

Research Article

Anaklia Project: Strategic Importance and Challenges

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Abstract:

The Anaklia deep-sea port project is one of the important projects planned to be implemented in Georgia. Thus, this project, which is as important as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project, aims to increase Georgia's cargo transportation potential and connect the East with the West. Since Black Sea ports such as Poti and Batumi cannot compete with Turkish and Russian ports, the future potential of Anaklia has become the center of attention. The purpose of the study is to highlight the difficulties this project has faced since its inception, the political events surrounding the project, and also to show its importance for the region in political and economic terms. Studies show that the change of government in Georgia, and economic and political problems have led to certain interruptions in the implementation of the project. The study, conducted using the descriptive research method, analyzed information from Georgian press agencies on the subject.

Keywords: Anaklia, South Caucasus, Georgia, deep-sea port, project.

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Introduction

Infrastructure initiatives in the Caucasus region, particularly those connected to strategic transport and logistics, have received a lot of interest from both the region and around the world. Among these, the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project stands out as a critical initiative aimed at boosting Georgia's geopolitical position and transforming the country into a major transit route between Europe and Asia. However, major political difficulties, decision-making ambiguities, and external pressures have hampered the project's progress. The fundamental goal of this research is to assess the Anaklia project's strategic importance and to comprehensively investigate the political, economic, and diplomatic challenges it has faced.

The research is guided by the following central question:

What are the primary political, economic, and international factors contributing to delays and uncertainty in the Anaklia Port project? Based on this question, the study presents several significant hypotheses:

1. Georgia's political polarization and government-opposition dynamics have had a negative impact on the project.
2. China and the West's geopolitical rivalry have played a significant role in shaping the project's trajectory.
3. Despite public support, shifting governmental priorities have led to repeated postponements in implementation.

This study employs a qualitative methodology centered on content analysis. It draws on reports and analytical articles from leading Georgian media, official statements by governmental and non-governmental actors, and international commentary on the initiative. This methodology allows for a thorough understanding of both domestic political processes and the larger international context in which the Anaklia initiative has developed.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section provides a chronological overview of the Anaklia project and its significant advancements. The second segment looks at the previous Lazika effort and the reasons for its failure in comparison to Anaklia. Subsequent sections explore the political dynamics of the project, incorporating both official narratives and public sentiment. The next sections address the project's strategic importance, international controversies, and the ramifications of a Chinese company's recent engagement in the project. The study concludes by summarizing key findings and offering a forward-looking assessment of the project's trajectory.

This study aims to show the Anaklia initiative not only as a technological or commercial endeavor but also as a complex field of political and geopolitical contestation. To fully understand the Anaklia project's brief history and the political challenges it has encountered to fully understand its geopolitical significance, as its implementation is fraught with both political and economic difficulties.

About the project's history

V. E. Kvarchia suggests that the name was derived from the term Akra, which means "lighthouse" in Abkhazian. Subsequently, due to the regular addition of the suffix "-n" brought about by the Megrelian language, it evolved into Anakra, Anakria, and Anaklia.¹ Because of their similar sounds, the toponyms Anakria and Anaklia are occasionally conflated with Anakopia in historical literature. The word "akra" is thought to have entered the Abkhaz language from the Greek word "ἄκρον" (sharp, corner, peak).² Another possible connection is with the Greek city of Heraclea.

Lieutenant General **Johann Blaramberg** stated in his work on the historical and topographic description of the Caucasus that Anaklia, also known as "Anakra" in Turkish, was surrounded by a stone fortress wall and that it had 500 houses and 2,000 inhabitants. It also functioned as an open checkpoint. According to his memoirs, the city was seized from the Mingrelian prince Grigory Dadiani by the Abkhazian monarch Kelash Bey (ქეილაშ აჰმედ-ბეგი შარვაშიძე [keilash ahmed-beqi sharvashidze]) in 1799 and later returned to his heir Levan Dadiani. The source also mentioned that Anaklia was taken by the Russians in 1770.³

The first attempt to construct a port in Anaklia occurred in the 1960s. Despite the building of the first pier for the realization of this project at the time, the concept did not progress beyond this stage. The topic gained broader attention in the 1970s. **V. Zenkovich, Teofan Davitaia, and Archil Kiknadze** founded a laboratory for "Research of Sea Coasts" at the Vakhushti Bagrationi Institute of Geography in 1974. Their efforts led to the creation of field study stations on Georgia's Black Sea coast. Extensive research provided valuable data on the complex processes occurring in the

¹ Кварчия, Валерий Еремеевич. *Собрание Трудов В Семи Томах* [Collected Works in Seven Volumes]. Том IV Историческая Топонимика. Сухум: Academia, 2019, стр. 93-94.

² ლექსიკონი ქართული [Georgian dictionary] National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, s.v. "აკრა" [Akra], last updated March 28, 2025, <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=term&d=8&t=708>

³ Бларамберг, Иоганн. *Историческое, топографическое, статистическое, этнографическое и военное описание Кавказа* [Historical, topographic, statistical, ethnographic and military description of the Caucasus]. Москва: Изд. Надыршин, 2010, стр.73.

coastal zone via depth plans and lithological studies. As a result, in 1981, the first ecological institute, "Sakzgvnapirdatsva" (Protection of the Sea Coasts of Georgia) საქზღვანაპირდაცვა („საქნაპირდაცვა“) was established in Georgia.⁴ On this basis, it was possible not only to study the Black Sea coast of Georgia but also to design restoration works. As a result of the activities of this organization from 1981 to 1990, more than 100 km of coastlines that had been subjected to severe erosion were restored naturally.

Vsevolod Zenkovich's 1976 essay "Expected Sea-Shore Changes in North Kolkhida" in the Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences highlighted the anticipated changes in the Georgian coastline as a result of the Enguri HPP development. The report examined the importance of developing a port and suggested solutions to the challenge of coastal defense. The paper provided scientific evidence to support the port's construction. The author stated that studies were undertaken for the port, which had long been intended to be built on the coasts of Kolkhida, and that the mouth of the Khobi River was appropriate for this development. The researcher, who analyzed the elements influencing the approach of project ships to the coast, believed it was critical to propose the establishment of a port water area in the lower portion of the Enguri Channel through dredging without delay.⁵

During this period, academician **Teofan Davitaia**, the head of the Institute of Geography, established a laboratory for coastal research, incorporating geographers **Archil Kiknadze** and **V. Zenkovich**. A. Kiknadze established field research stations along Georgia's Black Sea coast (Batumi, Poti, Ochamchire, and Bichvinta). During the research, **Archil Kiknadze** and architect **Giorgi Metreveli** conceptualized the initial plan for the Anaklia deep-water port in the 1980s. From 1993 to 1995, the

⁴ “საქართველოს სსრ ფარგლებში შავი ზღვის სანაპირო ზონის შესწავლისა და დაცვის რესპუბლიკური სამსახურის სრულყოფის ღონისძიებათა შესახებ” [On measures to improve the Republican Service for the Study and Protection of the Black Sea Coastal Zone within the Georgian SSR], საქართველოს სსრ მთავრობის დადგენილებათა კრებული, N5, სექტემბერი-ოქტომბერი 1980 წ.: ს. 5-6. (Accessed: 01.03.2025) https://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/96633/1/Kanonta_Da_Dadgenilebata_Krebuli_1980_N5.pdf

⁵ Всеволод Зенкович, “Ожидаемые изменения морского берега на севере Колхиды” [Expected Sea-Shore Changes in North Kolkhida], *Сообщения Академии Наук Грузинской ССР*, 83, N3, 1976: стр. 637-640. / ვ. ზენკოვიჩი, ზღვის სანაპიროს მოსალოდნელი ცვლილებები კოლხეთის ჩრდილოეთში. საქართველოს სსრ მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის მოამბე, 83, N3, 1976, სტრ. 637-640.

Georgian government sought to establish an oil port at Anaklia. The idea of constructing a port in Anaklia remained relevant in the following years.

In the early 2000s, engineer **Spartak Eragia** proposed an alternative concept for Anaklia's deep-water port. According to the plan, the port was projected to handle a capacity ranging from 100 to 120 million tons.

The purpose and non-termination of the "Lazika" project

Successive Georgian governments have endeavored to implement this project. In December 2011, former President **Mikheil Saakashvili** announced plans for the implementation of the "Lazika" project between Kulevi and Anaklia. According to the initiative, within a decade, Lazika was envisioned as the primary economic hub of Western Georgia, projected to house a population of 500,000. This presidential proposal ignited public debate. The opposition contended that the project's implementation was unfeasible.⁶ The Georgian press at the time also viewed the construction of a new business initiative in a location near Abkhazia as a political problem. Furthermore, research undertaken in the press at the time reveals that to lay the groundwork for the project, a specific business initiative needed to be proposed, which had to be thoroughly justified by outlining the reasons, both technically and economically. A proposal was made to change the constitution to establish a favorable legal environment for the planned enterprise.⁷ In 2012, the Georgian Parliament passed a constitutional amendment concerning the status of Lazika, with 106 votes in favor and one against. According to the draft, the status and powers of the city of Lazika were established through an organic ordinance that added a fifth paragraph to the third article of the Constitution.⁸

The "Lazika" project was closed in 2012 following the rise to power of the 'Georgian Dream' party.⁹ However, the possibility of reviving this concept emerged in 2015. In August 2014, Georgia's Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development expressed interest in the Anaklia deep-water port project. In 2014, Prime Minister **Irakli Garibashvili** stated that the

⁶ “პროექტი "ლაზიკა"” [Lazika Project], *Kvirispalitra*, December 12, 2011, <https://kvirispalitra.ge/article/10480-proeqti-qlazikaq/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025)

⁷ “ლაზიკას 'განსაკუთრებული სტატუსი'” [“Lazika's 'special status'”], *Civil.ge*, May 9, 2012, <https://old.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=25438> (Accessed: 01.02.2025)

⁸ “პარლამენტმა ლაზიკასთან დაკავშირებული საკონსტიტუციო ცვლილებების პროექტი დაამტკიცა” [Parliament approved the draft constitutional amendments related to Lazika], *Tabula*, June 12, 2012, <https://tabula.ge/en/news/547681-parlamentma-lazikastan-dakavshirebuli> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

⁹ “რატომ შენდება ლაზიკა?” [Why is Lazika being built?], *Radio Tavisupleba*, April 14, 2012, https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/lazika_city/24547789.html (Accessed: 01.03.2025)

Anaklia port should encompass logistical and industrial zones, along with an international airport and a liquefied natural gas terminal. The government initiated discussions with Japanese engineering consulting firms with international experience on the project's preliminary phase. At the time, the American investment holding company Conti Group demonstrated interest in the project. **Kurt Conti**, the company's president, met with the Georgian Prime Minister during his visit to the United States, after which the company devised a three-phase plan for the Anaklia port, designed to handle 100 million tons of cargo annually.¹⁰

The government established a commission, chaired by Prime Minister **Irakli Garibashvili**, to evaluate port applications. As per the concept, the Anaklia port was planned to be constructed in seven phases. In February 2016, the Georgian-American Anaklia Development Consortium secured the Georgian government's tender for the construction of a deep-water port in Anaklia. 12 international and local enterprises demonstrated interest in the project, but only two progressed to the final stage following a year-long tender process. One of them was the “Anaklia Port and Industrial Eco Park”, established by Georgian entrepreneur **Temur Karchava**¹¹, while the other was the “JSC Anaklia Development Consortium”¹², founded by **Mamuka Khazaradze**, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of TBC Bank.¹³ According to preliminary estimates, based on the government's decision, the port's maximum cargo turnover was projected to reach 100 million tons. Its ecological soundness and adherence to modern world norms were justified.

The initial three phases of the project are expected to provide cargo handling capacity for 12 years following the commencement of construction (1 million tons in the third year, 7–20 million tons in the seventh year, and at least 40 million tons in the twelfth). In addition to the

¹⁰ “ღარიბაშვილი: ჩვენ არ ვამბობთ უარს წინა ხელისუფლების მიერ წამოწყებულ პროექტებზე” [Gharibashvili: We are not rejecting projects initiated by the previous government], *Tabula*, April 2, 2014, <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/562073-gharibashvili-chven-ar-vambobt-uars-cina>; “ღარიბაშვილი: ანაკლიაში უნდა გაკეთდეს საერთაშორისო აეროპორტი და გაზის ტერმინალი” [Garibashvili: An international airport and gas terminal should be built in Anaklia], *Netgazeti*, April 2, 2014, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/30638/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025)

¹¹ **This consortium also included:** Power China – Hubei Hongyuan Power Engineering CO., LTD (Cin); British Eco Power LTD (Great Britain) and Spartak Eragia (individual).

¹² **This consortium also included:** Conti International LLC – (Conti Group) (ABS) and TBS Holding companies.

¹³ “ვინ მიიღებს ანაკლიის პორტის მშენებლობის ნებართვას?” [Who will receive the construction permit for the Anaklia port?], *Transparency International of Georgia*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.transparency.ge/ge/content/stub-581> (Accessed: 01.03.2025)

port, the Anaklia development plan includes the establishment of a logistical and industrial zone, a new urban settlement designed to accommodate 20,000 residents, an international airport, and a liquefied natural gas terminal.¹⁴ According to the port's master plan, the project was initially scheduled to commence in the fall of 2017, with the completion of its first phase anticipated by 2020. The JSC Anaklia Development Consortium designed the project with a 50-year operational framework. According to the proposal, the first step required building infrastructure for receiving containers, as well as arranging the port and shoreline. It is also intended to construct a roadway, a railway line, and a residential complex for port personnel. The port's overall investment cost is \$2.5 billion. Furthermore, there were plans to establish a 600-hectare free industrial zone within the port's territory.¹⁵ After completing all three initial stages, the port's cargo turnover was projected to exceed 20 million tons per year. Furthermore, due to the project's strategic importance, the Anaklia Development Consortium has initiated negotiations with "SSA Marine", the largest US shipbuilding terminal operator.¹⁶ The corporation owns terminals in nine countries worldwide and handles 27.2 million containers (TEU) per year, according to government figures.

After winning the official contract for the port's construction, the consortium and the Georgian government signed an investment agreement on October 3, 2016, while **Giorgi Kvirikashvili** was prime minister. This agreement granted the consortium the exclusive rights to construct and operate the port. The first phase of port construction began in December 2017.

At the time, the project was regarded as an ambitious, innovative, and promising endeavor. The envisioned port was intended to be integrated into a broader industrial metropolis, designated as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), and positioned as a key free trade hub similar to Singapore. The initiative assembled a coalition of highly qualified technocrats and experienced business leaders, each with a proven track record in both

¹⁴ "“ანაკლია-პორტის” პროექტები საჯარო ქსნილვის საგნად უნდა იქცეს!” [Anaklia Port projects should become a subject of public scrutiny], *“საერთო გაზეთი”*, September 9, 2015, გვ. 17.

¹⁵ “ანაკლიის პორტის საინვესტიციო ღირებულება 2,5 მილიარდი დოლარია” [“The investment value of Anaklia Port is 2.5 billion dollars”], *ახალი თაობა გაზეთი*, February 10, 2016, N 33 (6959), გვ. 6.

¹⁶ “ანაკლიის ღრმაწყლოვანი პორტის ოპერირებით მსოფლიო კლასის პორტოპერატორი SSA MARINE დაინტერესდა” [World-class port operator SSA MARINE has expressed interest in operating the Anaklia Deepwater Port], *საერთოელის რესპუბლიკა*, January 11, 2017, N6 (8143), გვ. 2.

Georgia's public and private sectors. Furthermore, the project attracted investment interest from stakeholders in the United States, Europe, and China, alongside substantial diplomatic and financial backing from Georgia's strategic partners in Washington and Brussels.

Political processes involving Anaklia.

The cancellation of the Anaklia project, much like that of Lazika, was largely attributed to the excessive politicization surrounding its development. Nevertheless, public discourse remained centered on the project's financial feasibility. Concerns regarding the viability of the project began to emerge in 2018.

Bidzina Ivanishvili allegedly returned to politics as chairman of the dominant Georgian Dream party¹⁷, publicly expressing his opposition to **Giorgi Kvirikashvili's** policies. Following a contentious Georgian Dream party committee meeting in June 2018, **Giorgi Kvirikashvili** tendered his resignation as prime minister. According to media reports, the Anaklia project was a focal point of discussions, despite the closed-door nature of the meeting. **Giorgi Kobulia**, the then-Minister of Economy, stated that the Anaklia project had been extensively debated, emphasizing its role within Georgia's broader logistics strategy. The minister also stated that the Anaklia project required a comprehensive investigation.¹⁸

The opposition expressed dissatisfaction with the project's cancellation. Notably, during a 2018 meeting with Anaklia residents, **Sandra Roelofs**, wife of former President **Mikheil Saakashvili**, described Anaklia and Lazika as a "lost opportunity."¹⁹

In 2019, **Badri Japaridze** and **Mamuka Khazaradze** were legally charged with legalizing illegal revenue totaling \$16 million 754 (US dollars). On the eve of the charge hearing, it was reported that the American corporation Conti Group had withdrawn from the project, and the consortium and its Dutch partner **Bob Meyer** had filed arbitration

¹⁷ "ივანიშვილი პოლიტიკაში ოფიციალურად დაბრუნების სამ მიზეზს ასახელებს" [Ivanishvili names three reasons for his official return to politics], *Tabula*, May 11, 2018, <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/608372-ivanishvili-politikashi-opitsialurad-dabrunebis>

¹⁸ "ქობულასთვის ანაკლიის პორტი პრიორიტეტული, თუმცა განსახილველი საკითხია" [For Kobulia, Anaklia Port is a priority, but still a matter for discussion], *Netgazeti*, July 13, 2018, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/292368/>

¹⁹ "ვერ გამოიყენეს ანაკლია და ლაზიკა, ეს არის გაშვებული შანსი – სანდრა რულოვსი" [They failed to use Anaklia and Lazika, this is a missed opportunity – Sandra Roelofs], *Reginfo*, November 26, 2018, <https://reginfo.ge/politics/item/10973-ver-gamoiybenes-anaklia-da-lazika-es-aris-gashvebuli-shansi-%E2%80%93-sandra-rulovsi>

proceedings against Georgia. In June 2019, amid an open confrontation between Anaklia consortium representatives and authorities, then-US Secretary of State **Mike Pompeo** made a statement supporting the Anaklia port and warning Georgian authorities about Russia and China's "predatory influence" during a meeting with the Georgian Prime Minister.²⁰

On March 4, 2019, **Mamuka Khazaradze** stated at a meeting of the Georgian Parliament's Finance and Budget Committee that he had received a threatening letter from then-acting Minister of Internal Affairs, **Giorgi Gakharia**, on the eve of the second round of the 2018 presidential election. According to **M. Khazaradze**, the letter demanded that he comply with specific conditions. According to the letter, if he did not meet these standards, his reputation in the local and international arenas would be shattered. "I was amazed they sent such a letter. I still have the letter. We did not meet the conditions there. The Minister of Internal Affairs penned this letter."²¹

He further stated that, following the receipt of this letter, a criminal case was initiated against him and his colleague, **Badri Japaridze**, in January 2019. In January 2019, the Prosecutor General's Office reported that it had seized TBS Bank documents as part of the investigation. According to the agency, in April and May 2008, Samgori Trade LLC and Samgori M LLC obtained an expedited loan of up to \$17 million from TBC Bank without providing adequate collateral. According to the department, the matter was probed under the "Legalization of Illegal Income" section. **M. Khazaradze** and **B. Japaridze** believed that the authorities' intimidation, followed by the investigation, was intended to hinder the development of the Anaklia port. In turn, this goal was intended to harm the reputation of **Khazaradze-Japaridze**.

M. Khazaradze informed the press that the original letter had been sent to London for forensic examination.²² In response to allegations that

²⁰ "იმედია, საქართველო დაასრულებს პორტის მშენებლობის პროექტს და ქვეყნის პოზიცია დაცული გახდება რუსეთის ან ჩინეთის ეკონომიკური გავლენებისგან - პომპეო" [Hopefully, Georgia will complete the port construction project and the country's position will be protected from economic influence from Russia or China - Pompeo], *Prime News Georgia*, June 12, 2019, <https://primenewsgeorgia.ge/com/news/view/32280>

²¹ "გახარიამ ეთერში ისაუბრა ხაზარაძის გამოკითხვის დეტალებზე, რომელიც არ უნდა სცოდნოდა" [Gakharia spoke on tv about details of Khazaradze's interrogation that he should not have known], *Netgazeti*, June 8, 2021, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/547149/>; "ხაზარაძის თქმით, გახარიას წერილი სასამართლოში მიიტანა" [Khazaradze says he brought Gakharia's letter to court], *Netgazeti*, March 5, 2019, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/345872/>

²² "მამუკა ხაზარაძე აცხადებს, რომ გამოკითხვაზე წერილის ასლი მიიტანა, ორიგინალი კი, ლონდონში ექსპერტიზაზე გაგზავნილი" [Mamuka Khazaradze states that he brought a

he had failed to meet his obligations during the implementation of the Anaklia port project and had abandoned it, **Mamuka Khazaradze** asserted that the government was responsible for bankrupting the project²³: *"In general, I would like to emphasize that it is not good for an important strategic project for the country to become the subject of political gossip and speculation. We have always stated, and I repeat, that Anaklia does not belong to any individual. Anaklia, as a project, contributes to the country's development, and as a result, everyone should approach major projects for the country with greater responsibility."*²⁴

Mamuka Khazaradze, in response to accusations that he failed to fulfill his obligations during the implementation of the Anaklia port project and abandoned it, stated that it was this government that bankrupted the project: "I want to say to everyone with full responsibility that the "Anaklia" project was ruined by this government led by **Bidzina Ivanishvili**, specifically with the participation of **Gakharia**. I am one of the investors who, along with many Americans and other foreigners, took a chance and invested \$80 million in this country despite having nothing to do with Anaklia. I repeat, I have not worked for this company in two years. I have been a victim, I am being accused, my job has been suspended, and my foreign partners have been ejected from the country."²⁵

At the center of these political processes, the project failed once more, and the government officially cancelled its implementation in January 2020.

copy of the letter to the interrogation, while the original has been sent to London for examination.], *Pirveli Arkhi*, March 5, 2019, <https://1tv.ge/news/mamuka-khazaradze-ackhadebs-rom-gamokitkhvaze-werilis-asli-miitana-originali-ki-londonshi-eqspertizazea-gagzavnili/>

²³ “გახარია: მე მამუკა ხაზარადისტვის წერილი არც მიმიწერია და არ გამიგზავნია, წერტილო” [Gakharia: I have neither written nor sent a letter to Mamuka Khazaradze, period], *Tabula*, March 22, 2019, <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/621716-gakharia-me-mamuka-khazaradzistvis-cerili-arts>

²⁴ “ანაკლიის ღრმაწყლოვან პორტს სჭირდება პასუხისმგებლიანი, სერიოზული, კერძო ინვესტორები, რომლებიც სამუშაოდ არ გვყავს” [The Anaklia deep-water port needs responsible, serious, private investors, which unfortunately we do not have], *Presა*, September 16, 2019, <https://presa.ge/ka/65907/page/%E2%80%9Eanakiilis-ghrmatckhlovan-ports-tschirdeba-pasukhismgebliani-seriozuli-kerdzo-investorebi-romlebic-samtckharod-ar-gvkhavs%E2%80%9C>

²⁵ "ორი წელი სახელმწიფოს ხელში ანაკლია, მამუკა ხაზარაძე რა შუაშია? - მამუკა ხაზარაძე" [Anaklia has been in the hands of the state for two years, what's Mamuka Khazaradze got to do with it?" - Mamuka Khazaradze], *Rustavi 2*, June 25, 2021, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/202881>

Public Protests

In February 2020, members of the "Change" movement (Georgian: შეცვალეს [shetsvales]) organized a rally in front of Anaklia Port. The demonstration attendees symbolically launched paper boats into the water. The participants feared that suspending the project would lead to the loss of over 3,000 jobs, leaving many individuals unemployed.²⁶

In 2021, the "Lelo" party participated in a protest in Samegrelo under the slogan "Do not kill Anaklia". According to the event participants, the country possesses a resource like Anaklia that can assure economic freedom. On May 26, demonstrators gathered symbolically, aiming to revive this crucial initiative for Georgia.²⁷

The Restoration Process

On January 9, 2020, after the Georgian government terminated its contract with the Anaklia Development Consortium due to failure to meet obligations, it was agreed to restart the project, with the state participating in a significant way. It should be emphasized that the "Anaklia Development Consortium" originally held a 99.99% stake in the project, while the state retained a symbolic 0.01% ownership.

The decision was made to involve the state in the construction of the Anaklia deep-water port. Thus, the state will hold a 51% controlling stake in the port, while the remaining shares will be allocated to international partners through a tender process. Minister of Economy **L. Davitashvili** believes that the port project will strengthen Georgia's position in the area and enhance its international visibility. The minister also stated that take an active role as an investor and that cooperation between private enterprises, investors, and operators with the government aims to foster a thriving private sector.²⁸

²⁶ "მომრაობა „შეცვალეს“ აქცია შსს-თან" ["Changed" movement holds protest near the Ministry of Internal Affairs], *Pirveli Arkhi*, February 8, 2020, <https://1tv.ge/video/modzraoba-shecvales-aqcia-shss-tan-2/>

²⁷ "დაძარი ანაკლია" - "ლელოს" სამეგრელოს ორგანიზაციამ აქცია გამართა" [Dazari Anaklia - "Lelo" Samegrelo organization held a rally], *Odishi News*, May 26, 2021, <https://odishinews.ge/2021/05/26/dadzari-anaklia-lelos-samegrelos-organizatsiam-aqtsia-gamartha/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025)

²⁸ "ანაკლიაში ღრმაწყლოვანი პორტი აშენდება - როდის დაიწყება პროექტი და როდიდან მიიღებს ანაკლია პირველ ტვირთებს" [A deep-water port will be built in Anaklia - when will the project start and when will Anaklia receive the first cargoes], *Rustavi 2*, December 18, 2022, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/244856> (Accessed: 11.07.2024)

As Prime Minister, **I. Garibashvili** stated in 2022 that the development of ports remains a top priority for the administration. In this regard, the Prime Minister declared that the state should own the major lever at the Anaklia port.²⁹

Current discussions about the project

Before September, Georgian Economy Minister **Levan Davitashvili** presented the results of the second stage of the investor tender for the Anaklia project's realization to the Georgian Parliament. At the meeting on September 22, the Minister also faced questions from opposition deputies. The legislators expressed concerns mainly about the project's current status, which countries will participate in port building, and what guarantees the government will provide that Russia will not receive the 49% stake. **Roman Gotsiridze**, a member of the "Eurooptimists," asked the minister about the countries of origin of the two companies, whether they involved Chinese or, indirectly, Russian companies, and whether European or American companies participated in the competition. The minister revealed that European, Russian, and American corporations did not participate in the competition, while the Swedish-Luxembourg and Chinese-Singaporean consortia advanced to the second stage.³⁰ According to the information presented, the Israeli and Chinese companies did not make it to the next level of the competition.

At the conference, **Ana Tsitlidze**, a member of the United National Movement party, stated that "if it were not for the third president of Georgia, whom Russia had imprisoned, Anaklia probably would not have existed at all." According to the party member, the current government detained the former president on Russia's orders, and if this had not

²⁹ "პრემიერი - ჩვენი გადაწყვეტილებით, ანაკლიის პორტი აშენდება სახელმწიფოს თანამონაწილეობით, სადაც 51%-ის მფლობელი იქნება სახელმწიფო. დანარჩენზე ჩვენ გამოვაცხადებთ საერთაშორისო კონკურსს და შევარჩევთ პარტნიორებს" [Prime Minister - according to our decision, the Anaklia Port will be built with the participation of the state, where the state will own 51%. We will announce an international competition for the rest and select partners], *Kvira*, December 12, 2022, <https://kvira.ge/799668> (Accessed: 05.08.2024)

³⁰ "რომელი ქვეყნიდან არიან ინვესტორები, რომლებიც ანაკლიის პორტის მშენებლობის საკითხზე გამოცხადებული კონკურსის მეორე ეტაპზე გადავიდნენ - ეკონომიკის მინისტრი დეპუტატების კითხვებს პასუხობს" [From which country are the investors who have advanced to the second stage of the competition announced for the construction of the Anaklia port - the Minister of Economy answers questions from MPs], *Rustavi 2*, September 22, 2023, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/265132> (Accessed: 01.03.2025)

happened, Anaklia would not have been left without food and a job for 11 years.³¹

International significance of the project

EU Ambassador to Georgia **Carl Hartzell**: *"Anaklia Port is a very important infrastructure project. Although there is certain disagreement among the partners, its implementation is important. We hear positive attitude and readiness for implementation of the project from all sides, therefore, I think that the importance of Anaklia Port Project is obvious for everyone"*.³²

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania **Teodor Viorel Meleşcanu**: *"The deep-water port of Anaklia will undoubtedly be of interest to Romania. Anaklia is one of the major ports. I must say that we are highly interested in developing a direct link between the ports of Anaklia and Constanta. This is a bilateral project in which Romania will contribute to the growth of the Black Sea economy"*.³³

Lieutenant General **Ben Hodges**, the former commander of the US Army in Europe, stated that Russia has done everything possible to destroy the Anaklia port project, and the Georgian government has, unfortunately, bowed to Kremlin pressure. **B. Hodges** made the statement at the "Maritime Security and the Blue Economy" conference in Brussels, which was organized by the European Conservatives and Reformist Group. According to the former military man, the port that will be created in the eastern Black Sea will be deep and large enough to accommodate huge

³¹ "ანა წითლიძე - იმდენი განცხადება მოვისმინეთ ანაკლიის პორტის აშენებაზე, რომ არ გამიკვირდება კიდევ ბევრჯერ დააანონსოთ - გეტყვით რა იქნება: ორ ტრაქტორს დააყენებთ, ორდღიან სამუშაოებს ჩაატარებთ და საარჩევნოდ ეცდებით, რომ მოატყუოთ მოქალაქეები" [Ana Tsitlidze - We have heard so many statements about the construction of the Anaklia port that I would not be surprised if they announce it many more times - I will tell you what will happen: you will install two tractors, carry out two days of work and try to deceive the citizens during the elections], *Interpressnews*, September 22, 2023, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/770703-ana-citlize-imdeni-gancxadeba-movisminet-anakliis-portis-ashenebaze-rom-ar-gamikvirdeba-kidev-bevrjer-daaanonsot-getqvit-ra-ikneba-or-traktors-daaqenebt-ordgian-samushaobes-chaatarebt-da-saarchevnod-ecdebit-rom-moatquot-mokalakeebi/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

³² "ანაკლია ევროკავშირისთვის სტრატეგიული პროექტია და ვისურვებდით, რომ განხორციელდეს, - კარლ ჰარცელი" [Anaklia is a strategic project for the European Union and we would like it to be implemented, - Karl Hartzell], *Rustavi 2*, October 18, 2019, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/144571> (Accessed: 07.11.2024).

³³ "რუმინეთის საგარეო საქმეთა მინისტრი: „ანაკლიასა და კონსტანცას პორტებს შორის კავშირის დამყარებით დაინტერესებულეები ვართ" [Romanian Foreign Minister: "We are interested in establishing a connection between the ports of Anaklia and Constanta], *Accentnews*, June 19, 2019, <https://accentnews.ge/ka/article/2121-ruminetis-sagareo-sakmeta-ministri-anakliasa-da> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

ships, and the time it takes to convey a container from Shanghai to Rotterdam might be cut to two weeks. As a result, Georgia would become a major logistics hub between Eurasia and Europe.³⁴

Former US Ambassador to Georgia **Kelly Degan**, who visited the Anaklia port area following a conference organized by the Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC), stated that Georgia has lacked progress in the development of its transportation network due to economic and political challenges surrounding the port. The ambassador noted that Georgia could bring several concerns to the table with the Anaklia port within the context of new prospects that will appear in the region following the end of the Karabakh war.³⁵

The Chinese company won the Anaklia tender.

Georgian Prime Minister **Irakli Kobakhidze** revealed at a government meeting that a Chinese-Singaporean consortium had submitted the final proposal for the Anaklia port project and that a concession deal would be signed after the necessary procedures were completed.³⁶ The authorities will hold 51% of the controlling shares, with the consortium owning the other 49%. Levan Davitashvili underlined that the winning consortium is one of China's largest state-owned enterprises, as well as one of the world's top 500 large corporations.

Consider that Anaklia Sea Port" LLC announced a worldwide tender for the Anaklia Port project on March 15, 2024, in compliance with World Bank procurement regulations. According to the tender documents, invited bidders were asked to submit a proposal that included technical and financial components. The tender materials were sent to four significant

³⁴ “ბენ ჰოჯესი: ეკონომიკური ინტერესის არ არსებობის გამო, არავინ გამოთქვამს რუსეთის მიერ საქართველოს 20%-ის ოკუპაციაზე პრეტენზიას” [Ben Hodges: No one is claiming Russia's occupation of 20% of Georgia due to lack of economic interest], *Formula News*, February 6, 2020, https://formulanews.ge/?m=41&news_id=20555&lng=geo&cat_id=; “საქართველოს მთავრობა დანებდა კრემლის ზეწოლას – ჰოჯესი ანაკლიის პორტზე” [Georgian government has succumbed to Kremlin pressure” – Hodges about Anaklia port], *Netgazeti*, February 6, 2020, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/424936/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

³⁵ “ანაკლია მოვინახულე და გული მეტკინა, ეს ხელიდან გაშვებული შესაძლებლობაა – დეგნანი” [I visited Anaklia and my heart ached, this is a missed opportunity – Degan], *Netgazeti*, February 1, 2022, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/589342/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

³⁶ “პრემიერი - ანაკლიის პორტის საზღვაო ინფრასტრუქტურის სამშენებლო სამუშაოები ძალიან მალე დაიწყება” [Prime Minister - Construction works on the maritime infrastructure of Anaklia Port will begin very soon], *Interpressnews*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/801949-premieri-anakliis-portis-sazgvao-infrastrukturis-samsheneblo-samushaoebi-zalian-male-daicqeba/> (Accessed: 07.02.2025).

businesses with extensive experience in offshore design and construction (Boskalis, DEME, Jan De Nul, and Van Oord).

The development of Anaklia Port has been marred by mutual accusations, and its implementation has also been fraught with controversy. For example, while **Mamuka Khazaradze** initially agreed to work with a Chinese company on port building years ago, he now associates China's interests with Russia's. **M. Khazaradze** feels that the consortium's stake should have been distributed among the project implementers, with 1/3 Georgian, 1/3 European, and 1/3 Chinese investors. In this instance, the risks would be allocated fairly, allowing for the project's efficient implementation.³⁷ In 2021, the opposition accused **M. Khazaradze** of following Russian interests. **Gakharia's** party stated that he had attempted to introduce the Meridian firm, which is associated with **Vladimir Putin**, to Georgia as one of the investors.

The most pressing question among the public is why a Chinese investor was involved in this project. **Irakli Garibashvili**, chairman of the Georgian Dream party, stated that three years ago, he was negotiating with strategic partners regarding the Anaklia port project, hoping to attract American and Western corporations to build it. According to him, no Western corporation was interested in building this port. The party chairman went on to say that everyone who knows the importance of the Middle Corridor should be pleased that China is participating in the port's construction. **Irakli Garibashvili**, who also referenced **Mamuka Khazaradze** in his statement, emphasized that he failed the project, that the state was unable to get financing for the planned 5 to 6 years, and that he owed the state \$1.5 billion.³⁸ In response to the question "Does Georgia's relations with China distance it from Europe?" **Irakli Garibashvili** stated

³⁷“მამუკა ხაზარაძე – როცა ამერიკელების და ევროპელების ინვესტიციას, რეკეტის სახით ართმევ ინვესტორებს, მათ ხარჯზე შემოგყავს კომპანია, რომელიც სრულად სახელმწიფოა და ემეგობრება ჩვენს მტერს და ოკუპანტს, აქ კითხვების დასმა უადგილოა” [Mamuka Khazaradze - When you take away the investment of Americans and Europeans in the form of a racket, and at their expense you bring in a company that is completely state-owned and friendly with our enemy and occupier, it is inappropriate to ask questions here], *Interpressnews*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/802035-mamuka-kazaraze-roca-amerikelebis-da-evropelebis-investicias-reketis-saxit-artmev-investorebs-mat-xarize-shemogqavs-kompania-romelic-srulad-saxelmcpoa-da-emegobreba-chvens-mters-da-okupants-ak-kitxvebis-dasma-uadgiloa/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

³⁸ “ირაკლი ღარიბაშვილი ხაზარაძეზე: როგორ შეიძლება დღეს საუბრობდეს ანაკლიის პორტზე ადამიანი, რომელმაც ეს პროექტი ჩააგდო” [Irakli Gharibashvili on Khazaradze: How can a person who abandoned this project be talking about Anaklia Port today?], *Rustavi 2*, June 2, 2024, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/283837> (Accessed: 12.07.2024).

that both the United States and Europe have contacts with China and that it is appropriate to use every scenario to the country's benefit.³⁹

The Prime Minister, in turn, discussed the project's relevance as well as the accusations leveled by opponents. According to **Irakli Kobakhidze**, the Chinese company's success in the tender ensures that the Anaklia project will be implemented to the highest standards.⁴⁰ This was highlighted in the Prime Minister's yearly report. According to the document, high-level visits between the two nations occurred during the reporting period, resulting in the adoption of a document titled "On the Establishment of Strategic Partnership between China and Georgia" on July 31, 2023. During the reporting period, the Georgia-China Intergovernmental Economic Commission had its next meeting. The agreement reached following the meeting on April 10, 2024, is particularly notable. On May 28, 2024, the "On Mutual Exemption from Visa Requirements for Holders of Ordinary Passports between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the People's Republic of China" entered into force. According to the report, significant progress has been made between Georgia and China in improving the legal framework and deepening trade and economic relations. During his visit, Prime Minister of Georgia signed five different agreements in the areas of transport, trade, education, institutional cooperation, and intellectual property.⁴¹ According to the yearly report, bilateral commerce transaction with China totaled 1.6 billion US dollars, with 48,304 Chinese visitors visiting Georgia during the relevant period. This shows that there is a 555% rise over the prior year.⁴²

³⁹ "“ყველას უნდა უხაროდეს, რომ ჩინეთის ინტერესი დაფიქსირდა ამ სტრატეგიულ პორტში” - ღარიბაშვილი ანაკლიაზე” [“Everyone should be happy that China's interest has been noted in this strategic port” - Gharibashvili about Anaklia], *Business Media*, June 2, 2024, <https://bm.ge/news/yvelas-unda-ukharodes-rom-chinetis-interesi-dafiqsirda-am-strategiul-portshi-gharibashvili-anakliaze> (Accessed: 25.06.2024).

⁴⁰ “რატომ არ მოსწონს “ლელოს” ჩინური კომპანიის შემოსვლა და რას პასუხობს მას ხელისუფლება - ანაკლიის პორტი პოლიტიკური ურთიერთბრალდებების თემა” [Why does Lelo not like the entry of a Chinese company and what is the government's response to it?” - Anaklia Port is a topic of political recriminations], *Rustavi 2*, June 2, 2024, <https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/283846> (Accessed: 01.08.2024).

⁴¹ “სამთავრობო პროგრამის შესრულების მიმდინარეობის შესახებ მოხსენება. 2023 ივნისი-2024 მაისი” [Report on the progress of the implementation of the government program], *Civilge*, May 2024, <https://civil.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/363328.pdf> (Accessed: 01.02.2025).

⁴² “მოკლედ: რაზეა საუბარი პრემიერის 171 გვერდიან მოხსენებაში, რომლითაც ის პარლამენტში უნდა წარსდგეს” [In brief: what is the Prime Minister's 171-page report that he is to present to Parliament about?], *Ambebi*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.ambebi.ge/article/310916-mokled-razea-saubari-premieris-171-gverdian-moxse/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

Transparency International Georgia has issued a statement asserting that the Georgian government has chosen a Chinese corporation "known for its corruption scandals" as an investor in the Anaklia port, raising concerns about the country's foreign policy.⁴³ The port will be constructed by a consortium that includes China's state-owned China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC) and China Harbour Investment Pte Ltd. The latter is a subsidiary of CCCC, but it is incorporated in Singapore.

According to the group, CCCC has been on the Consolidated Sanctions List (Non-SDN) of the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) since June 2021 because it is a component of China's military-industrial complex.⁴⁴ Although companies on this list have unrestricted access to assets and financial activities, deals involving CCCC require US government clearance.⁴⁵

The organization's investigations have revealed that the CCCC has been implicated in corruption cases in different nations on multiple occasions. In 2020, the US Embassy in Georgia issued information about CCCC, stating that the Chinese company's efforts in developing countries are marked by subpar construction, labor rights violations, environmental harm, and debts.⁴⁶ On June 1, the US State Department released a similar statement, stating that it was critical to "not jeopardize the security and sovereignty of Georgia, as well as the security of the country's Euro-Atlantic partners."⁴⁷

President **Salome Zurbishvili** also had reservations about Chinese investors participating in the project. For her, "the involvement of so many

⁴³ "ანაკლიის პორტს საეჭვო რეპუტაციის ჩინური კომპანია ააშენებს" [Anaklia Port Will Be Built by a Chinese Company of Questionable Reputation], *Transparency International Georgia*, June 5, 2024, <https://transparency.ge/ge/post/anakliis-ports-saechvo-reputaciis-chinuri-kompania-aashenebs> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

⁴⁴ "Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list", *Office of Foreign Assets Control*, June 3, 2022, <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=32072> (Accessed: 01.03.2024).

⁴⁵ "Chinese Military Companies Sanctions", *Office of Foreign Assets Control*, June 3, 2021, <https://ofac.treasury.gov/faqs/topic/5671> (Accessed: 01.03.2024).

⁴⁶ "China's Construction Companies Sow Chaos Worldwide", *U.S. Embassy in Georgia*, September 10, 2020, <https://ge.usembassy.gov/chinas-construction-companies-sow-chaos-worldwide/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

⁴⁷ "თბილისს ანაკლიის პროექტთან დაკავშირებით ამჯერად აშშ-ის სახელმწიფო დეპარტამენტი აფრთხილებს" [The US State Department is warning Tbilisi about the Anaklia project this time], *Accentnews*, June 1, 2024, <https://accentnews.ge/ka/article/114581-tbiliss-anakliis-proekttan-dakavshirebit-amjerad-ash> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

Chinese in the implementation of the Anaklia project is a blow to our relations with our American and Western partners."⁴⁸

Salome Samadashvili, in an article published in Project Syndicate, stated that Western political leaders are in danger of losing geopolitical influence over Georgia, a strategically vital Black Sea country, as they become increasingly distracted by the current war in Ukraine and Gaza.⁴⁹

Conclusion

In conducting an extensive examination of the Anaklia project, it is essential to address a range of questions through a series of stages for greater clarity. To begin with, the analysis explores why this project is significant from multiple perspectives:

- Strategically located between the Caspian, Black, and Mediterranean Seas, the Anaklia port serves as a vital trade link.
- Its development and operations can stimulate the regional economy, create jobs, and attract foreign investment.
- Enhancing transportation infrastructure can improve freight efficiency, reduce costs, and boost the profitability of trade activities.
- Integrating with international trade networks can elevate Georgia's strategic relevance and strengthen regional commerce.

Several issues have arisen during the project's implementation:

- Attracting substantial investments for construction presents challenges in securing the necessary financial resources.

⁴⁸ “პრეზიდენტი - ანაკლიაში ჩინელების ამ დოზით შემოყვანა დანის ჩარტყმაა პარტნიორებთან” [President - Bringing this number of Chinese people to Anaklia is a stab in the back with our partners], *Expressnews*, June 3, 2024, <https://expressnews.ge/index.php?id=183117&lang=object%20Object> (Accessed: 25.07.2024).

⁴⁹ “სალომე სამადაშვილი - როდესაც დასავლელი ლიდერები დაკავებული არიან უკრაინასა და ჰაზაში მიმდინარე ომებით, ისინი რისკავენ გეოპოლიტიკური გავლენის დაკარგვას სტრატეგიულად მნიშვნელოვან საქართველოში” [Salome Samadashvili - When Western leaders are busy with the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, they risk losing geopolitical influence in strategically important Georgia], *Pirveli Arkhi*, June 4, 2024. <https://1tv.ge/news/salome-samadashvili-dasavleli-liderebi-dakavebuli-arian-ukrainasa-da-ghazashi-mimdinare-omebit-isini-riskaven-geopolitikuri-gavlenis-dakargvas-strategiulad-mnishvnelovan-saqartveloshi/> (Accessed: 01.03.2025).

- Internal political dynamics in Georgia, including government transitions and stability, pose obstacles to progress.
- The region's physical characteristics, along with complex technical and logistical challenges in execution and operations, hinder development.
- A decline in foreign investment amidst global economic uncertainties has slowed the project's advancement.

The Anaklia project stands as a crucial infrastructure initiative with the potential to seamlessly connect the East and West. Its execution in Georgia has historically progressed in phases, revealing conflicts of interest that have delayed advancement. Critical decision-making must consider key factors amid these disputes.

General monitoring indicates that following the Georgian Dream party's rise to power, specific Chinese investment in the project appeared anticipated, although the involvement of the United States was somewhat unexpected. Given the economic tensions between China and the U.S. at the time, maintaining a consistent approach to the project is vital for Georgia's independence and future revenue.

A number of contentious issues continued to emerge in relation to Mamuka Khazaradze, a significant figure potentially influencing Georgian politics, alongside the U.S.'s withdrawal from involvement in the project. U.S. representatives have expressly called for the exclusion of Russia and China from this initiative. Simultaneously, while Chinese businesses publicly express economic interests, Russia's involvement remains less overt.

Referring to the current phase of the project as a "reconstruction period," the opposition's critiques reflect concerns regarding Russian and Chinese influences.

The Chinese consortium's assumption of the Anaklia project has raised alarms among opposition forces, particularly in the West. With Chinese funding, the project's completion is perceived to advance China's goals in the Black Sea, raising caution in Western quarters. Over recent years, active strategic cooperation agreements and increased diplomatic visits have bolstered project funding. A major concern for the Georgian opposition is the potential abandonment by the West, which could lead to corruption risks in managing a project tied to a company with a scandalous history.

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