



**Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development**

**The Crisis of Democratization in Georgia?**  
**The visions, paths and resources of democratic consolidation**

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**Policy Paper**

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## Introduction: Why this paper was written

A large majority of Georgians believe that Georgia should and will be a democratic country and that Georgia's only viable future is as a democracy. However, there is also a near consensus that the country is not quite there yet: there exists a significant democracy deficit. Overcoming it is a priority. This general assessment is shared by the Georgian government, its political opponents, all major players in civil society, Georgia's Western allies, experts and commentators.

There are disagreements, and quite sharp ones at that, about exactly how acute the problem is and what its specific manifestations and core reasons are. The disagreement is not only between the Georgian government and the opposition: there is broad variance of opinion among politicians, experts and civic activists both inside Georgia and abroad. Keeping that in mind, one can say that most competent and independent analysts define Georgia as a "hybrid regime" with both democratic and autocratic features. Freedom House, an American organization that is the most authoritative international evaluator of the state of democracy worldwide, has for many years put Georgia in the "partly free" category, which may be considered roughly equivalent to the concept of a "hybrid regime".<sup>1</sup>

It is not the objective of this paper to give yet another evaluation of the state of democracy in Georgia – although it takes into account and builds upon existing studies. It also does not aim to give a political forecast. There is no guarantee that Georgian democracy will strengthen in the future. The political regime may stay "hybrid" for a long time, it may consolidate as an autocracy or, due to external intervention or internal turmoil, and it may collapse altogether. The probability of each of these scenarios may differ but none of them can be ruled out completely. Everything depends on Georgian society, its political elites, as well as on the international environment.

This paper is not neutral in a normative sense: it assumes that democratic consolidation is the most desirable scenario of Georgia's political evolution. Respectively, it aims to answer the question: What should be done in order to achieve qualitative progress in Georgia's democratic institutions? How can Georgia overcome the precarious condition of being a "hybrid regime" and become a stable, consolidated democracy?

There is no guarantee that Georgian democracy will strengthen in the future. The political regime may stay "hybrid" for a long time, it may consolidate as an autocracy or, due to external intervention or internal turmoil, and it may collapse altogether. The probability of each of these scenarios may differ but none of them can be ruled out completely. Everything depends on Georgian society, its political elites, as well as on the international environment.

<sup>1</sup> However, the ratings of Freedom House also demonstrate how complex and fickle assessments of the level of democracy in a given country may be. If we look at Georgia's scores in the Freedom House project "Freedom in the World", in recent years they oscillate between 3 and 4 points. According to Freedom House methodology, 3 stands for "free" and 4 – for "partly free": This implies that the Georgian "hybrid" regime is still closer to democracy than autocracy. At the same time, in another Freedom House project, *Nations in Transit*, which is focused on ex-Communist countries using mainly the same methodology, Georgia's grades fluctuate between 4 and 5, which puts Georgia closer to the pole of autocracy (Freedom House deems "unfree" those countries that score above 5). – see both sets of scores on [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

There are lots of specific ideas and suggestions regarding the democratic development of Georgia. They usually come from international organizations, domestic opposition and the NGO community. In recent years, many of them were actually implemented. For example, the threshold of the popular vote required to secure party list seats in parliament was reduced from seven to five percent, the mayor of Tbilisi was elected through direct elections, Georgia's president can no longer exert influence on the appointment of judges and the ownership of media outlets has become fully transparent. In 2013, important changes to the Georgian constitution will come into force considerably abridging the powers of the president and bringing the political system much closer to a European-style parliamentary model. Judges will be appointed for life.

Usually, each of these changes is described (quite rightly) as a "step forward". But should we assume that sum total of these steps will lead to the consolidation of democratic institutions in Georgia so that neither Georgian citizens nor outside observers continue to define the political system as a "hybrid regime"? In the perception of political actors and observers, so far the implementation of the above reforms did not bring any breakthrough that would put Georgian political system into a qualitatively different category. Therefore, there exists justifiable skepticism that the implementation of further institutional reforms urged by the democracy promotion community will bring such a qualitative change in the near future.

What are the alternative visions of Georgia's democratic progress? Democratic breakthroughs are usually associated with a change in power that political scientists may define as a "democratic revolution" or "democratic transition". Does democratic consolidation in Georgia require such an event? To be sure, opposition politicians claim that the progress of democracy depends on their coming to power. One cannot rule out that indeed, a different political group in power may demonstrate greater commitment to democratic values and institutions than the current government.

However, one should keep in mind that over the last twenty years, political power has changed hands in Georgia three times, and each time under rather dramatic circumstances. In 1990, the nationalist Round Table coalition defeated the Communists in the country's first free elections; in January 1992, this government was forced from power for allegedly dictatorial practices and, in 2003, the 'Rose Revolution' swept away the deeply corrupt government of Eduard Shevardnadze after obviously fraudulent elections. Despite vast differences, there are strong structural resemblances between these events. In each case, the incumbent government was accused of autocratic practices and was crushed by a wave of genuine public enthusiasm for democratic change. The act of replacing the government was invariably defined as a "democratic revolution" and the new authorities promised a fresh start for democracy.

In particular, the Rose Revolution brought to power a group of young, reform-minded and often Western-educated politicians who invited to government many of the leading pro-democracy activists who personified democratic change. No wonder that this event created high expectations of a democratic breakthrough leading to a

relatively fast consolidation of democratic institutions. However, while most commentators commend achievements of the current government in many areas – especially, in the much higher capacity and will of the government to serve its citizens, and the elimination of mass corruption<sup>2</sup> – this proved insufficient for the consolidation of the democratic system.<sup>3</sup> It is quite understandable, therefore, that a large part of the Georgian public is rather skeptical about the feasibility and desirability of yet another “democratic revolution”.

This experience underlines the need for greater attention to be devoted to the issue of the structural prerequisites of democracy. These prerequisites are most famously discussed within the so called ‘modernization theory’. Should one conclude, in line with this theory, that at the current stage of Georgia’s development, conditions are not yet ripe for democratic consolidation, and that the focus should be on the more general task of modernization instead? One could define this approach as a strategy of postponement. Such a conclusion would also be deeply unsatisfactory for many Georgians and this paper does not in any way advocate such an approach. However, this paper will analyze the structural factors of democratization in Georgia.

There is one more logical possibility. Maybe, our starting assumption is wrong: Georgia should be categorized not as a “hybrid regime” but an established democracy that is in need of adjustment and fine-tuning in some of its institutions. This is the view that members of the Georgian government defend. Arguably, the current stage of debate with regards to institutional democratic reforms in Georgia, focused as it is on relatively narrow, technical issues, could be considered an indirect corroboration of such an assessment.

We believe that the current stage of democratic development in Georgia calls for a much more comprehensive approach. Most debates organized by civil society actors, usually in cooperation with international organizations, useful as they may be, miss this larger target. If implementation of their recommendations only marginally improve the state of Georgia’s democracy, they are not adequate for the consolidation of democracy in Georgia.

This paper is an attempt to take this broader and more comprehensive approach and deal with the issues and dilemmas outlined in the previous paragraphs. This will start with a brief outline of general methodological issues in democratic theory.

## **Working Definition of Democracy**

The concept of democracy (as it is understood in modern liberal democracies) is not self-evident: different people conceive of it in different ways. Therefore, we need to elucidate its meaning.

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<sup>2</sup> For an especially impressive praise for the Georgian reforms, see *Fighting Corruption in Public Services: Chronicling Georgia’s reforms*, (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> On this see Christian Caryl, “The Georgian Paradox”, *Foreign Policy*, January 31, 2012, available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/01/31/the\\_georgian\\_paradox](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/01/31/the_georgian_paradox), accessed February 23, 2012.

The etymology of the Greek word “democracy” suggests that it is the “power of the people”. This definition is correct, but too abstract. It only defines a general philosophical principle: that the legitimacy of power in a given polity is derived from the popular will. However, in order for this general principle to be implemented, at least two conditions should be met:

- Citizens of a given polity should at certain periods be able to replace their government through elections. This is known as a minimalist, “Schumpeterian” definition of democracy.<sup>4</sup> However, if it looks fairly narrow and technical, this is misleading. The act of electing government can only be real and meaningful if basic civic and political freedoms are secured, such as the freedoms of association and assembly, and the existence of free media. Having this in mind, “electoral democracy” is in itself a fairly wide and substantive concept.
- There should be mechanisms ensuring that government is *limited* and *accountable*. A government created through fully free and fair elections may still descend into tyranny unless there exist mechanisms that limit its power. In practice, this implies the division of powers between different branches of government (legislative, executive, and judiciary, as well as between national and sub-national levels of it) so that they somehow check and balance each other. Moreover, society at large, constituted through so called intermediary institutions such as public associations, political parties and independent media, should be vigorous enough to limit government power and hold it accountable to citizens in the periods between elections.

These two principles may be enough to define those specific features that make liberal democracy different from all other political regimes. But there also exist broader principles that are not specific to democracy but whose absence makes a fully-fledged democracy impossible:

- *Individual and minority rights*. “Power of the people” in practice implies dominance of the majority. Elections constitute a mechanism to determine what the majority wills. The danger of this is that the majority may end up “oppressing” the minority, imposing its will on specific individuals or groups. Therefore, it is necessary to balance the power of the government that represents majority with guaranteed rights for individuals and minority groups that no legitimately constituted democratic government can infringe upon.
- *Economic freedom* constitutes an extremely important component of individual freedom. Private economic activities should be autonomous from the state and not controlled by the latter – which obviously does not mean that corporations or individual citizens can avoid paying taxes that are necessary for the functioning of the state.
- *Rule of law* means that every action of the “people” as a whole as well as any state agency or individual citizen should be confined to the bounds of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, (New York: Harper Perennial 1942), pp. 269-273.



law. With regards to state governance, the same idea is essentially covered by the concept of *constitutionalism*: The constitution is superior to the will of any political player, including that of the “people”.

- *The combination of pluralism and consensus in society.* The spirit of democracy is practically embodied in the principle of pluralism: There should exist a multiplicity of political parties, sources of information, development agendas, societal interests, etc. Citizens may differ in their cultural identity or religious faith. The diversity of interests and values is expressed through an array of more or less organized groups, such as political parties, civic associations and the like – their entirety is sometimes referred to as “civil society”. Individuals and groups may enter into sharp debate and competition with each other but they should accept the very existence of pluralism and diversity in society.

On the other hand, all citizens of a state (or, at least, a sufficient majority) should share some common principles: consider themselves citizens of this particular state, conform to its Constitution and laws, pay taxes, have some kind of emotional attachment to it (the latter may be called “civic patriotism”) and solidarity towards their co-citizens. Without this there cannot exist a civic nation or “demos” that is the carrier of democratic sovereignty.

All of the above: the relative protection of the rights of individuals and minorities, economic freedom, rule of law, societal pluralism and civic patriotism, can also exist in non-democratic political regimes. But the reverse cannot be true: wherever the above conditions are not met, there can be no liberal democracy. Therefore, the above may be called *both* components of democracy and its necessary preconditions.

Apart from this, we can speak of more general factors conducive to the development of democracy: those are relatively high levels of economic welfare, urbanization, mass education, among others. But in this regard, it is difficult to define the specific benchmarks of development that would be necessary for democracy: exactly how developed must the economy be, how educated must the citizens be, etc. For instance, India was a very poor country with fairly low rates of literacy, but it has been democratic for decades. In this case, one can talk about factors conducive but not necessary for democracy.

All the above shows that democracy is not something simple and easy to measure. It is quite natural that with regards to any given country, one can legitimately argue whether or not it is democratic or how far democracy is advanced. But we can still agree that those features that we consider to be specific to democracies (periodic elections and the limitation of government through division of power) are central for it.

### ***Democracy or good governance?***

For the purposes of our paper, it is necessary to ascertain two more methodological issues. The first of them refers to the relation between democracy and good governance; the second – to the question of who is responsible for democracy and the process of democratization.

The need for clarity on those points was demonstrated over the course of our research as well. Several Georgian experts and politicians interviewed for this paper found it difficult to distinguish between progress in the development of democratic institutions from more general achievements of the government (in our case – that of the ruling National Movement party). When asked, both supporters and critics of the Georgian government mentioned fighting corruption, police reform, the introduction of national exams for entry into universities as among its successes in advancing democracy. This implies a confusion of the concepts of democracy and good governance. The latter concept refers to the ability of government to effectively provide for societal needs. But in that, autocratic regimes may be reasonably successful as well: they can crack down on corruption, have good educational systems, an effective police force and achieve progress in the rule of law.

In recent years, Georgia's successes in developing good government are conspicuous and rarely denied. But they do not automatically imply the advancement of democratic institutions and cannot serve as indicators of the latter.

This does not exclude a positive correlation between democracy and good governance. If we compare the record of democracies and autocracies, it is evident that democratic regimes tend to serve their citizens better than autocracies.

Which makes sense: if a democratic government fails to deliver, it will lose the next election, while for autocrats it is easier to ignore popular opinion and popular needs. But there are exceptions, when autocracies outperform some democracies. Examples are rare but they do exist: Augusto Pinochet's Chile and Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore readily come to mind.

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### ***Who is responsible for the process of democratization: society or government?***

Why is a given country democratic or not? Georgian political discussions are often based on an assumption that assessing the state of democracy in a given country is the same as grading its government: the government should be praised for the existence of democracy and scolded for its absence.

Such an approach may be defined as that of a "benevolent democratic king", or "hegemonic democratization". However, it contradicts the core idea of democracy: If democracy depends on the good will of the rulers, than it simply does not exist. It is the system of democratic *institutions* that does not allow any leader or group, who may be inclined to tyrannical power, to disrupt the democratic system. By its very nature, government aspires to broaden its scope; there is no guarantee that any public authority, even if constituted through popular elections, will respect the right of other people to compete with it for the levers of power. In a consolidated democracy, the accession of even the most power-

hungry individuals or groups to government poses little danger to the basic principles of liberal democracy.

This does not mean that citizens should not demand that specific governments conform to the rules and principles of democracy – especially, if it claims to be committed to them. In some critical moments of political development – those that we call periods of political transition – the decisions of individuals in power may be decisive in shaping democratic

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institutions. The example of George Washington, the first president of the United States, may be invoked here: He decided not to seek a third term as president and not to become a “democratic king” although, arguably, under the circumstances he could have done this.

But the long-term prospects of consolidated democracy cannot depend on the good will of a given government. If so, what constitutes the institutional foundation of a functional democratic system? This implies at least three things: (1) the formal framework of democracy, that is a Constitution and laws underpinning effective mechanisms of the division of power, accountability, as well as guarantees of free and fair elections; (2) routinization of democratic rules, turning them into a habit, so that a sufficient majority of political and societal players take it for granted that all problems and conflicts can be solved through democratic procedures; (3) the existence within a society of effective mutually balancing powers, whose contradictions and conflicts can only be solved through the negotiations and deals that are typical of democratic systems.

Whether or not these conditions are met, does not depend only on the government. It is not incumbent governments that are categorized as democratic but political systems. It is the people or society that can be considered owners of this system. The latter concepts, however, are too vague and get easily abused by demagogues. In practice, the “rule of the people” or the government’s accountability to the people implies that the functioning of democracy depends on the aggregation of players or “actors” who have divergent interests and opinions and often clash with each other. It is in order to solve these conflicts that a set of rules is created that we call “democracy”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to the “democratic transition” theory, actual democracies are built on agreements or “pacts” between major elites in a country. If the provisions of those agreements become institutionalized, if adherence to them turns into a routine, one can speak of a consolidated democracy. See Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Or see another formulation by Francis Fukuyama: “successful liberal democracy requires both a state that is strong, unified, and able to enforce laws on its own territory, and a society that is strong and cohesive and able to impose accountability on the state. It is the balance between a strong state and a strong society that makes democracy work” - Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011) p. 479.

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Cases of successful democratization demonstrate that democratic institutions are usually created through the interrelationship of different, often mutually hostile individuals and groups, and it is quite possible that defending the values of democracy does not constitute a conscious priority for any of them. Therefore, in order to adequately assess the state and prospects for democracy in a

given country, it is not sufficient to look at actions taken by the government, but also all those of other influential players such as the opposition, civil society institutions, business, the international community, etc.

## Indicators and causes of the democracy deficit in Georgia

Both the scope of the democracy deficit in Georgia and its specific indicators are the subject of lively debate. Below we will only briefly review those issues that are most often discussed by Georgian society and the international community in relation to the democracy deficit in Georgia.

*Mistrust towards the election process.* In Georgia, the most basic and necessary criterion of democracy: the replacement of governments through elections, is a matter of doubt. There has been no precedent of such a change,<sup>6</sup> although the government did change twice through non-constitutional means: once violently and once, though a bloodless “rebellion”, “revolution”, or “coup” (the choice of a term here depends on the political preferences of a given individual).

Trust towards the electoral process in Georgia is rather low. Many people do not consider elections to be an effective mechanism of changing government. One can often hear fatalistic statements like: “who asks the people, the elections will be falsified anyway”. With rare exceptions, the losing parties and candidates do not recognize the legitimacy of the result and ascribe it to fraud – with most of their supporters apparently accepting this judgment.

Outside assessments of the elections in Georgia are mixed – significant shortcomings are usually indicated that may be summed up by saying that there is no level playing field between the participants, as the ruling party enjoys much better access to financial resources and the media. However, the validity of the final results are usually not questioned.

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<sup>6</sup> The defeat of the Communist party at the 1990 parliament elections may be considered the only exception to that rule – but that can also be explained through the general crisis of Soviet Communist institutions of power and not just the political dynamics in Georgia. Technically speaking, that change of government happened within the Soviet Union and not independent Georgia. In any case, this episode did not spark a trend.

Successful liberal democracy requires both a state that is strong, unified, and able to enforce laws on its own territory, and a society that is strong and cohesive and able to impose accountability on the state. It is the balance between a strong state and a strong society that makes democracy work.

Francis Fukuyama

On the positive side, there has arguably been no precedent of an obviously unpopular government keeping power after elections. This may mean that society has mechanisms to expose and disallow blatantly rigged elections, even if it needs to use non-constitutional methods. The 2003 “Rose Revolution” is a case of that: There was conclusive evi-

dence that massive fraud essentially changed the election results, and this evidence was used by the people who took to the streets to prevent the ruling party from remaining in government. However, this is the only case, so one cannot generalize that no government in Georgia will ever get away with blatant electoral fraud.

Critics claim that there were violations of a comparable scale during the January 2008 presidential elections. Keeping in mind that Mikheil Saakashvili won those elections with a relatively narrow margin (with 53,5 percent of the vote), and international and domestic observers reported some significant irregularities,<sup>7</sup> it cannot be fully ruled out that there was sufficient electoral fraud to change the final outcome. However, neither the opposition nor civil society organizations produced conclusive evidence for this.<sup>8</sup> In any case, nobody could seriously contest that the incumbent candidate commanded substantive popular support, which was not the case for the ruling party in November 2003 elections.

In what case shall we say that Georgia fully meets criteria of “electoral democracy”? Scholars often refer to a criterion suggested by Samuel P. Huntington, an influential American political scholar, according to which one can only speak of a consolidated democracy if there have been two consecutive, peaceful changes of government via free elections.<sup>9</sup> However, a strict application of that criterion may be contested. For instance, from 1955 to 1993 the Liberal-Democratic Party of Japan stayed in power without interruption; in 1994, after an eleven-month break, it returned to power until 2009. During all this time, however, Japan was considered a liberal democracy. For about twenty years after the World War II, Germany was ruled by the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union, at times joined by Free Democrats as junior partners. But during these periods, these countries were widely considered democratic, though according to the “Huntington criterion”, Germany can only be considered a democracy from 1982, when the center-right returned to government. In Italy after the Second World War, cabinets fell frequently, but for decades all of them had been led by Christian

<sup>7</sup> See OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “Georgia Extraordinary Presidential Election 5 January 2008. OSCE/ODIHR Observation Mission Final Report”, Warsaw, 4 March 2008.

<sup>8</sup> According to a parallel vote tabulation carried out by the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy in cooperation with National Democratic Institute of the US, Saakashvili received 50.8 percent of the vote. The exit polls conducted by a consortium of several Georgian think-tanks (CIPDD being one of them) also showed a victory for Mikheil Saakashvili with a similar share of the vote.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 266-67.

Democrats: by the same measure, Italy can only be considered to have been a full democracy since 1987.

To take a less well-known example, Botswana, one of the most successful African countries, has been governed by the same party – the Democratic Party of Botswana, since 1966, that is since its establishment as an independent state. During the last elections, in 2009, it got 44 out of 57 parliamentary mandates. However, Freedom House does not question its status as an “electoral democracy”.

In the case of Georgia, it is difficult to define clear benchmarks of electoral democracy. One could imagine as a critical benchmark a state whereby the results of elections are accepted by the absolute majority of society as well as all major political parties. Georgia has yet to achieve this condition.

Periodic changes of government are indeed important for democracy. But experience shows that new democracies might need a couple of decades before they achieve routine alternation of power between major political forces. As a matter of principle, one cannot rule out that for a relatively long period of time,

majority of people can express a preference for the same political force. In such periods, a less distinct, but still appropriate indicator of an electoral democracy may apply whereby the political class agrees on certain rules of the game in competition for power, each player is prepared to accept electoral results – however unpleasant they might be, and the wider public believes that the official results represent the real will of the electorate. In all the above examples, these conditions were presumably met.

In the case of Georgia, it is difficult to measure success and define clear benchmarks. There has never been full-scale agreement among the multiplicity of political parties on electoral rules, while violations of the process persist. Therefore, there are also many who question the legality of the election outcome. As for the assessments of international monitoring missions, they may not be free from political motivation as well and their conclusions may not always be fully shared by society. One could imagine as a critical benchmark for the sufficient level of electoral democracy in Georgia a state whereby the results of elections are accepted by the absolute majority of society as well as all major political parties. Georgia has yet to achieve this condition.

Other areas. When talking about the democracy deficit in Georgia, the areas mentioned most often apart from elections are those of media and the judiciary. According to many commentators, the weaknesses of the independent media and the judiciary constitute the principal shortcomings of democracy in Georgia. When it comes to the media, the most frequently mentioned issue is the strength of pro-government bias in its most influential segment, that of the TV broadcasting media. The editorial policy of the so-called “national” TV companies – that is those that broadcast to the whole country, are evidently pro-government. Nobody questions the fact that there is also media that is truly independent from the government and is conspicuously oppositional in its content, but since its impact is considerably weaker

than that of the “national TV channels”, opponents of the government find themselves in an unfair competition.

Typical power configuration in Georgia is based on a confrontation between a dominant political party that is merged with the state apparatus, and a fickle and irresponsible opposition. However, the apparent strength of the ruling party is illusory as well. It fully depends on its control of the levers of power: One cannot be sure at all that in the event of losing this control, it will maintain its unity, organization, and supporters.

As for the judiciary, there exists a strong perception that it is not genuinely independent from the executive, especially the prosecutors. The extreme rarity of acquittals in criminal cases, as well as pro-government rulings in politically sensitive cases are the most frequently mentioned indicators of this.

The electoral environment in Georgia and problems related to the judiciary will be discussed in greater detail in two separate papers written within the same project by David Aprasidze. There are a number of other problem areas, of which the following are most notable:

- *Weakness of the political party system and the opposition.* In modern developed democracies, the quality of political competition largely depends on the ability of political parties to aggregate and articulate diversity of societal interests and provide a reasonable choice for the electorate. In the Georgian case, political parties fail to perform this function. A typical party is built around a recognizable name or the financial resources of its leader, lacks any distinct agenda, while its membership mainly depends on personal loyalty or financial interests. The party system is extremely fragmented and unstable, with a completely new selection of contestants being formed before each election. The opposition does not propose meaningful alternative policies to the public, but is focused on negative messages.<sup>10</sup>

Against the backdrop of the weakness of the party system, a typical power configuration in Georgia is based on a confrontation between a dominant political party that is merged with the state apparatus, and a fickle and irresponsible opposition. However, the apparent strength of the ruling party is illusory as well. It fully depends on its control of the levers of power: One cannot be sure at all that in the event of losing this control, it will maintain its unity, organization, and supporters. At least, the history of political parties that held power in Georgia but lost it (the Communist Party, Round Table, Citizens Union of Georgia, and The Union of Revival of Georgia) does not give grounds for optimism in this regard.

- *Weakness of local government.* Subsidiarity is often considered to be the most desirable principle for the modern democracy. This implies that power

<sup>10</sup> On the Georgian political party system, see Ghia Nodia, Alvaro Pinto Scoltbach, *The Political Landscape in Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects* (Delf (Holland), Eburon Delft, 2006).

should be concentrated locally as much as is practical; the upper levels of government (regional, national) should only be mandated to perform those tasks that local government, which is closest to citizens, is simply unable to take care of. In Georgia, there are local government bodies at district (rayon) level but their mandate, resources and effective independence in the decision-making process is rather limited. This makes the Georgian political system too centralized and quite contrary to the principle of subsidiarity.

- *Lack of strong and independent business corporations.* If the state has effective leverage to influence the behavior of the business community, this considerably diminishes the chance of democratic pluralism developing. It is frequently alleged that the Georgian government “controls” big business, though such statements are rarely supported by concrete data. However, there is at least one repeatedly mentioned indicator of insufficient business independence that deserves attention: There exists a conspicuous contrast between the generosity of donations to the ruling party and to the total lack of business donations to the opposition.<sup>11</sup>
- *Weakness of civil society institutions and the intermediate institutions of democracy in general,* may be considered the core expression of the structural democracy deficit in Georgia. This, in turn, may be linked to the lack of *social capital*. This means that society has a low capacity to organize itself around its interests; respectively, there are no adequate mechanisms for articulating and defending the variety of societal interests and values. The aforementioned weakness of political parties is but one expression of this general feature; other indicators include the rarity of public associations, the lack of quality media, the weakness of trade unions, etc. This makes political participation unstable, inconsistent and unfocused: it tends to express itself through periodic confrontations between the government and segments of society that claim to represent the “public” or the “people” as such rather than promote any specific societal interests and agendas.
- *The tendency for political disagreements to turn into violence.* Democratic political institutions are linked to both the existence of effective diversity in the society as well as an acceptance of that diversity as a normal condition by a sufficient majority of citizens. Predominantly, this implies openness to *political differences*: It is normal for a democracy that groups of people find themselves in sharp conflict over political issues, but it is also crucial that these disagreements do not lead to violence and are resolved exclusively within the framework of democratic procedures.

There have been several episodes over the last twenty years in Georgia when political disagreements have led to stand-offs that either took violent form or brought the country to the brink of violence. The widespread readiness to

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<sup>11</sup> On this see Transparency international – Georgia, *Political Party Finance Report*, Tbilisi 2011. Arguably, the December 2012 legislative changes that banned any corporate donations to political parties as well as to entities linked to them have made this issue redundant.



engage in politically motivated violence is matched by the character of political discussion, in which the demonization and dehumanization of opponents constitute routinely used methods of political debate.

It is therefore not surprising that, while the political elite call for a multiparty system, Georgians tend to be suspicious of the very existence of political divisions within society.

- *Acceptance of ethnic and confessional diversity* is another feature that is crucial for democracy. A critical benchmark of this could be defined as: a society where the equality of all citizens in civil and political areas is not only formally recognized, but is actually embraced by a majority of citizens, while representatives of ethnic and confessional minorities can be successful in civil, political and economic arenas. Even most developed democracies have problems in this area, but without some level of success, the very existence of democracy in culturally diverse societies comes under question.

The character of political life and public discussion in Georgia demonstrates that civic identity is still fragile here. Minorities are still insufficiently integrated into civic and political life, while expressions of xenophobia that in more liberal society would be met with general condemnation, are easily tolerated.

## **What has Georgian democracy achieved and why?**

When Georgia is described as a “hybrid” regime this does not only mean that there is a democracy deficit, but also that it is not an autocracy, that is, it has some tangible achievements in the area of democratic development. What are those achievements and what factors underpin the prospect of their future consolidation?

*Legal and constitutional mechanisms.* Georgia’s constitution and laws essentially conform to democratic standards. They create the basis for free and fair elections, provide for the separation of powers (both horizontally and vertically), determine the independence of the judiciary and firmly entrench core civil liberties.

This does not exclude the desirability of further legislative changes for the development of democratic institutions in Georgia. Such ideas are being proposed and debated. But in these cases, all competing suggestions usually generally conform to practices that exist in developed democracies. For instance, there are arguments between those defending majoritarian (first-past-the-post) or proportional electoral systems, or different combinations thereof. One can argue which would be the best electoral formula in the context of today’s Georgia. But it cannot be denied that each of those systems provides a potentially satisfactory model for representative democratic institutions.

Amendments to the Georgian Constitution adopted by Parliament in February 2004 is an important exception to this trend. These amendments granted the presi-

dency, and the executive branch in general, powers significantly in excess of the other branches of government, introducing what can be called “superpresidentialism”. The “Rose revolutionaries” justified this by arguing the necessity of swift reforms in the transitional period. Whether we accept this latter argument or not, it is obvious that this level of concentration of power in the executive branch does not correspond to accepted democratic practice. Modern democracies either establish strict divisions between the legislative and executive branches, or concentrate power in the former.

If this is so, the more recent constitutional amendments of November 2010, which generally preserve the mixed parliamentary-presidential system but turn the prime-minister, who is elected by parliament, into the effective leader of the executive branch, essentially changes the situation and brings Georgia’s constitutional system in conformity with democratic standards. To be sure, these amendments also leave space for legitimate debate. It is well-known, for example, that the Venice Commission disagreed with certain provisions of the amendments.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, an absolute majority of competent and impartial experts agreed that the amendments helped to correct the excessive concentration of power that was evident in the current “superpresidential” system and made the Georgian constitution considerably more balanced.

The November 2010 amendments fully come into force only after the 2013 presidential elections. Therefore, at this point it is impossible to predict how they will impact the actual practice of governance. However, it is fair to say that there is no expectation in Georgian society (including both supporters of the incumbent government and its opponents) that this change will by itself lead to a breakthrough in the quality of Georgian democracy. On the other hand, no alternative constitutional or legislative idea has been proposed that would promise to sharply increase the quality of Georgia’s democracy.

Here it is proper to remember that not so long ago, most of the Georgian opposition rallied behind a specific constitutional idea: in the January 2008 presidential elections, its main promise was to abolish the very institution of the presidency. At that time, the opposition claimed that the presidency in its current form constituted the institutional basis of autocracy in Georgia. The opposition did not propose any specific constitutional scheme instead, but the outright rejection of presidentialism logically left no other option save a parliamentary system.<sup>13</sup>

The enactment of the November 2010 amendments brought about a paradoxical situation: the change goes in the same direction as the opposition had demanded, though the latter refuses to recognize this. Instead, critics tend to explain that the constitutional amendments are happening because Mikheil Saakashvili, the incumbent president, wishes to stay in power in the position of prime minister.

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<sup>12</sup> See the opinion of the Venice commission on November 2010 constitutional changes in [www.venice.coe.int/docs/2010/CDL-AD\(2010\)028-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2010/CDL-AD(2010)028-e.asp).

<sup>13</sup> Some Georgian political parties advocate the restoration of the monarchy, but usually they add that they imply constitutional monarchy – which in effect makes it a version of the parliamentary system.

This example shows that in Georgia, even most crucial constitutional issues tend to be linked to specific personalities. It also confirms that despite the multiplicity of legislative recommendations, hope of qualitative progress in democratic development is not linked to any project of institutional change.

*The entrenchment of the traditions of political pluralism, free expression and independent political activism.* Apart from formally declaring the general principles of liberal democracy and turning them into law, the development of democratic political institutions requires embedding habits of civic and political action. In this, the experience of the last twenty years in Georgia creates some ground for optimism. There has been no period in the past twenty years when government policies were not subject to sharp criticism from the political opposition, media and civil society. This is a long enough time to implant an idea that political and societal pluralism is the only normal condition for the country, that freedom of expression should not be abridged, that no government - even the most successful one - can exist without criticism and opposition. Even though the party controlling the executive branch can usually rely on a parliamentary majority, at every stage of the country's development Parliament has served as an arena for genuine political pluralism and heated discussion. While the public is still suspicious about the fairness of electoral procedures, it is convinced that only leaders who have popular support should be in power, and people have leverage to defend their choice if it is threatened.

*Consensus around democracy imperative.* While the general political environment in Georgia is extremely polarized, there is a high level of consensus around declared political values. Over the last ten years, no Georgian political party of any influence is oriented towards political values opposed to liberal democracy. For instance, there are no parties that openly appeal to nostalgia for the Communist past, religious fundamentalism or claim the existence of some uniquely Georgian model of democracy, such as Russia's "sovereign democracy". All political parties agree that Georgia's political future depends on the development of the institutions of liberal democracy, and that Georgia should look for role models mainly from amongst Western democracies.

Admittedly, declared values and actual political behavior may differ. Therefore, there is no guarantee that players claiming commitment to democratic principles will also act according to the respective standards. Examples to the contrary are easy to find.

However, even declarative consensus around principles of liberal democracy may be an important factor increasing the probability of the effective entrenchment of democratic institutions. In particular, it may considerably reduce the chance of authoritarian consolidation: in a society that deems democratic norms mandatory, open autocracy cannot be legitimate.

*The stability of Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.* The above factor is closely linked to Georgia's foreign-policy orientation. Despite changes of government and internal turmoil, a large part of the population sees the future of the country as being part of the European family of nations, and this trend is quite stable. The shock of the 2008 war did not really change this: while initially support for NATO member-

ship did fall somewhat, by 2011 it had recovered to its previous high.<sup>14</sup> As for Georgia's EU membership aspirations, public support for this has always been strong.

The imperative of European and Euro-Atlantic integration is supported not only by the government, but by the majority of opposition parties. After 2008, there emerged some opposition parties that prioritized the improvement of relations with Russia at the expense of the pro-Western course. But this strategy did not prove productive because these parties failed to attract significant levels of public support. Today, there is only one relatively influential party, the Labor party, who openly contests Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic orientation, but its support does not exceed 10 percent either.

Orientation in foreign policy does not by itself imply the adoption of the political values of those countries considered to be allies. But it is well understood in Georgia that the country can only integrate into Europe as a democracy. After the Rose Revolution, Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations are taken much more seriously than before. Both internal and external players hold Georgia to a much higher standard on the level of development of democratic institutions, and the government has to take that into account. This makes foreign policy orientation the key positive factor for Georgia's democratic development.

Low levels of corruption. The sharp reduction in corruption is a crucial achievement of the current Georgian government.<sup>15</sup> As noted before, the level of corruption is not an indicator specific for democracy: there are rather corrupt democracies and relatively "clean" autocracies. But it is also not for nothing that Freedom House still deems levels of corruption as one of the indicators of freedom. Corruption at large and the sense of impunity that had been characteristic of pre-2003 Georgia and is still typical of many post-Soviet countries, weakens trust towards public institutions. But without such trust, stable democratic institutions are hardly possible. The fact that Georgia has managed to free itself from mass corruption quite fast and has maintained that achievement for a considerable time, contributes to the belief that public institutions do actually serve people's interests. In other words, citizens develop a sense of ownership towards public institutions. This does not in itself guarantee democracy, but significantly increases chances of its consolidation.

Establishment of free market institutions. By the same logic, as free market institutions gradually take root, the probability of democratic consolidation increases. Of course, a liberal market environment is compatible with an autocratic regime, but without it democratic institutions cannot consolidate. Democratic political culture is underpinned by the understanding that a citizen is personally responsible for his or

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<sup>14</sup> According to polls conducted over the years by the International Republican Institute of the US, since 2004 support for Georgia's membership in NATO mostly oscillates between 70 and 80 percent. It went down to 68 percent in June 2009 but later recovered again reaching 80 percent in November 2011. Levels of support for EU membership are similar – See <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2012%20January%205%20Survey%20of%20Georgian%20Public%20Opinion,%20October%2027-November%2011,%202011.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> According to the Corruption Perception index of Transparency International, in 2011 Georgia ranked 64th out of 183 countries with a score of 4.1 ("10" means the lowest level of corruption and "1" – the highest). – see <http://transparency.ge/en/post/corruption-perception-index-cpi/corruption-perceptions-index-2011>; in 2003, Georgia ranked 124th out of 133 with the score of 1.8 - [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2003](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2003).

her well-being and that it is on his or her taxes that the financing of public institutions depends. It is this fact that entitles a citizen to keep the government accountable: the link between taxation and representation works both ways. It is too early to say that this understanding is engrained in Georgians' minds; but development of the market economy contributes to strengthening it.

## **Towards democratic consolidation: normative imperative and actual resources**

The above can be summarized by saying that Georgia has a formal institutional framework for liberal democracy, and the general will to embed democratic political

Georgia has a formal institutional framework for liberal democracy, and the general will to embed democratic political institutions in practice is relatively strong; on the other hand, the basic institutions that underpin the democratic power structure and relevant political culture are weakly developed, therefore democratic political practices are far from entrenched.

institutions in practice is relatively strong; on the other hand, the basic political institutions that underpin the democratic power structure and relevant political culture are weakly developed, therefore democratic political practices are far from entrenched. If we remember what we have said about the institutional underpinnings of democracy, the roots of the deficit should be sought in

the lack of pluralism of societal and political interests and agendas, as well as a lack of the habits and skills necessary for solving conflicts through democratic procedures.

What can be the basis for hope that Georgia can take decisive steps towards democratic consolidation in the nearest future? What are the resources for its democratic consolidation?

As has been outlined above, the principal resource for democratic consolidation may be the consensus within the public and the political elite around the idea that Georgia has no alternative to democracy, linked to the belief that integration into the Western world is the only viable strategy for the country. If so, one should ask a question: how strong and sustainable is this consensus? How deep and thought through is this choice? Is it based on an analysis of Georgia's problems and resources, or is it a shallow political declaration? Since the idea of democracy is universally accepted, Georgians may just superficially ascribe to it without an adequate understanding of what it means.

### ***Democracy Today or the Theory of Sequencing?***

There is a paradoxical situation in today's Georgia: Everybody pledges allegiance to the normative idea of democracy, but in effect, the practice of democratic institutions fails some basic tests. What is the problem? One possibility is that belief in democracy is not as strong as it looks. This does not necessarily imply that people who

say that there is no alternative to democracy in Georgia are lying: But having such a general belief does not in itself imply that development of democracy is considered a priority at a given moment in time.

There is a paradoxical situation in today's Georgia: Everybody pledges allegiance to the normative idea of democracy, but in effect, the practice of democratic institutions fails some basic tests. What is the problem? One possibility is that belief in democracy is not as strong as it looks.

In order to check this notion let's ask a question that Georgians do not openly ask: even if we admit that liberal democracy is generally the best (or least bad) political regime compared to all the alternatives, should the consolidation of democracy be the top priority for Georgia today? Maybe,

keeping in mind Georgia's international position and level of development, other tasks should take precedence at this point in time.

Democratic theory does not provide a universal answer to the question of how a democratic political regime should be established in a country that does not have historical experience of having it.<sup>16</sup> According to an influential (though not universally shared) view, the establishment (or consolidation) of democracy in a country requires certain political, socio-economic and cultural preconditions. This presupposes that a country should follow some sequence of strategic tasks: first, the socio-economic preconditions of democracy should be created and only afterwards does it make sense to build democratic institutions in a more specific sense.

If we accept this approach, a belief that Georgia should eventually become a democracy does not necessarily imply that the task of democracy-building should take priority at this stage. Possibly, one should focus on those objectives that constitute the pre-requisites of democracy. In democratic theory, this approach is known as the "theory of sequencing".<sup>17</sup>

These prerequisites can be divided into three major groups: political, socio-economic, and cultural. The first of them in its turn envisages two principal areas. On the one hand, there should be some clarity on the borders and composition of the polity: where does jurisdiction of a state extend and how the citizenry is composed. Without clarity on this issue, one cannot say who the "demos" is, in whose name the political regime operates and in what geographic area are the rules that constitute the essence of a democratic regime valid.

Apart from this, there should be effective government bodies, implying a governable and functional state bureaucracy, army, and police force.

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<sup>16</sup> The experience of Georgian Democratic Republic of 1918-21 was an important experiment in democracy, but lasted for a short time and seventy years passed until the next attempt was made. Therefore, for today's Georgia it has just symbolic meaning. The symbolism of it, though, reinforces the same message articulated in the previous sections of this paragraph: That independent Georgia should be a democracy.

<sup>17</sup> For a critical outline of this approach, see Thomas Carothers, "The 'Sequencing' Fallacy", *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 18, No.1 (January 2007), pp. 13-27.

All these elements of modern political order can exist in an autocratic state as well, but without them stable democracy is impossible. One possible definition of democracy may be that it establishes civilian control over state bureaucracy and the armed forces through the popular election of political leaders and the introduction of mechanisms of accountability for them. If democratically elected leaders cannot control and use the state bureaucracy and armed forces, democratic procedures become futile.

The second set of the prerequisites for democracy can be categorized as social-economic modernization. These pre-requisites are described by the so-called “modernization theory” that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s, but went out of intellectual fashion before being partly revived at the end of 1990s.<sup>18</sup> According to this approach, developed democracy requires a relatively high level of economic development, popular welfare and education, with an urban middle class becoming the center of gravity within the social structure. This theory states that in places where the majority of the population lives in poverty and is illiterate, or where more than half of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, the chances of stable democratic institutions emerging are miniscule.

Many Georgians blame the lack of democratic political culture for the democratic deficit in Georgia and do not believe that changes in government or the introduction of better laws will make the country considerably more democratic. On the other hand, the fact that among government supporters, talk of democracy is often replaced by talk of “modernization” may be interpreted as another indirect indication that the logic of “prerequisites” and “sequencing” is not alien to Georgian’s thinking.

Last but not least, one can speak about the cultural prerequisites of liberal democracy. Democracy requires that the majority of its citizens accept main values of liberal democracy, such as the supremacy of law over commitments that stem from clan and clientelistic ties, and recognize the equality of all humans whatever their religious or ethnic background. If, on the other hand, xenophobia and religious intolerance is too strong in a society, it

is difficult to achieve real equality before the law. In this case, the methods of democratic populism may be manipulated by a group that is aggressively disposed towards ethnic or religious minorities, among while the mandate from the democratic majority may enable them to harass minority groups. Some theorists call this “illiberal democracy”.<sup>19</sup>

The same logic can be extended to social-economic and cultural factors: They may exist in autocratic political regimes as well, but their absence, at the very least, considerably reduces the chance of establishing a democratic political system in a given country.

<sup>18</sup> For the most famous summary of this approach, see Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Mar., 1959), pp. 69-105.

<sup>19</sup> See Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec 1997; Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2000).

Do the mentioned prerequisites exist in Georgia? Or, to use a popular phrase, “is Georgia ready for democracy”? While no political group in Georgia defends the “theory of sequencing” openly, an analysis of political debates suggests that quite a few people appear to find its logic quite compelling. Admittedly, while the validity of democracy imperative is generally recognized, a large part of Georgian society is skeptical or ambivalent towards the chances of full democratic consolidation in the near future, and this skepticism is based on deficiencies in the above “prerequisites” of democracy. Discussions carried out within this project indicated that most socially active people who are not directly involved in politics blame the lack of democratic political culture for the democratic deficit in Georgia and do not believe that changes in government or the introduction of better laws will make the country considerably more democratic. On the other hand, the fact that among government members and its supporters, talk of democracy is often replaced by talk of “modernization” may be interpreted as another indirect indication that the logic of “prerequisites” and “sequencing” is not alien to Georgian’s thinking.

If we apply the above concept of prerequisites of democracy to the reality of Georgia, we will see a whole range of issues. Here are some examples of major deficiencies in this area:

- Twenty percent of Georgia’s territory is occupied by a foreign country and the majority of the Georgian population is not reconciled to this reality. On the other hand, the intensity of conflict with Russia is such that the very sovereignty of Georgia, that is the ability of the Georgian people to decide its own fate is under question.<sup>20</sup>
- According to social-economic indicators, Georgia is still not a developed country. A large proportion of the population still lives in poverty. More than half of the workforce is involved in low-productivity agriculture, which also implies a low level of urbanization.
- Many people in Georgia – at least among liberal-minded elites – are concerned that high levels of ethnic xenophobia and religious intolerance threaten the prospect of liberal democracy.<sup>21</sup>

According to the theories of prerequisites and sequencing, in order to prepare ground for the consolidation of liberal democratic institutions in Georgia, priority should be given to the task of political and social-economic modernization, which means strengthening state sovereignty; clarifying the effective boundaries of state jurisdiction;

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<sup>20</sup> In February 2009, when asked a question: “Do you think that Russian aggression against Georgia is over or is it still going on?” – 84 percent answered that it still continues; by November 2011, this number came down to 65 percent, but 17 percent thought it was over but likely to resume. The people who are really relaxed about the Russian threat (those who agreed that “Russian aggression to Georgia is over and unlikely to resume”) constituted 2 percent in February 2009 and 7 percent in November 2011 – see the same source as in ref. 12.

<sup>21</sup> The extreme unpopularity of the July 2011 amendments to the civil code allowing the registration of minority religious communities as entities of public law became an important reminder of this problem. In September the same year, 69 percent of those who were aware of the amendment opposed it with just 24 percent supporting it– see results of a poll by the National Democratic Institute of the US, at <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/2011/NDI-Poll-Sept2011.pdf>.



tion; the creation of a governable, competent and reasonably clean state bureaucracy; reaching at least a minimal level of economic welfare; fostering the growth of an educated urban middle-class; achieving advanced standards in the education system and developing a common civic sense of belonging within a multiethnic and multi-confessional society.

Admittedly, these were main priorities of the Georgian government that came to power in 2003. One can disagree about exactly how successful the Georgian government has been in tackling the above issues, but one can rationally argue that Georgia did take important positive steps regarding these issues. At least, those who support the government of the ruling National Movement party, see its main achievements in these areas.

Shall one infer from this that at this point of Georgia's development it is justified to postpone the tasks of democratic development and focus on "modernization", even by more or less autocratic means? Can one say that Georgia's development in the last years is a relatively successful example of "autocratic modernization" and that taking this course was the right decision for its government?

Shall one infer from this that at this point of Georgia's development it is justified to postpone the tasks of democratic development and focus on "modernization", even by more or less autocratic means? Can one say that Georgia's development in the last years is a relatively successful example of "autocratic modernization" and that taking this course was the right decision for its government?

Putting this question on the table would spark a sharp political debate. One should note first of all that Georgian government representatives ardently deny the view that their policies represent an example of autocratic modernization. They argue that their policies were within the mandate they got from voters and list reforms which were specifically aimed to

boost democratic development.<sup>22</sup> Critics, on the other hand, claim that since the Rose Revolution there has been no progress in democratization (while many insist things have actually become worse), and put the blame for this on the government.<sup>23</sup> They have strong arguments as well. Among them, the weightiest and most difficult to refute are the February 2004 constitutional amendments that weakened Parliament and concentrated power in the presidency.

Without getting deep into this debate, we will summarize our general assessment of this problem in three points:

- The political developments of the last three years in Georgia do really carry some features of autocratic modernization. The government prioritized fast reforms that were modernizing in their character, and, for this reason, started by concentrating power in the executive, weakening the institutional

<sup>22</sup> "2004-2010: Seven Years that Changed Georgia forever. Democratic Reforms." A publication of the government of Georgia, available at [www.georgianreforms.com](http://www.georgianreforms.com).

<sup>23</sup> Lincoln Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: US Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008; Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Georgia's Soviet Legacy", *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 21 No. 1 2010, 144-151.

checks and balances. However, the autocratic aspect of modernization was also underpinned by objective structural factors: weak civil society institutions failed to serve as a counterweight to a popular, effective and activist government.

- Despite this, the mentioned stage of Georgia's development cannot be considered a classical example of "autocratic modernization" because the functioning of major democratic institutions continued (with the exception of several days in November 2007, when a state of emergency was introduced) and the government did not try to create an ideology that would legitimize autocratic governance.
- The modernizing agenda of the Georgian government was quite successful, especially in the area of political modernization. For the first time in Georgia's history, effective and governable state institutions were created that were capable of producing public goods useful for its citizens. The occupation of 20 percent of Georgian territory by an external force continues to be a grave concern. However, one has to note that the 2008 war has led to the effective boundaries of the state's jurisdiction being delimited much more distinctly, and this creates a more predictable environment for the functioning of state institutions and economic development.

The "sequencing" approach cannot work in Georgia today, not just because it is morally unacceptable, but because the legitimacy of the Georgian government largely rests on its claim that it is engaged in developing democratic institutions.

What practical conclusions can one draw from this for the agenda of democratic consolidation in Georgia? We will stress two conclusions that may look mutually contradictory but in reality complement each other.

First of all, the "sequencing" approach cannot work in Georgia today. The reason for saying this is not only that it is morally unacceptable because it implies support for autocratic methods – though the moral factor cannot be discounted either. The main argument is that it cannot work because the legitimacy of the Georgian government largely rests on its claim that it is engaged in developing democratic institutions. The fact itself that there has never been a deliberate and comprehensive program of autocratic modernization as a tool to legitimize political actions is indirect proof of this; "autocratic modernization" is something the government is accused of. The agenda of modernization – in the sense outlined above – exists and is valid. However, the current government has no other option but to combine it with the agenda of democracy. It is more difficult to speak about the hypothetical policies of any alternative government that may come to power, but arguably, it will be difficult for any government to pursue an openly authoritarian path.

The second conclusion is that while the "sequencing" approach is impractical under the circumstances, the fact that the modernization preconditions for democracy are not in place does considerably reduce the chance of successful of democratic consolidation in a given country, and there is no way around this

problem. The good news is that the aforementioned successes that the Georgian government has already achieved in this area have removed many impediments in this regard – at the very least, the situation is much better than it was in 2003. This is especially true of political modernization, which is also more directly linked to democratic consolidation: Georgia is a much more functional state now than it was ten years ago. Hence, even if we accept that the theory of pre-requisites has some truth, at the current moment there is a much stronger basis in Georgia for prioritizing the democracy agenda than at the time of the ‘Rose Revolution’.

### ***External factors and Georgian Identity***

We have said that the Georgian government cannot be legitimate unless it claims to be developing democratic institutions and can present some evidence to verify

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this claim. But why should this be so? Why should having institutions supporting democratic pluralism be a priority while Georgia has other, truly existential threats to face?

This question is sometimes answered based on the international orientation of the country. In this case, the line of reasoning is approximately as follows: Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic course is stable and supported by a large majority of its citizens. But Georgia’s actual integration into the Western structures cannot happen if it is not considered a democracy. Therefore, the country must speed up democratic reforms if it wants to achieve progress in Western integration.

The same argument may be reformulated in terms of security. Georgia is fundamentally dependent on Western support, not so much economically, but for its security. While relations between Georgia and Russia remain extremely tense, the significance of Western support is existential: Georgia’s very survival as a truly independent state depends on it. But why should it hope for such support? Its size, resources and geographic position do not make it important enough for leading Western countries to see it as their priority to fight for Georgia’s sovereignty and welfare, especially when better relations with Russia may bring them greater benefits. One important reason for the West to support Georgia is that it empathizes with Georgia’s democratic experiment:<sup>24</sup> Despite many shortcomings and objective difficulties, the country still attempts to develop democratic institutions; and despite all the criticism it receives, Georgia remains a “beacon of democracy” by regional standards. If Georgia fails to maintain this image as a leader in democratic reforms, it will lose international support as well. Therefore, the country’s security depends on its successful democratization; its democratic reforms are part and parcel of its security politics.

The conclusion from this may be formulated in different ways: (1) Georgia should prioritize democratic development because this is what the international community ex-

<sup>24</sup> See on this Atlantic Council, Georgia in the West: A Policy Road-Map to Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic Future, available at [http://www.acus.org/files/publication\\_pdfs/403/101311\\_ACUS\\_GeorgiaWest.PDF](http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/403/101311_ACUS_GeorgiaWest.PDF).

Where the foundations of democratic pluralism are not sufficiently strong and the institutions that should serve as a counterbalance to the government are weak, the international community may provide important incentives for democratic progress.

pects from it; (2) Where the internal foundations of democratic pluralism are not sufficiently strong and the institutions that should serve as a counterbalance to the government are weak, the international community may provide important incentives for democratic progress.

The first formulation is normative and it answers the question: Why should democracy develop in Georgia now. The latter refers to the actual resources for democratization and answers the question: What gives us hope that Georgia really will become more democratic in the near future?

Simple observation demonstrates that this line of reasoning has significant grounds in Georgian reality. It is obvious that the democratic international community is a source of authority and influence for the government as well as for the opposition and for many of their supporters. While specific actions and assessments of Western actors may be criticized, this criticism usually does not extend to rejecting Western values or the moral authority of the democratic world. In general, major political forces tend to steer clear of openly anti-Western rhetoric.

In particular, the Georgian government highlights its respect for Western recommendations on issues related to democratic governance. This does not mean that it unquestionably accepts them: sometimes it may disagree fully or in part. For instance, when the 2010 constitutional amendments were discussed, the government accepted some recommendations of the Venice Commission and rejected others. But as a rule, the government prefers to implement Western recommendations. It is an important part of its public rhetoric that Georgia successfully applies suggestions that come from NATO, the European Union and the Council of Europe: many of which concern democratic development.

When Georgian political players want the government to take their views into account, or refrain from what they deem to be undemocratic actions, they try to convince international actors to apply their influence to the government. It is a deeply held view within the opposition, media and civil society that without pressure from the international community, Georgia would be a much less free place.

This makes the international community a sort of informal arbiter in Georgian internal politics. When these relations near a point of crisis, Western representatives adopt a de facto mediating role (though they avoid any formalization of this function). Western assessments of Georgian democratic processes often become the starting point for lively debates in which both the government and the opposition try to interpret favorably.

All this allows us to conclude that Western influence or pressure is a significant, if not decisive, resource for democratization in Georgia. While there is no social or

political force within Georgia that can serve as a counterweight to the government, to some extent this role may be played by the democratic West, because the government feels obliged to take its views into account.

The central role played by external actors in the process of democratization is not unique to Georgia. One may draw an analogy with the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe. It is a widely shared belief that the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration was pivotal for the consolidation of democracy in these countries. Admission to the Western clubs was so valuable to them that they readily accepted suggestions coming from the European Union and NATO. On the other hand, frequent and intense contacts with people from developed democracies led to the Westernization of their elites who were much faster to internalize the values and habits that underpin Western democratic practices.

Western influence or pressure is a significant, if not decisive, resource for democratization in Georgia. While there is no social or political force within Georgia that can serve as a counterweight to the government, to some extent this role may be played by the democratic West, because the government feels obliged to take its views into account.

Georgia considers the recent experience of these countries as a model for itself. Its government assumes that Georgia is another ex-Communist East European country that for certain reasons was late in carrying out democratic and economic reforms and integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic community of nations. This makes it logical to

presuppose that the same organizations may play a significant role in Georgia's democratic consolidation as well.

However, making external actors such a pivotal factor for democratization raises many questions both analytically and strategically. It is very common for Western political players to appeal to other governments to act in a more democratic way and respect human rights. In some cases, these pleas work, in others they are ignored. These differences need to be explained. There were two reasons that Western advice was especially effective in East European countries. First of all, NATO and the European Union gave these countries clear membership prospects: the latter knew that if they did their homework well, membership in both organizations was guaranteed. In this regard, the Georgian situation is qualitatively different: The current international conditions are not conducive to NATO and the EU being open to Georgia's membership. While the EU does not even formally consider Georgia's ambition to eventually join it, NATO declares that Georgia is welcome to join but drags its feet in reality, due to a lack of consensus within the alliance.

Therefore, the Georgian government cannot work on the assumption that if the recommendations of these organizations were all implemented, this will actually open the doors to these prestigious clubs. For that reason, Western recommendations may *not* have the same weight for Georgia, as they had for Poland or Romania ten years ago.

The fact that the international democratic community is indeed capable of influencing internal political processes in Georgia depends on the fundamental choice of Georgian society itself to become part of that community and share its norms and values.

The second reason is even more profound and significant. While the process of Western integration did admittedly facilitate and speed up democratic consolidation in the countries of Eastern Europe, this happened because a firm consensus in favor of lib-

eral democracy already existed within those societies, and their political and social elites had strong enough skills to master functional democratic institutions. These countries' definite EU and NATO membership prospects only became clear in the second half of the 1990s: By that time, they had already taken decisive steps to consolidate democracy.

The cases of the East European countries may serve to illustrate a general provision that for external players to exert strong influence on the democratic development of a given country, there should be a strong, pre-existing internal consensus on at least two issues: (1) that non-democratic alternatives are not a valid path for development, and (2) that the democratic international community is a legitimate moral authority to judge democratic development. International experience shows that in lieu of these premises external influence can only be marginal.

In this last regard, the Georgian situation is promising. The fact that the international democratic community is indeed capable of influencing internal political processes in Georgia depends on the fundamental choice of Georgian society itself to become part of that community and share its norms and values. This may be called using national identity for democratic development. At the end of the day, it is because of Georgia's understanding of its national identity as a European country that despite all the difficulties and zigzagging, the country firmly links the prospect of its development to the consolidation of democratic institutions.

It is difficult to submit the roots of this identity and its future sustainability for scrutiny and empirical analysis or measure it scientifically. But the fact that this orientation has endured for a long time gives ground for optimism. If, in the foreseeable future, Georgia maintains its firm political orientation towards European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, this will considerably increase the prospect for democratic consolidation.

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To be sure, the international political environment is very important in this context. Georgia needs to be decisively and consistently recognized by the international community as a European nation. Although some political developments

prompt Western countries to be skeptical towards Georgia's European vocation, the overall trend of the decade is that Georgia is increasingly considered part of Europe. The prospects of Georgia's democratic development are closely linked to this.

## Summary: Problems, Prospects and Priorities

### *The Status of the Problem*

This can be summarized in two points:

- There is a near consensus among major political players that democratic institutions in Georgia are underdeveloped and that overcoming this deficit should be a priority for the political class. However, there is a broad difference of opinion over how deep the problem is, its causes, and the strategy needed to achieve a breakthrough.
- While there is an abundance of specific suggestions for changes aimed at improving quality of democracy, no internal or external actor has presented a comprehensive vision of what should be done to secure democratic consolidation in Georgia.

### *The core reasons for the democratic deficit*

The specific expressions and causes of the democratic deficit in Georgia may be linked both to the actions of specific players (the so called “agency approach”) as well as to the structural conditions of societal development. The former may be summed up by saying that within the Georgian political elite (both the government and the opposition) the commitment to democratic norms and values is insufficiently strong, and the habits of behavior according to those norms and procedures are weak. In other words, Georgia suffers from a shortage of democrats.

As for the deeper structural reasons for the democracy deficit, this may be summed up as follows:

Within the Georgian political elite (both the government and the opposition) the commitment to democratic norms and values is insufficiently strong, and the habits of behavior according to those norms and procedures are weak. In other words, Georgia suffers from a shortage of democrats.

- Georgia inherited the syndrome of “failed state” from the period of the Soviet break-up. Respectively, the Georgian political elite (including the current government) prioritized strengthening basic state institutions (this may be called a task

of political modernization), which primarily implied increasing the capacity of executive power. In itself, this choice is legitimate and has popular support. But this also serves as a justification for concentrating power in the executive which is the basis of an autocratic trend.

- The conflict with Russia remains a significant existential threat to Georgia’s statehood. The existence of this conflict hampers greater openness to political pluralism and risk-taking, which is vital for democracy.

- The prospects for democratic consolidation in Georgia are also hindered by conditions related to the lack of modernization such as high levels of poverty, an unbalanced economy, a weak sense of common civic belonging, etc.
- There is no system in place to articulate and defend the various social interests and orientations that is expressed in the pluralism of political agendas.
- Intermediate civic institutions such as political parties, public associations and independent media are consistently weak. This reduces the scope and quality of citizens' participation in politics. This is also the basis for *a dominant party system*, where one ruling party which has largely merged with the state apparatus is confronted with a fragmented, fickle and irresponsible opposition, which is reconstituted after each change of power.

### ***What is the foundation for democratic consolidation?***

Despite these structural problems, there exists the potential to consolidate democratic institutions in Georgia. The following shall be noted:

- There exists a fairly strong consensus in society and the political elite that the Georgian political system can only be stabilized around democratic institutions, and that there is no alternative to democracy for Georgia. In the 20 years since independence, no influential political force has openly supported alternative ideologies to liberal democracy.
- *The pro-democracy consensus correlates with a stable foreign-policy orientation towards Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.* This aspiration is incompatible with any other agenda that does not imply democratic consolidation.
- *The Georgian Constitution and legal environment are mainly consistent with democratic standards* (or will be after the November 2010 constitutional amendments come into force).
- *A fairly vigorous tradition of political pluralism and freedom of expression has developed in Georgia.* Most of the public takes it for granted and does not deem it a particular achievement any more: this allows us to say that the respective values and habits are already institutionalized.
- Thanks to the achievements of the recent decade, *Georgia has mainly overcome its "failed state" syndrome.* This creates a better environment for prioritizing the tasks of democratic reform.
- Over the last twenty years, *new elites were formed* in Georgia and many people entered politics, the civil service, business, and civil society organizations who understand and follow the norms, values and practices of the contemporary democratic world.



- While public opinion and elite disposition in the West today is not conducive to the rapid integration of Georgia into European and Euro-Atlantic organizations, political support for Georgia is still fairly high and its general European vocation is increasingly recognized on the international level. Moreover, problems of democratic development in Georgia attract considerable international attention. The trend of the last years is that Georgia is being held to higher democratic standards than before. This creates a beneficial international environment for the progress of democratic institutions in Georgia.

### ***The prospects and priorities of democratic consolidation***

What are the concrete steps and trends that will give us a credible hope of tangible progress in democratic consolidation in Georgia?

The principal notion here is that there can be no simple “action plan” or “road map” of formal institutional reforms that, if implemented, will bring democratic consolidation. Progress can only be achieved in the complex and unpredictable practice of tense political competition. The only way to democratic consolidation is through compromises and agreements between opposing players. No single hegemonic player can achieve this goal, even if it implements all the recommendations of the international community.

Here are some general normative statements and recommendations based on the above:

There can be no simple “action plan” or “road map” of formal institutional reforms that, if implemented, will bring democratic consolidation. Progress can only be achieved in the complex and unpredictable practice of tense political competition. The only way to democratic consolidation is through compromises and agreements between opposing players. No single hegemonic player can achieve this goal, even if it implements all the recommendations of the international community.

- The urgency of democratic consolidation in Georgia is caused by several normative and pragmatic considerations. Saying that democracy provides the best conditions for the individual as well as the development of the country, is correct but insufficient. It is also not enough to say that without progress in democratic development Georgia will not be able to maintain interna-

tional support. The crucial line of reasoning is that without democratic consolidation, the Georgian political system will never stabilize and will always face potential crises.

- The core structural reason behind the democratic deficit in Georgia is the weakness of intermediary institutions such as political parties, civic associations, and the independent media. However, this is a sphere that by its very nature cannot develop fast as a result of institutional reforms, government

decisions or support from outside players. This pivotal sphere can only develop gradually.

- In the short term, *the practice of political competition* is the pivotal area. It is critically important for political contestants to play by the rules and behave in a civil way in the process of tense political confrontation. The principled defense of positions should be matched by tolerance and mutual respect. If there is a chance for relatively fast progress of Georgian democracy, this is the area to watch. To be sure, this is also the most dependent on the factor of “agency” and the good will of all the contestants.
- The need for a sharp increase in public trust towards democratic institutions, first of all elections, is another key area. This is also a possible area for relatively fast progress. This depends not so much on the improvement of formal procedures (saying this does not mean that they are not important), but first and foremost, by respect for the existing rules and general democratic norms by major players.
- It is extremely important that discussions on the issues of democratization are more concrete and result-oriented. Bland general statements (like “the media shall be free” and “people should be more engaged”) should be replaced by proposing specific means of improvement in any given area.
- More realistic expectations should be created with regards to the role of Western players in Georgia’s democratic development. Today they play an important positive role, especially when it comes to encouraging the culture of moderation and compromise in the behavior of competing political players. In the nearest future, their role will continue to be important. Western influence will be more productive if there are also positive dynamics in Georgia’s relations with NATO and the European Union. But ultimately, the role of external players is still peripheral as compared to actions of Georgian political actors: At the end of the day, it is up to them to work out the rules of political game that will engrain and institutionalize the practice of democracy. Excessive reliance on the external players can actually protract of the existence of the so-called “hybrid regime”.
- *In the long term*, it will be conducive to Georgian democratic development for it to solve its national security issues, improve the economic well-being and education of its people and develop closer links to the democratic international community. But the task of democratic consolidation in Georgia cannot be delayed until those objectives are achieved: The former is a necessary component of the overall agenda of Georgia’s modernization process.



