alone, imports from China were approximately six times higher than Georgian exports to China.

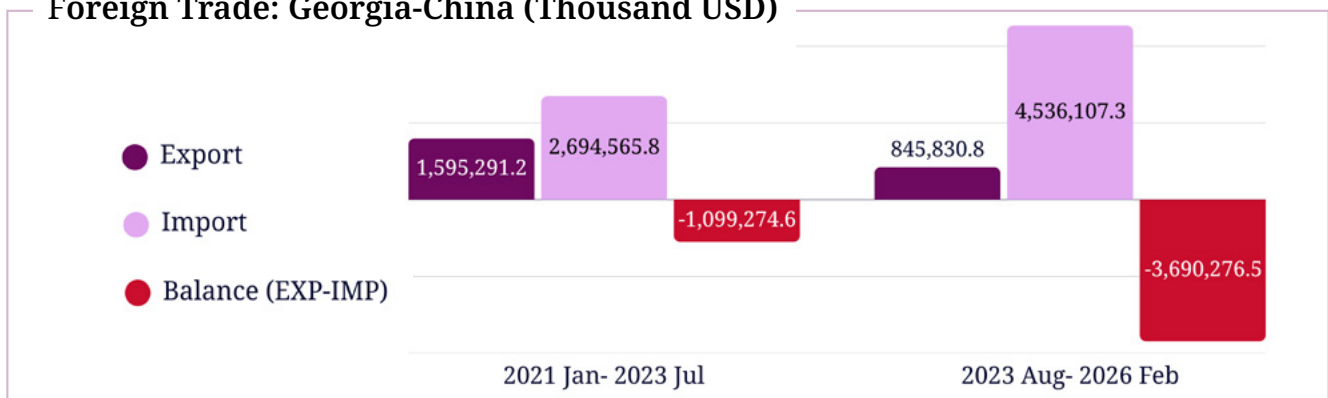
Georgia-China Trade Statistics of 2021-2025 (Thousand USD)



Despite the promising prospects embedded in the Strategic Partnership, Georgia has not significantly benefited from bilateral trade. A comparison of trade statistics from the 31 months preceding and following the announcement of the Partnership illustrates this imbalance clearly. After the Partnership was established:

- Georgian exports to China have halved.
- Imports from China nearly doubled.
- The trade deficit increased by approximately threefold.

Foreign Trade: Georgia-China (Thousand USD)



Structural Imbalance of Bilateral Trade: A Bias Toward Raw Materials



“After the entry into force of the free trade agreement with China, goods and services produced in Georgia gained access to one of the world’s largest markets, comprising approximately 1.4 billion consumers. Georgian producers have the opportunity to export around 94% of their products to the Chinese market without customs duties.”

Statement of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development

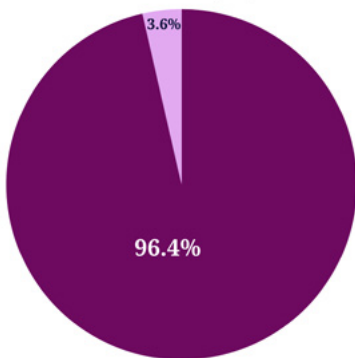
Officials from GD frequently portray trade with China as an exceptional opportunity for Georgian businesses to access a vast market, generate benefits for local entrepreneurs, create jobs, and benefit citizens of Georgia. However, the structure of bilateral trade suggests a different story.

Before the announcement of the Strategic Partnership, in 2021-2023 (including July), the top ten products exported from Georgia to the PRC were predominantly raw materials. Thus, produced goods were only 3.6 % of the total Georgian exports. The trend has not changed since 2023 – produced goods remain under 5 % of the total exports.

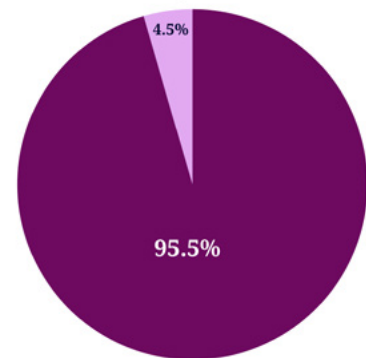
The three main products exported from Georgia to China:



2021-2023 July



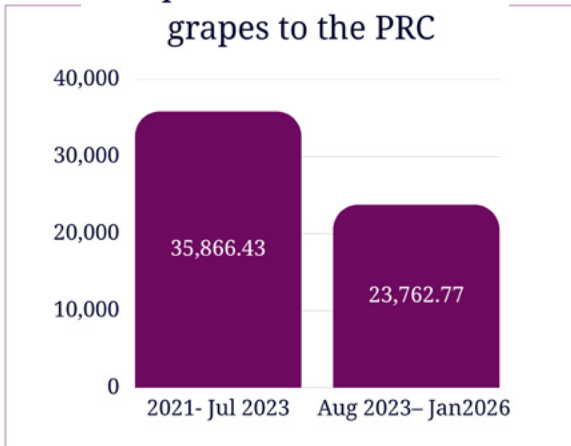
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● raw materials
● produced goods

This export structure demonstrates that Georgian exports to China are overwhelmingly composed of raw materials rather than produced goods. Thus, contrary to GD promises, bilateral trade with China generates limited domestic economic value for Georgian society: it does not significantly stimulate industrial production, create manufacturing jobs, or meaningfully benefit local entrepreneurs.

Export of wine of fresh grapes to the PRC



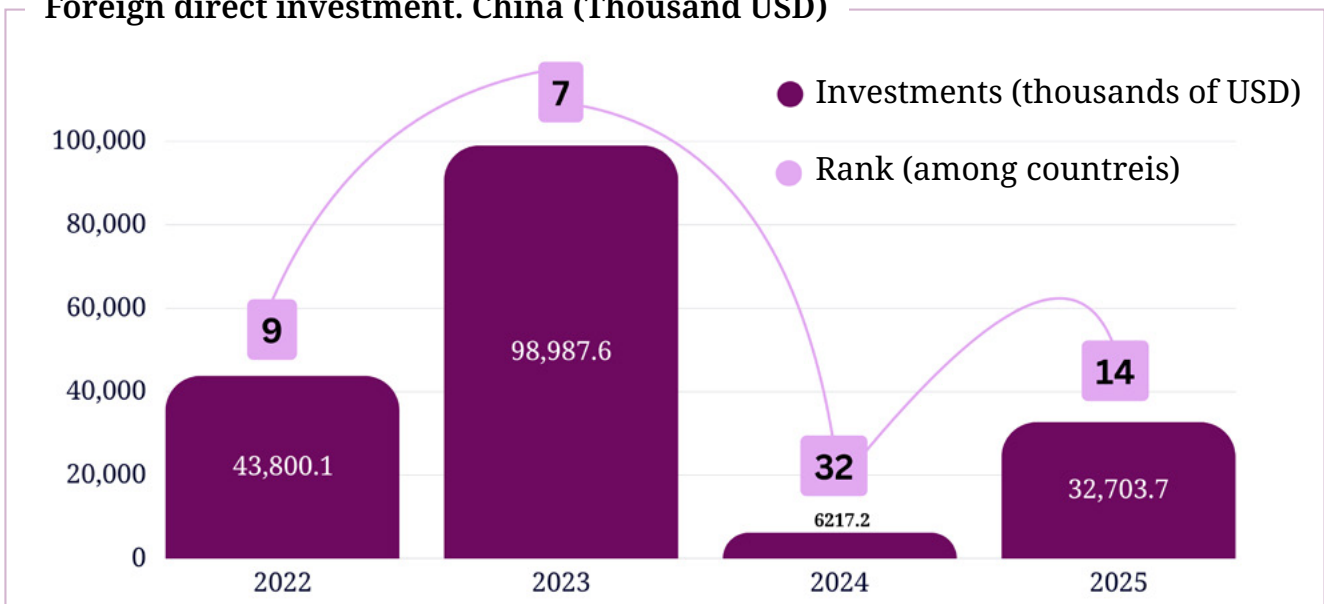
The structural imbalance of bilateral trade is reflected in the export of Georgian wine to China. According to the [statement](#) by the National Wine Agency of Georgia, China is one of the well-defined “strategic” markets for Georgian wine. Since 2013, the agency has conducted marketing campaigns in China to increase awareness about and the export of Georgian wine. However, despite these unwavering efforts, exports of wine to China have not grown. After the announcement of the partnership, the exports have declined by approximately 33%.

Foreign Direct Investments from China

The volume of Chinese foreign direct investment in Georgia remains relatively limited. Between 2010 and 2025, Chinese investment in Georgia totaled approximately USD 765 million, accounting for just 3.29% of the country’s overall foreign direct investment.

China does not appear among the top 10 largest investors of the country and consistently lags behind not only major economies such as the United States and the European Union, but also smaller countries such as the Czech Republic and Malta. In 2025, China ranked 14th among Georgia’s investors, trailing countries such as Spain, the Czech Republic, the Marshall Islands, and the Virgin Islands.

Foreign direct investment. China (Thousand USD)



The elevation of bilateral relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership has not significantly changed this trend. In 2022–2023, total Chinese investments amounted to nearly USD 118 million, whereas in 2023–2025 they declined to approximately USD 63 million. Thus, following the signing of the strategic partnership agreement, Chinese FDI in Georgia decreased by about 1.8 times compared to the preceding period.

Anaklia Deep Sea Port Project – An Unfulfilled Georgian-Chinese Dream

In May 2024, then Minister of Economy, Levan Davitashvili, [announced](#) that the Chinese-Singaporean Consortium is the only final participant of the state tender, which will present its investment proposal. Later, in June 2024, Irakli Kobakhidze [stated](#) that an agreement would be signed with the consortium in the “near future”.

Nearly two years have passed, and the negotiations still continue. GD officials provide vague, general assessments of the selection process. The most recent statement on this matter was made by the deputy minister of the economy, Tamar Ioseliani, in January 2026. According to her, the government hopes to achieve more clarity in the selection of a private investor for the Anaklia port.

Chinese companies in Georgia

Official data confirms that China does not play a significant role in the Georgian economy as an investor country. Despite this fact, both GD and CCP officials highlight economic engagement between the two countries as one of the key successes of bilateral relations. In this regard, the participation of Chinese companies in Georgian infrastructure projects is frequently emphasized. Public perceptions of China in Georgian society are also positively shaped by this narrative. However, a significant misperception persists: Chinese companies are not major investors in the country’s economy; rather, they are beneficiaries of Georgian state tenders, winning millions of GEL through state contracts for building roads and other construction works across the country.

Since 2010, Chinese companies have participated in more than 10 large-scale critical infrastructure projects, winning contracts worth over 4.5 billion GEL. For comparison, the income that Chinese companies earned in Georgia through state contracts significantly exceeds the total foreign direct investments from the PRC.

It is also worth noting that Chinese companies’ involvement in Georgian infrastructure projects is not accompanied by high-quality construction standards. An examination of open sources, including the World Bank’s Ineligible Entities and the U.S. OFAC sanctions list, suggests that these companies possess controversial and questionable reputations. At the local level, Civic IDEA’s monitoring and [research](#) indicate that their activities in Georgia have been marked by systematic violations, such as breaches of worker safety standards, environmental damage, delays in project implementation and completion, and the construction of substandard infrastructure.

A New Dimension of Involvement for Chinese Companies – Renewable Energy Sector

In January 2021, the Ambassador of China to Georgia, Zhou Qian, stated that Georgia–China cooperation “now involves more sectors and has reached a more advanced level.” As a prime example of this evolving collaboration, the ambassador highlighted the participation of a Chinese company in the Gori Wind Electropower project. Indeed, in 2024, the Chinese company Goldwind Science & Technology Co. Ltd won a state tender for the installation and 15-year operation of 33 wind turbines (For further details, see Civic IDEA’s report: “[Chinese Company Enters Georgia’s Renewable Energy Sector.](#)”). Thus, in light of China’s [rising prominence](#) in the green and renewable energy sector, Chinese companies are anticipated to participate in newly launched projects in Georgia.

People-to-People and Cultural Domain:

CCP's Soft Power Operations Enabled by GD

One of the earliest and most visible areas of Chinese engagement in Georgia has been the educational and cultural sector. Since 2010, four Confucius Institutes/Classrooms have been open and operate in the country. A fifth Confucius Institute is expected to be opened at the Georgia Institute of Technology in partnership with Sichuan University.

Interest in learning Chinese among Georgian youth has grown in recent years, a trend supported by the ruling GD party. In 2025, Georgia's Ministry of Education [announced](#) plans to introduce standards for Chinese as a second foreign language in Georgian schools. At present, Chinese is taught in 15 schools in Tbilisi. Under the framework of an agreement signed in 2023, Chinese teachers participate in teaching the language in both Georgian schools and universities.

China's growing interest in Georgia's education sector became particularly apparent in 2023, when the Chinese-owned company Georgia International Education Investment acquired the private Guram Tavartkiladze University. The institution, now operating as Georgian International University, has numerous partnerships with Chinese educational and cultural institutions. In General, Georgian universities increasingly cooperate with Chinese academic institutions. In 2024–2025 alone:

- Chinese and Georgian universities formalized nine cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding.
- Twelve Chinese educational institutions visited Georgian universities to establish and expand bilateral cooperation (For further details, see Civic IDEA's research: [“Sino-Georgian Strategic Partnership: Cooperation in Education”](#)).

Conclusion – Strategic Partnership in Words or in Deeds?

The establishment of a Strategic Partnership with China came amid Georgian Dream's brazenly hostile rhetoric toward the EU and the US. Shortly after, within a year, it was followed by a suspension of EU accession negotiations.

Georgian Dream's domestic and foreign anti-democratic policies resulted in its growing isolation from Western diplomatic circles. Consequently, Ivanishvili's government intensified diplomatic exchanges with China to assert respect and support for the party by showcasing its ties with a “big country” like China. Thus, the political elite aggregated its pro-Chinese rhetoric, describing the Communist regime as a friend, a “peaceful superpower,” and an exemplary international actor.

Despite the forecasts propagated by Georgian Dream, the Strategic Partnership with China has not materialized in action. Since 2023, Georgia has entered a disproportionate partnership, with China dominating the country through growing imports and an increased presence of Chinese companies in the Georgian infrastructure sector. The Partnership has not resulted in increased Chinese investment or the PRC's diplomatic support for Georgia in platforms such as the UN. Consequently, the partnership remains largely on paper, without significant economic or political benefits for Georgia.