

Policy Brief

Jacqueline Hale and Ivane Chkhikvadze

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Can Democracy Take Root in Georgia?

Introduction

On 1st October 2012 the coalition “Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia”, led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, won a genuinely contested parliamentary election. The “United National Movement” which had led the country since 2004, went into opposition together with its leader President Mikheil Saakashvili. Georgia’s unprecedented transition to a government chosen via the ballot box and without the involvement of street protests was widely seen as a leap forward in its democratisation process.

Yet, seven months after the election, the situation remains shaky and the initial euphoria is subsiding. The new ‘cohabitation’, between the Georgian Dream-led coalition in a strengthened Parliament and Saakashvili, who remains president with a reduced role, is proving an

- ▶ Reforms aimed at an independent judiciary and effective criminal justice system should take precedence over restorative justice for previous wrongdoings;
- ▶ Reform of the civil service would ensure that state institutions are neutral and not fused with the ruling party;
- ▶ The government needs to communicate better with its public at home, and place less importance on improving its image abroad;
- ▶ EU member states, parliamentarians and officials should judge Georgia on its commitments rather than take sides in the run-up to the Vilnius Summit.

uncomfortable reality. Personal enmity between the prime minister and the president is a significant problem, as demonstrated by the stand-off in early 2013 caused by legal uncertainties in the constitution with regard to the president’s right to dissolve parliament after 1st April and schedule new parliamentary elections. In addition, the ‘winner takes all’ habit, whereby the winning party typically appoints its supporters to civil service posts in public institutions and controls all organs of state, has previously fed fractious street demonstrations by the losers and may yet beset Georgia as it enters this unchartered territory.

The recent transition offers opportunities as well as the challenges for the country’s political forces, particularly the Georgian Dream coalition government that is tasked with moving Georgia forward. To set Georgia firmly on the path of lasting democracy, the political elite will have to move away from personality politics and instead direct its attention to fostering strong institutional checks and balances. In parallel, the government

will need to ensure that the desire to seek justice for abuses committed by the previous administration does not prevent it from enacting the institutional reforms needed to prevent such abuses recurring in future. A key test of the new government will be its willingness to pay

attention to aspects of reform neglected by the previous ruling party; notably reform of the criminal justice system, particularly prisons and the prosecutor's office, as well as reform of the civil service. Developing a sound socio-economic policy will also be important, since poverty and unemployment were key electoral issues. The European Union will have an important role to play in supporting Georgia to consolidate its gains and bring it closer to the European family through a mixture of incentives and pressure under the 'more for more' logic of its neighbourhood policy. Leading up to autumn's Vilnius summit and beyond, the EU should ensure that its offer is implemented in a manner that does not prize socialisation (coming closer to the EU) above progress in implementing reforms; nor favouritism over democratic norms. Over the longer term, the EU will need to ensure that it offers tangible rewards in return for progress.

A historic election

The outcome of the election was historic. For the first time since the country's independence, Georgians were able to change their government peacefully through an electoral process, without taking to the streets, or the involvement of armed gangs. Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition (GD) may not enjoy the dizzying percentages received by Saakashvili and his United National Movement (UNM) party in March 2004, but its convincing victory has given it a clear mandate to govern. In another first, the political party on the losing side did not dissolve but went into opposition, which was not the case in previous elections.

The former government deserves credit for conceding defeat. This was not necessarily predictable. The incumbent UNM had tried to influence the outcome of the elections through various means, such as intimidation of the opposition and the dismissal from their posts of civil servants who were seen as siding with the challengers. The party-state fusion, whereby political appointees controlled the upper echelons of ministries, was also allegedly used by the former government to benefit its campaign financially.¹ Furthermore, the pre-election period was highly politically polarised, and assessed by the OSCE as "being characterised by frequent public exchanges of accusations and allegations among political adversaries".²

Yet these questionable tactics did not change the electoral outcome. The fact that the election day was judged by the international community to be free and fair bolsters the legitimacy of the new government. The results also show that elections in Georgia can be won on the arguments. As former Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili stressed in an interview, the major reason for losing the election was the fact that the UNM government failed to engage with the people and address their needs.³ Instead, the years running up to the election saw arbitrary decision-making as the Saakashvili government invested in expensive populist projects, carried out without consultation and analysis of cost, such as building the new city of Lazika, or transferring the Parliament out of the capital to the town of Kutaisi. The UNM relied on gimmicks such as a dental project labelled "Georgia with a smile" which arose from a visit by President Saakashvili to an old people's home,⁴ rather than initiating structural reforms to address urgent challenges such as

¹ The Georgian Prosecutor's Office is currently investigating a case where state funds were used by UNM to mobilise communities for election campaign rallies in eleven Georgian towns on 8th September 2012. See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25593>.

² Interim report of OSCE ODHIR <http://www.osce.org/odihr/93609>.

³ Merabishvili interview with a TV program "PS" on Sunday 25th November 2012. He stressed that "our biggest mistake was that public dialogue was not held on issues of public interest. We limited ourselves to certain directions and were oriented only on development, infrastructure, and were talking with public only on those issues.... We had to try to understand what problems were bothering the public on an everyday basis. I have impression that at some point we were talking different languages with the public and it resulted in losing the elections."

⁴ On 21st December 2011, when Saakashvili - on his birthday - visited "Virtue House" in Batumi he noticed that the elderly residents did not smile. He said that the reason for them not smiling was that they had teeth problems and he told the head of

unemployment. According to the recently published European Neighbourhood Policy Progress Report, joblessness stands at 14.4%, though a recent survey carried out by Caucasus Research Resource Center puts the rate at 36%.⁵

The former government and the UNM also dedicated much of their resources to communicating with the international community rather than the local population, including through expensive contracts with government affairs consultancies.⁶ The decision by the new government to continue to invest in such contracts shows that the political class still sees it as important to maintain a favourable image in key capitals, particularly Brussels and Washington. On the other hand, the fact that these new contracts were announced publicly, and disclosed publicly on the internet, including the fees involved, is a step forward.

Beyond personality politics and social polarisation?

Georgia may have passed a basic test of democracy in organising a free and fair election, but there are more challenges ahead. Although the majority won by the new ruling coalition was convincing enough to prompt the incumbent UNM to concede, the Georgian population does not see the Georgian Dream, which achieved 55% of votes, as a panacea, nor its leader Bidzina Ivanishvili, as a messiah. This can be contrasted with the wave of enthusiasm that gave Mikheil Saakashvili 97% of the vote following the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze in late 2003. The new government has to take into account the extent to which society remains polarised along political lines if it is to succeed in winning broad support for its reform agenda, particularly reassuring rank-and-file UNM supporters that they are not set to be discriminated against as a result of the government's reforms.

The new GD coalition and the former ruling UNM will also have to overcome their personal differences, embodied by the current uncomfortable cohabitation between the president and the parliament. President Saakashvili remains a key figure in the opposition UNM, while the GD has a majority in the parliament.⁷ There is evidence that political and personal tensions can easily boil over. In early February several UNM lawmakers going to attend the annual address of the president to the people were assaulted by protestors in front of the National Library. This followed a political spat between Ivanishvili and Saakashvili over the timing of the presidential address to the nation.⁸ The GD coalition and the UNM will have to work to ensure that the principle of a peaceful transfer of power is consolidated and sustained, rather than exceptional and temporary.

For its part, the opposition UNM has to work constructively within the parliament as well as between the presidential and prime ministerial office. The agreement on 21st March on a constitutional transfer of powers leaves room for cautious optimism. 135 MPs voted unanimously in favour of a measure which removed the president's right to dismiss parliament. Although this agreement removes a constitutional uncertainty which could have left the president

Adjara's region Levan Varshalomidze that they should deal with the issue. Cf. Official website of the president <http://president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/?p=7221>.

⁵ "Public attitudes in Georgia: results of a March 2013 survey carried out for NDI" available at <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-March2013-survey-ENG.pdf>.

⁶ Between 2004 and 2012, the government hired numerous PR agencies on short term contracts (6-12 months) for fees ranging from 180,000 USD to 470,000 to 'enhance the reputation of the Republic of Georgia government', according to one contract, or else to advise the President. Groups include Public Strategies, Brussels-based Aspect consulting, Glover Park Group, and Gephardt Government Affairs, headed by the former US House Democratic leader, Richard Gephardt. Sources:

<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20591>; <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25036>;

<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24565>; <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21965>.

⁷ The head of the party in parliament is David Bakradze. Vano Merabishvili is the Secretary General.

⁸ The political controversy related to the competence of the President to set priorities for the nation. The GD-led parliament had wished to delay the speech until after the president had been constitutionally divested of his powers.

with a trump card, questions remain over the need for a clear division of labour between the prime minister and president, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. The parties do appear to agree on a Euro-Atlantic orientation for the country, evidenced by Ivanishvili's choice of Brussels as his first overseas trip upon taking office, and reassurances from the new government regarding its commitment to NATO. But the leaders will need to find agreement on sharing duties in international fora. This is more than a mere practical question of who talks to whom, since the international (Western) constituency remains important in Georgia's domestic politics.

Aside from ensuring unity of purpose between the president and the prime minister, the GD coalition faces the challenge of preserving unity between its own coalition of five parties, including the Georgian Dream Party, the Republican Party, the Conservative party, the National Forum and the Industry Will Save Georgia Party. Unlike the former ruling party, the GD coalition has no common ideology.⁹ The GD coalition and its member parties will also have to walk a fine line between delivering the justice called for by a significant portion of the electorate, while refraining from vengeance and politically motivated criminal prosecutions. The government must carry out impartial and transparent investigations, potentially leading to court cases in relation to former government officials. At the same time, it will have to resist the temptation to succumb to the winner-takes-all logic. This has pervaded Georgian politics since independence and meant the hiring and firing of judges and civil servants has depended on their political loyalties.

The reform agenda

Nine years after the Rose Revolution promised democracy and the rule of law,¹⁰ Georgia still requires a number of deep reforms to ensure a workable system of justice. Revelations during the election campaign of human rights abuses in a Tbilisi prison confirmed the widespread mistrust among the citizenry in the criminal justice system, and arguably played a pivotal role in the victory of the GD coalition. The new minister of justice, a former lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights, faces the daunting task of overhauling the courts, the prosecutor's office and prison system to restore faith in the much maligned criminal justice and courts system.

The level of social polarisation makes it critical that the government proceeds with required reforms with careful sequencing so as to avoid the appearance of seeking retribution, whilst also delivering the reforms which will safeguard the system from abuse in the future. Georgia will also have to rely on that same system to deliver justice for perceived impunity or wrongdoings of the previous administration. This brings important challenges. First, the government has to find a balance between allowing prosecution of serious offenders from within the previous administration without being seen to persecute individuals for purely political purposes. This issue is increasingly critical following the high profile cases opened against former ministers.¹¹ The government will need to reform the prosecutor's office to ensure its independence from the executive. The powers of the office include the authority to conduct preliminary investigations, the right of initiative in pursuit of criminals, coordination of the fight against crime and

⁹ Ivanishvili has indicated that GD is social democratic; this is not the case for other parties in the GD coalition. GD remains affiliated with the European liberal ALDE group. To date, there have been two cases of defections in Parliament from UNM to GD. There have also been defections in the regions, where UNM holds a lot of power. There are increasingly allegations that this is due to intimidation by the new government.

¹⁰ Mikheil Saakashvili ousted Eduard Shevardnadze in November 2003 and was swept into power in early 2004 on the promise of democratic reform in what became known as the first of the 'colour revolutions'.

¹¹ The government has initiated a number of cases against former officials, notably former interior minister Bacho Akhalaia and former army chief of staff Giorgi Kalanadze, and has invited OSCE/ODIHR to monitor them. More recently cases have been opened against former prime minister Vano Merabishvili and former health minister Zurab Tchiaberashvili. At the same time, there are allegations of politicisation of justice, as in the case of Tengiz Gunava, former head of the internal investigation unit of the Interior Ministry.

implementing human rights protection measures. Key indicators of success will be: putting in place effective measures to combat torture and impunity; overhauling Georgia's prisons, some of the most overcrowded in Europe; as well as addressing the controversial plea bargaining system and the low acquittal rate, which in 2011 was 0.1% of cases.¹²

The government will also need to follow due process. The decision by parliament to overturn a presidential veto in January and release 190 people ranging from academics and activists to former officials identified by a parliamentary working group as 'political prisoners' was welcomed by many Georgians. Yet the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, among others, criticised the government for failing to involve the judiciary in the process.¹³ NGOs, such as the Georgian Young Lawyers Association and Article 42, also withdrew from the working group that compiled the list of detainees to be freed, stating that the proposed timeframe of two weeks and the failure to share materials among group members did not give them the opportunity to consider individuals on a case-by-case basis.

A further question is how the government will deal with sitting judges, many of whom are considered to be complicit in perceived abuses of power by the previous government. There has been some controversy around current initiatives aimed at changing the system of election of members of the High Council of Justice, an independent body tasked with overseeing the judicial system, with the authority to appoint or dismiss judges.¹⁴ The minister of justice has said that judges will not be dismissed, but the government should not repeat past mistakes. The forced removal by the previous Saakashvili administration in December 2005 of Supreme Court judges, as well as dismissal of law enforcement and senior civil service officials who had opposed the Rose Revolution, did little to promote the rule of law. During the Saakashvili era, the judiciary consistently ranked as one of the top two sectors in need of reform (alongside the economy) in polls,¹⁵ with growing levels of public distrust in the courts and a perception that *de facto* politically appointed judges continued to make politically motivated decisions.

More broadly, the rules for appointing and dismissing civil servants must be reformed in the near future so that hiring and firing cannot be used to reward or punish political allegiances. The current practice of politically appointing civil servants has exacerbated the zero sum logic in Georgian politics, whereby the party gaining most votes commands all the resources of the legislative and executive branches of government. Employment protection for civil servants is also a key issue since pressure on those with alternative political views was visible during the election campaign where opposition activists working within local government structures alleged intimidation by local officials within the ruling party. With allegations surfacing that there is party-political pressure on UNM officials and supporters in the regions, it will be important to enact reforms to ensure that civil servants are free of political pressure.

The new government has managed to initiate long overdue amendments required by the EU and the ILO to the labour code which had been much criticised for its failure to protect rights to collective bargaining and the right to strike. Reform of these rules should be complemented with grading systems and salary scales that are similar for the same positions in different state agencies,

¹² Figure for 2011, see: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/gavin-slade/georgia-politics-of-punishment>. By comparison with Georgia's 99% conviction rate, the UK had an 83% conviction rate in 2011 (17% acquittal rate). See: <http://sentencingcouncil.judiciary.gov.uk/facts/facts-and-figures.htm>.

¹³ Opinion of the Venice Commission on the Draft Amendments to the Organic Law on Courts of General Jurisdiction of Georgia. See: <http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD%282013%29007-e>.

¹⁴ In addition to its right to initiate disciplinary proceedings against judges, the High Council of Justice is tasked with organising the composition of court panels, determining the jurisdiction of regional courts and setting qualification exams for judges.

¹⁵ See surveys by Transparency International Georgia: <http://transparency.ge/en/content/refreshing-georgia%E2%80%99s-courts-trial-jury-more-democracy-or-face-lift-judiciary>.

which would avoid abuse of the bonus system as a political tool. Elaborating clearer terms of reference for all civil service positions and drawing dividing lines between politically appointed decision-makers and civil servants as implementers of policy would help combat the fusion between the ruling party and the state.

To avoid the repetition of past mistakes decision-making should be as transparent as possible, and inclusive of civil society so that the government can be seen to be fair and accountable. This will be an important indicator that the government sees restorative justice as not restricted to punishing previous misdoings, but is willing to establish new standards in order to tackle outstanding issues – including elite corruption.

There are early signs that the new government will follow a social program to tackle deep socio-economic disparities seen as being neglected by the former government, but it has yet to elaborate such a program fully. Development initiatives such as a sovereign wealth fund, and a 1 billion GEL agricultural development plan will need a clearer strategy behind them to ensure sustainability, including greater clarity as to the extent and ramifications of use of the prime minister's personal wealth for government activities.¹⁶ Georgia will also need to develop a greater understanding within government, among civil society and through broader public debate about the extent to which proposed economic plans are compatible with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) being negotiated with the EU. This will be important if Georgia is to make the most of what the EU is offering.

More Europe for more reforms?

The EU is a key player in Georgia. The country avowed its European direction in 2003 and is committed to reforms under the European Neighbourhood Policy and its Eastern Partnership. Conversely, the EU's interest in having a success story for this policy at the forthcoming Vilnius summit in November ratchets up Georgia's importance for the EU. GD ministers have sought to dispel allegations by the UNM that it is pro-Russia, and reassure Georgia's European partners that European integration remains the touchstone of Georgia's foreign policy. Commentators have made much of Russia's overtures to Georgia to rejoin the CIS, yet this offer is not a serious competitor to the EU's incentives in trade and mobility, and because of the domestic political consensus for more Europe. The Russian-led customs union is also firmly off the table for Georgia, not least because of the unresolved conflict between the two countries over the disputed territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia following the 2008 war.¹⁷

The new government is working to consolidate gains made by the former administration: 2011 and the first half of 2012 marked fairly significant progress in EU-Georgia relations. Negotiations on an Association Agreement (AA) encompassing a DCFTA got underway. A Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreement came into force and Georgia is currently performing well in ensuring readmission of its citizens illegally residing in the EU.¹⁸ Following the EU's decision to grant Georgia a Visa Liberalisation Action Plan in February 2013, the next step in the process offers incentives for Georgia to enact further key reforms: obtaining visa-free travel will depend on Georgia passing and implementing legislation in a range of areas, not least an anti-discrimination law to protect minorities.

¹⁶ Ivanishvili has an estimated wealth of USD 5.3 bn according to Forbes magazine; <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66738>.

¹⁷ The decision to resume wine and water exports to Russia is however a sign of thawing of relations between the two countries, which had been marked by personal enmity between Putin and Saakashvili.

¹⁸ Between 1st March 2011 and 26th September 2012 there were 1326 readmission requests from 20 EU member states. 1225 requests were approved (92.4%) according to official statistics of the government of Georgia.

For the time being, negotiations with the EU are proceeding at a good pace.¹⁹ Following the most recent formal round, the political part of the Association Agreement which is important for the human rights and democratisation agenda, is for the most part completed and Georgia is on track to initial the agreement at the Vilnius Summit.²⁰ On DCFTA there is still more work to do, particularly in the areas of customs, trade facilitation and services although the EU hopes to conclude negotiations at the next round in June.²¹ An outstanding issue in the political chapter of the AA relates to Georgia's prospects of gaining an EU membership perspective. Member states are divided on the issue with regard to countries among the eastern partners, although there is some support in the European Council for offering the ultimate carrot of the future EU membership to willing and deserving partners.

Georgia will need to implement commitments before the EU will offer further incentives. Whilst Georgia has been performing well under the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, particularly regulatory approximation and management,²² more can be done to deliver on outstanding commitments, as the recent EU progress report makes clear.²³ There is ongoing uncertainty as to whether democracy can be consolidated, and the government also needs to deliver on its human rights commitments. In line with its 'more for more' policy, which gives closer ties and greater incentives (financial, trade and political) to partners which successfully implement reforms, the EU is in a position to remind Georgia of the urgent need to implement reforms in its justice sector. There is also a question of efficient delivery: the EU taxpayer has invested 34 million euro in judicial reform programmes in Georgia since 2008. An upcoming report on the human rights situation by the recently appointed EU special envoy to Georgia on human rights, Thomas Hammarberg, could also play a pivotal role in assessing Georgia's progress and shaping priorities.²⁴

Pressure to deliver at Vilnius notwithstanding, the EU can use its leverage in the coming months to remind Georgia's government and opposition of their obligations to the Georgian electorate, as well as pushing for delivery on key reforms. In implementing 'more for more', the EU can usefully – to quote former EU Ambassador to Georgia Per Eklund – exercise 'tough love' rather than unconditional love. In this respect, government ministers of EU member states including Estonia – whose defence minister wrote an op-ed in the run-up to the last election citing polls predicting a UNM win and criticising the then opposition for being stooges of Russia and instigating 'rising political violence'²⁵ – must also learn their lessons. Member state champions for Georgia, as well as political groups of the European Parliament, have at times pursued a partisan agenda, allowing favouritism to obscure the need for a measured response from the EU in urging Georgia's political elites to pursue complex institutional reforms. Members of the European Parliament, notably from the European People's Party, intervene in debates out of loyalty to their sister party, the UNM. They should rather respect the choice of the majority of Georgian citizens who democratically voted out the UNM government. For example, a recent undiplomatic exchange of letters between (mostly) EPP MEPs to Ivanishvili and the Parliament

¹⁹ Fourteen plenary rounds of negotiations have taken place between the EU and Georgia since July 2010, with the latest formal round in late March 2013.

²⁰ Outstanding issues relate to Georgia's European perspective as well as the agreement's territorial application (with regard to the breakaway territories).

²¹ This means in practical terms that the EU and Georgia are unlikely to initial the over 1,000 page DCFTA at Vilnius, although a strong political signal will be given regarding the completion of the negotiations.

²² Georgia scored highly on the 2012 Eastern Partnership Integration Index on management of EU processes and approximation, coming second overall behind Moldova.

²³ The report focuses on implementing reforms in the fields of elections, anti-discrimination, judiciary as well as conducting investigations into torture and implementing transparent criminal prosecutions.

²⁴ Thomas Hammarberg is already in the country and due to report in June 2013.

²⁵ Georgian democracy and Russian meddling, Wall Street Journal, 10 September 2012: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443819404577635072656640822.html>.

of Georgia was far from constructive and highly emotional on both sides, rather than evidence-based. The aim for European parliamentarians, regardless of their political affiliation, should be to combine their strengths in supporting Georgia's endeavours to move its democratisation project forward, and to hold the political class (of all parties) to the highest standards of human rights and democracy in line with European values.

Conclusion

The recent elections have made history in Georgia but time will tell whether the cohabitation period is sustainable and the 2012 electoral result marked a real shift to democratic consolidation and regular transfer of power via the ballot box. The depth of reforms and timing of reforms to the judiciary (relative to potential prosecutions for abuses committed by the previous regime) will have an important impact on the consolidation of democracy. Greater ambition in instituting checks and balances between the organs of state, coupled with a less zealous approach towards bringing political opponents to book will, over time, pay dividends for Georgia. Broader efforts to mitigate the 'winner takes all' logic of power transitions will also be important to ensure the political neutrality of public institutions.

The government will need to communicate better with the public and enact meaningful reforms to improve the economic and social conditions of citizens, rather than concentrating its efforts on improving its image in the eyes of the international community. Georgia will need to overcome ongoing social polarisation, in part by offering platforms to citizens so that they can participate in a debate about ideas and policies, rather than political personalities. Independent civil society can play a key role in acting as an impartial, balanced and critical voice, producing assessments that are trusted by political factions and the population at large. Civil society needs to avoid the temptation of being co-opted by the new government merely because its leader has promised change. Rather, it must remain an independent watchdog capable of holding the government, whatever its leadership, to account on the core values and principles of democracy.

The EU has significant leverage to push for reforms in Georgia, and not only because of the incentives it can offer leading up to and beyond Vilnius. It also plays an important role in the Georgia-Russia peace talks in Geneva and as a security guarantor through its Monitoring Mission, which has patrolled the administrative border lines since the 2008 conflict. Yet, EU demands should be driven by broader democratic principles rather than simple partisanship, as the letters incident exposes. Making the most of international pressure on Georgia will itself be a challenge, paradoxically, because of the strength of Georgia's longstanding positive, and partisan, PR machine.

A growing awareness that the recent election was also lost on socio-economic issues rather than through an elaborate Russian scheme to unseat Saakashvili; or exclusively because of the former administration's authoritarian grip on civil and political life means there is scope for opening up a more mature debate. For parliamentarians in Tbilisi's strengthened parliamentary chamber (as well as their counterparts in Brussels), it is an opportunity to debate such substantive issues as how to organise key sectors ranging from the economy to social services and welfare as well as how to overcome protracted conflicts to build a sustainable peace. The development of a culture of substantive debate is a new benchmark for Georgia's path to democratic consolidation.

Open Society European Policy Institute contact on Georgia:
Jacqueline.hale@opensocietyfoundations.org
Tel: +32-(0)2-505-4646

Open Society Georgia Foundation co-author of this policy brief:
Ivane Chkhikvadze - ivane@osgf.ge

For all media enquiries related to Open Society Foundations' work in Europe contact:
Eleanor Kelly - eleanor.kelly@opensocietyfoundations.org
Tel: +44 (0)20 7031 1719



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